

“I Don’t Believe in Jesus, But What If. . .”

I was raised into a liberal, and yet Protestant family. As a child I went to church like any other, and even within the past five years I’ve attended the occasional session. Often people will tell me, “All you have to do is ask God to forgive your sins.”

The problem with this, and one that I’ve seldom been able to ask without feeling alienated, is that within my heart I don’t believe in Jesus. And so even assuming I repented and following the Bible to the word, I wouldn’t have what is called true faith. This is difficult to explain, but while I want to be a part of this religion if it’s real, several parts of it have ill logic. Logic that I can’t convince myself to ignore. Here are some comments and questions that I’d appreciate feedback on.

1. If Christianity is such a good thing, then why has it caused so much death in the past? The Crusades are only one example.
2. When the world is so full of grey, then how can there be a strict set of guidelines that clearly defines right and wrong? If you follow these rules, you’ll go to Heaven where everything’s inexplicably perfect. If you don’t, then you burn in eternal fire. It all sounds a little stretched to me.
3. I’ve been to sermons, and it’s emphasized there that if you don’t stay true to His word, then you’ll burn in Hell. Doesn’t it feel a little selfish to be praying and worshiping a supreme being specifically so that you aren’t punished forever? In a few scriptures, there’s an implication that you must be concerned with anything but yourself. An oxymoron?
4. Gay people are often criticized for their actions in the

world, especially by Christians. I have homosexual friends, and several of them take to it rather naturally. Being hetero myself, I could never have sexual relations with another man and like it. I find it highly unlikely that something like this could be anything but real. Especially given the constant state of harrassment that many of them live in.

5. I've never felt the presence of Jesus Christ in my life. I went to church for years, and the closest thing to divineness for me was hearing women mumble in what I heard as jibberish. Ultimately I would like to believe, but at this point I have absolutely no reason to.

On the other hand, I'm going to tell you why I can't let myself shake the idea that there is no immortal entity.

Christianity has had such a huge influence on so many of the past. The United States of America was founded upon this religion. It's grown to have countless followers now. I inquire to myself, "How could they all have it wrong?"

There are plenty of creative freethinkers who've enveloped themselves deeply into your faith. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Adolf Hitler (his own perception of it anyway), etc.

Sometimes when I'm thinking about life and how I got here, I become increasingly afraid of what'll happen when I finally die. Possibly because deep down, I know that there's something I need to fulfill that I've yet to. Whether this is knowing God or something else, I have no idea at this point. I'm hoping that you might have some insight to my questions.

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Sounds like a rather simplistic formula, doesn't it? And

there's something in your intellect that rebels that surely, *something* must be missing. And you would be right.

Because true, biblical Christianity is about a personal relationship with a personal God. It's about two beings communicating with each other, and loving each other. It's more than a simple "forgiveness transaction." There are a lot of people who see God as some kind of cosmic vending machine; we put in our coin of "belief" and out comes forgiveness? How hokey is that?>

The problem with this, and one that I've seldom been able to ask without feeling alienated, is that within my heart I don't believe in Jesus. And so even assuming I repented and following the Bible to the word, I wouldn't have what is called true faith.

I honor you for your intellectual integrity to admit the truth. You are in good company; there are a lot of people who have come into a personal relationship with God through Jesus, who discovered along their journey that the Jesus they didn't believe in was a false Jesus—a too-small Jesus. So I am suggesting that you investigate the REAL Jesus and not the stereotype you may have been exposed to.

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1. *If Christianity is such a good thing, then why has it caused so much death in the past? The Crusades are only one example.*

Great question. First, please consider that true Christianity is not a belief system or a religion like the rest of the world religions, but a relationship with Jesus. And every single follower of Jesus is a sinful, fallen, imperfect person

who is going to follow Him in varying degrees of sinfulness, fallenness, and imperfection. The validity of Christianity is not the weakness of us Christ-followers, but the strength and truthfulness of Jesus Christ himself.

Many horrible things that were done in the name of Jesus Christ, such as the Inquisition and the excesses of the Crusades, were inflicted by people who were not his followers. Many people have done evil in the name of Jesus, but in the end he will tell them, "Away from me—I never knew you."

While there are mortifying blots on history, I think it's also important to realize that people who understand how to view life and the world from a biblical perspective were world changers. The Christian influence is responsible for the invention and development of hospitals and orphanages. Many schools were founded by Christians. The abolition of slavery and the very foundation of modern science are both based on Christian principles. So I think it's important to see a balance of good and evil, and this is exactly what we would expect from fallen, sinful people trying to live out the principles rooted in the character of a good, loving God.

2. When the world is so full of grey, then how can there be a strict set of guidelines that clearly defines right and wrong? If you follow these rules, you'll go to Heaven where everything's inexplicably perfect. If you don't, then you burn in eternal fire. It all sounds a little stretched to me.

Let's visit the "back story" that explains why it is we live in a world so full of grey. The world God originally created was perfect and sinless, but man made a choice that plunged us into shades of murkiness. You've probably heard the phrase "the fall of man," but it truly was a fall of gigantic proportions. One of the things that fell when Adam sinned was our intellect, our reason. We no longer apprehend things correctly or accurately.

When God speaks truth to us, when he communicates his set of guidelines that explain how to make life work according to his design, there is now a problem. Two, actually. First, our fallen intellect doesn't grasp what he says as well as it would have before the fall. Second, another thing that fell was our will, and we are all rebellious, stiff-necked people who insist on having our own way and being god of our own lives. So between fuzzy minds and rebellious hearts, it can sure seem like the world is full of grey!

Nonetheless, God was never unclear about his intentions for his creation, and he communicated his set of guidelines very clearly. Interestingly, the same set of written-down laws in the Ten Commandments, are also written on the hearts of all people in all places at all times. We all intrinsically know it's wrong to murder and steal and lie and disrespect God.

The rules are clear—it's our hearts that want to excuse them and find loopholes to justify our bad behavior.

The thing is, no one can follow the rules. Nobody. If we break one, we've broken the set. There isn't a single person who is good enough to go to heaven. Rebellious, sinful, wayward people (and that is every one of us), left on our own, will enter life as enemies of God and stay that way. If God hadn't intervened, NO ONE would be in heaven.

But he did.

He reaches out to us and offers us one way, the only way, to have a restored relationship with him. Someone had to pay the penalty for our sins, so he sent Jesus from heaven to live a perfect life, showing us what God is like, and then die on the cross in our place. He was perfect and sinless, so he didn't die for his own sins—but for ours instead. Three days later God raised him from the dead to give his life back, and it's that new, resurrected kind of life Jesus offers to those who trust in him.

Heaven isn't a reward for those who did "good enough" to get there, since no one qualifies. It is a place to enjoy an intimate personal relationship with God. A relationship that is entered into as a gift we don't earn and never could.

Hell isn't the place where people go who didn't do enough good to cancel out their bad. When people have spent their life saying "no" to God (and "yes" to doing life their own way, worshiping themselves, or others, or things), it's where God lets them have their own rebellious way forever.

3. I've been to sermons, and it's emphasized there that if you don't stay true to His word, then you'll burn in Hell. Doesn't it feel a little selfish to be praying and worshiping a supreme being specifically so that you aren't punished forever? In a few scriptures, there's an implication that you must be concerned with anything but yourself. An oxymoron?

All of us here at Probe would disagree with those sermons. There are many people who believe God puts people on a performance standard, requiring us to stay on "the straight and narrow" or we get zapped. It not only overestimates our ability to be good, since we are fallen people, but it underestimates God's ability to hold onto us. When we receive his gift of eternal life by trusting in what Christ did for us, God gives us a new heart and a new source of power to live a life pleasing to him. But He also understands that change is a process and a journey, and as the Bible says, "He knows that we are but dust." He knows how incredibly frail and weak we are. Good thing he is strong and powerful, not to mention amazingly loving! The Bible actually says that we can KNOW we have eternal life, and that God will complete what he starts. We disagree strongly that what God gets started in us, we have the power to wreck forever.

The Bible says that our relationship with God is like that of a lover and his bride. We are God's beloved, and he delights

in us. I don't know if you are married, but I hope if you are, you know what it is for your beloved to have adoring eyes for you. That's the kind of love we receive from God, and when one is loved like that, it's easy and natural to love him back and worship him with joy and surrender.

The idea of praying to and worshiping a supreme being for the sole purpose of avoiding eternal punishment is a cruel hoax and a horrible counterfeit of the real thing. Which is why I suggest you find out who the REAL Jesus is, since apparently the one you've been hearing about is a gross caricature.

4. Gay people are often criticized for their actions in the world, especially by Christians. I have homosexual friends, and several of them take to it rather naturally. Being hetero myself, I could never have sexual relations with another man and like it. I find it highly unlikely that something like this could be anything but real. Especially given the constant state of harrassment that many of them live in.

Their attractions are real, but not chosen. What is not real is the contention that they were born gay, or that God made them gay. There are certain patterns that show up in the lives of those who experience same-sex attractions: a relational deficit with the same-sex parent and with same-sex peers, a sense of gender insecurity, often the ridicule and rejection of peers. Everyone is created with the need to connect in a deep and lasting way with our same-sex parent and peers, and if that need goes unmet, it can become sexualized with the onset of adolescence. Everybody wants to be loved and accepted, but those who are attracted to those of their same sex didn't get the kind of affirmation that would have allowed them to move on to the next step of emotional development, which is connection with the opposite sex.

5. I've never felt the presence of Jesus Christ in my life. I went to church for years, and the closest thing to divineness

for me was hearing women mumble in what I heard as jibberish. Ultimately I would like to believe, but at this point I have absolutely no reason to.

I can well imagine why, given what you have experienced and were taught!

I want to recommend to you a couple of books I think you will find satisfying and challenging. Lee Strobel is a former journalist (he used to be a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*) and atheist, who tracked down credible sources to answer his questions about Jesus and Christianity. *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for Christ* are both really excellent books. A third book, *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis, would also probably appeal to you.

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The Bible intriguingly says in one place, "God has set eternity in our hearts." I think this is what you're experiencing, _____. God made you for a purpose, and he made

you to have a relationship with him that is more deeply satisfying than you could possibly imagine. But first you need to find the true God and not the little-bitty false god that is worth rejecting.

I truly respect your position and your intellectual integrity, and I am so glad there are real answers for your important questions.

I do hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

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“I’m a Compulsive Masturbator!”

I hate it that I am overpowered by an addiction to porn and compulsive masturbation. I don’t understand why I just can’t stop it. I really loathe that part of myself. It disgusts me. Can you help?

You and millions of other people, millions MORE now that the internet has invaded our lives!

I serve on the board of [Living Hope Ministries](#), a Christ-centered outreach to those wanting to leave homosexuality. I asked Ricky Chelette, a pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington (TX) and Executive Director of Living Hope, to share his highly understandable explanation of what happens in an addictive cycle, in a way that has also helped many people dealing with their various besetting sins. He graciously gave

me permission to offer his material to answer your question. I hope it helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Understanding The Cycle of Sin

This is the cycle of sin that I often share with folks that meet with me. Though I designed this visual image for overcomers with same gender attraction (SGA), I have used it with my single adult group as a whole, for I feel the concepts are universal though the vehicles we use to accomplish our end result might be somewhat different.

Take a look at this diagram.



You begin the cycle of sin at the bottom of the page where you see the letters and blank lines.

Though many of you think that what triggers you is the sight of a good looking man/woman, I think something much deeper is taking place. Most of our triggers fall into one of these broad categories:

- **Health**

I am talking about bad health. When you are sick you are open to temptation.

- **Hunger**

When we are hungry we can feel temptation.

- **Angry**

- **Lonely**

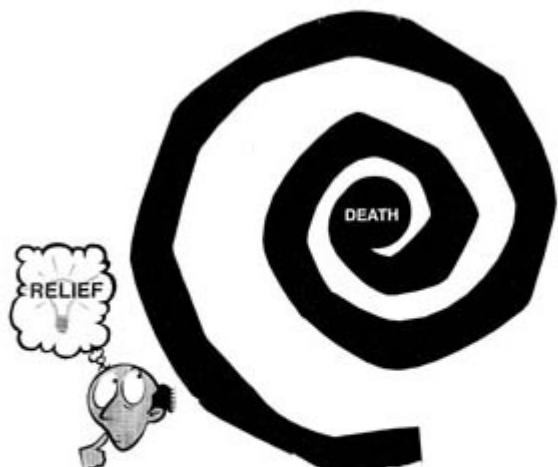
Need I say more...

- **Tired**

- **Stressed**

- **Depressed**

Whenever we feel one of these feelings or something closely related to one or more of them, we have the thought of RELIEF. We all want relief from the pain, hurt and stresses of our lives.



Hunger or poor Health

Angry

Lonely

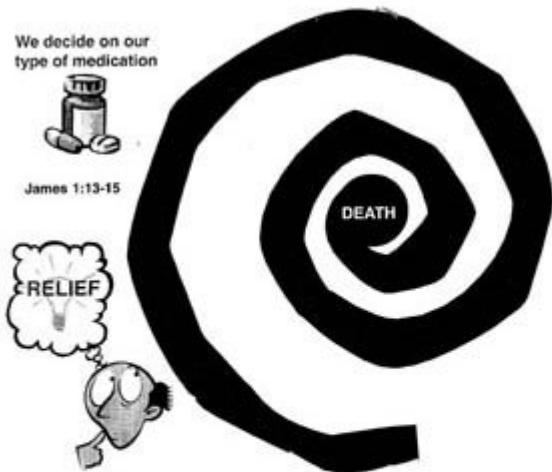
Tired

Stressed

Depressed

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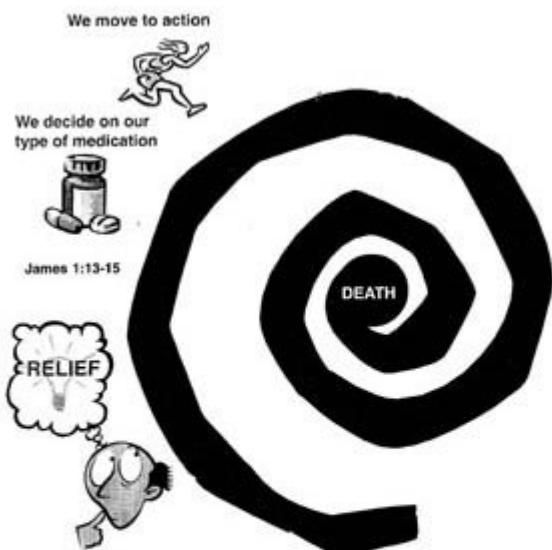
The way that we find relief is to seek some form of medication. This does not have to be actual medication, though it can be and this is how people get addicted to drugs, but it is medication all the same. It is something that causes us to experience pleasure and relief.



Hunger or poor Health
 Angry
 Lonely
 Tired
 Stressed
 Depressed

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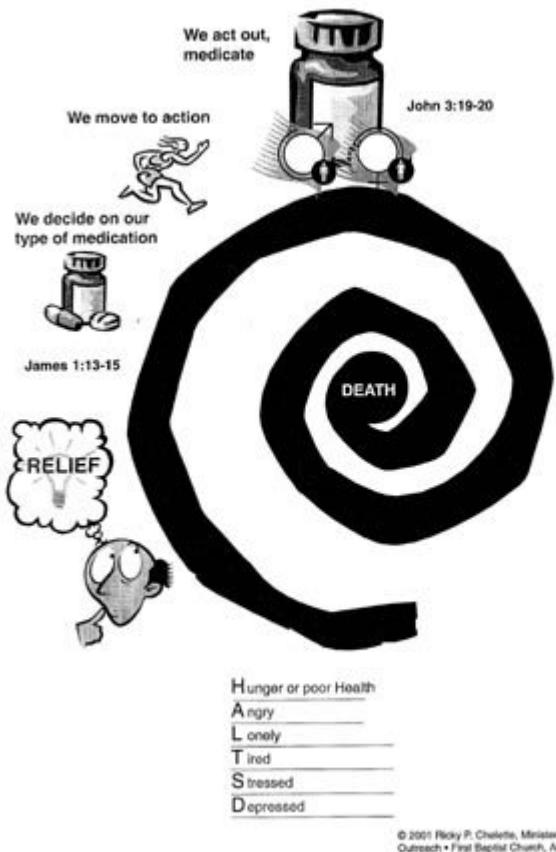
So we move from the bottom of the diagram to the thought for relief (the man and the bubble) to the thought of what we will do to medicate our pain and find relief (bottle of pills). When we decide to medicate our pain we go through some action (the runner) before we actually get to the medication.



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Oddly enough, even the action toward the intended medication, is somewhat medicinal itself. For example: If you are going to do the big M (masturbation) for your medication you might get undressed and lay in bed, or jump in a warm shower. If you are going to cruise P (internet Porn) on the internet you might get into something more comfortable and begin the search process. If you are going to act out with another or "cruise," you might get cleaned up and put on some alluring clothing or other articles that would give clues to your intent. Basically, you go through some sort of ritual of preparation. It just doesn't "happen." However, we have done this ritual so many times that it feels quite automatic—we may not even realize that we are doing it. It is at this stage that most people tell me that they feel as though they really can't help themselves—"it is like another person has taken over my body and I am just on autopilot." In many ways, they really are. I am convinced that once you move from thought to action, it is very difficult if not nearly impossible to stop the ultimate medication/action from taking place. Yes, of course God could intervene, but He has created us with free will and He rarely interferes with our willful decisions. During this phase of the cycle you are also likely to be producing adrenalin; a very strong chemical that makes a person's heart rate increase, increases their blood pressure, and gives them a sense of invincibility.



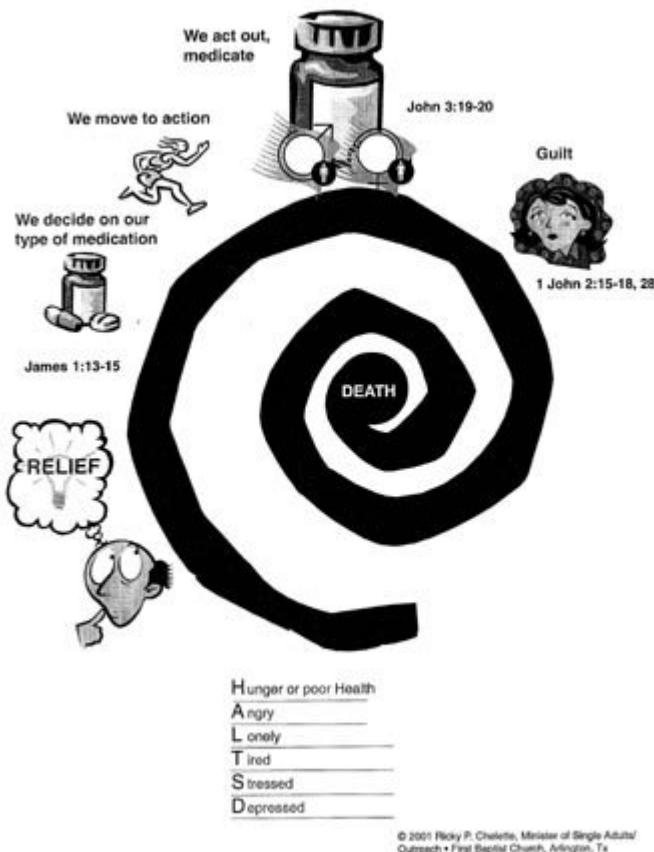
Finally, you carry out your medicative fix by doing the big M or having sex and achieving an orgasm in some way. When you do this, your brain produces a chemical called endorphin. This chemical is extremely strong, some say even ten times stronger than cocaine.

Every time you achieve an orgasm or act out in some way to achieve your medication, endorphins are produced and your body responds in a very predictable way. This is why you get that feeling of pleasure, euphoria, or peace when you orgasm (medicate). There are actually chemicals being produced in your brain that make you feel good. The preparation for the orgasm also can produce these chemicals (remember Pavlov's salivating dogs?!) but not in the same quantity or intensity as the orgasm itself. (Now you are at the top of our diagram—medicine bottle)

I want you to think of your brain as a CD. Each time endorphins are produced, you burn another track on that CD. If you keep playing the same tune (producing the same chemical)

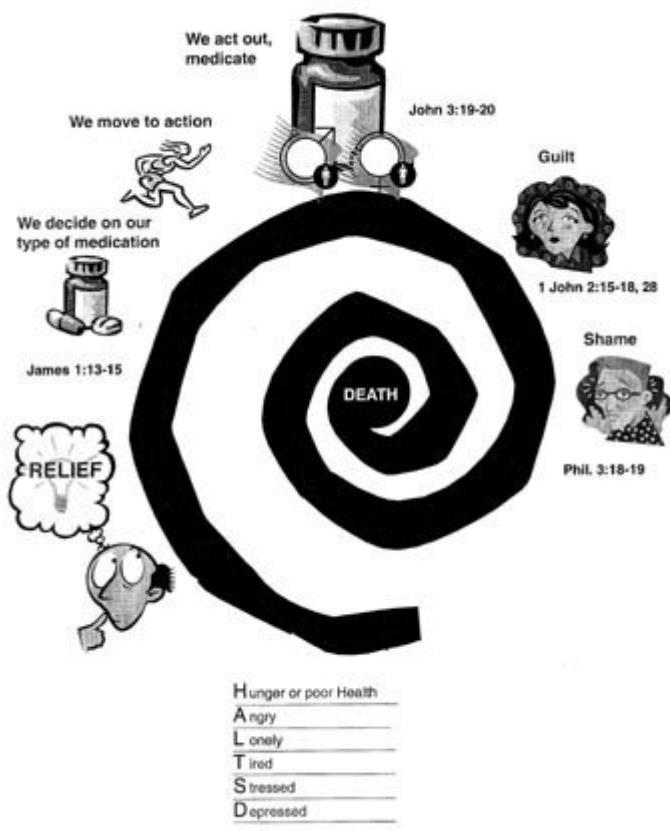
over a period of months/years, you burn a rut in your CD and it is very, VERY difficult to get out of that rut. It is a universal, psychologically proven fact. We establish pathways in our brain that demand that we do certain things and get our fix. Thus, we continue to the cycle of medicating our hurts. .

However, like every high, it is followed by an equally powerful low. The low begins as the chemicals in our brain are absorbed and assimilated into our bodies. We first begin to feel guilty (the lady that is crying on the diagram).



I believe that guilt and conviction are really good things. I see them as a way that the Spirit of God brings correction and discipline to our lives. However, many times we feel guilty, but we don't confess and repent. We simply feel guilty. We do this because we think that God will not hear our prayers. .again, for the thing that we seem to keep doing over and over. As a result, not too long after we feel guilt, Satan comes in and uses our sense of guilt to make us feel shame

(the man that looks perplexed).



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Shame, I believe, is of the devil. The difference between guilt and shame is that guilt is over our actions—things we do. Shame is feeling bad about who we are—our sense of self. Shame causes us to review the lies of Satan and our old tapes that tell us that, “I am worthless. God doesn’t really love me. I am a loser. No one will ever love me. I will never be rid of this sin. I am gay. Etc., etc.”



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These self-loathing statements do nothing but drag us further down the cycle so that we become confused, stressed, angry, lonely, etc. (the confused triple-headed person). And where does that lead us?

Back at the beginning of the cycle to keep repeating our sin again and again..

You should also notice that this spiral makes an inward progression that ends at a black hole. You see, what happens with our desire to medicate is that each time we do it, it takes a bit more stimulation to get us to the place that we have the same medicative results. We constantly need more. That is why the spiral is a spiral and not just a circle. It draws us in, deeper and deeper, until we reach the black hole—DEATH. James 1 says when sin is complete it will bring forth death: spiritual death, emotional death, and even physical death. The process is gradual most of the time, but it is guaranteed.

Take for example the person who starts out just looking at a

"Men's Health" magazine. Nothing wrong with that really. But there are some buff men that have their shirts off. They get excited about that, do a little lust and masturbate and then they decide to find some porn on the internet. At first it is "mild porn" and then they have a need to find more explicitly sexual pornography, etc. Before you know it that is not enough for them and they search for chat rooms. They start chatting dirty and eventually they decide to call and talk with someone. They won't meet. At least not this time.... But sooner or later chatting is not enough and they meet... and they have sex.... and you know the rest of the story....



Our desire to medicate will take us further and further down this path of destruction. The results are guaranteed, but so is its destructive end.

So how do we break the cycle of sin in our lives?

I really think that there is only one opportunity for us to break the cycle. I think that we have to learn how to cope effectively and Biblically with our triggers.

If, when we realize that we are experiencing a trigger, we want relief (which we all do naturally) this is OK. However, this is where the discipline comes in. When we want relief we have to move from seeking to medicate our pain with acting out, to taking that need to medicate to the One who is the Great Physician-God. We have to go to Him, at this early stage, and tell Him what we are experiencing; what is going on with us; and ask Him for help. We have to do what 2 Cor. 10:5b says, "Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." Every thought... not just some, but especially those that seek relief.

If we do this, we are able to kick ourselves out of the cycle of sin and find victory and freedom in Christ.

Is it that easy? Absolutely not. It is hard work. Many of you have not yet learned how to identify the triggers and that will be your first step. But with God's help, it is doable.

Now, don't think that this is just a struggler thing. It is not.

Here's another example from my wife who does not struggle with SGA issues at all (thank God!). She is a nurse in ICU; a very stressful job. She is also a self-proclaimed chocoholic (any ladies relate to this?). Many times, when things are going bad at work (stress trigger), she says she can "hear" the candy machine calling her name (need for relief). She puts things in order with her patients (action/ritual) and sneaks out to the machine (more action) and eats a candy bar (medication). After she eats it she gets an insulin rush (sugar high) which makes

her feel all euphoric and wonderful only to be followed by a sugar low which makes her feel guilty and convicted because she knows that she shouldn't handle stress by eating. She then can easily slip into a shame cycle of self-loathing thinking that she is too fat (which she is not), out of control, etc. and the cycle begins again. [She told me I could share this as this diagram has helped her understand you and herself better.]

The same could be said of people who shop when they are triggered, spend money, drink coffee, become violent, use drugs or alcohol, etc. Same triggers, different courses of medication, different chemicals produced (sometimes), but all ending in the same results.

Well, I hope this makes some sense to you and is helpful to you in visualizing and getting a handle on what is taking place in your life. I would really encourage you to memorize the 2 Cor. 10:5b passage and the James 1:13-15 passage as these can help you in directing your thinking when you begin to think "RELIEF"—it will point you to Christ rather than to medication.

"How Do We Know God's Will About Infertility?"

I have a few questions. First, does God cause everything to happen or does He just allow most things to happen? I know that He can make good results out of things that seem bad to us, but did He make the thing happen because it was what was best for us, or did it just happen as a result of free/human will? I know that God certainly CAN make things happen, but I just wonder how often He does. It seems that we thank God for

the good things that happen in our life. And we should! But is it then right to "blame" Him for the bad in our life? Or maybe not so much blame, but just thank Him for the bad too because we know it's ultimately for the best? Or maybe we shouldn't thank Him or blame Him for every little thing, because maybe some things just happen. But typing that out – it just doesn't sound right.

Many things make me wonder this, but on a personal level, it's in regards to my and my husband's infertility. Did God cause this to happen because we must learn something from it, or did it just happen because we live in a fallen world where things like disease, infertility, and bad things as a result of sin and our free will are just going to happen?

Also, in regards to our infertility problem, how do we know what God's will is for us? We have been trying for 2 years now. We've had advanced and expensive treatments that have failed. Sometimes people tell us to "just trust God." But what do they mean, that we should stop pursuing treatments and just let it happen naturally? I mean, we have medical diagnosis that need treating... one would do the same for a cold, or flu, or cancer right? They would seek help. I feel the same way about infertility. Do you have an opinion on that? Now, maybe by saying "Just trust God," they mean not to worry so much. And that I can understand. I know that God has a plan and that it will be perfect for us. So I do need to not worry so much. It's just a very emotional issue!

But as far as knowing God's will.... I mean, I just wish I knew if His will for us was to never be parents, or to adopt, or to keep trying for a biological child. We pray for guidance, but it's hard to tell if we're "hearing" God or just doing what we want to do. If I ask God to "speak" to me, will He always? How will I know it is God rather than just myself telling myself, "it's a sign?" Does that makes sense?

Oh, and I don't know what your thoughts are on fertility

treatments. We have done in vitro fertilization but we do not believe in destroying any embryos. We also only put in as many as we'd be willing to carry and froze the rest to use in another cycle. We would never do selective reduction or kill an embryo. So I hope if you have time to reply, that you don't automatically say that we should stop fertility treatments because they are immoral... unless you think they are for another reason that I have not mentioned and that you might enlighten me with.

Thanks for your trust in us to help you think through these important issues.

I have a few questions. First, does God cause everything to happen or does He just allow most things to happen?

Ultimately, I think it's really a matter of semantics because of the biblical teaching that God is sovereign. Bottom line is, nothing happens to us without His permission, so whether He proactively caused it to happen or He allowed it to happen, it still has His fingerprints all over it and He has a purpose in it before it ever reaches us to begin with.

I know that He can make good results out of things that seem bad to us, but did He make the thing happen because it was what was best for us, or did it just happen as a result of free/human will? I know that God certainly CAN make things happen, but I just wonder how often He does.

“Just happening” sounds a lot like “accident” or “coincidence.” And in a universe where God is sovereign, there are no accidents. Nothing “just happens” apart from His permission. God is big enough to use both things He directly sends to us, as well as indirectly such as through people’s choices, to accomplish His purposes. The “how often” part is a shrouded mystery that He doesn’t let us in on. There’s no way to know that, only to speculate.

It seems that we thank God for the good things that happen in our life. And we should! But is it then right to “blame” Him for the bad in our life? Or maybe not so much blame, but just thank Him for the bad too because we know it’s ultimately for the best? Or maybe we shouldn’t thank Him or blame Him for every little thing, because maybe some things just happen. But typing that out – it just doesn’t sound right.

Absolutely! And that’s why God calls us to always give thanks for everything (Eph. 3:20). From our very limited perspective, we don’t always know the difference between the good things that happen in our lives, and the bad things. The biggest example of that is the horror and pain the disciples experienced when Jesus died, which devastated them because they thought it was a bad thing, but it was the very best thing that ever happened-until right around the corner, an even better “best thing” happened, when Jesus was raised from the dead. When we give thanks for what feels like a bad thing, we are relinquishing it into God’s hand and affirming our trust in His goodness and His sovereignty. (By the way, this is one of the major lessons God has taught in my Christian walk. I invite you to read my story, which I call “How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can’t Change” here: www.probe.org/how-to-handle-the-things-you-hate-but-cant-change/)

Many things make me wonder this, but on a personal level, it’s in regards to my and my husband’s infertility. Did God cause this to happen because we must learn something from it, or did it just happen because we live in a fallen world where things like disease, infertility, and bad things as a result of sin and our free will are just going to happen?

Unfortunately, God often doesn’t let us know the “why” of our trials. But when you consider that He calls us to honor him in the midst of our suffering (1 Peter 2), then the reason behind

them doesn't matter as much as our response to them.

Also, in regards to our infertility problem, how do we know what God's will is for us? We have been trying for 2 years now. We've had advanced and expensive treatments that have failed. Sometimes people tell us to "just trust God." But what do they mean, that we should stop pursuing treatments and just let it happen naturally? I mean, we have medical diagnosis that need treating... one would do the same for a cold, or flu, or cancer right? They would seek help. I feel the same way about infertility. Do you have an opinion on that? Now, maybe by saying "Just trust God," they mean not to worry so much. And that I can understand. I know that God has a plan and that it will be perfect for us. So I do need to not worry so much. It's just a very emotional issue!

Yes, I think that God's command to Adam and Eve to exercise dominion over the earth was the overarching principle that resulted in modern science. So, if there's something that can correct infertility, it makes sense to do what we can (and what we can afford, while still remaining good stewards of the money God has put in our hands). Of course this is an emotional issue for you. . . it's much more than just a command to "be fruitful and multiply," it's also the desire of your heart which God put there as an element of your femininity and your husband's masculinity!

But as far as knowing God's will.... I mean, I just wish I knew if His will for us was to never be parents, or to adopt, or to keep trying for a biological child. We pray for guidance, but it's hard to tell if we're "hearing" God or just doing what we want to do. If I ask God to "speak" to me, will He always? How will I know it is God rather than just myself telling myself, "it's a sign?" Does that makes sense?

Boy, it's hard when we're trying to discern God's leading, isn't it?

Here's one way to look at it: God will not open a door that violates His will for you. Which is how fertility clinics can put all the right chemicals in a Petri dish, add eggs and sperm. . . . and the stuff just sits there and no baby is made. Only God can create life. (And yes, we can theoretically force a clone, but we can't control whether or not a healthy baby makes it to full-term delivery.) Which is why you have to go with the biblical principles, which are to be fruitful and multiply. If you try in vitro and God doesn't bless it, He is speaking His will to you. You can try to adopt and if God doesn't allow an adoption to go through, He is speaking His will to you.

I think the best route is to commit your desire for children to the Lord, ask Him to guide you, and then move forward, trusting Him to take care of the details. If you have submitted yourselves to the Lord about this issue, then you can rest in Him and in His love for you that He will be faithful to lead you. (My guess is, that describes how you've been living already. . .??)

I do think that often, God leads us through His peace (consider Col. 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule [act as umpire] in your heart. . .") or the lack of it. I often counsel people, "Go to where the peace is." After praying much about it, you probably don't have any peace about the idea of never being parents, for example, which would constitute direction to continue to seek His ways of getting His children into your family, whether by adoption or biology.

Oh, and I don't know what your thoughts are on fertility treatments. We have done in vitro fertilization but we do not believe in destroying any embryos. We also only put in as many as we'd be willing to carry and froze the rest to use in another cycle. We would never do selective reduction or kill an embryo. So I hope if you have time to reply, that you don't automatically say that we should stop fertility treatments because they are immoral... unless you think they

are for another reason that I have not mentioned and that you might enlighten me with.

Nope, we don't think they're immoral; we think that using the criteria you specified, that is the God-honoring and life-honoring way to do it.

I hope this helps. I don't have a crystal ball to tell you what you should do, but I CAN encourage you to daily give thanks for your fertility problems, give thanks for your desire for a baby, give thanks that God is in control, give thanks for His faithfulness in guiding you in the process, and give thanks by faith for the baby He has for you, however He chooses to do it.

(And by the way, we experienced secondary infertility after our first baby died, so I have prayed these prayers myself. We have two sons.)

Blessings to you!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

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“How Do You Explain Knowledge of Past Lives Unless It’s True?”

On the History Channel I saw a program on reincarnation, in which a woman named “Jenny Cockel” had memories of being in

Ireland. She remembered facts about her previous life, such as the name of her eight children. She drew the correct map of her childhood town, gave an accurate description of her house etc. These things were later found to be true. How can a woman remember the name of her 8 children, the place where she lived, what was in their house (two oval-shaped photos, one of her and a child and the other of a soldier) this accurately? Is there any other proof of people more solid than this of people remembering their past life? Her past life son says what she says is exactly correct, and only she could know it. Please see this program on the History Channel. Please tell me something about other solid experiences that support reincarnation.

Since the Bible's teachings do not allow for reincarnation to be true ("It is appointed unto man to die once, and after that comes judgement," Hebrews 9:27), we believe that the type of information given to people like Jenny Cockel is the result of the deception of demons. These fallen, sinful beings have been around people since Adam and Eve. They know all kinds of information not available to people naturally, and they will feed this information to those open to believing it.

This is similar to the stage "psychics" who have their shills circulate among the audience, picking up information that the "psychic" would never know on his own, and then this outside information is fed to the performer via a small earpiece receiver. When he reveals it publically, people are impressed with his "supernatural" knowledge.

Demons have no trouble knowing geography to be able to feed someone specific map information, nor do they have trouble collecting genealogical information on a family, or descriptions of physical artifacts, to feed someone. (Demons are sneaky. They can't read minds, but being spirits, they can speak in ways that we think it's our own thoughts. That's what I mean by "feeding.")

(For a purely natural explanation, it's also possible that people gained information from reading books and other sources that they forgot about.)

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Why Doesn’t the Bible Specifically Condemn Father-Daughter Incest?”

In “[How Can a Just God Order the Slaughter of Men, Women and Children?](#)” your author quoted the Bible as saying incest with someone’s daughter was forbidden. I have Revised Standard Edition of the Bible, and I have noticed that in this version, at least, it says “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter, for their nakedness is your nakedness.”

Out of this whole long list of people (relatives) one is not supposed to have sexual relations with, in Leviticus 18, only the daughter is omitted. I have always wondered about this. You could say, well, it’s inferred that someone should not commit incest with one’s daughter. But why list all the other relatives one by one, and leave out the daughter??? It seems very suspect that the author of Leviticus would make a very detailed, explicit list, and yet still leave out the daughter.

As an incest survivor, this bothers me greatly that even one version of the Bible would have this translation.

My heart hurts for you. I am so sorry to hear about your sexual abuse. Did you know that the Hebrew word for incest is "confusion"? Appropriate, isn't it?

You're right, there isn't a specific prohibition against father-daughter incest in the Bible, although I do believe it is covered under Lev. 18:6, "None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness; I am the LORD."

I found this interesting statement on a website (www.arlev.clara.net/lev038.htm):

Father and Daughter

It needs to be noted that sexual relations between a father and his daughter aren't mentioned as being forbidden in either this passage or chapter 20 which follows. This is a tricky problem but it seems best to follow Wenham's explanation on this in seeing this prohibition as already in existence amongst the Israelites and so not repeated here.

The implication of Genesis 19:30-38 appears to be that such a union was unacceptable in the eyes of the natural culture of the tribes and didn't warrant a comment forbidding what was already accepted as illicit.

Wenham notes (page 254) that:

It is expressly forbidden both in the laws of Hammurabi . . . and in the Hittite laws . . . In other words these regulations extend the prohibitions on incest already accepted in other parts of the ancient Near East

Since even the Gentiles knew that incest with one's daughter was unthinkable, perhaps that's why the umbrella prohibition of Lev. 18:6 was understood to include one's own daughter.

I also checked with a great friend of Probe, Dr. Reg Grant (professor at Dallas Theological Seminary), who also added

this:

I went to the [NET Bible](#) and found this little note on 18:6 (which is the place I would have taken her as well):

*Heb “Man, man shall not draw near to any flesh of his body/flesh.” The repetition of the word man is distributive, meaning “any” [or, “every”] man (GKC 123.c; cf. Lev 15:2). The two words for flesh are combined to emphasize the physical familial relatedness (see Hartley, *Leviticus* [WBC], 282 and Levine, *Leviticus* [JPSTC], 119).*

It's interesting to me to see the emphasis of the Hebrew in Lev. 18:6: first, literally, “no man, man,” indicating that this is across the board for EVERYONE, and secondly, the repetition of both Hebrew words for “flesh” (literally, “flesh of flesh to him”) to cover every family relationship.

I hope the fact that the unspeakable horror of father-child incest is not specifically forbidden in Scripture does not make you feel that it is any less heart-breaking to God than it is. There are no words for the depth of my compassion for anyone who has to live with the soul-wounds of this horrible sin and trauma. Again, I am so sorry.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

P.S. A reader sent an email responding to this article, suggesting that the prohibition in Lev. 18:17 (“You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter; you shall not take [in marriage] her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness they are close relatives, it is evil counsel”) also works to include daughters and step-daughters.

“You Promote Hate and Intolerance”

How can people who say they are God's children stand in judgment of others. . . only God can judge man! “He who is without sin cast the first stone.” You promote hate and intolerance and I am quite sure that Jesus would be ashamed of your actions.

It would be helpful if we had any idea of what you had read on our website. I'm curious where you saw hate; intolerance is another matter altogether since today's values, elevating a new kind of tolerance, say that everything is equally valid. I guess you don't believe that, or you would have a live and let live attitude toward our position.

What did you read?

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries Webservant

This was written by you Sue Bohlin http://www.*****.com Regardless on how you feel about homosexuality and I am a straight female by the way your complete lack of compassion by showing a man with AIDS and how he looks before and after death is sick. I am a Christian and ashamed that there are so called “Christians” out there that can be so cruel that is not what Jesus preached when he walked this earth. Remember he died on the cross for all of our sins and no one is without sin even YOU. So before you start judging others start with yourself for not being able to show compassion and love something that Jesus preached over and over again.

You have your right to disagree with homosexuality but it is

the manner in which you choose to disagree that makes me sick. I wonder if you have ever met a homosexual, believe it or not they are no different than you and me. They are human beings and deserved to be loved and respected like everyone else.

I will pray for you and your "ministry" that you will come to find compassion for those who are different than you. Remember God loves us all ...regardless....that is why his Son Jesus died on the cross.

Thank you for writing me back. I appreciate the time it took you to find the article you were referring to. I truly want to make sure that my heart for those dealing with homosexuality comes through, and if I have written something in a way that invites misunderstanding, I definitely want to fix it.

Which is why I was so puzzled by your reference to this: "by the way your complete lack of compassion by showing a man with AIDS and how he looks before and after death is sick."

I am so glad you said you found my article on the *****.com website, which provided the key to the mystery. The people who have that website republished my article on Homosexual Myths from our Probe Ministries website, Probe.org (and actually didn't even ask permission, as I recall). I am not connected with the *****.com people and didn't even know what else was on the website. No wonder you thought I agreed with them! I am quite sure that Dr. Throckmorton, a good guy with a HUGELY compassionate heart, whose article follows mine on their website, would agree with me that we are distressed to be linked to such unloving, uncompassionate people.

I am glad to be able to reassure you that you and I are on the same page. I have a huge, joyful passion for those dealing with unwanted homosexuality, and in fact minister on a daily basis to women dealing with same-sex attraction. It is one of the highlights of my life to watch God change lives of the

sexually broken through the power of Jesus Christ, and I tell my struggler friends all the time that they are my heroes.

In fact, if you're interested, here's a [link](#) to a number of my e-mail answers to homosexuality questions from real, hurting and questions people on the Probe website.

I am glad to be able to clear up this misunderstanding with one of my sisters in the Lord BEFORE we get to heaven! <smile>

The Lord bless you and keep you today!

Sue

“When Is It Wrong to Have Lust For Your Spouse?”

I read this in your [article](#) about God's plan for sex in marriage and I need some clarification.

Here's their list of what God prohibits in His Word:

Fornication (immoral sex, which is any sex outside of marriage)

Adultery

Homosexuality

Impurity

Orgies

Prostitution

Lustful passions

Sodomy

Bestiality

Incest

Obscenity and coarse jokes

Can you please give a more specific definition of impurity, and lustful passions? What is the difference between being attracted to your spouse, and lusting after your spouse? When does it become evil? I am really concerned about this because I don't know if the passion my husband has for me is too much, to the point of being evil lust...

Within marriage, there isn't a problem with lust toward our spouses, since lust is a strong desire for something God hasn't given us, and He HAS given us our spouse! In fact, I heard Linda Dillow (co-author of *Intimate Issues*) once suggest to wives that we pray for a "holy lust" for our husbands, which is a way of praying for greater sexual desire (a win-win for everybody).

Impurity is having thoughts and engaging in actions that are directed toward the wrong person (i.e., someone other than one's spouse), such as thinking about being sexual with another person, or dressing in a way to be alluring to anyone other than one's husband.

The passion your husband has for you is God-designed and God-given. Men are visual creatures, and when you combine that with the testosterone that God created to flow through his body, it means he has a strong desire for sex-WITH YOU. When he directs that desire toward you and you alone, this is the safety net that marriage provides. God means for our sexuality to flow within the banks of marriage alone, and not overflow those banks into other relationships or a habit of physical masturbation (a temptation for men and a growing number of women) or emotional fantasy (a temptation for mainly women).

Speaking as one woman to another, we will probably never understand how strong a man's sex drive is, or the power of his attraction for us and our bodies, but that's the way God designed it, so you don't need to worry about it being lustful in a sinful way. Being desired is one of the great joys of life (think about the opposite: not being wanted!!), and may I

suggest that you enjoy it as the gift that God intends for it to be.

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Can You Be Pro-Life and For the Death Penalty? Isn’t That Judging?”

In my college class, a girl asked the other day, “How can you be for the death penalty if you are pro-life?” She also said the Bible says don’t judge, so how can you use the death penalty (because you would be judging). I was trying to find out the correct way to let her know that you can be pro-life and for the death penalty.

The point of being pro-life is that we put the same high value of all life that God does, from the earliest pre-born baby to the last breath of an elderly, dying person. We derive our high value of life from the fact that every human being is made in the image of God. Thus, when someone takes the life of another in murder, they are treating the person they murdered as less important and valuable than they are. God instituted the death penalty Himself after the flood when He said, “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God, He made man.” (Gen. 9:6)

The reason the death penalty is pro-life is that it puts the highest possible value on the life of the person murdered by

exacting the life of the person who violated that value by murdering. It's a strong way to say, "It is not OK for one human being to take the life of another. If you murder, you forfeit your own life because the person you killed is so valuable."

Concerning judging: yes, the Bible does say don't judge, but it also commands us to judge rightly. So you have to look at the context of commands such as "Judge not, lest ye be judged" (Matt. 7:1), which is about condemning others for doing the very same thing we do. Judging also means "be discerning" and "make a distinction between right and wrong." Jesus repeatedly taught men to judge rightly, insisting they "judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). He praised a man who "rightly judged" (Luke 7:43). Jesus also said, "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him, and if he refuses to listen, tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:15,17). Obeying such a command is only possible by making a judgment on one who sins. Jesus' apostle Paul later gave God's command to the church: "Do you not judge those who are within the church? . . . Remove the wicked man from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:12,13).

Also, the Bible tells us that governments (which are the only entities entitled to carry out capital punishment) are instituted by God for maintaining order: "[F]or [government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. (Rom 13:4)

Thus, I would argue that the Bible supports capital punishment, although it is extremely important to make absolutely sure that only the guilty are executed.

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“The Bible Has Been Changed and Corrupted Over Time”

You Bible-thumping Christians are so deluded and stupid. The Bible has been so changed and translated and mistranslated over time that it can't be trusted. Didn't you play the telephone game when you were a kid? Whatever the first person whispered to the second person, is going to be very different from what the last person hears. Stop acting as if you have all the answers—your Bible is a book of myths.

You're in good company; a lot of people think that way because they simply don't know the facts about how trustworthy the Bible really is. When you find out the truth about how the Bible has been handed down from one generation to the next, your charge will have as much significance as proclaiming that courts have no basis for determining the constitutionality of issues since the Constitution was written so long ago we can't know what it originally said.

But we can go back to the original Constitution and check, right?

We don't have the original biblical documents, but we have the next best thing: thousands of copies of the original New Testament manuscripts, by which we can determine what was originally said. The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (www.csntm.org) tells me that the current number is about 5500 copies of just the Greek New Testament, and when we combine the Greek with all translations in the various languages before the printing press was invented, there are a staggering 15,000 copies of NT manuscripts in existence, with more being found every day!

Greg Koukl of Stand to Reason (www.str.org) helps illustrate how Bible scientists (the discipline of textual criticism) can assure us of the Bible's accuracy:

RECONSTRUCTING AUNT SALLY'S LETTER

Pretend your Aunt Sally learns in a dream the recipe for an elixir that preserves her youth. When she wakes up, she scribbles the directions on a scrap of paper, then runs to the kitchen to make up her first glass. In a few days Aunt Sally is transformed into a picture of radiant youth because of her daily dose of "Sally's Secret Sauce."

Aunt Sally is so excited she sends detailed, hand-written instructions on how to make the sauce to her three bridge partners (Aunt Sally is still in the technological dark ages—no photocopier or email). They, in turn, make copies for ten of their own friends.

All goes well until one day Aunt Sally's pet schnauzer eats the original copy of the recipe. In a panic she contacts her three friends who have mysteriously suffered similar mishaps, so the alarm goes out to the others in attempt to recover the original wording.

Sally rounds up all the surviving hand-written copies, twenty-six in all. When she spreads them out on the kitchen table, she immediately notices some differences. Twenty-three of the copies are exactly the same. Of the remaining three, however, one has misspelled words, another has two phrases inverted ("mix then chop" instead of "chop then mix") and one includes an ingredient none of the others has on its list.

Do you think Aunt Sally can accurately reconstruct her original recipe from this evidence? Of course she can. The misspellings are obvious errors. The single inverted phrase stands out and can easily be repaired. Sally would then strike the extra ingredient, reasoning it's more plausible

one person would add an item in error than 25 people would accidentally omit it.

Even if the variations were more numerous or more diverse, the original could still be reconstructed with a high level of confidence if Sally had enough copies.

This, in simplified form, is how scholars do “textual criticism,” an academic method used to test all documents of antiquity, not just religious texts. It’s not a haphazard effort based on hopes and guesses; it’s a careful linguistic process allowing an alert critic to determine the extent of possible corruption of any work.[{1}](#)

When the thousands of copies of manuscripts (far more than for any other document of antiquity) are compared, we can know that the New Testament is 99.5% textually pure. In the entire text of 20,000 lines, only 40 lines are in doubt (about 400 words), and none affects any significant doctrine.[{2}](#)

Even if all the manuscripts in the whole world were to disappear, the New Testament is so comprehensively quoted by early church letters, essays and other extra-biblical sources that we could still reconstruct almost the entire testament.

We have a much fuller explanation of this in our article “Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?” at www.probe.org/are-the-biblical-documents-reliable

The historical evidence for the reliability of the biblical documents is so great that we can rest assured that the Bible we read today is the same Bible that God intended for us to have from the very beginning.

Wishing you well,

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

Notes

1. Greg Koukl, *Solid Ground*, Jan/Feb 2005, Stand to Reason.
2. Norman Geisler and William Nix, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 475.

“Should I Pray to God or Jesus? What About the Holy Spirit?”

When I pray, I pray to God and I pray in Jesus’ name. Others I know pray solely to Jesus. Should I be praying to Jesus as well as God? Furthermore, should I also be praying to the Holy Spirit?

It’s really not such a matter of “should,” but more like “get to.” There is only one God, but He consists in three Persons (which I’m sure you know). So, since there is only one God, no matter to which Person you address your prayers, the one God hears them.

Here’s how I look at it: Sometimes I address the Father, for example thanking Him for sending Jesus to die for me and live in me. Sometimes I address the Son, inviting Him to be present in an event or a job I’m about to be engaged in. Or thanking Him and praising Him for dying for me and calling me to be His bride. Sometimes I address the Spirit, asking Him to impress His presence on the heart of someone hurting, or asking Him to call the heart of someone who is lost. Most of the time I just

say "Lord"!! <smile>

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries