

“What Does It Mean to be Filled With the Spirit?”

I need some clarification! What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? I believe that it happens at the point of salvation, but many times in scripture it talks about people who are “full of the Spirit.” Is this filling a one time deal or something that can happen many times. I know that in Old Testament times the Spirit came and went upon certain people. But in our times (and since Pentecost), how would you explain this. Thanks so much for your time, wisdom, and ministry.

The best explanation I have seen (and which has worked for me experientially for many years) is that being filled with the Spirit means yielding to Him (the Holy Spirit) in full dependence so that we are out of the way and He can do His thing through us and in us. The verb tense in Ephesians 5:18 means “be continually being filled,” so it’s not a one-time event. It’s an ongoing discipline of submission.

I love the analogy of taking a hard, dried-up sponge and plunging it into a sink full of water. The sponge softens and soaks up the water until it is super-saturated. It is “filled with” water, right? But of course, a sponge can’t choose to jump into the sink like we can choose to open ourselves to the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. And this choice is a matter of will, not of emotion; the difference between operating in the flesh (our own power apart from God) and being filled with the Spirit is a simple choice to ask, “Holy Spirit, please fill me” with a submissive, humble heart. It doesn’t LOOK any different to someone else and it usually doesn’t FEEL any different to us, but it’s a real event. It can happen many times throughout the day. (I have shared this concept with my MOPS [Mothers of Preschoolers] group, and suggested they draw a line in the carpet with their shoe or draw an imaginary line across the kitchen floor, and step

across the line to signify that they are moving from self-dependence to Christ-dependence and filling. One girl told me, “Sue, you should see my house! There are lines all OVER the place!”)

The problem is that we default to the flesh; we keep gravitating toward doing things on our own and either rebelling against God or passively ignoring Him. We wake up “reset” to the flesh every morning. ☐ So we need to be filled again and again and again. Sort of like eating. We need to do it again and again and again! ☐

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“What Do You Say When People Call Christians Hypocrites?”

I was just wondering... when people call Christians hypocrites, what is a good response? Isn't everyone a hypocrite in one way or another? I mean, I TRY not to be one, but like all humans, I mess up. Thankfully I am a Christian and have God's forgiveness. What is a quick reply that I can give people who accuse me of hypocrisy?

That is a tough accusation, for sure. Too bad it's so often accurate.

I would agree with the person that many Christians are indeed hypocrites, and it saddens God greatly. But you might remark that the church is supposed to be a hospital for sick people, not a museum for perfect people.

Sometimes, the “Christians are hypocrites” charge is nothing but a smokescreen, which is why I would ask if they have any personal experience with it, or if it’s just something they’ve heard and they’re using it to keep distance between themselves and Christians. Or, more accurately, between themselves and God.

If someone were to make that comment to me, I would respond with, “Is that something you’ve just heard, or have you had a personal experience with someone in a church who hurt you?” I’d try to find out the heart of the matter. Sometimes people just need for someone to know and acknowledge that they were hurt by a Christian who brought dishonor to the name of Christ, and they would appreciate a compassionate and regretful response. I have been able to say, “I am so sorry you had to experience that. So is God.”

I would also ask, in humility, “Have I done anything to make you see hypocrisy in me that I need to ask forgiveness for?” And then be prepared to LISTEN to the answer!

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“How Is It Just for God to Put Our Sins on Jesus?”

How is it just for God to put someone’s sins on Jesus, making them sinless? I have heard the analogy of a judge fining someone, and then paying the fine on their behalf; but sin is surely really, really bad, and no court would allow a judge to

die instead of a criminal who had been given the death sentence.

After talking through the gospel with friends, this seems to be a big sticking point. How can a murderer seemingly get away with what he's done and go to heaven, while Johnny Average gets punished—solely on the basis of whether he accepts Jesus? It is loving on God's part to give everyone the chance of salvation, and it is just for him to punish unrepentant sinners, but how is it *just* for God to forgive a repentant sinner, who though repentant still sins?

I think you might be confusing “just” with “fair.”

Justice is about making sure that someone pays the penalty for a wrongdoing. Fairness is about treating people appropriately and right.

It is *just* for God to insist that someone pay the penalty for sin. It wasn't *fair* for Jesus to pay that penalty Himself, because that's about grace, not justice. Someone has said that justice is getting what we deserve, mercy is not getting what we deserve, and grace is getting what we don't deserve. I find those distinctions very helpful.

It is just for God to forgive a repentant sinner who continues to sin (that would be all of us!) because all of our sins, those committed before salvation and all those committed after salvation, were all paid for at the cross. Maybe I can help with the “sticking point” with a very simple word picture: we are all standing at the bottom of the waterfall of God's love and grace. Those who refuse to turn to God in trustful dependence, receiving His forgiveness and salvation, have their cups upside down and therefore can't receive what God is pouring out on them. Those who have trusted Christ have turned their cups right side up, and can receive what God is offering.

One of the most amazing truths about the gospel is that our

sins are transferred to Jesus, who paid for them at the cross, and His righteousness is transferred to us. It is the most absurdly unfair transaction in the history of all creation, but it's true. Love does things like that.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Why Did Jesus Have to Go to Hell After He Died?”

At a family picnic, my niece asked a very good question that had us all puzzled.

When reciting the Apostolic Creed, we say “...and suffered under Pontius Pilate...was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again and ascended into heaven.” My niece asked, “Why did Jesus have to go through hell too...what was the point of that? Didn't Jesus defy the devil right here on earth ... why did he have to go through hell upon death?”

I am embarrassed to have to write and ask you (and yes, I am even more embarrassed to go to my pastor and look him in the eye and ask him directly...because I feel I “should” know this answer. I guess I was sleeping somewhere along the line...I've been searching in my Bible and Bible commentary, but cannot find a “real” answer.) Thanks for your help!

Great question! There is still a lot of discussion about what that phrase meant to those who inserted it into the Creed, and

what it means today.

First, we need to make a distinction between the Apostles' Creed and scripture. Scripture is inspired; the creed, while based on scripture, is not. Secondly, you may be surprised to learn (as was I) that the Apostles' Creed does not date back to the time of the apostles, but was a "work in progress," developing gradually from about A.D. 200 to 750. Before 650, the phrase "descended into hell" only appeared in one version of the creed, in 390, written by a man who understood it to mean simply that Christ was buried—He "descended into the grave." (Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, p. 174)

In defending this part of the creed, these scriptures have been offered:

*Acts 2:31 (KJV) He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that **his soul was not left in hell**, neither his flesh did see corruption.*

The problem is that the Greek word translated in the KJV "hell" is actually "Hades," which means "the place of the dead." The word that definitively refers to hell, "gehenna," isn't used here.

*1 Pet 3:18-19 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and **made proclamation to the spirits now in prison...***

The context indicates that the "spirits in prison" may have been disobedient demons from Noah's time, to whom Jesus went and made proclamation—what, we're not told. The Greek word for preached means "proclaimed," not evangelized. This may well indicate that He visited the demons in their holding cells after His death, but that's not the same thing as experiencing

hell after His death.

When we look at what the scripture says about where Jesus went after his death, what we see is:

1. He told the thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in paradise." After His death, Jesus knew He would be in heaven and see the repentant and newly converted thief there.
2. Some of His last words on the cross were, "It is finished." He had already suffered hell—separation from his Father—while hanging on the cross. His work was over and so was the torment of being under the Father's wrath and alienation.
3. Just before dying, He said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit," indicating that He expected the Father to receive Him when he died.

There is clearly a mystery here, in view of the 1 Peter passage, and I don't think any of us will figure it out this side of heaven.

So, what I would say to your niece is, "Jesus didn't have to go to hell, and He didn't suffer anymore in hell (or any other place) after He died, but it seems that He visited it to make a point to the demons there."

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

© July 2003 Probe Ministries

When Someone In Your Congregation Says “I’m Gay”

Things to Remember

1. **No one is born gay**, and no one chooses to be gay. Because of relational brokenness in families and among peers, some people experience emotional needs that they try to meet in ungodly ways. Many of them are uncomfortable with their own gender; later, they discover they are attracted to others of the same sex, but this is not their choice. Acting on it, however, is.

2. **Change is possible.** Even going back to the first-century church, the apostle Paul wrote to former homosexuals in the Corinthian church, “and such were some of you” (1 Cor. 6:11).

3. Because we live in a fallen world, **we are all broken.** Many people in our churches are sexually broken—victims of incest, pornography and masturbation addicts, and compulsive sex addiction. Homosexuality is only one form of brokenness.

4. **Homosexuality grows out of broken relationships and is healed in healthy relationships**, especially same-sex relationships. This is one of the reasons it is essential for recovering homosexuals and lesbians to be actively involved in the church, because this is where they can find healthy, God-honoring friendships. Their homosexuality is not contagious!

5. **Treat them with respect like you would anyone else.** They are people made in the image of God for whom Christ died—they are not their sexuality. Many people trying to come out of the gay lifestyle expect to find respect and acceptance only in the gay community. Finding it in church is immensely healing to their souls.

6. **Accept them where they are, just as Jesus did.** Choose to accept the person, but not sinful behavior. People don't change unless they experience the grace of acceptance first. But once they know they are loved and accepted, many of them are willing to do what it takes to live a life of holiness.

7. **Seek to see them with God's eyes** of love and acceptance, with His intention for their wholeness, healing and freedom. This means depending on the Holy Spirit for divine perspective and exercising humility to recognize that first impressions are often incomplete and inaccurate.

8. This is a great opportunity to lead people to an understanding of **what it means to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.** Some homosexual strugglers, especially men, feel that they have committed the unpardonable sin. They've heard they are going to hell no matter what they do, so they are permanently separated from God. They need to know this is a lie, because when we confess our sins, the blood of Jesus covers them ALL and cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

9. Because of abuse issues, most **strugglers seem to have an especially hard time relating to Father God** and to receiving His love. Yet it is the masculine voice (first in earthly fathers, and ultimately in our Heavenly Father) that calls gender out from both men and women, and it is the Father's personal and powerful love that is the most important healing agent in human hearts.

10. Because most pastors are men in authority, **most strugglers (men and women) are INCREDIBLY intimidated** by them. Pastors need to know this and really understand in order to minister to strugglers. This means respecting the fragility of strugglers' relationships with pastors and choosing to be deliberately tender and gentle. They really need "good shepherds." Verbalize to them that God can not only change them, but He is very proud of them (as you are) for sharing

this with you and desiring to change.

11. Most same-sex strugglers have very weak and broken boundaries. Their deep neediness causes them to lapse into emotionally dependent relationships with everyone who gets close. We encourage you to only counsel these folks at your office during regular business hours where others can be aware of your activities. This gives a sense of security to the struggler and a protection for you as the pastor.

12. The most success in overcoming same-gender attraction has occurred when strugglers experienced **God as Healer through heterosexual people who were willing to come alongside them** in their journeys—men helping men, and women helping women. It would be helpful for you to find someone willing to befriend and mentor the struggler. This takes a person willing to seriously invest in the life of a very needy person. They will need to be available and accessible. Their presence in the struggler's life can be powerful and healing.

13. If someone comes in with an agenda of arrogance, demanding acceptance of their sexual sin, don't let them bully you. There is a difference between welcoming the sinner and allowing him to continue in his rebellion. Homosexuality is sin. Lev. 18:22-23; Rom. 1:26-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-11. Note that these verses condemn homosexual behavior, not feelings.

Five DON'TS:

1. Don't panic. An excellent resource for understanding the issue of homosexuality is *Someone I Love is Gay* by Bob Davies and Anita Worthen (published by InterVarsity Press). Also Exodus International (exodusinternational.org/), a Christ-centered ministry that helps people deal with unwanted homosexuality, has numerous resources. Living Hope Ministries (www.livehope.org) is an Exodus referral ministry in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area with excellent online forums for parents, spouses, men and women, and youth (ages 13+) who

struggle with homosexuality

2. Don't make false assumptions or accusations. For example, please do not assume he is HIV positive. Many aren't. And if he is, AIDS is sexually transmitted; the people in your congregation are safer than many fear. Respect the seriousness of HIV with commonsense precautions (such as contact with bodily fluids), but don't ostracize the person. Handshakes and hugs are perfectly safe.

3. Don't shut down pastorally or emotionally. The person coming to you has known a lifetime of rejection and desperately needs to know that a representative of Jesus Christ will extend grace to him. Hug them when they leave. It may be the first positive touch they have had in years.

4. Don't pass judgment. All of us have besetting sins! As Billy Graham said, "Don't take credit for not falling into a temptation that never tempted you in the first place."

5. Don't disclose this person's secret without permission, even among church staff. There is nothing safe about the gay lifestyle; people struggling with same-sex attraction need to find safety in the church.

This is the text of a brochure from Living Hope Ministries, written by Sue Bohlin, who serves on the Board of Directors of Living Hope and moderates one of the online forums. A PDF version of this brochure is also available for download [here](#); you will need the free Adobe Acrobat reader to see it.

© 2003 Living Hope Ministries. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Galapagos Islands: The Bohlins' Visit



The Galapagos Islands, off the coast of Ecuador, are where Charles Darwin received the inspiration for the theory of evolution. In observing the islands' ecosystem and how its bird and reptile inhabitants compared to similar South American cousins, Darwin assembled what has become the driving philosophy of science.

In May 2003, Dr. Ray and Sue Bohlin visited the Galapagos Islands with a different perspective, focusing on intelligent design and the natural limits to biological change. Here is their report.

[1 – Why Visit the Galapagos Islands?](#)

[2 – Thursday PM: Bartolome](#)

[3 – Friday AM: Punta Espinosa](#)

[4 – Friday PM: Tagus Cove](#)

[5 – Saturday AM: Punta Moreno](#)

[6 – Saturday PM: Urbina Bay](#)

[7 – Sunday AM: Darwin Research Station](#)

[8 – Sunday PM: Santa Cruz Highlands](#)

[9 – Monday AM: Beach Visit](#)

[10 – Galapagos Wrap Up: ICR Lecture, What It All Means](#)

“I Disagree with Your Judgment of Conversations With God”

Mrs. Bohlin,

My name is _____ and I am a devotee of the Conversations with God philosophy. I noticed [you are not a fan of the books or beliefs in the CwG series](#). I respect the fact that you have an opinion on this and express it openly, however, your claims that the books are “false doctrine of devils” and “very unsafe in anyone’s hands” are not supported. Why do you feel they are “evil” and dangerous? Perhaps because people may change their minds about religion after reading them? If this is so, you say that your religion does not allow freedom of thought nor disagreement with your beliefs. You proclaim that the Bible is God’s ultimate truth and that any writings against the holy scripture (even the Qur’an, which includes both the New and Old Testament) are “wrong”. Correct me if I am mistaken, but isn’t your God’s wish that each person come to her of their own volition? If nothing but obedience to pre-set rules is required, what then is the purpose of life?

I wonder if you are aware that most sections of the Bible were written as many as 200 years after the ascension of Jesus. That leaves a lot of room for error, especially in light of the fact that the Bible was written by humans (whom are inherently imperfect according to your beliefs). Are you familiar at all with a Red Bible? It is a copy of the Bible where all direct quotes from Jesus are printed in red and all other words in black—more than 90% of a Red Bible is black

print. This means that over 90% of the Bible is subject to the opinions and cultural influences of those who wrote it. It is said in *CwG Book Two* that even this most recent missal from God is not entirely pure because any human will “filter” the message through his own perception (Neale Donald Walsch is no exception).

Thank you! Namaste!

Hello _____,

...however, your claims that the books are “false doctrine of devils” and “very unsafe in anyone’s hands” are not supported. Why do you feel they are “evil” and dangerous? Perhaps because people may change their minds about religion after reading them?

Let me put it this way. Let’s say someone has a recipe for brownies that her mother gave her, which she got from her mother, and which she got from HER mother. But this person starts tinkering with the recipe. Instead of baking soda, she puts in arsenic. They’re both powder, and you don’t use very much of either, so what’s the problem? The problem is that brownies made with arsenic kill people.

At Probe Ministries we come from a definite position on the Bible: it really is true, and it really is without error, and it really is the word of God. We don’t believe this because we’ve just been taught it; we believe it because there is such strong evidence for it. There are a number of articles on our Web site about [the reliability of the Bible](#). If someone writes something that claims to be spiritual truth, and it contradicts the Bible, then either this other writing is false, or the Bible is false, but they cannot both be true. As I’ve already said, we place our faith in the validity of the Bible, so our position is that books such as *Conversations with God* are evil because—even if they say a lot of nice and true things—they make false statements about God, about truth,

about sin, and about the consequences of departing from what is true. In the exact same way that eating arsenic-laced brownies will cause physical death, “swallowing” books like CwG can cause spiritual death, which is separation from God.

People changing their minds about religion is not a problem; that’s how ALL of us here at Probe came to become believers in Jesus Christ. We all changed our minds. But when people discard what is true and embrace a lie as a result of reading books like Walsch’s, THAT is a problem. Or, when people don’t even know what is true but they embrace the lie, that is also a problem.

If this is so, you say that your religion does not allow freedom of thought nor disagreement with your beliefs.

Actually, biblical Christianity gives a lot of room for disagreement within the confines of what is true and important. And it is very clear that no one can force another person to believe or conform from the heart, even to what is truly true. If this were the case, God would never have given us as His creation the gift of choice, which includes the freedom to think whatever we want. I can tell you, as a biblical, orthodox Christian, that Christianity very much allows you as an unbeliever to believe whatever you want and to disagree with me as much as you want. You have that right.

What you—and I, and everybody else on the planet—don’t have the right to, is to be free from the *consequences* of believing wrong things. Such as believing that gravity can be suspended at will. Or believing that arsenic and baking soda are interchangeable. Or believing that a person can violate what God has said in His word and there are no consequences.

You proclaim that the Bible is God’s ultimate truth and that any writings against the holy scripture (even the Qur’an, which includes both the New and Old Testament) are “wrong”.

Excuse me, but the Qur’an may contain points and *elements* from

both the New and Old Testament, but that doesn't it make it holy scripture.

Correct me if I am mistaken, but isn't your God's wish that each person come to her of their own volition?

First, God has revealed Himself to us as masculine. It is just as disrespectful to call Him a "her" as it is to deliberately call you "George" when you have revealed yourself to be "Jane."

Second, you are absolutely right about His desire that we turn to Him in faith. However, Jesus also told us that no one can come to God unless He calls us to Him first. This is because we come into the world spiritually dead—it's like getting a radio with no antenna. It takes a miracle for anyone to hear Him calling to us.

If nothing but obedience to pre-set rules is required, what then is the purpose of life?

I would respectfully disagree that "nothing but obedience is required." The purpose of life is to enjoy God, to love Him, to bring glory to Him, and to walk out His plan for our lives. The kind of obedience that pleases God comes from a heart that is tuned to Him first. God's desire is that we be in a love relationship to Him. That's very different from a callous God who demands we jump through hoops to please Him. I would suggest that that kind of God is a caricature and not the true, living God.

I wonder if you are aware that most sections of the Bible were written as many as 200 years after the ascension of Jesus.

And I'm wondering if you know where this information came from. There are skeptics who dismiss the early dates of the New Testament because they don't want to believe in the validity of the New Testament documents. There are also plenty

of biblical scholars who accept the evidence for first-century dates. People believe what serves their presuppositions. Did you know there are people who deny the Holocaust happened? Does that make it go away? Those who insist on later dates for the New Testament, and who deny the authorship of all the gospels and epistles, do so because they have an agenda.

That leaves a lot of room for error, especially in light of the fact that the Bible was written by humans (whom are inherently imperfect according to your beliefs).

I would say that the Bible was PENNED by humans, but this book makes the amazing claim to be the very word of God, who “breathed” His words into the minds and spirits of the human writers. And its remarkable internal consistency, combined with the fact that there is so much fulfilled prophecy, not to mention the power to change lives as testified by millions of people, is strong evidence that it really is the word of God. God would be very interested in making sure that His communication stayed pure, don’t you think? And since we still have the original languages (still spoken today) with thousands of copies of the biblical documents that we can go back and check, there is good reason to trust the Bible. What evidence do you have for error?

Are you familiar at all with a Red Bible? It is a copy of the Bible where all direct quotes from Jesus are printed in red and all other words in black—more than 90% of a Red Bible is black print. This means that over 90% of the Bible is subject to the opinions and cultural influences of those who wrote it.

Yes, I have a Red Letter Edition. This is something an editor produced. It doesn’t mean that the rest of the Bible is any less the word of God than what Jesus said. And yes, the human personalities and cultures of the writers are identifiable, but that doesn’t prevent God from expressing His thoughts perfectly through those writers. He’s a very big God. <smile>

It is said in *CwG Book Two* that even this most recent missal from God is not entirely pure because any human will “filter” the message through his own perception (Neale Donald Walsch is no exception).

We all filter EVERYTHING through our own perceptions. But that doesn't change the truth of what's in the Bible. There are several questions we must ask when we read the Bible: far more important than “What does this mean to me?” is “What does this mean? What did the author intend to communicate?” There are ways of answering those questions that allow us to be fairly certain, much of the time, that we're getting a pretty accurate handle on what was meant.

We all have our filters, but it's not that hard to remove them. What kind of filter do you use when you read the label on a medicine bottle? I would imagine that, like me, you don't try to figure out “what does this mean to me?” but “what did the doctor intend here?” and it's usually not very hard to figure out.

I find it very interesting that Neale Walsch appears to make the claim that this is a communication from God. If that were so, why does it contradict what God has already said in black and white? And if one takes the position that we can't trust what's in the Bible because of all the alleged errors and cultural filters, what CAN we trust? How do we know what is true? Why should we believe Neale Walsch's writings? Why should we believe anything at all?

Thank you! Namaste!

And I honor you as a creation of God, made in His image, and much beloved by the God and Father of us all.

Blessings,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Posted April 2003

“You Mismatch People About Jesus and Allah”

Hi—I’m a Muslim from UK. I visited your site and found you to be a misleading person who is blinded by faith most probably passed down the family. You say that Jesus is god then that means that you don’t believe in one god but you believe in two gods, Jesus and his father (god forgive). And if Jesus was god why were the Romans able to overpower him, how can the god who created everything be overpowered by a few measley people?

I hope you do your research thoroughly in the future and look at and review religion with the same eye you look at yours, and if not look at your own religion with the same critical eye you look at others. Please don’t forget your initial duty is the search for truth not the enforcement of your own religion. Please don’t lie in order to achieve a genuine good purpose or you are opposing your own fundamental beliefs.

Hope allah guides to the correct path. Please search for the truth the real truth.

Thank you for writing. I want to honor you for your deep respect and love for God, which is very evident in what you write. I understand why you want to defend your perspective on God.

However, God has revealed certain things about Himself to us that Islam does not accept, but that does not mean they are not true. I share your belief in one God, not two Gods. The idea that God could have three persons and still only be one

God is so outrageous it HAS to be a divine idea—how could mere mortals think it up?!

Let me try to explain. Do you believe in water, and steam, and ice? I bet you do. They are all comprised of the H₂O molecule. Do you believe in three different H₂O's? I bet you don't. You probably believe in one H₂O molecule that takes three different forms. This isn't a perfect analogy to God, but it's closer than anything else I can imagine.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is God, the Father is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but they are not each other and they are not three separate Gods. I have no idea how this can be true, but it's what the Bible teaches and it is what Jesus said. Jesus was 100% God, but left heaven to become 100% God AND 100% man at the same time. He wrapped Himself in human flesh and became one of us. The purpose for this was to die for our sins because we cannot possibly overcome the penalty for our sin and make ourselves perfect—and God requires that people be perfect to enter heaven.

The Romans did not overpower Him: He allowed them to take Him because that was the divine plan from before creation. There is a huge difference. Even when He was on the cross, He said that if He wanted, He could call a legion of angels to come take Him off but that wasn't the plan, so He didn't.

I assure you I have done my research. I tell you, most respectfully, that it is Islam that has gotten off the path of truth. Muhammad listened to Christians and to Jews but chose to believe only what he wanted to believe about Jesus and about what the Bible says. The Bible says that Jesus is fully God and fully man, but Islam says that is a lie. Jesus said He would die for our sins and then come back to life in three days—and He did. He is alive today. Where is Muhammad? He is dead. Jesus is far more than just a prophet; He is actually God.

I pray that God will allow you to see that this is true. Why don't you ask Him? Ask the one true God if it's true that Jesus is God. If you have the courage, I challenge you to read the story of a faithful Muslim who discovered this truth about Jesus: www.answering-islam.org/Testimonies/athanasios.html

God bless you, and lead you into all truth.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“You’re Mistaken About Islam”

Hi there Sue,

I was sent a copy of your article [A Short Look at Six World Religions](#). Having studied most of them in school years ago, and then in seminary, I had a pretty good knowledge of things, but as with many things, I haven't really thought about the Hindus or the Buddhists for some 30 years! While you read this note, keep in mind that I am a born-again Christian, who lives in Spain, works in Spain and Morocco and is professionally dedicated to translating texts (English/Spanish and a long list of etc.) so I do know a bit about languages.

I found the Moslem part interesting, but I do disagree about a thing or two. One must consider two things before getting into Islam...its founder married a rich widow, so by the time he was 20, he was married, and had no need to work (unlike us and the rest of humanity at that time), so he dedicated his time to meditation and searching...for God I would imagine. He entered into contact with Judaism, and with the early years of Christianity. Therefore, when you start looking at the Koran and the Moslem faith, there are many, many things that are

taken out of Judaism....no pork, no shellfish, and a long list of etc, etc. When you see them praying, they use a string of beads just like a rosary! And there are also many, many aspects that are from the early Christian faith. (Remember that the first Christians were much more Jewish in their thinking that most of us could ever be!)

As I said at the beginning, my work is 100% dedication to translation and there is a clear translation problem with Allah/God when it comes to Islam. The word God for us who speak English is fine, but if you speak Spanish, the word is Dios, and if you speak Arabic, it is Allah (when written in English format, and if it is in the Spanish format, it is Al). Saying that the Moslems do not believe in the same God as us Christians do is totally mistaken. The whole problem stems from a translation error. In Spain, most of the "modern" Moslems, when they say their prayers in Spanish, they use the word "Dios", and not the word "Al." Today, when it comes to translating, it is considered correct to not translate proper nouns in a text, therefore, when the Koran was translated into English, you translated everything, and the Arabic word Allah was made to sound English and therefore considered to be another god. (To give you another example....I live in Seville in southern Spain, but here in Seville, the name of the city is Sevilla, and most people want the city to be called Sevilla, and not Seville. Does this mean that Seville is one city and Sevilla is another? No, of course not) This is the same problem with God and Allah. How many born again Christians use the word Jehovah to describe the God of Abraham? Does that mean they are two different Gods? Of course not. Is the God of the Old Testament different from the God of the New? One again, of course not!

If you consider for a moment that Allah is not Yav nor God, then you are pulling the rug out from under the feet of the many missionaries who have spent years trying to take Christianity to the Moslems.

After being raised in the US in an active, church-going Christian family, and having lived abroad for 30 years, I have discovered that the western version of Christianity has become altered over the centuries to adapt to cultural implications of various nations. Our beliefs have incorporated heathen beliefs and customs, which are accepted, but are about as far from the truth as can possible be! (sorry about so many examples) We exchange presents at Christmas, and have a tree and the like, including Santa Claus, who was a saint. Where did it all come from?? First of all, Christ was not born on December 25. Based on the Bible description, and knowing weather conditions in the Mediterranean, I am sure that it was more like March or April, and according to my studies, historically, the Wiseman visited Christ about July, so really, the best time of the year to have Christmas would be July, but change the business world on that point! Then, we have a tree...that all comes from the pre-Christian beliefs in northern Europe and England...the druids used to think that the (oak) trees died in winter because the gods left, so they decorated them to get the gods to come back...and they did, in Spring! Over the years, pine trees were decorated, and then people started bringing them into their houses, and the like. If you get down to the bottom line, then if you want to really celebrate Christ's birthday, then we'll have to throw out the heathen tree! The celebration in December 25...it is only 4 days later than the celebration of the coming of winter, a heathen practice in Stonage (UK). Personally, I would rather celebrate Christmas and gift giving in July, with no strings attached, but then business is business!!

Thank you so much for taking the time to send such a thoughtful and educational letter! You have obviously gained a great deal of perspective in your time in Europe, and I appreciate all the things you've shared with me.

I would like to address your comment "Saying that the Moslems do not believe in the same God as us Christians do is totally

mistaken." If you re-read my reasons for this statement, they have nothing to do with the word for God in English and Arabic, and everything to do with the character of Allah and of the God of the Bible. Because the article was written as a time-constrained radio transcript (aimed at a Christian audience), I was limited in what I could say. A strong case can certainly be made for the perspective that Muslims and Christians differ in our understanding of how God is revealed in the Bible and the Qur'an. I suppose it's something like the old story of the three blind men encountering different parts of an elephant: one felt its tail and said the animal was like a rope, the second felt its trunk and said it was like a tree, and the third felt its hide and said it was like a house. I do believe that because the Bible is inspired and the Qur'an is not, we can trust what the Bible says and must see the Qur'an as a man-made book that, as you point out, borrows from both Judaism and Christianity. Thus, one view of God is correct and the other, while containing some truth about God, is incomplete and incorrect.

You mention the work of Christians trying to evangelize Muslims (an amazing task!). I see a parallel between their calling and Paul's sermon at the Areopagus, where he invoked the unknown god the Greeks worshipped and suggested that he could identify that unknown god for them, taking them from what they already knew to unfamiliar theological territory.

It's always hard, when we're trying to fit a large subject into a short amount of time, to strike the right balance between simplicity and accuracy. To be honest, my statement about Allah not being the same as the God of the Bible was directed at the well-meaning people who mistakenly believe "we all worship the same God with different names: God, Allah, Brahman, Buddha. . ." Certainly, Islam and Christianity have many points of similarity, particularly in terms of the fact they are both monotheistic, but there are too many Christians who don't understand the huge and significant differences.

I really appreciated your comments about the cultural aspects of Christianity. I think it's a challenge to Christians in every culture, in every time in history: to stick to Biblical Christianity and leave out what is cultural. As Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 4:6, "Do not go beyond what is written." A lot of people equate American (or Western) Christianity with Biblical Christianity, and they're not the same! You gave the excellent example of how we celebrate Christmas, by using imported pagan symbols and dates. I have also seen a difference in the way many American Christians view the use of alcohol compared to European Christians, and when one culture's taboos are imposed on another, misunderstandings occur and opportunities for bridge-building can be lost.

Thanks for sharing your thoughts with me.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Homosexuality: Questions and Answers from a Biblical Perspective

Sue Bohlin provides distinctly biblical answers to your questions about homosexuality. As a Christian, it is important to understand what the Bible says and to be able to communicate this message of compassion.

Q. Some people say homosexuality is natural and moral; others say it is unnatural and immoral. How do we know?

A. Our standard can only be what God says. In Romans 1 we

read,

God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion (Romans 1:26-27).

So even though homosexual desires *feel* natural, they are actually *unnatural*, because God says they are. He also calls all sexual involvement outside of marriage immoral. (There are 44 references to fornication—sexual immorality—in the Bible.) Therefore, any form of homosexual activity, whether a one-night stand or a long-term monogamous relationship, is by definition immoral—just as any abuse of heterosexuality outside of marriage is immoral.

Q. Is homosexuality an orientation God intended for some people, or is it a perversion of normal sexuality?

A. If God had intended homosexuality to be a viable sexual alternative for some people, He would not have condemned it as an abomination. It is never mentioned in Scripture in anything but negative terms, and nowhere does the Bible even hint at approving or giving instruction for homosexual relationships. Some theologians have argued that David and Jonathan's relationship was a homosexual one, but this claim has no basis in Scripture. David and Jonathan's deep friendship was not sexual; it was one of godly emotional intimacy that truly glorified the Lord.

Homosexuality is a manifestation of the sin nature that all people share. At the fall of man (Genesis 3), God's perfect creation was spoiled, and the taint of sin affected us physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually—and sexually. Homosexuality is a perversion of heterosexuality,

which is God's plan for His creation. The Lord Jesus said,

In the beginning the Creator made them male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh (Matthew 19:4, 5).

Homosexual activity and pre-marital or extra-marital heterosexual activity are all sinful attempts to find sexual and emotional expression in ways God never intended. God's desire for the person caught in the trap of homosexuality is the same as for every other person caught in the trap of the sin nature; that we submit every area of our lives to Him and be transformed from the inside out by the renewing of our minds and the purifying of our hearts.

Q. What causes a homosexual orientation?

A. This is a complex issue, and it is unfair to give simplistic answers or explanations. (However, for insight on this issue please consider our articles [Answers to Questions Most Asked by Gay-Identifying Youth](#) and ["Why Doesn't God Answer Prayers to Take Away Gay Feelings?"](#)) Some people start out as heterosexuals, but they rebel against God with such passionate self-indulgence that they end up embracing the gay lifestyle as another form of sexual expression. As one entertainer put it, "I'm not going to go through life with one arm tied behind my back!"

But the majority of those who experience same-sex attraction sense they are "different" or "other than" from very early in life, and at some point they are encouraged to identify this difference as being gay. These people may experience "pre-conditions" that dispose them toward homosexuality, such as a sensitive and gentle temperament in boys, which is not recognized as acceptably masculine in our culture. Another may be poor eye-hand coordination that prevents a boy from doing well at sports, which is a sure way

to invite shame and taunting from other boys (and, most unfortunately, from some of their own fathers and family members). Family relationships are usually very important in the development of homosexuality; the vast majority of those who struggle with same-sex attraction experienced a hurtful relationship with the same-sex parent in childhood. The presence of abuse is a recurring theme in the early lives of many homosexual strugglers. In one study, 91% of lesbian women reported childhood and adolescent abuse, 2/3 of them victims of sexual abuse.[\[1\]](#) There is a huge difference, however, between predispositions that affects gender identity, and the choices we make in how we handle a predisposition. Because we are made in the image of God, we can choose how we respond to the various factors that may contribute to a homosexual orientation.

Q. Wouldn't the presence of pre-conditions let homosexuals "off the hook," so to speak?

A. Preconditions make it easier to sin in a particular area. They do not excuse the sin. We can draw a parallel with alcoholism. Alcoholics often experience a genetic or environmental pre-condition, which makes it easier for them to fall into the sin of drunkenness. Is it a sin to want a drink? No. It's a sin to drink to excess.

All of us experience various predispositions that make it easier for us to fall into certain sins. For example, highly intelligent people find it easier to fall into the sin of intellectual pride. People who were physically abused as children may fall into the sins of rage and violence more easily than others.

Current popular thinking says that our behavior is determined by our environment or our genes, or both. But the Bible gives us the dignity and responsibility missing from that mechanistic view of life. God has invested us with free will—the ability to make real, significant choices. We can

choose our responses to the influences on our lives, or we can choose to let them control us.

Someone with a predisposition for homosexuality may fall into the sin of the homosexual behavior much more easily than a person without it. But each of us alone is responsible for giving ourselves permission to cross over from temptation into sin.

Q. What's the difference between homosexual temptation and sin?

A. Unasked-for, uncultivated sexual desires for a person of the same sex constitute temptation, not sin. Since the Lord Jesus was "tempted in every way, just as we are (Hebrews 4:15)," He fully knows the intensity and nature of the temptations we face. But He never gave in to them.

The line between sexual temptation and sexual sin is the same for both heterosexuals and homosexuals. It is the point at which our conscious will gets involved. Sin begins with the internal acts of lusting and creating sexual fantasies. Lust is indulging one's sexual desires by deliberately choosing to feed sexual attraction—you might say it is the sinful opposite of meditation. Sexual fantasies are conscious acts of the imagination. It is creating mental pornographic home movies. Just as the Lord said in the Sermon on the Mount, all sexual sin starts in the mind long before it gets to the point of physical expression.

Many homosexuals claim, "I never asked for these feelings. I did not choose them," and this may be true. That is why it is significant to note that the Bible specifically condemns homosexual *practices*, but not undeveloped homosexual feelings (temptation). There is a difference between having sexual feelings and letting them grow into lust. When Martin Luther was talking about impure thoughts, he said, "You can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them

from building a nest in your hair.”

Q. Isn't it true that “Once gay, always gay?”

A. It is certainly true that most homosexuals never become heterosexual—some because they don't want to, but most others because their efforts to change were unsuccessful. It takes spiritual submission and much emotional work to repent of sexual sin and achieve a healthy self-concept that glorifies God.

But for the person caught in the trap of homosexual desires who wants sexual and emotional wholeness, there is hope in Christ. In addressing the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul lists an assortment of deep sins, including homosexual offenses. He says,

And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:11).

This means there were former homosexuals in the church at Corinth! The Lord's loving redemption includes eventual freedom for *all* sin that is yielded to Him. Some (rare) people experience no homosexual temptations ever again. But for most others who *are* able to achieve change, homosexual desires are gradually reduced from a major problem to a minor nuisance that no longer dominates their lives. The probability of heterosexual desires returning or emerging depends on a person's sexual history.

But the potential for heterosexuality is present in everyone because God put it there.

See our article “Can Homosexuals Change?” at www.probe.org/can-homosexuals-change/.

Q. If homosexuality is such an abomination to God, why doesn't it disappear when someone becomes a Christian?

A. When we are born again, we bring with us all of our emotional needs and all of our old ways of relating. Homosexuality is a relational problem of meeting emotional needs the wrong way; it is not an isolated problem of mere sexual preference. With the power of the indwelling Spirit, a Christian can cooperate with God to change this unacceptable part of life. Some people—a very few—are miraculously delivered from homosexual struggles. But for the majority, real change is slow. As in dealing with any besetting sin, it is a process, not an event. Sin's power over us is broken at the moment we are born again, but learning to depend on the Holy Spirit to say no to sin and yes to godliness takes time. 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "We...are being transformed into His likeness from glory to glory." Transformation (*this* side of eternity!) is a process that takes a while. Life in a fallen world is a painful struggle. It is not a pleasant thing to have two oppositional natures at war within us!

Homosexuality is not one problem; it is symptomatic of other, deeper problems involving emotional needs and an unhealthy self-concept. Salvation is only the beginning of emotional health. It allows us to experience human intimacy as God intended us to, finding healing for our damaged emotions. It isn't that faith in Christ isn't enough; faith in Christ is the *beginning*.

Q. Does the fact that I had an early homosexual experience mean I'm gay?

A. Sex is strictly meant for adults. The Song of Solomon says three times, "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires." This is a warning not to raise sexual feelings until the time is right. Early sexual experience can be painful or pleasurable, but either way, it constitutes child abuse. It traumatizes a child or teen. This loss of innocence does need to be addressed and perhaps even grieved through, but *doesn't* mean you're gay.

Sexual experimentation is something many children and teens do as a part of growing up. You may have enjoyed the feelings you experienced, but that is because God created our bodies to respond to pleasure. It probably made you feel confused and ashamed, which is an appropriate response to an inappropriate behavior. Don't let anyone tell you it means you're gay: it means you're human.

Even apart from the sexual aspect, though, our culture has come to view close friendships with a certain amount of suspicion. If you enjoy emotional intimacy with a friend of the same sex, especially if it is accompanied by the presence of sexual feelings that emerge in adolescence, you can find yourself very confused. But it doesn't mean you're gay.

It is a tragic myth that once a person has a homosexual experience, or even *thinks* about one, that he or she is gay for life.

Q. Are homosexuals condemned to hell?

A. Homosexuality is not a "heaven or hell" issue. The *only* determining factor is whether a person has been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul says that homosexual offenders and a whole list of other sinners will not inherit the kingdom of God. But then he reminds the Corinthians that they have been washed, sanctified, and justified in Jesus' name. Paul makes a distinction between unchristian behavior and Christian behavior. He's saying, "You're not pagans anymore, you are a holy people belonging to King Jesus. Now *act* like it!"

If homosexuality doesn't send anyone to hell, then can the believer indulge in homosexual behavior, safe in his or her eternal security? As Paul said, "May it never be!" If someone is truly a child of God, he or she cannot continue sinful behavior that offends and grieves the Father without suffering the consequences. God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews

12:6). This means that ultimately, no believer gets away with continued, unrepented sin. The discipline may not come immediately, but it will come.

Q. How do I respond when someone in my life tells me he or she is gay?

A. Take your cue from the Lord Jesus. He didn't avoid sinners; He ministered grace and compassion to them—without ever compromising His commitment to holiness. Start by cultivating a humble heart, especially concerning the temptation to react with judgmental condescension. As Billy Graham said, "Never take credit for not falling into a temptation that never tempted you in the first place."

Seek to understand your gay friends' feelings. Are they comfortable with their gayness, or bewildered and resentful of it? Understanding people doesn't mean that you have to agree with them—but it *is* the best way to minister grace and love in a difficult time. Accept the fact that, to this person, these feelings are normal. You can't change their minds or their feelings. Too often, parents will send their gay child to a counselor and say, "Fix him." It just doesn't work that way.

As a Christian, you are a light shining in a dark place. Be a friend with a tender heart and a winsome spirit; the biggest problem of homosexuals is not their sexuality, but their need for Jesus Christ. At the same time, pre-decide what your boundaries will be about what behavior you just cannot condone in your presence. One college student I know excuses herself from a group when the affection becomes physical; she just gets up and leaves. It is all right to be uncomfortable around blatant sin; you do not have to subject yourself—and the Holy Spirit within you—to what grieves Him. Consider how you would be a friend to people who are living promiscuous heterosexual lives. Like the Lord, we need to value and esteem the person without condoning the sin.

Note

1. Anne Paulk, *Restoring Sexual Identity* (Eugene OR: Harvest House, 2003), p. 246.

For further reading:

- Bergner, Mario. *Setting Love in Order: Hope and Healing for the Homosexual*. Baker, 1995.
- Paulk, Anne. *Restoring Sexual Identity*. Eugene OR: Harvest House, 2003.
- Dallas, Joe. *Desires in Conflict*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1991. (Particularly good!)
- Konrad, Jeff. *You Don't Have to Be Gay*. Pacific Publishing, 1987. (This is directed at young men. I can't recommend this one highly enough.)
- Satinover, Jeffrey. *Homosexuality and the Politics of Truth*. Baker, 1996.
- Schmidt, Thomas E. *Straight & Narrow? : Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate*. Intervarsity Press, 1995.
- Worthen, Anita and Bob Davies. *Someone I Love is Gay: How Family and Friends Can Respond*. Intervarsity Press, 1996.
- The website of Living Hope Ministries, an outreach in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area. Of particular interest are the online testimonies and especially an excellent online support group, a confidential, free, moderated message board for strugglers, overcomers and those who seek to encourage and uplift.
www.livehope.org