

Tuning Up Your Baloney Detector

Critical thinking skills are necessary for thinking biblically and in a way that glorifies God. Sue Bohlin explores some of the ways to develop those skills.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).



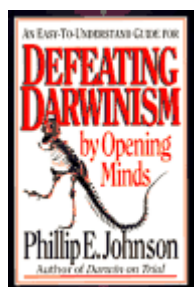
The Need to Think Critically

One of our main objectives here at Probe Ministries is to help people learn to love God with their minds. You really can't do that without learning to think biblically, and think critically. In our television-saturated culture, we have discovered that more Christians are conformed to the philosophies and deceptions of the world than the teachings and truths of the Bible. So in this essay I offer some suggestions on how to sharpen our thinking skills. The apostle Paul exhorts us in Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." The way to prevent ourselves from being taken captive to unbiblical, ungodly thinking is to build a kind of mental grid through which we filter what we see, hear, and read.

The first element of the grid is to know what the Bible says, so we can compare the ideas that permeate our culture to the absolute truth of what God has revealed. There is no room for shortcuts here; it takes time in God's Word, reading and meditating on what we read. And in order to understand the context for what we read, we need to work our way through the Bible one book at a time rather than opening it up at random and reading in a hit-or-miss fashion. We know that not everyone is a reader; God made some people auditory learners,

and they need to hear the Word rather than read it. That is fine—the Scripture says, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17). It doesn’t say “reading”! It is now possible to hear the Bible on cassette or CD or even on the Internet.[\[1\]](#) Whatever it takes for you, get the Bible into your head and heart.

As you learn what the Bible says, you will be able to recognize counterfeits to God’s truth. For instance, over the past several years the definition of truth has shifted. It used to be that everyone assumed that there was such a thing as absolute truth: things which are true for all people, at all times, in all places. Today, many people believe that contradictory beliefs, such as the different world religions, can all be true at the same time and that murder, lying, and adultery can be acceptable under certain conditions. The belief that truth is relative is a worldly philosophy that has taken many captive, and Christians should filter this out of our thinking because God has revealed unchanging truth to us in His Word.



In his book *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds*, Phillip Johnson has a great chapter called “Tuning Up Your Baloney Detector.” He lists a number of critical thinking tools that originally came from Carl Sagan, the late astronomer who made science understandable to us lay people. (Unfortunately, Dr. Sagan failed to point his baloney detector at himself as he ferociously insisted that true science was the same as a purely naturalistic worldview.)

A well-tuned baloney detector will be able to filter out several kinds of baloney that would take Christians captive when we swallow the thinking that comes from the surrounding culture.

Vague Terms and Shifting Definitions

One kind of baloney we need to be alert for is the use of vague terms. People with a non-Christian worldview can start off using language that we think we understand and then suddenly veer off into a new meaning. Once when I was a brand-new believer, people collecting money to care for underprivileged kids approached me on the street. I asked, "Do you teach them about Jesus?" and they said, "Yes. . . ." After I gave them money and took their brochure, I discovered that they taught that Jesus and Satan were brothers! We also see this deliberate vagueness happening in the abortion debate. It is much easier to justify getting rid of a glob of unwanted cells if you do not call it "shredding and mutilating an unborn baby."

We also need to be on the lookout for shifting definitions. In the evolution debate, many people will start out defining evolution as "change over time." Who can argue with that? But then we find out that the true working definition of evolution is unguided, purposeless change.

Believing What We Want to Believe

We also need to be on the lookout for what Phillip Johnson calls the "original sin" of believing what we want to believe, even if there is evidence to the contrary. It is intellectually dishonest to deny facts that contradict our pet beliefs so that we can stay in our comfort zone. We get critical e-mail at Probe complaining about the fact that we do not take a position on the age of the earth. It comes from people who believe what they want to believe regardless of the fact that there is good evidence for another position. One of the wisest prayers we can pray is "Lord, show me where I'm being deceived." Whether we are talking about our emotional, spiritual, or intellectual life, we need to move from the darkness of believing what we want to believe, into the light

of truth as God shows it to us.

Selective Use of Evidence

Another critical thinking skill is to be watchful of the selective use of evidence. We need to be careful not to jump on bandwagons of all kinds before checking out any evidence that would provide a different conclusion. The creation-evolution debate is a great example of this principle, because it's awfully hard to find any biology textbooks that provide students with the evidence against evolution. They do not learn that evolutionists cannot account for things like flight, or the eye, or the explosion of fully formed animals in the Cambrian layers of rock.

I know of several women who deeply regret having had abortions based on the selective use of evidence. They were told that this would solve their problem, that it was simply removing unwanted fetal tissue, that it was really no big deal. They were not given a sonogram where they could have seen their babies moving around inside them, or told about how the Bible declares the personhood of even the tiniest unborn human being. They also weren't told about the horrendous burden of guilt and shame they would carry for years afterwards. We need to know both sides of an argument in order to avoid being held in captivity to the world's philosophies.

Appeal to Authority

Another critical thinking skill is to be wary of is the appeal to authority. "Nothing is true just because some big shot says it is true." [\[2\]](#) In our culture, we practically worship experts (especially scientific experts), and willingly set aside our own beliefs and instincts if somebody with a white lab coat or letters after their name tells us something is true or right or good. That is how we got millions of students who are poor readers in the U.S.: educational experts decided to throw out

phonics, which works very well, and substitute the whole-word approach to reading, which fails miserably.

But it's not just white lab coats; the appeal to authority exploits the way our culture values celebrity. Michael Jordan may be the world's best basketball player, but does that mean he is an authority on underwear too? We need to be skeptical of anybody who says, "Believe it because I say so."

***Ad Hominem* and Straw Man Arguments**

Two kinds of communication that ought to set our internal alarms off are the *ad hominem* argument and the straw man argument.

Ad hominem is Latin for "to the man." When people use this kind of argument, they are attacking the person instead of what he is saying. My son experienced this on one occasion in his college class where he got into a spirited discussion with a girl who was not being too logical. She could not counter his arguments, got frustrated, and dismissed him with, "Oh, you're just too pretty to be a boy anyway." That's an *ad hominem* argument. It means someone is out of ammunition and defenses for their argument, so they attack the other person or the other side instead.

Now, there is a value to pointing out that someone has a bias, because it is going to impact their conclusions. That is not the same as attacking the person. When people e-mail us here at Probe and accuse us of being biased about Christianity, we freely admit we are very biased. But that does not change whether it is true or not. On the other hand, if a tobacco company releases a study showing that secondhand smoke is not dangerous, one can legitimately question the inherent bias without attacking the people making the argument.

Another critical thinking tool is to watch out for straw man arguments. This is where an opponent distorts someone's

position to make it easier to attack. Recently I participated in a panel discussion on therapies and organizations that help people leave homosexuality. One of the students in the class pointed at me and said, "I just think you shouldn't try to make gays change against their will. That's not right." Well, I agree, and I do not know anyone who tries to change homosexuals against their will. He was using a straw man argument, because the truth is, I work with a ministry that offers help only to those who want it.^[3] We do not even let anyone in the door unless they are willing to consider that change is possible, and they are the ones seeking us out. This student twisted my position to make it easier to attack.

Of course, nobody announces that they are using a straw man or ad hominem argument when they do it! But when you recognize it and call it what it is, you are thinking critically about what you are hearing.

Untestable Theories

When I was a young girl, my mind was a sponge—an avid learner, I soaked up everything with a total lack of discernment. There was a time when I was confused about whether the gods of Greek and Roman mythology were real or not!

In this article we have been looking at loving God with our minds by building a mental filter through which we examine what we see, hear, and read. A mental filter consisting of a Christian worldview allows us to keep what is true and right and good, and not swallow the rest like I did! One final baloney detector involves recognizing theories and ideas that cannot be proven either true or false. Many people believe things simply because they sound good, even though there is no way to find out if they are right or not. For example, Carl Sagan opened his famous Cosmos series with the worldview statement that "The Cosmos is all there is, or ever was, or ever will be." How do you test such a statement to see if it

is true or not? At Probe we get e-mail from people who have accepted such untestable theories. What test is there to prove or disprove reincarnation or the existence of the Goddess? How do you run an experiment to prove whether people who have died are sending messages to us when we come across pennies on the pavement?

On the other hand, testability is one of the things that makes Christianity so robust. If someone were able to come up with the bones of Jesus Christ, it would prove Christianity wrong and the millions of believers deluded. It's a testable idea, not an unprovable, pie-in-the-sky concept. Remember what Paul says in Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." In order to do that, we need to work to build a strong mental filter that constantly compares what we see and hear and read to the truth of God's word. We need to interact with TV, movies, newspapers, and magazines, identifying those things that contradict the truth God has already given us. We should feel free to jot comments in the margins of books, especially when we find baloney in them. We need to remember that the world system and our adversary, the devil, are both continually working to tear down what is good and true, and erect false arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against the knowledge of God. So we can take every thought captive to make it obedient to Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

To mix metaphors, we need to tune up our baloney detectors so we will not be sponges.

Notes

1. bible.gospelcom.net

2. Phillip Johnson, *Defeating Darwinism by Opening Minds* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997], 39.

3. Living Hope Ministries. For more information, please see www.livehope.org.

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“I Have Some Questions About Women in the Church”

Dear Sue,

I have read [your answer to email](#) “Should Women Be Pastors?” and have a few questions for you.

- Do you believe a woman can teach a man under any circumstances?
- Do you believe women can be preachers?
- Do you believe women can be elders?
- Do you believe women can be deacons?
- Are there any limitations for women in scripture?
- Do you belong to any church (congregation)?

Hello _____,

1. Do you believe a woman can teach a man under any circumstances?

If a pastor or the spiritual leaders of a congregation ask a woman to come in under their authority and address a topic on their behalf, and if she maintains an attitude of submission and humility in the process mindful of the restrictions of 1 Tim. 2:12 (“But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man”), I think a case can be made for it. Also, if a woman is teaching women and a man wants to come in

and listen, I think that's fine since the scriptures do not prohibit a man from learning from a woman. The problem, as I understand it, is for a woman to be in a position of spiritual authority over men.

I like how the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood puts this: "The teaching inappropriate for a woman is the teaching of men in settings or ways that dishonor the calling of men to bear the primary responsibility for teaching and leadership. This primary responsibility is to be carried by the pastors or elders." (www.cbmw.org/Questions-and-Answers)

2. Do you believe women can be preachers?

Absolutely—to other women. The Women of Faith conferences are a good example of that.

3. Do you believe women can be elders?

No. 1 Tim. 3:2 states the requirement of elders being the husband of one wife. It is limited to men. The biblical pattern of spiritual leadership and authority in the church is of male leadership.

4. Do you believe women can be deacons?

Yes, but this is not a hill I'm willing to die on. Romans 16:1 commends Phoebe as a servant of God, which can also be translated "deacon." It also seems to me that 1 Tim. 3:8-13, which describes the qualifications for deacon, can and does include women.

Even if they're not called deacons, a lot of women serve the Lord through serving the church. This is how much of the work gets done, and since we are all called to service in one way or another, the needs of God's people are met. People hung up on titles are focusing on the wrong thing; if we're focused on

loving and serving Jesus, it doesn't matter if someone else puts a label on it. Personally, I believe a lot of women will receive the reward of "Well done, good and faithful servant" from the Lord regardless of whether they were ever called deacons or not.

5. Are there any limitations for women in scripture?

1 Timothy 2:11-15

restricts women from teaching or exercising authority over men.

1 Corinthians 14:34-36

says that women are to be silent in the churches in a spirit of submission. My understanding is that this protects the orderliness of the worship and teaching times from the disruptions of inquisitive and verbal women. It also helps us to maintain an attitude of submission to the Lord and to the church leadership. However, 1 Cor. 11:5 permits women to pray and prophesy, so TOTAL silence is not what the above passage is prescribing. This call to silence is about not dishonoring the role of men as leaders of the congregation.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

teaches male headship in the marriage relationship and male leadership in the church.

6. Do you belong to any church (congregation)?

Yes, I'm a member of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, Texas.

Sue Bohlin

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See Also Probe Answers Our E-Mail:

- [Should Women Be Pastors?](#)
- [So Are All Women Pastors Deceived and Going to Hell?](#)
- [Your Position Against Women Pastors Is Outdated](#)

“I Struggle with Doubts”

Hello there – I have a question that I hope you can help me with. I am 38 years old and I have recently lost my second parent to cancer – and I am going through a time where I guess you could say I am re-evaluating my belief system. I was raised in the Presbyterian Church and currently attend _____ here in Houston. What I struggle with is occasional doubts lately and I find it really scary. I believe in God without question but I have trouble sometimes comprehending the resurrection and life after death.....I want to believe and have a stronger faith that's for sure!! The thing that bothers me is someone told me that doubts were blasphemy and that by having doubts you are calling God a liar and that I might not have ever truly been saved. Needless to say that has petrified me, however others have mentioned that doubts are normal..... I went through confirmation with the Presbyterian Church when I was 12 and hope that I am saved. I would really appreciate your thoughts on this!!!! You honor me by sharing your heart with me. Thank you.

Let me cast my vote with those who have assured you that doubts are normal. God understands that as puny-minded humans who are trying to relate to a God we cannot see, touch, or hear, we're going to face areas we don't understand! Often, what we experience is confusion, but some people label it doubt.

I think doubt is more in-your-face unbelief. "I know You're there, God, but I question Your goodness to me so I'm going to do things my own way and pretend like You're not there." The way that Satan encouraged Eve to doubt God's goodness in the garden of Eden.

There is a difference between being overcome by doubts and struggling with comprehending really huge mysteries like the resurrection. God understands, especially at a time like this when you're grieving. (I am so very, very sorry, to hear about your parents' deaths. This is my first Mother's Day without my mother, who died a few months ago. It's hard, isn't it?)

Since you have internet access, you can get some very interesting information about the resurrection and life after death that will help strengthen and establish your faith in those areas. You can start reading at the Probe Ministries site (www.probe.org) and look in the "[Apologetics: Reasons to Believe](#)" section. Leadership University (Leaderu.com) also has some dynamite articles.

Concerning the statement that doubts are [blasphemy](#). Well, no, they're not the same thing. People like you who are concerned that it is, are never guilty of it! Blasphemy is hard-hearted insult against God. I'm sorry that someone has burdened you with the false guilt of "calling God a liar." Now that would be pretty blasphemous, but simply experiencing some questions is usually an issue of not being sure of something. And that's a far cry from saying "God, You're a blankety-blank liar."

Truly saved people have doubts all the time. That's the first step to wrestling with individual issues of faith, and studying them to come out with a stronger faith on the other end. God isn't threatened by our doubts and questions. When we go to Him in simple faith, asking Him to help us understand truth and help us see things as they really are, He truly does answer. It may take a while, but He takes those requests seriously.

You said you were confirmed when you were 12 and you hope that you are saved. I am so glad you put it so bluntly, because I am delighted to be able to give you some very clear direction on this!

Quick question: what were you confirmed IN? Were you confirmed that yes, indeed, you were a Presbyterian, the way we confirm flight reservations? Or were you confirmed in your faith because at some point before that, as you were growing up, you made a deliberate choice to put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

He told Nicodemus that we must be born again. Just like when we were born the first time, that's a specific event at a specific point in time. In order to pass over from death to life, there must be a specific point at which we choose God over our own way, where we realize that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and we receive His gift of forgiveness and eternal life by saying "thank You!"

So my question to you is, was there a specific point at which you were born again? Being baptized as an infant doesn't do it, because that's not a decision that a disciple makes; it's more of a statement of our parents' intent to raise us in the ways of God. It's possible to go along, learning the catechism questions and having a lot of religious head knowledge ABOUT God, without ever embracing Him as our personal Lord and Savior. Have you done that?

If you have, YOU ARE SAVED FOREVER. If you haven't, then you aren't saved but you can be as soon as you choose to. I know several people who just weren't sure of a specific time and place when they chose to put their trust in Christ, so they chose right then and there and said to God, "God, I am a sinner and I need you. Thank You for sending Jesus to die on the cross in my place, and then raising Him from the dead three days later. I believe Jesus is Your Son, and I trust Him to save me from my sins and take me to heaven when I die."

Then they KNEW they had trusted Christ and had passed over from death to life.

1 John 5:11-13 says,

11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

I love the part in verse 13 that says, “you may KNOW that you have eternal life.” When someone showed that to me not long after I trusted Christ as a college sophomore, that was the point at which I knew for sure that I was saved—because the Bible said I could know! That was very cool for me, since I was raised just hoping that everything would be okay when I died but I couldn’t ever know. Now I KNOW!!!

Let me know what you think about all this, OK?

The Lord bless you and keep you.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“I Can’t Forgive God for Taking All Those People in the WTC!”

I saw a distraught woman on the news asking, “Pray? Who do we pray to? God took all those people in the buildings !” It’s

obvious there is so much hurt and a sense of betrayal toward God for allowing such a horrific thing to happen. I'm having a rough time forgiving God for allowing such terrible evil in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

I'm so glad you wrote.

A lot of people struggle with anger toward God when we experience pain or when bad things happen. (I completely understand, and carried anger toward Him for many years myself for allowing me to get polio, and not healing me when I begged Him to. That story is [here](#).)

In his excellent book *I Should Forgive, But . . .* [1998, Nashville: Word Publishing, p. 143-157], Dr. Chuck Lynch addresses this issue. There are three problems with a perceived need to forgive God.

*1. It implies **an offense**. But God does not and can not sin against us. He does not morally offend us and does not need to be forgiven.*

The number one complaint against God is that He failed to protect. We can be angry that He did not protect us, or He did not protect other innocent people. We believe a good God does not let bad things happen to good people. Bad things only happen to bad people. Therefore, if bad things happen to good people, God "did us dirty." But we live in a fallen world; bad things happen to people, period. Our longing for a perfect world where nothing bad happens is a perfectly legitimate longing for the Eden we were created for, and God will re-create that perfect world in the future. . . but we don't live there yet.

If God doesn't "perform" as we think He should, we think He has offended us. The real failure is not with God's performance, it's with our misperception of His character.

We are upset when we realize that God knew the bad thing was

going to happen and He didn't stop it. Why not? Because He is graciously patient now, but His full wrath will be poured out on sin and unrighteousness at a later time.

Acts of nature such as weather tragedies, birth defects and diseases, as well as the consequences of things like terrorist attacks, are also perceived as offenses by God against man.

Many people believe it's God's job to keep their lives free from pain and loss, especially if they are faithful to Him. They fail to remember two things:

- God does not suspend the natural laws of nature for believers. He also does not violate the gift of free will to humanity, even when a person's choice means others will be hurt.
- While we have the promise that all pain and tears will be wiped away in heaven, this is earth.

2. It implies **accountability**. We demand to know the "WHY???" We think God owes it to us to explain why He does what He does, and why He allows the things that He does. And if He doesn't explain it to us [and often, if not usually, He doesn't], then many cut off fellowship with Him. "I'll show You, God, I won't believe in You anymore/I will live in rebellion/I will ignore You!"

God does not owe us an explanation. He is not accountable to us. He does as He pleases (Ps. 115:3), and He has the right to be the sovereign Lord without explaining to His creatures how his actions today, in time, fit into the big plan of eternity.

3. It implies **payment**. Somebody has to pay for sin. Jesus paid for our sins—but who's going to pay for God's "sins" against us?

Our anger against God is like a red light on a car's dashboard. It alerts us that something is wrong and we need to deal with what we're thinking and thus, what we're feeling. The red light tells us we need to grow into acceptance of our losses and adjust to them over time. When God allows bad things to happen, we get mad because of our loss and hurt. We don't need to forgive Him; we need to ask for grace to accept what He has allowed to happen.

God doesn't sin against us; He does things we don't like. He understands our anger the same way a parent understands a child's anger when the parent allows the doctor to give the child a shot. Just as a parent acts in the child's best interest, God is always acting in our best interests even in the midst of horrific evil and pain. He can do that because He is much bigger and more powerful than we can even begin to imagine.

God allows us to experience pain because His goal is our growth and maturity. He is in the process of developing a mature and solid Bride for His Son Jesus, and He knows that the best way for us to grow is often through pain. Even the Lord Jesus, although the Son of God, "learned obedience from what He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). God has a bigger plan than keeping us comfortable.

The real issue is to put aside the misconception that God needs to be forgiven, and move through to trust and acceptance.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

Myths Christians Believe – False Beliefs Exposed

Sue Bohlin identifies and examines some common false beliefs held by many Christians. These beliefs, which are countered by biblical scripture, range from considerations of angels to heaven to salvation to “God helps those who help themselves.”

Angels, Good and Bad

In this article we examine some of the myths Christians believe.

There are lots of misconceptions about angels and devils that come from non-biblical sources ranging from great literature to films to the comic strips in our newspaper.

One myth about angels is that when a loved one dies, he or she becomes our guardian angel. While that can be a comforting thought, that's not what Scripture says. God created angels before He created the physical universe; because we know they sang together in worship and shouted for joy at the creation (Job 38:7). When believing loved ones die, they stay human, but they become better than they ever were on earth, and better than the angels. No angel was ever indwelt by God Himself, as Christians are!

An even greater myth that many people believe is the image of Satan as an ugly red creature with pitchfork, horns, and a tail who gladly reigns in hell. For this misconception we have several authors to thank, mainly the 13th century work of Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, written in the 1700s. The biblical image of Satan is of an angel who has fallen to irredeemable evil and depravity but yet can transform himself into a beautiful angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14) He can make himself appear winsome, which is why people

can be attracted to the occult. But Satan is not the king of hell. Jesus disarmed him at the Cross, made a public spectacle of him and the rest of the demons, and made him into a defeated foe destined for an eternity of torment in the lake of fire. (Col. 2:15, Rev. 20:10)

Another misconception about Satan that many people believe is that he is the evil counterpart to God. In C.S. Lewis' preface to the Screwtape Letters, he answers the question of whether he believes in "the Devil":

Now, if by 'the Devil' you mean a power opposite to God and, like God, self-existent from all eternity, the answer is certainly No. There is no uncreated being except God. God has no opposite. No being could attain a "perfect badness" opposite to the perfect goodness of God; for when you have taken away every kind of good thing (intelligence, will, memory, energy, and existence itself) there would be none of him left.

If I Do Everything Right, Life Will Work Smoothly.

A very common myth that many Christians believe is, "If I do everything right, life will work smoothly." We seem to be immersed in an attitude of entitlement, believing that God owes us an easy and comfortable life if we serve Him. We expect to be able to avoid all pain, and we look for formulas to make life work. Frankly, many of us are addicted to our own comfort zones, and when anything disturbs our comfort zone, we feel betrayed and abandoned by God.

So when life doesn't go so smoothly, we often jump to one of two conclusions. Either we must be sinning, or God is out to get us. The book of Job draws back the curtain on the unseen drama in the heavenlies and shows us that when problems come, it doesn't have to be one of these two options. Sometimes

things are going on behind the scenes in the heavenly realm that have nothing to do with our sin. And since God is totally good, it's a lie from the pit of hell that when bad things happen, God is out to get us in some kind of cosmic sadistic power play.

Even when we do everything right—although NOBODY does everything right, not even the holiest, most disciplined people—things can go wrong. The Bible gives us insight into why it might be happening. First, we live in a fallen world, where bad stuff happens because that's the consequence of sin. This includes natural disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes and floods, and includes moral disasters like divorce and abuse and murder.

Secondly, we live in a spiritual battle zone. Unseen demonic enemies attack us with spiritual warfare. God has provided spiritual armor, described in Ephesians 6, but if we don't put it on, His armor can't protect us.

Third, we have an inaccurate view of suffering. We think that if we're suffering, something is wrong and needs to be fixed. But 1 Peter 4:19 says that some people suffer according to the will of God. That doesn't sound very nice, but that's because we often think the most important thing in life is avoiding pain. But God isn't committed to keeping us comfortable, He's creating a Bride for His Son who needs to shine with character and perseverance and maturity.

The Lord Jesus promised that we would have tribulation in this world. (John 16:33) The word for tribulation means pressure; it means we get squeezed in by trouble. Jesus said that in the world we would have pressure, but in Him we have peace. Life won't always work smoothly, no matter how well we live, but we always have the presence and power of God Himself to take us through it.

God Won't Give Me More Than I Can Handle.

People get baffled and angry when bad things happen, and it just gets worse when God doesn't make the difficult situation go away. We start wondering if God has gone on vacation because we're nearing our breaking point and God isn't stepping in to make things better.

The problem with this myth is that God is in the business of breaking His people so that we will get to the point of complete dependence on Him.^{1} Brokenness is a virtue, not something to be protected from. When the apostle Paul pleaded with God to remove his thorn in the flesh, God said no. Instead, He responded with an amazing promise: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul realized that his weakness was the very key to experiencing God's strength and not his own.

One of my friends ministered as a chaplain at Ground Zero in New York after the Sept. 11 attacks. She got so tired and exhausted that she knew it was more than she could bear. That's when she discovered that her exhaustion took her out of God's way and He could shine through her, ministering with His strength through her profound weakness.

I love this definition of brokenness: "Brokenness is that place where we realize that all the things we counted on to make life work, don't."^{2} God makes life work. Formulas don't. Our own efforts don't. Trustful dependence on Him plugs us into the power source for life. And that often happens when we've crossed over the line of what we can handle on our own.

God Helps Those Who Help Themselves.

This myth has been repeated so many times that many people think it's in Scripture. It's not. In fact, the truth is exactly the opposite. A heart full of self-dependence and self-reliance says to God, "I don't need You, I can do it

myself. I can handle life without You.” God honors our choices and the exercise of our will; He doesn’t push His help on us. He waits for us to ask for it. He can’t help those who help themselves because we’re too busy *doing* to receive His strength and His help. It’s like the way you can’t fill a cup with coffee when it’s already full of tea. Jesus said, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) But that doesn’t stop lots of us from trying! The truth is, God doesn’t help those who help themselves; God helps the helpless.

Two Myths About Heaven

The first myth is perpetuated by the many jokes and comics about St. Peter at the pearly gates. Many people believe that if our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, St. Peter will let us into heaven. It doesn’t work that way.

God has one standard for getting into heaven: absolute perfection and holiness. The person who has sinned the smallest sin is still guilty and cannot be perfect and holy. It’s like a balloon: once it’s popped, there’s nothing anyone can do to make it whole again. Only one Person has ever qualified for heaven by being perfect and holy—the Lord Jesus. When we trust Christ as our Savior, He does two things for us: He pays the penalty for our sin, which keeps us out of hell, and He exchanges our sin for His righteousness, which allows us into heaven.

Another myth is that heaven is like a big socialist state where everybody gets a standard issue harp and halo and we all sit around on clouds all day praising God in a never-ending church service. Doesn’t sound all that great, does it?

Fortunately, heaven’s a whole lot better than that. For one thing, the reason we think worshiping God for all eternity is boring is because we don’t know God as He really is. We’re like the six-year-old boy who declared that “girls are stupid, and kissin’ ’em is even stupider.” Kids don’t have a clue how

great love can be, and we don't have a clue how wonderful God is.

Heaven is no socialist state. There will be varying degrees of reward and responsibility in heaven, depending on the way we lived our life on earth. All believers will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, when God will test our works by passing them through the fire of motive. If we did things in His strength and for His glory, they will pass through the refining fire and emerge as gold, silver and costly stones. If we did things in our own flesh and for our glory or for the earthly payoff, we will have gotten all our strokes on earth, and our works will be burned up, not making it through the testing "fire."

There are different types of rewards in heaven: a prophet's reward, a righteous man's reward, and a disciple's reward. Some will receive the crown of life, or a martyr's crown, and there's also the crown of righteousness. Our lives in heaven will be determined by the choices, sacrifices, and actions of earth. Some will be very wealthy, and others will be "barely there." You can check our Web site for the scriptures about this. [{3}](#)

Myths About the Bible and Salvation

Many non-Christians believe a myth that is accepted by a lot of Christians as well—that the Bible has been changed and corrupted since it was written. The historical evidence actually makes a rather astounding case for the supernatural protection and preservation of both Old and New Testaments.

As soon as the New Testament documents were written, people immediately started making copies and passing them around. There are so many copies in existence that the New Testament is the best-documented piece of ancient literature in the world. And because there are so many copies, we can compare them to today's Bible and be assured that what we have is what

was written.

The Old Testament scribes were so meticulous in copying their manuscripts that they were obsessive about accuracy. They would count the middle letter of the entire original text and compare it to the middle letter of the new copy. If it didn't match, they'd make a new copy. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, they demonstrated that this collection of Old Testament scriptures has been faithfully preserved for two thousand years.

Many people believe that certain parts of the Bible have been corrupted or deleted, such as supposed teaching on reincarnation. However, this is just hearsay from people who do not understand how the canon of scripture was decided on. From the beginning of the church, Christians recognized the 27 books that make up the New Testament as God's inspired word, and the writings that weren't inspired were eventually dropped. We have some great articles on our Web site that explain about the reliability of the Bible.[{4}](#)

Many Christians believe another myth: "I believe in Jesus, but surely God will let people of other faiths into heaven too." Many seem to think that being a "good Muslim" or a "sincere Buddhist" should count for something.

This does make sense from a human perspective, but God didn't leave us in the dark trying to figure out truth on our own. He has revealed truth to us, both through Jesus and through the Bible. So regardless of what makes sense from our limited human perspective, we need to trust what God has said.

And Jesus, who ought to know because He is God in the flesh, said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Me." (John 14:6) No other religion deals with the problem of sin and God's requirement of perfection and holiness on God's terms. There may be many ways to Jesus, but there's only way to the Father. It's God's heaven, and He

makes the rules: it's Jesus or nothing.

Notes

1. I am indebted to Dr. Al Meredith, the pastor of Wedgwood Baptist Church in Ft. Worth, Texas, for this perspective. Wedgwood Baptist was the site of the massacre the night of the "See You At the Pole" celebration when seven youth and staff members were killed and seven others wounded by a crazed gunman.

2. Jeff Kinkade, pastor of Reinhardt Bible Church in Garland, Texas.

3. "[Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Help Me Understand Rewards in Heaven.](#)"

4. "[Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?](#)". Also, "[The Authority of the Bible](#)" and "[The Christian Canon](#)".

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"My Racist Parents Disapprove of My Boyfriend"

I am a Christian. I have had a boyfriend for almost three years. He is a wonderful guy...inside and out. He is a strong Christian and we have great chemistry and are very like-minded in our habits, finances, etc. I love him very, very much.

The only thing is that we are an interracial couple... with him being Chinese-American and me being white. There are some cultural differences in that his family depends on him for support...and that worries me. (That in the future, he will

never leave his family so we can start our own family.)

Also, he loves his mother and sister dearly and I feel that he compares me to them...which I can never meet up. I can't help but to feel jealous for the way he loves and puts his sister on a pedestal. I compare myself to her frequently and it is killing my confidence.

Furthermore, my parents (they are non-Christians) strongly disapprove of our relationship because of his race.

I guess my questions are: 1) What does the bible say about interracial dating /marriage and 2) Should I obey my parents or give in to their racism?

I am just overwhelmed and have lost myself in all these problems. I know God will keep us together if it is in His will...but I could really use some godly truth and insight to all these things. Can you offer some insight into my problem?

The Bible makes distinctions between two kinds of people: believers and non-believers. It says nothing about interracial marriages. We have an article on that here: www.probe.org/what-does-the-bible-say-about-interracial-marriages/

Obeying your parents is a command for children. Once we become adults, we are commanded to *honor* our parents. The difference is that once we're adults, we take our direction directly from God. We honor, not obey, our parents by listening to what they say and seriously considering it, and then doing whatever God leads us to do.

However, the cautions you express about your relationship are very serious and should be explored even if your parents were 100% for your marriage. You not only have a cultural difference, you have a situation where your boyfriend's relationship with his mother and sister could very well be more important than his relationship with you. That's why Gen.

2:24 (later re-emphasized by Jesus Himself) says that a man should leave his mother and father (both physically and emotionally) and cleave (i.e., stick like Superglue) to his wife. If a man's primary emotional connection is to his family of origin instead of his wife, the marriage will be in trouble from day one.

You need to have a very frank talk with him about his emotional priorities. It may well be that this is a matter of your perception and not his reality, because of your own insecurities. If you fight jealousy and insecurity NOW, there's a good chance it will only get worse. That's a part of finishing growing up that you need to deal with before you marry anyone, but spend some time finding out who you are and what your strengths and "gift package" are so that you are content with YOU. If you're content with yourself and able to accept yourself, you won't waste emotional energy comparing yourself with others.

One other thing: if your boyfriend's emotional warmth toward his mother and sister is actually healthy and he would truly have no problem putting you first, then the fact that he has a good relationship with them is a good thing. It's when men are hostile and disrespectful toward female relatives that there is a red flag. (The other red flag is when a man bonds more with his female relatives than with his male relatives.)

I would suggest that you spend more time talking to him about this, especially your fears that he will never leave his family so you can start your own. There are many, many forces against marriages today. If you get married knowing that both families are not in agreement, you are adding a huge amount of stress to your relationship, because I can verify after 28 years of marriage that you don't just marry a person, you marry a family.

You need to read some good books on Christian marriage: FamilyLife.com is a wonderful resource.

In the wise words of Dr. Laura, sometimes love just isn't enough. ☐

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

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“How Do I Treat People After a Church Split?”

Over the past couple years at my church some people had left for various reasons and I found myself really wondering how you're supposed to react to them after they've left and you see them out in town, on the street, etc. I had a close personal relationship with some of those people and on the other hand, I witnessed some ridiculous bouts by some of those people who left. Yet it seems that after they were asked to leave (or left themselves), some of the church members still invited them over and at the same time would invite the pastors, their families, or other members of the church body to the same outings as if nothing ever happened. How do I treat those people now when I see them and not disrespect the Lord in my actions and in my heart?

Bless your heart. This is an incredibly painful experience, isn't it? I'm so glad you wrote, if for no other reason that to hear from someone outside the situation for whom known personalities don't complicate things.

I think it's good to remember the big picture of what the Lord desires for us. The very biggest picture is the second commandment, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Love

God, love people—that sums it all up. Secondly, to remember what the Lord Jesus said about our relationship with other believers in John 13:35—“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Third, consider Philippians 2:1:

“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.”

So His desire for His body is that we love each other because that’s how we bring glory to God and validate our discipleship, that we pursue unity out of humility and service.

Even after a church split, even after people leave churches for fleshly reasons rather than God-ordained ones, even after people still retain unforgiveness and ungodly attitudes toward people with whom they used to worship, the message of the New Testament is that we are ONE BODY regardless of where we attend church. What God desires is that we love one another no matter what has happened.

If I were in your shoes (and I do have some experience with people in the above categories), when I encounter these people I would choose to remember that God wants us to love each other. That means choosing to be cordial and loving and kind even if the feelings aren’t there (because if God commands it, He provides the way to obey). Yes, ugly things happened. God knows all about it, and it doesn’t change His word that tells us to love one another.

I think it’s a good idea to stay forward-focused, remembering

that you will spend eternity being connected with these people as part of the Body of Christ, rather than continuing to see life through a rear-view mirror.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“ ‘Gender-Neutral’ Bibles?”

There’s a controversy brewing over the “gender-neutral” TNIV Bible. What is your position?

You know how gospel means “good news”? Well, the gender-neutral language of newer Bible translations is “bad news”!!! The editors, bowing to pressure of modern philosophies and values, have cast aside what God said in His word in search of something more palatable to today’s politically correct mindset.

One of the problems comes from the desire to elevate women by diminishing the masculine characteristics of God and the importance of male leadership. We’re always going to get in trouble when we diminish God. He chose to identify Himself as masculine, even though we know spirit transcends gender, I believe because of the deep and ineffable necessity of relationship to Father—both our heavenly Father and our earthly fathers.

I am also bothered by the unspoken assumption that women are too self-centered and hyper-sensitive not to be able to figure out that when the Bible—the very words of God Himself—uses the word “man” or “mankind” to refer to all humans, we can’t figure that out without getting upset. Just about every

language on the face of the planet uses the generic male pronoun to represent all people, but apparently our sensibilities are too finely-tuned to allow for readers of these newer translations to make the mental jump. . .!

This is a great example of the fulfillment of 2 Tim. 4:3: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires. . .”

So our position is, thumbs down to ear-tickling translations!
<smile>

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin

Update: August 2022

We were asked, “You gave gender-neutral Bibles a thumbs down, but what versions DO you recommend?” Here’s our answer:

After talking with some especially knowledgeable and wise people, here’s our list, in this order:

1. New English Translation (NET Bible – Available free at <http://netbible.org>) – Unbelievably rich resource with translators’ notes and study notes, plus access to Bible study tools such as the meanings of words in their original languages. Click on Menu → Tour the App)

2. New Living Translation (NLT)

3. New International Version (NIV), 2011

4. New American Standard (NASB)

I would say that gender-neutral is bad, but what we need is

“gender-accurate.” For example, the Greek word *adelphoi* is often translated “brothers,” but it actually means “brothers and sisters.” So why not use the more inclusive language in English when it’s there in the Greek?

Glad you asked!

Cheerily,

Sue Bohlin

“Where Do Demons Come From?”

Dear Sue Bohlin,

My friends and I are doing a Bible project on demons. I read your website and it had a lot of helpful information. But we are having trouble finding information on the origin of demons. We can’t find very many references to when Satan rebelled against God, or where demons came from. Can you help us?

The problem is that the Bible doesn’t give much information about the origin of demons, and that is the ONLY reliable source of truth.

In fact, we’re only given the faintest hint of what happened, in Revelation 12. The writer, the apostle John, uses poetic, symbolic language, and the events are not in chronological order. Here’s what it says:

“. . . a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.”
(Rev. 12:3-4)

Shortly after these verses, the same event is described again:

“And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.” (Rev. 12:7-9)

We are not told exactly when this happened. Sometime between the time God created the earth, and Satan’s temptation of Eve, he and his demons (apparently, a third of the angels) rebelled and were thrown out of heaven. But we don’t know when that was. In Job, when God is doing His wonderful work of creation, we are told that “the morning stars sang together, and ALL the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). That would indicate to me that the angels (also called “the sons of God”) were all still holy at that point.

This is where we run out of information, so I have given you all I have. I hope it helps!

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Did I Encounter a Demon?”

Dear Miss Bohlin,

I am a 17 year old aspiring writer who has just recently gotten back into the Church after a hiatus of several years

after getting caught up in some odd religious fever and being baptized. I've often wondered why that off sensation came over me, but I'm starting to piece together the way my life has panned out and how things are indeed serving a purpose.

I am writing you because of the article on the web you wrote entitled, ["Angels: The Good, The Bad, And The Ugly."](#) I was reading because I am trying to do research for a comic book project about a Christian "super hero" in the future, and I would like to feature an angel or two as supporting characters to my heroic lead character.

As I read the article, I came upon the part speaking of the falseness of those preaching the practice of channeling angels and praying to angels, and how these so called angels providing the information were more than likely actually demons. The part that hit me hardest, though, was the part speaking of the promise that those who seek out these "angels" will be visited by a "Shining" angel that is more than likely a personal encounter with an actual demon.

This hit me because of something that happened several years ago. If I remember correctly, I had just entered my teenage career, and had already been baptized sometime before. By this point, though, I had drifted away from religion, and had stopped attending church almost altogether. Lord forgive me if this isn't entirely accurate, I have horrible memory about some things. Anyways, I had become interested in ghosts and psychic phenomenon, and had decided to call a psychic 900-number. The man I spoke with was more than happy to assist when I asked if he could help me strengthen any abilities I may have had. He went with me through the motions for several days of meditating and "filling myself with a light" in my mind's eye. Finally, I actually saw the outline of a being's face, a being that looked like a perfect representation of what I have tended to see Angels as, like some kind of a Greek statue or something.

As I came back to the church, I have been at war with myself internally over what to believe in this world we live in, and in some ways I've been frustrated because I haven't felt a level of religious belonging like the one I experienced in the few weeks leading up to my baptism since the baptism itself. I had been using this "vision" of my "angelic guide" as proof of faith for so long, and now I realize I was trying to use an encounter with a demon as justification of believing in God.

Do you think this could be what has been holding me back from experiencing the joy I felt during the time surrounding my Baptism? If so, now that I have realized it, how should I deal with it? My first impulse at this discovery that I likely encountered a demon and have probably been under some sort of influence since then has been to be horrified and afraid. But as I talked about it with a friend, I began to see it as a backfire in the plans for whatever this being was. If there is a demon, then there must be angels. And if there are Angels, then there must be a God to follow, and obey and have faith in. Is this a good interpretation? Is this a personal victory for me? I've heard it said that nearly anything used for evil can be turned back and used for good. Should I be using my encounter with evil as reinforcement for a belief that there must, undoubtedly, be a good, and I have every reason to seek that good?

Your thoughts on this strangeness are greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Dear _____, I wish you could see the smile on my face as I read this particular section of your letter:

If there is a demon, then there must be angels. And if there are Angels, then there must be a God to follow, and obey and

have faith in. Is this a good interpretation? Is this a personal victory for me? I've heard it said that nearly anything used for evil can be turned back and used for good. Should I be using my encounter with evil as reinforcement for a belief that there must, undoubtedly, be a good, and I have every reason to seek that good?

Yes, yes, yes!! It's an excellent interpretation!

To answer your question, "how should I deal with it?" the best answer I can suggest is that you get Neil Anderson's book *The Bondage Breaker*. He explains the power and authority we have in Jesus Christ and how to completely renounce any hold Satan and demons have over you in an orderly, step-by-step manner. Many, many people have experienced freedom as a result of Neil's book.

Welcome back to the family of God! I am sure that you will experience the joy that is part of knowing Christ when you disengage yourself from the demonic oppression that is holding you back. . . but only until you find out how the Lord will free you.

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries