“I Am a Wiccan—Are You Saying I’m Going to Hell?”

I am a 16. I was searching through the web when I found your web site on the Occult, naturally I was interested so I read through it. I found all of the information to me quiet intriging. I am a practioner of Wicca. I am a wiccan. I have been for the past year. I am not a worshiper of satan nor do I inflict bodily harm opon myself through rituals. I do not believe in one all mighty god, rather I believe in many gods and godesses. I am a believer of faith, I worship all things, the dead, trees, inanimate or not. I do not use rituals to gain, or hinder others. I simply use them to help or support things I love, like a protection spell while a loved one is on a trip and away from the family. I also ask the Lord and Lady to look over a loved one as they make there last journy. I do not believe in Heaven or Hell. I believe in personal “heavens” and personal “hells.”

Your site has given me the impression that your view is that if you are not a pure christian you are going to “hell.” You must worship a certain way and do certain things to be “saved?” Am I right in saying this? I was just wondering on your personal views on Wiccanism. I am curious about your opinions. Please feel free to e-nail me back. I would greatly appreciate it.

Blessed be,

_____

Hello _____,

Thank you for taking the time to write us.

Yes, you read our views correctly. What we believe is definitely not politically correct. We believe that there is one God, that He has interacted with our world (which He

created), and that He communicated true truth to us. Part of that truth is that there is only one way to be reconciled to Him, and that is by trusting in His Son Jesus to save us from our sin problem and to equip us for life as He intended it in this world, and for heaven when we die.

We do realize that it is far more appealing to believe that there are many ways to God or god, however one defines him/her/it, all equally valid. However, just as you can't live in the real world under that type of "all preferences are equally valid, all truths are equally true" misbeliefs, we believe that spiritual reality doesn't abide by those lies either. For instance, many people say they believe that physical reality is mere illusion, but you don't find them meditating on railroad tracks. And many people say they create their own truth, but they all seem to agree that "red means stop," or they don't live too long!

Let me try to reframe a common misunderstanding of hell. When Jesus was on earth, He claimed to be God. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." One of the implications of that statement is that life is found in a relationship with Him. Apart from Jesus, there is no life, only death, which means separation from the source of life. Heaven isn't so much a place as it the fullness of *relationship* with a real Person—God. So being "saved" is not about jumping through religious hoops; it is about being rescued from an eternity of destruction and death where people are separated from life, which is only found in Jesus.

You said you don't believe in one almighty God, but various gods and goddesses. Are they real? What evidence do you have that they exist? If you are trusting in imaginary friends, wouldn't you want to know that? On the other hand, Jesus was a real, historical Person who made astounding claims that are ridiculous if they are not true, and the only way to be reconciled to God if they are. (He also said He was the only way to the Father. Again, that is an arrogant and presumptuous

thing to say—unless it's true.)

So hell is not a place where an angry, vengeful God laughs as he sends people who wouldn't jump through his hoops. Hell exists because God made us to be in a love relationship with Him, and He will not, cannot, force us to love Him. It has to be freely chosen. Since life is only found in God, hell is the place for people who would not accept His offer of love and friendship. And since there is no life apart from God, hell is a place of everlasting death and destruction because there is no life where there is no relationship with God.

You asked about our view of Wicca: it is not the same as Satanism, but it is another false religion based on lies and misbeliefs that are designed to draw people away from the true God. We believe that Wicca ultimately comes from the mind of the literal, evil being called Satan who hates God and hates people and lies to them so that they will suffer like he does. And while you may well be a gentle, kind and wonderful person, the kind of person that all of us at Probe would love to have as our next-door neighbor, we believe that without a personal relationship with the one true God through His Son Jesus Christ, you cannot experience life as He intended for you to live in this life, your sins will separate you from a holy God forever, and you cannot go to heaven when you die.

I do pray that because God loves you as much as He does, He will do whatever it takes to show Himself to you in a way that is sufficiently intimate to your heart that you will KNOW that it is Him pursuing you with a strong but gentle divine love.

And I pray you will experience His blessing on your life.

Most sincerely,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Is Islam a Religion of Peace or of Violence?”

I’m hearing people (like the president) say that Islam is actually a religion of peace. Others are warning us that the terrorists who attacked the U.S. on 9/11 represent the true Islam of anger and violence. Which is it? And why would they want to attack us anyway?

To get a better grasp on this apparent contradiction I had a very enlightening conversation with a missionary to Muslims for many years who also has a Ph.D. in Islamics. He provided perspective I have never heard:

We have to back up to 610 A.D. and look at the big picture of Muhammad and the Qur’an.

Muhammad was frustrated at the heathen polytheism of the Arabian culture, and wanted people to return to the one true God, the God of the Bible. In fact, he called Jews and Christians “the people of the Book.” In the beginning, he said he was preaching the same message, just in a different language. And if people had doubts about what he was saying, they should check with the people of the Book.

The Qur’an, which is a compilation of the teachings of Muhammad after his death, is not in chronological order. When Islamic scholars rearrange the chapters, or suras, into chronological order, they are comprised of the Mecca (early, middle and late) suras, the city where Muhammad started out, and the Medina suras, where he ended up. Something very important happened in between those two sections. As Muhammad rose in prominence and influence, accumulating followers, some of them wanted to verify that he was actually a prophet of

God. He said, “Go check with the Jewish tribes.” So they did. . . and the Jews said, “No, Muhammad is not a prophet of God.” This made him very angry, and it changed the way he thought about Jews. The anti-semitism of Islam began here. The hostility, violence, controlling nature, and forceful missionary zeal of Islam (“accept Islam or suffer”) developed in Muhammad’s later teachings.

So there are two very different aspects to Islam. Earlier suras are more about peace. Later suras are more about violence. In addition, where Muslims are in the minority (such as North America and Europe), they tend to follow the earlier Mecca suras. Where they are in the majority (such as the middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc.), they tend to follow the later Medina suras.

Add to this the fact that in the culture of Islam, people learn differently. We are taught to think critically, to analyze and compare and contrast literature. Muslims are taught NOT to think critically, only to memorize the Qur’an and parrot back what they are taught about Islam. So it is not surprising to learn that some Muslims say that Islam is a religion of peace, since that is their perception and experience, and other Muslims say that Islam is a religion of conquering and judgment, since that is their perception and experience.

The Qur’an contradicts itself from the early Mecca suras to the Medina suras. This is different from the progressive revelation we find in the Bible, where God reveals more and more information as history unfolds, and He reveals what had earlier been mysteries. This makes sense in view of the fact that the Qur’an is a human invention and the Bible is divinely inspired.

I also asked the missionary why Osama bin Laden wanted to attack us. He suggested three reasons:

• A personal grudge against the U.S. for pressuring Sudan and Saudi Arabia (bin Laden's home country) to kick him out.

• A resentment of America that he shares with many Muslims for exporting our immoral standards and examples to the world through TV, movies and music. They object to the way sexual immorality and impurity, women's provocative dress, pornography, drug and alcohol abuse, and homosexuality are presented as normal, desirable lifestyles. (And I have to say this is a completely legitimate complaint, although their way of showing frustration and displeasure is completely unacceptable!)

• The whole Palestinian-Israeli land fight. In the Arab mindset, the sons of Ishmael (Abraham's son) had the rights to the promised land, and they held it for thousands of years. Then when Israel (sons of Isaac, Abraham's other son) came and took it away from them, that was heinously unfair, but the U.S. backed and supported Israel. What looks like righting a wrong to Israel is "wronging a right" to the Palestinians. This is an impossible situation that cannot be solved until the Lord Jesus returns and HE makes all things right.

One final comment which Pat asked me to be sure and stress: it is just as illogical to judge all Muslims as terrorists as it is for the rest of the world to condemn all American Christians as Timothy McVeighs.

This is a very complex situation and won't be solved easily or quickly. It shows the importance of worldview and the truth that ideas have consequences.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Christ Was Around Before Satan?”

In your essay on angels it states that Christ created the angels, wouldn’t that mean that Christ would have to have been around before Satan? It states somewhere in the bible (can’t remember at the moment where exactly) that he is a “fallen angel.” Your statement confuses me at this point—please, if you can, explain. And I apologize if this shows naivete on my part, but like I said, it’s just a question.

Yes, that’s exactly right. Jesus Christ has existed eternally, in loving fellowship with the Father and the Holy Spirit; He was not created, He has always existed. He didn’t come to earth until 2000 years ago when He took on human flesh and became fully human as well as remaining fully God, but He DID exist before there was anything else. He created the universe, the earth, and the angels (John 1:3, Col. 1:16). He watched Satan choose to rebel and become a fallen angel, and He agreed to come to earth to redeem us and pay the penalty for our sin by dying on a cross for us, and then coming back to life three days later. Then, forty days after that, He went back to heaven, which is where He came from in the first place.

Does this help?

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Your Comments About Mormonism Are Nonsense”

I have read your statements in your article A Short Look at Six World Religions. I happen to be Mormon and have heard this nonsense before:

“Mormonism is not Christian because it denies some of the essential doctrines of Christianity, including the deity of Christ, salvation by grace, and the bodily resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, Mormon doctrine contradicts the Christian teaching that there is only one God, and it undermines the authority and reliability of the Bible”

1. We never have denied the deity of Christ. Christ is Jehovah, the great I am. This is within our doctrine.

2. We are saved by grace. No doubt about it. It’s part of our doctrine.

3. We have always taught that Jesus took his body the third day the same as it is recorded in the Bible. I don’t know where you received your info on that, but we never have denied the resurrection of Christ. In fact when serving my mission it was common for other Christian groups to say that Christ is only a spirit. We had to teach them that Christ in reality took his body the third day.

4. We believe that there is one Godhead. We believe in one Elohim.

5. “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly, we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.” Joseph Smith.

Christ taught that we should not judge. It seems to me that many so called “Christians” judge other Christians who don’t

believe as they do. Let the Lord do the judging.

Thank you for responding to my article. I don't know if you will be able to receive what I have to say, since the Mormon use of Biblical terms seems to differ from what the rest of us mean by it, but I will attempt to respond to your argument.

> *1. We never have denied the deity of Christ. Christ is Jehovah, the great I am. This is within our doctrine.*

When orthodox Christians say "deity of Christ," we mean that He is one with the Father. There is one God of the Bible, although He exists as three persons, and Jesus is—and has always been—as fully God as the Father. As I understand it, Mormon doctrine is that Jesus was a created being, which would put Him on a different—inferior—level to the eternally-existing Father. So the Father existed before Jesus did, which would make Him (Jesus) less than the eternally-existing Creator of the Universe. Which the Bible proclaims that He is:

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8)

"In Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9).

Of Jesus it was announced: "These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again" (Revelation 2:8); the same claim made by God Almighty: "This is what the LORD says—Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6). Also, compare Revelation 22:13 with Isaiah 48:12.

Also as I understand it, Mormon doctrine is that Jesus is Jehovah, and the Father is Elohim, and they are different Gods. But in the Old Testament, these are two names for the same, one, God.

James Talmage, one of the Mormon authorities, states: “This [the Trinity] cannot rationally be construed to mean that the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are one in substance and person” (*A Study of the Articles of Faith*, p.40).

James Talmage states: “Jesus Christ was Jehovah…Jesus Christ, who is the Jehovah of the Old Testament. In all of scripture, where God is mentioned and where he has appeared, it was Jehovah…The Father has never dealt with man directly and personally since the fall” (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol.1, p.11,27).

Joseph F. Smith stated, “Among the spirit children of Elohim, the first-born was and is Jehovah, or Jesus Christ, to whom all others are juniors” (*Gospel Doctrine*, p.70).

In contrast, the Bible uses the names Elohim and Jehovah interchangeably for the one true God. The English form “Jehovah” was developed from four consonants (YHWH) from which we get the word “Yahweh,” translated “LORD.” The words “Yahweh” and “Elohim” are used together hundreds of times, as in: ‘LORD our God’, ‘LORD my God’, ‘LORD his God’, ‘LORD your God’. For example: “The Lord [Jehovah] our God [Elohim] is one Lord [Jehovah]” (Deuteronomy 6:4). See also Genesis 2:4-22; Deuteronomy 4:1; Judges 5:3; 1 Samuel 2:30; Isaiah 44:6.

> *2. We are saved by grace. No doubt about it. It’s part of our doctrine.*

The Bible’s definition of grace is undeserved, unearned favor. It’s a gift from God with no strings attached and no way to earn it. Apparently the Mormon definition of grace is very different, including man’s efforts:

The LDS Third Article of Faith states: “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, *by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel*” (*Pearl of Great Price: Articles of Faith*). (emphasis mine)

Joseph Fielding Smith explains what that last phrase means: "that which man merits through his own acts through life and by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel" (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, p.134).

James Talmage explains: "…redemption from personal sins can only be obtained through obedience to the requirement of the Gospel, and a life of good works" (James Talmage, in *A Study of the Articles of Faith*).

In the Bible 'salvation' means deliverance from the consequence (eternal separation from God) of our sin. As I understand it, Mormon leaders have redefined the word "salvation" to have a two-fold meaning: a) forgiveness of sins and b) universal resurrection:

"There will be a General Salvation for all in the sense in which that term is generally used, but salvation, meaning resurrection, is not exaltation" (Stephen L. Richards, *Contributions of Joseph Smith*, LDS tract, p.5).

"All men are saved by grace alone without any act on their part, meaning they are resurrected" (Bruce McConkie, *What Mormons Think of Christ*", LDS tract, p.28).

> *3. We have always taught that Jesus took his body the third day the same as it is recorded in the Bible. I don't know where you received your info on that, but we never have denied the resurrection of Christ. In fact when serving my mission it was common for other Christian groups to say that Christ is only a spirit. We had to teach them that Christ in reality took his body the third day.*

Upon doing further research, I was able to ascertain that I was wrong in saying that Mormon doctrine denies the bodily resurrection of Christ. I apologize and I have removed that part of my article.

> *4. We believe that there is one Godhead. We believe in one*

Elohim.

Orthodox Christianity teaches that there is one God. Period. The Godhead consists of one God in three persons, not three Gods. Not a plurality of Gods.

Bruce McConkie states: “Three separate personages—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—comprise the Godhead. As each of these persons is a God, it is evident from this standpoint alone, that a plurality of Gods exists. To us, *these three are the only Gods we worship*” (*Mormon Doctrine*, p.576-7). (emphasis mine)

5. “We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly, we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the word of God.” Joseph Smith.

How do you know when the Bible has been translated correctly? There are thousands of manuscripts in existence that allow us to check the reliability of the Biblical documents. The Bible was written in human language, which we can easily check because of the existence of so much collateral literature in the same language, unlike the Book of Mormon, supposedly written on golden plates in angelic language. Where is the fallibility test for that book?

Christ taught that we should not judge. It seems to me that many so called “Christians” judge other Christians who don’t believe as they do. Let the Lord do the judging.

In the very same chapter as the “Judge not” verse, the Lord also says, “Beware of false prophets.” How else will we distinguish between true and false except by judging the words and behavior of what men say? Of course, we cannot judge another’s heart, which explains His command not to judge; but in order to be discerning about truth and deception, we MUST judge their fruit by comparing it to the only absolute we have, the Bible.

The Bible’s standard for a prophet is 100% accuracy. By that

standard, Joseph Smith is a false prophet. If he were a true prophet,

- Jesus would have returned in 1891 (*Documentary History of the Church* (DHC) 2:182)
- The Civil War would have poured out upon all nations (D&C 87:1-3), the wicked of Smith's generation would have been "swept from off the face of the land" (DHC 1:315)
- A temple would have been built in Independence Missouri by the generation living in 1832 (D&C 84:4,5)

I'm sorry, but the differences between Mormonism and orthodox Christianity are not "nonsense." They are significant, and need to be explored.

Respectfully,

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Do You Have Anything on Scientology?"

Would you have anything on Scientology?

To put it bluntly, Scientology is a cult, and one designed to fleece the flock at that.

Watchman Fellowship (www.watchman.org) has a lot of excellent information on Scientology, but let me give you an overview of the problems with this self-proclaimed "church" from Watchman Fellowship's profile on Scientology

(http://www.watchman.org/profile/sientpro.htm):

Problems with the Founder

Scientology was founded by L. Ron Hubbard after a career as a science fiction writer in the 1930s. His book *Dianetics* came out in 1950 and the religion of Scientology was established by 1953. Scientology publications have made grandiose claims about Hubbard such as earning a degree in nuclear physics and a doctorate, becoming a WWII hero who miraculously cured himself of nearly fatal combat wounds, and discovering the secret to curing various diseases—all of which have been shown to be false.

From the Watchman web page cited above:

> Biographers have also uncovered Hubbard's involvement with the occult, which probably influenced his writings. Hubbard claimed to have had a near-death experience where he learned everything that ever puzzled the mind of man. The notorious Satanist, Aleister Crowley, was Hubbard's mentor and he lived with Crowley protege John Parsons, engaging in sex magic at their black magic mansion hospice (*Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1990, p. A1). Despite the inconsistencies in his history, Hubbard would become one of the wealthiest and most well known leaders of a religious movement in only a few years. As of 1986 over eight million copies of his book *Dianetics* had been sold (Ibid., p. 299). Scientology's methodology and beliefs have led them into a long history of criminal and civil actions and convictions. Both the U.S. Federal and Canadian courts have found top Scientology officials, and the church, guilty of charges such as burglarizing, wiretapping, and conspiracy against government agencies (*Time*, 6 May 1991, p. 50).

Problems with Doctrine

Note the science-fiction terms that Hubbard coined to explain his new "religion." Mankind, at his core, is a *Thetan*. The

Thetan is that part of each individual which is immortal and which has become contaminated or debased by the influences of *MEST* (matter, energy, space, time). These contaminating influences have created *engrams*. Engrams are mental recordings of past moments of pain and unconsciousness that need to be cleared out so people can return to their original immortal, god-like, powerful state.

Scientology provides expensive "spiritual counseling" in the form of *Auditing*, where the engrams are cleared out of peoples minds through the use of an *E-meter* (like a lie detector). How many auditing sessions it takes to reach the goal of *Clear* depends, frankly, on how much money one has, up to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Of course, no one successfully reaches this higher state of being because that would put an end to the flow of money.

Scientology claims to be compatible with all other religions. It doesn't have to be practiced in place of any other faith system. It attempts to combine eastern religions and biblical wisdom with western philosophies. Scientology claims not to contradict other religions, but this is not true. Hubbard attacked Christianity as an 'implant' and said Christ was fiction. (*A Piece of Blue Sky*, p. 383).

Scientology has had a rocky history with the U.S. government's financial institutions. Tax difficulties, fraud, and embezzlement have been constant sources for friction between the government and the leadership of the "church."

In addition to some of the obvious problems with Scientology, there are many apparent dangers. Despite calling itself a church (obviously for the tax benefits), it seems to be disinterested in the concept of God while preoccupied with the doctrine of Man. Since men are inherently good in this worldview, the Christian view of sin is treated with contempt. Men do not need salvation through Jesus Christ; they only need to be cleared of their painful memories through the expensive

Auditing process.

Watchman Fellowship recommends these resources (most of which are now available on the Web; links are provided):

1) *Scientology: Cult of the Stars*. Various articles on Scientology written by Watchman Fellowship staff and previously published in the Expositor. Includes information on lawsuits filed against Watchman by Scientology, various doctrinal papers and Scientology President's claim to be a practicing Mormon. 23 pages.

2) *A Piece of Blue Sky*, Jon Atack. This book was written by a former Scientologist who is one of the premiere experts on the subject. It traces the history and sordid details of the organization. Interesting quote from the book: "It was 1950, in the early, heady days of Dianetics, soon after L. Ron Hubbard opened the doors of his first organization to the clamoring crowd. Up until then, Hubbard was known only to readers of pulp fiction, but now he had an instant best-seller with a book that promised to solve every problem of the human mind, and the cash was pouring in. Hubbard found it easy to create schemes to part his new following from their money. One of the first tasks was to arrange "grades" of membership, offering supposedly greater rewards, at increasingly higher prices. Over thirty years later. an associate wryly remembered Hubbard turning to him and confiding, no doubt with a smile, "Let's sell these people a piece of blue sky." 428 pages, Hardback.

3) *L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman?* Brent Corydon. Written by a former high ranking member with the help of L. Ron Hubbard, Jr. (the founder's son), this book exposes the "corruption and mind-control" of Scientology. 402 pages.

4) *Understanding Scientology*, Margery Wakefield and Bob Penny. Ex-Scientologists, now Christian, give detailed understanding of the inner workings, beliefs and front organizations of

Scientology. 167 pages.

5) *The Road to Xenu* and *Social Control in Scientology*. An autobiographical account revealing the methodology and unethical induction techniques in novel form. 169 pages.

Hope this helps.

Kris Samons and Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Boys Are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus: Raising Gender-Healthy Children

Sue Bohlin begins with the concepts from John Gray's best-seller and applies them to understanding and supporting our child's gender to develop a healthy self understanding. Recognizing the wide variation among children, she is still able to apply biblical truth from a Christian perspective to give sound advice on this important topic.

Gender Differences

John Gray's best-seller *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*{1} woke up millions of people to the truth that men and women are different, and different is good. The politically correct lie that gender is a culturally bound social construct was shown to be just that, a lie, because life doesn't work that way.

In this article I look at gender differences in boys and girls, examining the importance of supporting our children's

gender to encourage a healthy self-concept as a possible means of preventing the development of homosexuality. (While I by no means wish to oversimplify this very complex subject, there are nonetheless patterns that show up in many people who experience same-sex attraction.{2})

(Disclaimer: I do realize I am painting these gender differences in broad strokes. Not every boy and not every girl will follow along these lines. However, these generalizations are true for the vast majority of children, as well as adults.)

Boys get their sense of self from achievement. They're wired to be self-reliant. One of my son's first whole sentences was, "Me do it!" They think they get extra brownie points for doing things on their own. For boys, asking for help means admitting defeat, and being offering help means being disrespected. When I used to say, "Let Mommy help you" to my two sons, they would be offended and I never knew why. If I could do it over again, I would tell them, "Let's see if you can do it on your own. If it doesn't work, I'll be glad to help."

Girls, on the other hand, get their sense of self from relationships. Most everything is about people, and asking for help is a way to build a bridge to other people. When a girl is offered help, she often feels loved and valued. So when a Daddy from Mars lets his little girl struggle on her own, because that's what a boy would appreciate, she can feel hurt and abandoned.

Boys are very linear in their thinking; they focus on one thing at a time. Girls are usually multi-taskers, able to juggle several things at once. Both of these are strengths. I finally learned to show respect for my boys' one-thing-at-a-time kind of thinking by giving them my full attention when they were talking to me. Although *I* knew that I could focus on them even if my hands were busy, they didn't think I was really listening. It's also important for men to realize that

girls can do more than one thing at a time without being disrespectful, like simultaneously embroider and truly listen to someone talk.

Boys, being linear, tend to focus on a goal, whereas girls can enjoy the process as well. I frustrated my kids so many times when they'd be dressed and ready for a soccer game and I'd think, "We've got 10 minutes before we have to leave! Let's get the living room vacuumed!" They would be focused on the goal of playing soccer and I'd drive them crazy with my emphasis on the process of running a household.

Boys tend to be competitive and girls cooperative. That makes sense since boys get their sense of self from achieving, and girls get their sense of self from relationships. There has been a definite anti-male bias in many of our schools over the past several years where competition is seen as evil and hurtful, so it's been removed whenever possible. This means educational policy has been directed *against* boys' very nature.{3} They often achieve more through competition, even friendly competition, and that includes building relationships. Boys (and men) bond best with other guys shoulder-to-shoulder, engaged in a competition or a common task. Girls (and women) bond best face-to-face. We need to support these differences for each gender to be who God made them to be.

Boys are action-oriented. Many little boys naturally throw themselves into a chair rather than sit in it. They are naturally active, which frustrates both parents and teachers, but the solution is not to drug them or try to turn them into girls. We need to change our expectations of what makes for acceptable levels of activity in boys, and provide safe channels for all that energy.

Where boys are primarily action-oriented, girls are primarily verbal. This verbal nature of females is not a design flaw; God, who defines Himself as "the Word" in the Bible, imparted

that part of His own nature to girls and women. Girls' very wordiness is what allows them to connect with other people, to be the relational beings that God intended.

These differences really show up when kids get hostile. Boys will often get physical when they're mad or frustrated. The testosterone that flows through boys' bodies is part of their physical hostility, and it needs to be respected. This very same tendency to hit or kick when angered is usually channeled into the glory of adult masculinity where a man will fight to protect his family or his country.

When girls get hostile, they use their tongues. It's not true that "sticks and stones can hurt my bones but names will never hurt me." Unfortunately, more long-term damage can be inflicted with hurtful words than by hitting or kicking. That's why it's so important to teach girls what Proverbs teaches about the destructive power of the tongue,{4} and to work at using their verbal skills to uplift and encourage and nurture.

Follow God's Rules for Marriage and Family

Although there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for why homosexuality develops, many who struggle with same-gender attraction can identify unhealthy patterns of relating in their families as they were growing up.

One of the ways that the development of a homosexual identity can be prevented is by following God's rules for marriage and the family.{5}

First, Both husband and wife have clearly defined roles. Children need to see that mothers and fathers are not interchangeable, and there are distinct roles that men and women fulfill. They need to know that a man shows his masculinity by protecting and providing for his family, using

his strength to serve them and not hurt them. They need to see the beauty of femininity expressed in their mother's nurturing and intuitive capabilities.

Second, The father is an involved leader, and is warm and affectionate toward his children. All children, but most especially boys, long for their dads' acceptance, praise and physical affection. When boys don't get it, it creates an emotional void of a sense of intimate connection with a man, and a boy can grow up not comfortable with being male.

Third, The mother loves and nurtures her family without being controlling. Girls need their mothers to show them that being a female is a good and lovely gift from God, and boys need their mothers to love and respect them without smothering.

Fourth, The father loves the mother. In showing love for his wife, the father creates the climate in which a little girl can believe it is safe and good to be a woman, and men can be trusted. When a boy sees his father loving his mother, cherishing and protecting her, he sees a man going beyond himself, the glory of masculine strength. He sees that being a man is a good and wonderful gift from God.

Fifth, The mother shows respect for the father. For the daughter, her mother's esteem for her father again shows that men are to be trusted, that women can enjoy and celebrate men. The mother's view of the father can become her view of him—and her view of men in general. Many lesbians deeply believe that men are idiots or brutes, worthless and repulsive, and something desperately sad shaped that belief.

If a boy's mother treats his father with love and respect, it says being a man is a good thing. But a weak father who accepts contempt, or a mean father who fights back, can both lead the boy to choose to identify with his mother and against his father. This just confuses his developing gender identity.

Following God's command to love wisely and well usually

produces emotionally healthy kids.

Affirm Children's Gender

A wise person once said that it's easier to build a healthy child than repair an adult. The best way to build emotionally healthy children who accept and enjoy their gender is for us as parents (and grandparents and teachers) to affirm boys in their masculinity and girls in their femininity.

Boys and girls are definitely created differently from conception, and we should support those God-ordained differences. Boys who are typically active boy need to hear words of affirmation and acceptance for what makes them boys. A friend of mine recently took her little boy for a walk down to the lake. Along the way she said, "Parker, let's look for frogs and toads. Mommy is so glad God made you a little boy so you could like yucky things like frogs and toads." When they got back to the house, his grandmother asked, "So how was your walk?" and Parker said, "Mommy's glad that I'm a boy because I like yucky things like frogs and toads!"

Boys who are NOT typically boy, those who prefer quieter pursuits like reading and music and the performing arts, especially need to be supported in their masculinity. These boys can grow up to be the King Davids in our world, and we need them! I should also point out that these sensitive, quieter types, when cherished in their masculinity, grow up to be the best kind of husbands, and men with a shepherd's heart. All boys need to hear their parents affirm their existence with comments like "I'm so glad God made you a boy" and "You're going to make a fine man when you grow up." They need to hear that a boy can be a good strong male whether or not they play sports and like rough stuff.

Feminine little girls need to be admired and cherished for their girlishness. A little girl in a new dress can be praised by her mother and friends all day long, but she won't really

believe she's beautiful until her daddy tells her she is. And girls need to hear the "b" word—they they are beautiful. It's a part of the feminine heart. Not every girl or woman is beauty-pageant material, but there are many kinds of beauty, and we all need to hear that we are beautiful. Girls who aren't typically girly, the tomboys and "jockettes," especially need to be appreciated for their particular expression of femininity by praising and encouraging them. They need to know that one can be a soft, feminine lady AND a strong leader or a great athlete.

Every child's heart longs to hear "I'm so glad you're you, and I love you just the way you are."

Understanding Gender Differences

I think it's crucial for us as adults to understand gender differences in children and support them with a sense of humor, not condemnation.

One of my friends tells of an elaborate classroom Christmas craft where the kids were to fill socks with rice, tie them off and decorate them to be snowmen—a craft created by mothers of girls. The boys filled the socks with rice, tied them off and gleefully announced, "Look! A snow worm!"

I remember hearing another friend informing her young boys, "We don't roughhouse. We play quietly and gently." She didn't mean to, but she was trying to teach her boys to be girls. NOT a good plan!

Those who experience same-gender attraction, especially men, are usually uncomfortable and insecure in their masculinity or femininity. Homosexuality isn't primarily a sexual issue, but an emotional one, and it often starts with not being comfortable or confident in the gender God chose for us. So it's important to be on the lookout for signs that children might be struggling with their gender identity and may be

vulnerable to developing a homosexual identity later:

- Kids who don't fit in.
- Kids who lack a close relationship with their father, especially boys.
- Kids who wear clothes and play with toys associated with the other gender.
- Boys who are TOO good, everyone seeing them as "the good little boy."
- Poor peer relationships, not bonding with other children their same sex, often lonely.
- Kids who are bullied and shamed by other kids.

In closing, let me give three suggestions for raising emotionally healthy children with a strong sense of gender:

•Cultivate warm, affectionate, respectful relationships—between husband and wife, and between parents and children. A hurtful relationship with the same-sex parent, whether real or just perceived, is the number one contributor to the later development of homosexuality.{6} Both boys and girls, but especially boys, need a daddy's approval, acceptance and affection. Girls develop problems with gender identity from not being protected and cherished. They need to be encouraged toward feminine things with a close and loving relationship with Mom.

•Cherish and support your child's gender. Understand the God-designed differences and tell them how special it is to be a boy or a girl.

•When you see patterns of inappropriate gender behavior, lovingly correct it. For instance, boys don't wear girls' clothes or makeup or jewelry. And boys don't play with Barbies the way girls do. However, it's OK to play with Barbies the way BOYS would! That would include physical aggression and sound effects as well as nurturing behavior.

God knew what He was doing when he chose each child's gender,

and we would be wise to support His choice.

Notes

1. Gray, John. *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.
2. For example, see *Portraits of Freedom*, Bob Davies [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 9-10. Also, I highly recommend Don Schmierer's excellent book *An Ounce of Prevention: Preventing the Homosexual Condition in Today's Youth* [Word, 1998].
3. Please see my colleague Don Closson's article on the Probe Web site, "The Feminization of American Schools" at www.probe.org/the-feminization-of-american-schools/.
4. E.g., Prov. 18:21, 21:23, 25:23, 26:28.
5. I am indebted to Scott Lively's insight in his online book, *Seven Steps to Recruit-Proof Your Child* at www.defendthefamily.com/pfrc/books/sevensteps/Chapter5/index.html.
6. Lecture by Dr. Joseph Nicolosi, "Prevention of Male Homosexuality," Focus on the Family's *Love Won Out* conference, May 6, 2000, Dallas, Texas.

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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.

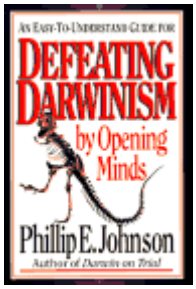
The Need to Think Critically

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