

# Answering the Big Questions of Life

*Sue Bohlin presents a Naturalistic, a Pantheistic, and a Christian perspective on the five major questions all of us should ask about life. Knowing the answers to these questions is critical to living a meaningful, fulfilling life on this earth. She concludes by demonstrating that only a Christian worldview provides consistent answers to all of these questions.*



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

One of the most important aspects of Probe's "Mind Games" conference is teaching students to recognize the three major world views—Naturalism, Pantheism, and Theism—and the impact they have both on the surrounding culture as well as on the ideas the students will face at the university. Because we come from an unapologetically Christian worldview, I will be presenting the ideas of Christian theism, even though Judaism and Islam are both theistic as well.

In this essay I'll be examining five of the biggest questions of life, and how each of the worldviews answers them:

- Why is there something rather than nothing?
- How do you explain human nature?
- What happens to a person at death?
- How do you determine right and wrong?
- How do you know that you know?[\[1\]](#)

## Why Is There Something Rather than Nothing?

The most basic question of life may well be, **Why is there something rather than nothing?** Why am I here? Why is anything

here at all?

Even Maria Von Trapp in the movie *The Sound of Music* knew the answer to this one. When she and the Captain are singing their love to each other in the gazebo, she croons, "Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could."

But naturalism, the belief that says there is no reality beyond the physical universe, offers two answers to this basic question. Until a few years ago, the hopeful wish of naturalism was that matter is eternal: the universe has always existed, and always will. There's no point to asking "why" because the universe simply *is*. End of discussion. Unfortunately for naturalism, the evidence that has come from our studies of astronomy makes it clear that the universe is unwinding, in a sense, and at one point it was tightly wound up. The evidence says that at some point in the past there *was* a beginning, and matter is most definitely not eternal. That's a major problem for a naturalist, who believes that everything that now is, came from nothing. First there was nothing, then there was something, but nothing caused the something to come into existence. Huh?

Pantheism is the belief that everything is part of one great "oneness." It comes from two Greek words, *pan* meaning "everything," and *theos* meaning "God." Pantheism says that all is one, all is god, and therefore we are one with the universe; we are god. We are part of that impersonal divinity that makes up the universe. In answering the question, **Why is there something rather than nothing**, pantheism says that everything had an impersonal beginning. The universe itself has an intelligence that brought itself into being. The "something" that exists is simply how energy expresses itself. If you've seen the *Star Wars* movies, you've seen the ideas of pantheism depicted in that impersonal energy field, "The Force." Since the beginning of the universe had an impersonal origin, the question of "why" gets sidestepped. Like naturalism, pantheism basically says, "We don't have a good

answer to that question, so we won't think about it."

Christian Theism is the belief that God is a personal, transcendent Creator of the universe—and of us. This worldview showed up on a T-shirt I saw recently:

"There are two things in life you can be sure of.

1. There is a God.
2. You are not Him."

Christian Theism answers the question, **Why is there something rather than nothing**, by confidently asserting that first there was God and nothing else, then He created the universe by simply speaking it into existence. The Bible's opening sentence is an answer to this most basic of questions: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

## **How Do You Explain Human Nature?**

Another one of the big questions of life is, **How do you explain human nature?** Why do human beings act the way we do? What it really boils down to is, Why am I so good and you're so bad?

During World War II, a young Jewish teenager kept a journal during the years she and her family hid from the Nazis in a secret apartment in a house in Amsterdam. Anne Frank's diary poignantly explored the way she tried to decide if people were basically good or basically evil. Acts of kindness and blessing seemed to indicate people were basically good; but then the next day, Anne would learn of yet another barbarous act of depravity and torture, and she would think that perhaps people were basically bad after all. After reading her diary, I remember carrying on the quest for an answer in my own mind, and not finding it until I trusted Christ and learned what His Word had to say about it.

Naturalism says that humans are nothing more than evolved social animals. There is nothing that truly separates us from the other animals, so all our behavior can be explained in terms of doing what helps us to survive and reproduce. Your only purpose in life, naturalism says, is to make babies. And failing that, to help those who share your genes to make babies. Kind of makes you want to jump out of bed in the morning, doesn't it?

Another answer from naturalism is that we are born as blank slates, and we become whatever is written on those slates. You might mix in some genetic factors, in which case human nature is nothing more than a product of our genes and our environment.

Pantheism explains human nature by saying we're all a part of god, but our problem is that we forget we're god. We just need to be re- educated and start living like the god we are. Our human nature will be enhanced by attaining what pantheists call "cosmic consciousness." According to New Age thought, the problem with humans is that we suffer from a collective form of metaphysical amnesia. We just need to wake up and remember we're god. When people are bad, (which is one result of forgetting you're god), pantheism says that they'll pay for it in the next life when they are reincarnated as something less spiritually evolved than their present life. I had a Buddhist friend who refused to kill insects in her house because she said they had been bad in their previous lives and had to come back as bugs, and it wasn't her place to prematurely mess up their karma.

The Christian worldview gives the most satisfying answer to the question, **How do you explain human nature?** The Bible teaches that God created us to be His image-bearers, which makes us distinct from the entire rest of creation. But when Adam and Eve chose to rebel in disobedience, their fall into sin distorted and marred the sacred Image. The fact that we are created in God's image explains the noble, creative,

positive things we can do; the fact that we are sinners who love to disobey and rebel against God's rightful place as King of our lives explains our wicked, destructive, negative behavior. It makes sense that this biblical view of human nature reveals the reasons why mankind is capable of producing both Mother Teresa and the holocaust.

## What Happens after Death?

In the movie *Flatliners*, medical students took turns stopping each other's hearts to give them a chance to experience what happens after death. After a few minutes, they resuscitated the metaphysical traveller who told the others what he or she saw. The reason for pursuing such a dangerous experiment was explained by the med student who thought it up in the first place: "**What happens after death?** Mankind deserves an answer. Philosophy failed; religion failed. Now it's up to the physical sciences."

Well, maybe religion failed, but the Lord Jesus didn't. But first, let's address how naturalism answers this question.

Because this worldview says that there is nothing outside of space, time and energy, naturalism insists that death brings the extinction of personality and the disorganization of matter. Things just stop living and start decomposing. Or, as my brother said when he was in his atheist phase, "When you die, you're like a dog by the side of the road. You're dead, and that's it." To the naturalist, there is no life after death. The body recycles back to the earth and the mental and emotional energies that comprised the person disintegrate forever.

Pantheism teaches reincarnation, the belief that all of life is an endless cycle of birth and death. After death, each person is reborn as someone, or something, else. Your reincarnated persona in the next life depends on how you live during this one. This is the concept of karma, which is the

law of cause and effect in life. If you make evil or foolish choices, you will have to work off that bad karma by being reborn as something like a rat or a cow. If you're really bad, you might come back as a termite. But if you're good, you'll come back as someone who can be wonderful and powerful. New Age followers sometimes undergo something they call "past lives therapy," which regresses them back beyond this life, beyond birth, and into previous lives. I think it's interesting that people always seem to have been someone glamorous like Cleopatra and never someone like a garbage collector or an executioner!

Christian Theism handles the question, **What happens to a person at death**, with such a plain, no-nonsense answer that people have been stumbling over it for millenia. Death is a gateway that either whisks a person to eternal bliss with God or takes him straight to a horrible place of eternal separation from God. What determines whether one goes to heaven or hell is the way we respond to the light God gives us concerning His Son, Jesus Christ. When we confess that we are sinners in need of mercy we don't deserve, and trust the Lord Jesus to save us from not only our sin but the wrath that sin brings to us, He comes to live inside us and take us to heaven to be with Him forever when we die. When we remain in rebellion against God, either actively disobeying Him or passively ignoring Him, the consequences of our sin remain on us and God allows us to keep them for all eternity—but separated from Him and all life and hope. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). But it is a delightful thing to fall into the arms of the Lover of your soul, Who has gone on ahead to prepare a place for you! Which will you choose?

## **How Do You Determine Right and Wrong?**

One of the big questions in life is, How do you determine right and wrong? Steven Covey, author of *Seven Habits of*

*Highly Effective People*, appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show one day. He asked the studio audience to close their eyes and point north. When they opened their eyes, there were several hundred arms pointing in wildly different directions. Then Mr. Covey pulled out a compass and said, "This is how we know which way is north. You can't know from within yourself." He used a powerful object lesson to illustrate the way Christian theism answers this big question in life.

Naturalism says that there is no absolute outside of ourselves. There is no final authority because space, time and energy are all that is. There is no such thing as right and wrong because there is no right- and wrong-giver. So naturalism tries to deal with the question of ethics by providing several unsatisfying answers. One is the belief that there is no free choice, that all our behaviors and beliefs are driven by our genes. We are just as determined in our behavior as the smallest animals or insects. Another is the belief that moral values are determined from what is; the way things are is the way they ought to be. If you are being abused by your husband, that's the way things are, so that's the way they ought to be. Even worse is the concept of arbitrary ethics: might makes right. Bullies get to decide the way things ought to be because they're stronger and meaner than everybody else. That's what happens in totalitarian regimes; the people with the power decide what's right and what's wrong.

Pantheism says that there is no such thing as ultimate right and wrong because everything is part of a great undifferentiated whole where right and wrong, good and evil, are all part of the oneness of the universe. Remember "Star Wars"? The Force was both good and evil at the same time. Pantheism denies one of the basic rules of philosophy, which is that two opposite things cannot both be true at the same time. Because Pantheism denies that there are absolutes, things which are true all the time, it holds that all right

and wrong is relative. Right and wrong are determined by cultures and situations. So murdering one's unborn baby might be right for one person and wrong for another.

Theism says that there is such a thing as absolute truth, and absolute right and wrong. We can know this because this information has come to us from a transcendent source outside of ourselves and outside of our world. Christian Theism says that the God who created us has also communicated certain truths to us. He communicated generally, through His creation, and He communicated specifically and understandably through His Word, the Bible. We call this revelation. Christian Theism says that absolute truth is rooted in God Himself, who is an Absolute; He is Truth. As Creator, He has the right to tell us the difference between right and wrong, and He has taken great care to communicate this to us.

That's why Steven Covey's illustration was so powerful. When he pulled out a compass, he showed that we need a transcendent source of information, something outside ourselves and which is fixed and constant, to show us the moral equivalent of "North." We are creatures created to be dependent on our Creator for the information we need to live life right. God has given us a compass in revelation.

## **How Do You Know That You Know?**

This question generally doesn't come up around the cafeteria lunch table at work, and even the most inquisitive toddler usually won't ask it, but it's an important question nonetheless: How do you know that you know?

There's a great scene in the movie *Terminator 2* where the young boy that the cyborg terminator has been sent to protect, is threatened by a couple of hoodlums. The terminator is about to blow one away when the young boy cries out, "You can't do that!" The terminator—Arnold Schwarzenegger—asks, "Why not?" "You just can't go around killing people!" the boy protests.

“Why not?” “Take my word for it,” the boy says. “You just can’t.” He knew that it was wrong to kill another human being, but he didn’t know how he knew. There are a lot of people in our culture like that!

Naturalism, believing that there is nothing beyond space, time and energy, would answer the question by pointing to the human mind. Rational thought—figuring things out deductively—is one prime way we gain knowledge. Human reason is a good enough method to find out what we need to know. The mind is the center of our source of knowledge. Another way to knowledge is by accumulating hard scientific data of observable and measurable experience. This view says that the source of our knowledge is found in the senses. We know what we can perceive through what we can measure. Since naturalism denies any supernaturalism (anything above or outside of the natural world), what the human mind can reason and measure is the only standard for gaining knowledge.

Pantheism would agree with this assessment of how we know that we know. Followers of pantheism tend to put a lot of value on personal experience. The rash of near- and after-death experiences in the past few years, for example, are extremely important to New Agers. These experiences usually validate the preconceptions of pantheistic thought, which denies absolutes such as the Christian tenet that Jesus is the only way to God. The experiences of past-lives therapy have persuaded even some Christians to believe in reincarnation, even though the Bible explicitly denies that doctrine, because personal experience is often considered the most valid way to know reality.

Christian Theism says that while human reason and perception are legitimate ways to gain knowledge, we cannot depend on these methods alone because they’re not enough. Some information needs to be given to us from outside the system. An outside Revealer provides information we can’t get any other way. Revelation—revealed truth from the One who knows

everything—is another, not only legitimate but necessary way to know some important things. Revelation is how we know what happened when the earth, the universe and man were created. Revelation is how we know what God wants us to do and be. Revelation is how we can know how the world will end and what heaven is like. Revelation in the form of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way we can experience “God with skin on.”

Naturalism’s answers are inadequate, depressing, and wrong; pantheism’s answers are slippery, don’t square with reality, and wrong; but Christian theism—the Christian worldview—is full of hope, consistent with reality, and it resonates in our souls that it’s very, very right.

## Notes

1. These questions are taken from James W. Sire’s book *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, Ill.:InterVarsity Press), 1977.

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# Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus

## How Men and Women Differ

[Sue] Counselor John Gray made a ton of money—and found a ton of grateful fans—in writing his best-selling book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*[\[1\]](#). This book explored the intrinsic differences between men and women in a way that has helped millions of people understand why relationships between the two sexes can be so frustrating!

**[Ray]** In this essay we'll be examining some of the insights from this book, then looking at what the Bible says about how God wants men and women to relate to each other. It's no surprise that since God created us to be different, He knew all about those differences thousands of years ago when He gave very specific instructions for each gender!

**[Sue]** The whimsical premise of *Men Are From Mars* is that many years ago, all men lived on Mars, and all women lived on Venus. Once they got together, they respected and enjoyed their differences—until one day when everybody woke up completely forgetting that they had once come from different planets. And ever since, men mistakenly expect women to think and communicate and react the way men do, and women expect men to think and communicate and react the way women do. These unrealistic expectations cause frustration. But when we understand the God-given differences between male and female, we have more realistic expectations of the other sex, and our frustration level drops.

**[Ray]** Speaking of which, we do realize that it can be very frustrating for some people when gender differences are painted in such broad strokes, since there's such a large spectrum of what women are like and what men are like. Both men and women come in different shapes and sizes but by and large, we feel that most will identify with these characteristics.

**[Sue]** With that said, let's look at some of the differences between men and women.

**[Ray]** Men get our sense of self from achievement. We tend to be task-oriented, and being self-reliant is very important to us. You put those two together, and you get people who hate to ask for directions or for help. I'll wander in a store for 15 minutes trying to find something on my own because accomplishing the task of getting a certain item isn't going to be satisfying unless I can do it on my own. For us, asking

for help is an admission of failure; we see it as a weakness.

**[Sue]** Women get our sense of self from relationships. Where men are task-oriented, we are relational-oriented. Our connections to other people are the most important thing to us. Instead of prizing self-reliance, we tend to be interdependent, enjoying the connectedness to other people, especially other women. For us, both asking for help and offering it is a compliment; we're saying, "Let me build a bridge between us. I value you, and it'll bind us."

**[Ray]** Men usually focus on a goal. We want to get to the bottom line, to the end of something.

**[Sue]** But women tend to enjoy the process. Not that reaching a goal isn't important, but we like getting there too. That's why driving vacations are so very different for men and women; the guys want to get to their destinations and beat their best time with the fewest stops, and we sort of treasure the time to talk and look and maybe stop at the outlet malls along the way!

## **Gender Differences, Continued**

**[Sue]** We believe these admittedly broad-brushed differences are rooted in God-created traits. In fact, some Christian authors like Gary Smalley and Stu Weber have addressed them in their books as well. [\[2\]](#) Ray, why don't you continue with the next point about men—something that's bound to be real surprising?

**[Ray]** Well, yes, men are competitive. Big shock, huh? Whether we're on the basketball court or on the highway, we just naturally want to win, to be out front. Many of us are driven to prove ourselves, to prove that we're competent, and it comes out in a competitive spirit.

**[Sue]** And it's not that girls aren't competitive, because of course we are; it's just that we tend to be more cooperative

than competitive. When girls are playing and one gets hurt, the game will often stop and even be forgotten while everyone gathers around and comforts the one who went down. It's that relational part of us coming out.

**[Ray]** Men are often more logical and analytical than women.

**[Sue]** And we tend to be more intuitive than men. This isn't some sort of mystic claim; there was a study at Stanford University that discovered women catch subliminal messages faster and more accurately than men.[{3}](#) Voila—intuition.

**[Ray]** This difference is evident in brain activity. Men's brains tend to show activity in one hemisphere at a time . . .

**[Sue]** . . .Where women's brains will show the two hemispheres communicating with each other, back and forth, constantly. That means that often, men and women can arrive at the exact same conclusion, using completely different means to get there. Our thinking has been accused of being convoluted, but it works!

**[Ray]** Men are linear. We can usually focus on just one thing at a time. That's why you've learned not to try to talk to me while I'm reading the paper. I really struggle to read and listen at the same time.

**[Sue]** Yes, I've learned to get your attention and ask if I can talk to you so it'll be an actual conversation and not a monologue! God made us women to be multi-taskers, able to juggle many things at once. It's a requirement for mothering, I've discovered. Many times I'd be cooking dinner and helping the kids with homework and answering the phone and keeping an ear on the radio, all at the same time.

**[Ray]** Men tend to be compartmentalized, like a chest of drawers: work in one drawer, relationships in another drawer, sports in a third drawer, and so on. All the various parts of our lives can be split off from each other.

**[Sue]** Whereas women are more like a ball of yarn where everything's connected to everything else. That's why a woman can't get romantic when there's some unresolved anger or frustration with her husband, and he doesn't see what the two things have to do with each other.

**[Ray]** One more; men are action-oriented. When we feel hostile, our first instinct is to release it physically. And when we're upset, the way for us to feel better is to actively solve the problem.

**[Sue]** Women are verbal. (Another big surprise, huh?) Our hostility is released with words rather than fists. And when we're upset, the way for us to feel better is by talking about our problem with other people.

## **More Gender Differences**

**[Ray]** When men are under stress, we generally distract ourselves with various activities to relax. That's why you see so many men head for the nearest basketball hoop or bury themselves in the paper or TV. But there's another aspect of the way we handle severe stress that can be particularly frustrating to women who don't understand the way we are: a man withdraws into his "cave." We need to be apart from everybody else while we figure out our problems alone. Remember, a man is very self-reliant and competitive, and to ask for help is weakness, so he will first want to solve the problem by himself.

**[Sue]** We women handle stress in the exact opposite way, which of course is going to pose major problems until we understand this difference! When we're stressed, we get more involved with other people. We want to talk about what's upsetting us, because we process information and feelings by putting them into words. But merely talking is only half of it; we talk in order to be heard and understood. Having a good listener on the other end is extremely important. No wonder there is such

misunderstanding when people are under stress: as a friend of ours put it, "Men head for their cave, and women head for the back door!"

**[Ray]** John Gray gave some great advice when he said that when a man's going into his cave, he can give powerful assurance to the woman in his life by telling her, "I'll be back."

**[Sue]** Works for me! What's next?

**[Ray]** A man's primary need is for respect. There are a lot of elements involved in respect, which he needs both from his peers and from the significant women in his life: trust, acceptance, appreciation, admiration, approval, and encouragement. A man needs to know he's respected. He also needs to be needed. That's why it's so devastating to a man when he loses his job. He gets his sense of self from achievement, and he needs to be needed, so when the means to achieve and provide for his family is taken away, it's emotionally catastrophic.

**[Sue]** It's good for us women to know that, so we can be grace-givers in a time of awful trauma. I think that just as a man is devastated by the loss of his job, a woman is devastated by the loss of a close relationship; both losses reflect the God-given differences between us. Just as a man needs to be respected, we primarily need to be cherished. Cherishing means giving tender care, understanding, respect, devotion, validation, and reassurance. We need to know others think we're special. And just as a man needs to be needed, we need to be protected. That's why security is so important to us. A man needs to be able to provide, and a woman needs to feel provided for.

**[Ray]** One final difference. For men, words are simply for conveying facts and information.

**[Sue]** But for women, words mean much more. Not just to convey information, but to explore and discover our thoughts and

feelings, to help us feel better when we're upset, and it's the only way we have to create intimacy. To a woman, words are like breathing!

## **Women's Needs and Issues**

**[Ray]** We have been examining how God created men and women to be different. So it's not surprising to find how many of our uniquenesses and needs are addressed by God's commands and precepts in the Bible.

**[Sue]** In this section we'll consider women's needs and issues, and look at how God's commands fit perfectly with the observations we've made. In the next section, we'll look at men's needs.

As I said above, our primary need as women is to be cherished—to be shown TLC, understanding, respect, devotion, validation, and reassurance.

**[Ray]** And in Ephesians 5:25, we read God's command that addresses this need: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." When we think about the way Christ loves the church, we see a sacrificial love, a tender love, and a love that is committed to acting in the church's best interests at our Savior's own expense. God doesn't just want men to love their wives like they love sports—He wants us to love our wives in a way that makes them feel cherished and very special. He wants us to love our wives with a sacrificial love that puts her needs and desires above our own.

1 Peter 3:7 gives further instruction along this line: "You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way." The Greek literally reads, "Dwell with them according to knowledge." The only way to live with your wife in an understanding way is to seek to know her. And when a husband listens and responds to what his wife shares—remembering that

women are created to be verbal—she will feel cherished and understood and loved.

The last part of 1 Peter 3:7 continues, “live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman.” This isn’t a slam on women. When we read this verse, we ought to think along the lines of a fine china cup. It’s definitely weaker than a tin cup, but that’s because it’s so fragile, delicate, and far more valuable. When we serve dinner on our china, we’re very careful in handling it, and extremely protective of washing and drying it. We treat our china with tenderness and gentleness because of its fragility and value. That’s how we cherish it. And that’s how a man is to treat his wife—not roughly or carelessly, but with tenderness and gentleness, because God made women to be treated with special care.

**[Sue]** The flip side of needing to be cherished is our need for security. We need to be protected and provided for. Even when a wife works, she wants to know that her husband is the main provider, or at least truly wants to be and is working to that end. The burden of being forced to provide for our families is bigger than we should have to bear.

**[Ray]** God created that need for security within women. That’s why He puts such a high value on the provisional aspect of a man’s character. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” God wants us men to be diligent workers and providers. He created us to bear the burden of providing; women are to be protected from that burden whenever possible.

## **Men’s Needs and Issues**

**[Ray]** Men’s primary need is for respect and support—to receive trust, acceptance, appreciation, admiration, approval and encouragement.

**[Sue]** I think God intends for wives to meet that need by submitting to our husbands, as we are commanded to do in Ephesians 5:22 and 1 Peter 3:1. Submission doesn't mean giving in or being an overworked doormat; it's a gift of our will. It means submitting to God first, then demonstrating that submission by choosing to serve and respect and be our husband's Number One supporter. Even when a man is more of a jerk than a Superman, he needs the respect of his wife, even if she has to ask the Lord for His perspective on what areas of his life are worthy of respect!

It's interesting to me that in Ephesians 5, at the beginning of the passage on marriage, Paul exhorts women to submit to their husbands as unto the Lord, and then closes this section by saying, "And let the wife see to it that she respect her husband." (v. 33) Submission and respect aren't the same thing, but they're both necessary to meet a man's God-given needs. In the middle of this "marriage sandwich," so to speak, is the awesome command to men to love their wives sacrificially and tenderly, as Christ loves the church. What I see is that submission and respect is a natural response to that kind of love.

**[Ray]** Another aspect of men's constitution is that we're action-oriented, whereas women are verbal.

**[Sue]** Yes, and that's why I'm very intrigued by the wisdom of Peter's admonishment to women, where he says,

*You wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. (1 Peter 3:1-2)*

To men, words are cheap—and if they're coming from a woman, all too plentiful! What impresses a man is what a person does, not what they say. So here the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to basically tell us to shut up and live holy lives, which is the

only language that's going to have a true impact on a man.

[Ray] Another characteristic of men is that we tend to be self-oriented, as opposed to women who are more relational.

[Sue] It's interesting to me that Paul exhorts men to love their wives as they love themselves and their own bodies (Ephesians 5:28,33). And he does this without condemning them for that self-orientation; he just uses it as a point of reference to demonstrate how powerfully men are to love their wives. From what I've observed at the health club about the way some men love their bodies, God wants men to indulge their wives with some major pampering!

[Ray] One last comment. While men and women may be constitutionally different by design, we do share one important and serious flaw: our sin nature. Both genders are prideful and selfish. And that is one reason we find commands to both men and women to serve the other sex. But in the midst of our service, we can certainly enjoy the differences God planted!

## **Notes**

1. Gray, John. *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992.
2. Smalley, Gary. *Hidden Keys to a Loving Lasting Marriage*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1984. Weber, Stu. *Tender Warrior*. Sisters, Ore.:Multnomah Books, 1993.
3. Smalley, *Hidden Keys*, p. 17.

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# Angels: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly – The Range of Angelic Activity

*Sue Bohlin presents accounts of angelic activity in our world today consistent with the biblical account of angels and their actions. From a biblical worldview perspective, she considers both the involvement of good angels and bad angels in the circumstances of life. A good understanding of angelic activity will aid us in understanding the full world around us, both the seen and the unseen.*

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



I was about thirteen years old when I had my first encounter with an angel. I was going upstairs to my room, pulling my entire weight on the handrail, when it suddenly came off in my hand. I fell backwards, head first. Halfway into a terrible fall, I felt a strong hand on my back push me upright. There was nobody there—well, nobody *visible*!

Angel stories are always fascinating, and in this essay I address angels: the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good angels are the holy ones, the bad angels are the evil ones, which the Bible calls demons, and the ugly angels are demons disguising themselves as good angels. These ugly angels have deceived many people in a culture that has embraced “angel mania.”

## The Good Angels

The book of Hebrews calls angels “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). Angels minister in many ways to us, and I’d like to look at some of their ministries with examples from the scriptures as well as

some modern anecdotes.

## **Provision**

The Lord uses His angels to physically provide for His own. It was an angel who brought Elijah bread and water while fleeing from Jezebel after his victory on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 19:5-6).

In 1944, the penniless wife of a pastor and evangelist in Switzerland, Susie Ware prayed, "God, I need five pounds of potatoes, two pounds of pastry flour, apples, pears, a cauliflower, carrots, veal cutlets for Saturday, and beef for Sunday." A few hours later, someone knocked on the door, and there was a young man carrying a basket, who said, "Mrs. Ware, I am bringing what you asked for." It was precisely what she'd prayed for—down to the exact brand of pastry flour she wanted. The young man slipped away, and even though Rev. and Mrs. Ware watched at the window to their building, the man never exited. He just disappeared. [\[1\]](#)

## **Guidance**

Sometimes, angels give guidance so God's people will know what He wants us to do. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and instructed him to take Mary as his wife and to name her baby Jesus. (Matthew 1:20-21)

And it was an angel who told Philip where to go in his travels so that he could meet the Ethiopian eunuch and lead him to Christ. (Acts 8:26)

My friend Lee experienced the comfort of guidance from an angel when the other men in his army unit were pressuring him to visit a red-light district. As he prayed for strength, an invisible messenger came to him and said, quite audibly from about ten feet away, "Have no fear of them. Do not succumb. I will sustain you and deliver you."

## **Encouragement**

Angelic ministry to us can include powerful encouragement. When Paul and his shipmates were caught in a horrible storm and faced shipwreck, an angel appeared to him, assured him that not a life would be lost, and that he would live to stand trial before Caesar. (Acts 27:23)

One mother of a young girl told me that the night after her daughter's cancer surgery, a very tall nurse with long braids, a real Amazon, ministered to her all night long. She was caring for the girl with a strong but gentle tenderness, and talking with the mom about how good God is. After they went home, the mother decided to write a thank-you note to the nurse, and called the hospital to ask for her name. Everyone—even the head of nursing—insisted that there was no nurse with that description working at the hospital. She believes God sent an angel to encourage her through that dark night.

## **Protection**

This world is a dangerous place, and angels can provide supernatural protection. Daniel 6 tells the story of how an angel shut the mouths of the lions when he was thrown into their den.

A young lady named Myra worked in the inner-city ministry of Teen Challenge in Philadelphia. One neighborhood gang liked to terrorize anyone who tried to enter the Teen Challenge building, and they harassed Myra as well. One night, when she was alone in the building with the gang banging on the door, she felt she should continue to try to reach out to them with the gospel of Jesus. As she opened the door, she breathed a prayer for protection. The boys suddenly stopped their shouting, looked at each other, turned and left quietly. Myra had no idea why.

Later on, as the staff people were able to build relationships with the gang members, the ministry director asked them why they dropped their threats against Myra and left her alone that night. One young man spoke up, saying, "We wouldn't dare touch her after her boyfriend showed up. That dude had to be seven feet tall." The director said, "I didn't know Myra had a boyfriend. But at any rate, she was here alone that night." Another gang member insisted, "No, we saw him. He was right behind her, big as life in his classy white suit." {2}

Another young woman walking home from work in Brooklyn had to go past a young man loitering against a building. She was fearful; there had been muggings in the area recently, and she prayed for protection. She had to go right by him, and although she could feel him watching her, he didn't move. A short time after she reached home, she heard sirens and saw police lights. The next day her neighbor told her someone had been raped, in the same place and just after she had passed by the young man.

She wondered if the man she'd passed was the rapist, because if it were, she could identify him. She called the police and discovered they had a suspect in custody. She identified him in a lineup and asked the policeman, "Why didn't he attack *me*? I was just as vulnerable as the next woman who came along." The policeman was curious too, so he described the woman and asked the suspect about her. He said, "I remember her. But why would I have bothered her? She was walking down the street with two big guys, one on either side of her." {3}

## Rescue

Sometimes, angels rescue people in danger. It was an angel—if not the Angel of the Lord, who is the pre-incarnate Christ—who joined Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, rescuing them from the flames (Daniel 3).

My friend John told me that he and a friend were walking

through a rough neighborhood one night when 12 or 15 gang members jumped them. John took two punches and sank to the ground. He expected to be robbed and severely beaten, but he wasn't. Instead, he heard a voice from about six feet up: "It's okay, they're gone." He looked up and saw his friend who mysteriously was now about 25 feet away, leaning against a wall with his fists still clenched as if he were ready to fight. But there was no gang. They just disappeared. And there was nobody next to John.

## **Warrior Angels**

The ministry of warrior angels catches the imagination in a special way. The prophet Elisha prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant so he could see the mighty angelic army of God protecting them.

In Nazi Germany, one mother took her little boy, who was unchurched, to a shelter run by nuns that had become known as a safe place because nothing bad ever seemed to happen there. His first night, while everyone else was praying that God would protect them, this little boy kept his eyes open. After the "amen," he told his mother, "It came up to here on them!" and pointed to his breastbone. When asked what he meant, he said, "The gutter came up to here on them!" A nurse asked, "What are you talking about?" and he told her that he saw men filled with light guarding each corner of the shelter, so tall that they towered above the roof. The shelter was protected by huge warrior angels that only a little boy could see.[{4}](#)

## **Guardian Angels**

Do we have guardian angels? The Bible doesn't give a definitive answer on that, although the Lord Jesus did say, "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:10) And Psalm 91:11 promises, "For He will command His angels concerning you to

guard you in all your ways.”

One day, when my son was a baby, I tripped while I was holding him, and he went flying headlong toward a brick wall. There was nothing I could do to protect him, but I watched as he inexplicably stopped an inch from the wall and fell gently to the carpet. I knew immediately that an angel’s hand had been his bumper pad.

These are only a few of the stories of thousands about angels who protected and rescued people, both Christians and non-Christians. But a nagging question continues to arise: where are the angels when girls are raped, and drunk drivers crash headlong into a car of teenagers, and evil people blow up buildings with hundreds of innocent people in them?

The angels are still there, continuing to minister in pain and death. We usually don’t realize the role of angels in the midst of horrible circumstances because their work is unseen and often unfelt.

Behind the question of, “Where are the angels?” is the very difficult problem of why a good God would allow pain and suffering. The book of Job gives us two important insights into the problem of pain: first, when disasters and suffering assail us in the physical realm, there may be something bigger and more important going on in the unseen spiritual realm.<sup>{5}</sup> Second, God never gives Job an answer to his demand to know the “why”: He just says, “I am the sovereign Lord, acting in ways you cannot understand. You just need to trust Me, that I know what I’m doing.” The fact that God is in control, that He allows all pain and suffering for a reason, is the great comfort that we need to remember when it seems like the angels have forsaken us. They haven’t, because God hasn’t.

## **The Bad Angels**

There are good angels, and there are bad angels. All of them

were created as holy angels, but about a third of them rebelled against God and fell from their sinless position. Satan, the leader of these demons or unholy angels, is a liar, a murderer, and a thief. (John 10:10) He hates God and he passionately hates God's people. The Bible tells us that he prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). We need to remember that Satan and all the demons are supernaturally brilliant, and Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

It's this masquerade as a holy angel that is behind the current angel craze in our culture. While there are a number of wonderful Christian books available that relate stories of holy angels helping people, there are many books, publications, and seminars that are filled with demonic deception of the ugliest kind. Because when you start talking to angels, you end up dealing with demons.

## **The Ugly Angels**

The enemy of our souls is using a new twist on an old lie, exploiting the current interest in angels to attract the untaught and the undiscerning. Much of the current angel mania is simply New Age philosophy, which is actually old-fashioned pantheism. Pantheism is the belief that everything—an impersonal God as well as every part of the creation—is one big unity. All is one, God is one, we are God—and New Age philosophy throws reincarnation into the mix as well.

You know you're around "ugly angels," or demons masquerading as angels of light and holiness, when you see or hear these terms:

1. Contacting or communing with angels.

There are now books available with titles like *Ask Your Angels*[\[6\]](#) and *100 Ways to Attract Angels*[\[7\]](#). But the Bible gives neither permission nor precedent for contacting angels.

When people start calling on angels, it's not the holy angels who answer. They're demons, disguising themselves as good angels to people who don't know how to tell the difference.

## 2. Loving our angels, praying to our angels.

Some self-styled "angel experts" instruct their followers to love their angels and call upon them for health, healing, prosperity, and guidance. But angels are God's servants, and all this attention and emphasis and glory should go to God, not His servants. God says, "I will not share my glory with another" (Isaiah 42:8). Scripture makes no mention of loving angels—only God, His word, and people. And it never tells us to pray to angels, only to the Lord Himself.

## 3. Instruction, knowledge, or insight from angels, particularly ones with names.

Some angel teachers are proclaiming that angels are trying very hard to contact us, so they can give us deeper knowledge of the spiritual{8}. Invariably, this "angel knowledge" is a mixture of truth and lies, and never stands up to the absolute truth of Scripture.

There are four angel names that keep popping up in the angel literature: Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael. Michael and Gabriel are the only angels mentioned by name in the Bible. The other two show up in the apocryphal *First Book of Enoch*, which includes a fanciful account of the actions of these four beings. [Note: it has been brought to my attention that there are actually two other named angels in the Bible: Apollyon, the angel of the abyss in Revelation 9:11, and Satan, who is an evil, fallen angel.] Those who report modern day angel teachings are actually channeling information from demons.

## 4. Special knowledge or teachings from angels.

Naomi Albright distributes teachings about the deep meanings of colors, and numbers and letters of the alphabet which she

claims is “knowledge given from above and brought forth in more detail by the High Angelic Master Sheate, Lady Master Cassandra, and Angel Carpelpous, and the Master Angel, One on High.”[{9}](#) These same beings told Mrs. Albright to stress two main teachings: first, that God accepts all religions, and second, Reincarnation.[{10}](#) These two teachings keep showing up in much of the New Age angel literature, which shouldn’t be surprising since they are heretical lies that come from the pit of hell, which is where the demons feeding these lies to the teachers are from.

Other angel teachings are that all is a part of God (pantheism); the learner is set apart from others by the “deep” knowledge that the angels give (this is a basic draw to the occult); and that eventually, the one who pursues contact with these angels will be visited by an Ascended Master or a Shining Angel (which is a personal encounter with a demon).

We need to remember that God’s angels are not teachers. God’s word says they are messengers—that’s what “angel” means—and they minister to us. God has revealed to us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), so any hidden knowledge that spirit beings try to impart is by nature occultic and demonic.

## 5. Human divinity

The message of the ugly angels is that we need to recognize that we are one with the divine, we are divine . . . we are God. In Karen Goldman’s *The Angel Book: A Handbook for Aspiring Angels*, she says things like, “Angels don’t fall out of the sky; they emerge from within.”[{11}](#) And, “The whole purpose in life is to know your Angel Self, accept it and be it. In this way we finally experience true oneness.”[{12}](#)

The following bit of heretical garbage was channeled from a demon posing as an angel named Daephrenocles: “The wondrous light of the Angels, from the elohim to the Archangels to the

Devas and Nature Spirits, are all bringing to you the realization that you are magnificent—you are divine now and divine first.”[\[13\]](#)

Much of the angel literature refers to “the angel within.” But angels are a separate part of the creation. They were created before man as a different kind. They are not within us. The movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” notwithstanding, when we hear a bell ring it does not mean that an angel is getting his wings. Nor do good people, especially children, become angels when they die. We remain human beings—not angels, and certainly not God.

What our culture needs in response to the angel craze is strong discernment built on the foundation of God’s word. We need to remember, and share with others, three truths about angels:

1. The ministry of holy angels will never contradict the Bible.
2. The actions of holy angels will always be consistent with the character of Christ.
3. A genuine encounter with a holy angel will glorify God, not the angel. Holy angels never draw attention to themselves. They typically do their work and disappear.

It’s very true that many have “entertained angels unaware” (Hebrews 13:2). But we need to make sure we’re entertaining the right kind of angels!

## Notes

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3. Anderson, p. 93-95.

4. Ibid, p. 162-163.
5. Webber, Marilyn Carlson and William D. Webber, *A Rustle of Angels* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994), p. 66.
6. Daniel, Alma, Timothy Wyllie, and Andrew Ramer, *Ask Your Angels* (New York: Ballantine, 1992).
7. Sharp, Sally, *100 Ways to Attract Angels* (Minnesota: Trust Publications, 1994).
8. Karyn Martin-Kuri, in an interview with *Body Mind and Spirit* journal, May/June 1993. Also, Albright, Naomi, *Angel Walk* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Portals Press, 1990).
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10. Albright, *Angel Walk*, p. 77-78.
11. Goldman, Karen, *The Angel Book—A Handbook for Aspiring Angels* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1988), p. 20.
12. Ibid, p. 95.
13. *These Celestial Times* newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 1. (Gaithersburg, Maryland), p. 4.

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## **Jesus' Claims to be God — Yes, Jesus Said He is God**

*Sue Bohlin answers the question about Jesus claims to be God by reviewing the major scripture passages where Jesus did so. This study clearly shows that Jesus was God and openly claimed to be so. Bottom line: Jesus clearly communicated that He and the Father are one and are God.*

*[Note: The following essay was written in response to a friend's request: "Can you tell me where in the Bible Jesus claimed to be God?"]*

This article is not an exhaustive list of Christ's claims to be God, but it does cover the major ones. I suggest you read this with a Bible open, as I have not posted all the scriptures listed.

1. Mark 2:1-12—Jesus heals a paralytic. He had authority to forgive sins, which is something only God Himself can do. Then, to authenticate His claim, He demonstrated His power by healing the paralytic.

2. The miracles Jesus performed are a very strong indication of His divinity (because no mere human can work actual miracles by his own power). Jesus referred to the miracles in John 10:24-39 as proof that he was telling the truth. This passage is Christ's own response to the unbelieving Jews' charge of blasphemy (dishonoring God by claiming to be God). Incidentally, this section also includes a beautiful promise that once you are saved/born again/become a Christian, you can never lose your salvation. Verses 28-29 say we will "never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (Here is another strong statement that He is God.) We can have the assurance of eternal security because we didn't earn salvation in the first place; it is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8,9).

3. During Christ's trial, the chief priests asked Him point blank, "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." And He said,

- "I am." (Mark 14:60-62)
- "Yes, it is as you say." (Matthew 26: 63-65)
- "You are right in saying I am." (Luke 22:67-70)

These are all ways of saying the same thing, written by different authors.

In John's gospel, he recounts Jesus' interview with Pontius Pilate (John 18:33-37). Pilate wanted to know if He were the

King of the Jews. Jesus then talked about how His kingdom was not of this world. Pilate said, "You are a king, then!" Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king..." The truth is, he is King of the whole universe.

4. Jesus says in John 10:11-18 that he is the Good Shepherd. When you read this passage along with Ezekiel 34:1-16, you can see that Jesus was identifying Himself with God, who pronounced Himself Shepherd over Israel. The Jewish people, being an agrarian and shepherding society, knew and dearly loved this section of the Old Testament because God was using a metaphor they *lived* every day. So when Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd," and that whole John passage so clearly parallels the Ezekiel passage, there was no doubt that He was claiming to be God.

5. John 4:25-26. This is where the Samaritan woman, whom Jesus went to meet at the well, gets into a discussion of "living water" with Jesus. He pinpoints her sinful lifestyle (knowledge He would not have had as a mere human passerby), then He admits that He is the long-awaited Messiah: "I who speak to you am He."

6. John 5:1-18. Jesus heals a lame man on the Sabbath, which the unbelieving Jews gave Him a hard time about. His answer was, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working." It was a well-known Jewish line of thought that, although God rested on the seventh day after Creation week, He continued to "work" in being loving, compassionate, and just, as well as keeping the earth producing, keeping the sun moving, etc. In other words, although the creating had stopped, the maintenance went on—even on the Sabbath, and that was the only "work" allowed on that day. So Jesus is putting Himself on the same level as his Father in working on the Sabbath. And by calling God "My Father" (instead of "Our Father"), He was claiming an intimate relationship with God that far exceeded anyone else's. So in these two ways, He was making Himself equal with God.

7. John 16:28. "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." What Christ is saying here is that He existed along with the Father before being born. He "entered the world" by wrapping Himself in human flesh and being born as a baby. He grew up, fulfilled His mission/ministry, was crucified and raised from the dead (all part of the "mission") and then left the world to go back to the Father in heaven, where He is now seated at the right hand of God (the place of honor). He is the only person who **ever** existed before conception. That Christ was in a "pre-incarnate state" means that He is God.

8. (This is many people's favorite argument for the deity of Christ, including mine.)

First, turn to Exodus 3, where Moses encounters God in the burning bush. God tells Moses that he is the one He has chosen to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses says to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me 'What is His name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God replies to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God has said that His own name, His personal name, is "I AM."

Now...

a) Turn to John 8:56-58. Jesus is talking to the unbelieving Jews. "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet 50 years old," they said to Him, "and *you* have seen Abraham?" "I tell you the truth," Jesus announced, "before Abraham was, I AM!" Jesus was the great I AM from before the beginning of time; He existed before Abraham ever was. He is claiming here to be the I AM of the Old Testament. Verse 59 says the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but the Lord Jesus slipped away. The reason they wanted to stone Him was because stoning was the death penalty for blasphemy. He was claiming to be

Yahweh–Jehovah–Almighty God–I AM. (Of course, it wasn't blasphemy when Christ claimed to be who He truly was!)

b) John 8:24. "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I AM, you will indeed die in your sins." In your Bible, it may read "if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be..." The extra words are supplied by the editors; they're not in the original text. If you're familiar with Exodus 3 you don't need the extra words for it to make grammatical sense. The Lord Jesus is again claiming to be God.

c) John 18:4. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas and some priests and soldiers are about to take Jesus prisoner. "Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it that you want?' 'Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'I AM,' Jesus said. When He said, 'I AM,' they drew back and fell to the ground." (Again, in your Bible the editors may have supplied "I am [he]" to make it grammatically correct. The Greek just says, "I AM.")

The force of Jesus' claim to be Yahweh (I AM) was so powerful that it literally knocked the arresting officers and the Jewish priests off their feet!

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The above points are by no means exhaustive, and are given to contribute to the reader's understanding that Jesus Christ is Lord because He is God. In this vein, I would like to close with one of the most powerful quotes ever written on the subject, by noted author C.S. Lewis in his classic, *Mere Christianity*:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said

would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come away with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

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