From Fig Leaves to Fur Coats

“Good little boys go to heaven and bad little boys don’t!” is one of the greatest conceptual heresies today. Probably most of us at one time or another have undergone the ordeal of having a Sunday school teacher point a bony finger at us and carp away at our inappropriate conduct, warning us of the ultimate outcome of such behavior.

This Santa Claus mentality suggests that God is “makin’ a list and checkin’ it twice,” to “find out who’s naughty or nice.” The conclusion we are supposed to reach is that our good deeds and our bad deeds are being placed on the divine scales and will be weighed at the tine of our physical death to see if we go “up” or “down.” This suggested approach to God is diametrically opposed to that which Jesus affirmed as the right approach.

The most righteous men of Jesus’ day were the Pharisees. In order to be a Pharisee, you had to be “Mr. Clean.” The Pharisees knew the Old Testament by heart. They went to the synagogue three times a day, and prayed seven times a day. They were respected in the community. But Jesus looked right through their religious veneer and exposed their spiritual bankruptcy to the thronging crowds with such statements as, “Except your righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of God”(Matthew 5:20).

“The crowds responded by staring at each other in bewilderment: “You mean the Pharisees aren’t righteous enough to make it? If they can’t make it, who can?”

What a moment in history! A radical young man dares to suggest that the most righteous and moral men of the ancient Jewish community are not righteous enough to make themselves presentable before God. In fact, Jesus said they were hypocrites! He informed them they were wrong to claim they

were righteous enough to assume that all was well between them and their Maker. When you are well, you don't need a doctor. The time to consult a physician is when you realize you are sick.

Jesus was pressing the Pharisees to be honest with themselves when He said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matthew 9:13).

A Mildewed Fig

When the word "sin" comes up in a conversation, most people look as though someone just slipped them a mildewed fig! Most of us don't know what sin really is, nor do we understand what a sinner is. A sinner is one who has violated the law of God.

Many assert that they try to live by the Ten Commandments, or by some other rule of life. And yet, if we are honest, each of us discovers that we have violated these standards at some point. These codes of behavior are to us what an X-ray machine is to a broken arm. The machine reveals the condition of the arm, but it will not set and knit the bones, nor will it put the arm in a cast. By the same token, the Ten Commandments can only *reveal* to us the condition of our lives; they cannot heal us of sin.

The Pharisee looked at the Law and then at his life and said, "I'm well." Jesus desired them to come up with exactly the opposite conclusion. A person must know he needs help before he will seek it. Everyone has this sin disease. Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying that there is no good at all in humans. There is a great deal of good. The point is merely that this relative human goodness is unacceptable to God.

In Russia they print and circulate rubles, and with those rubles you can buy your dinner, pay your hotel bill and buy things in the shops. But if you took those rubles across the Atlantic Ocean and brought them to America, they would be

worthless currency.

Debased Coinage

So it is with our characters, our lives. . . all that we have outside of Christ. A person may be a millionaire in character, and that might buy him a high position in this world, but when he crosses the great divide between this life and the next, his character is a debased coinage, and God in His Holiness cannot accept it at all.

It is important than individual comprehends the fact that there are *two* kinds of righteousness. There is a righteousness of men, and a righteousness of God. The apostle Paul, who was a Pharisee, finally recognized these two distinct types of righteousness when he said that the desire of his life was to "be found in Him, not having my *own* righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Philippians 3:9).

He saw clearly the predicament of his Jewish brethren when he wrote with a broken heart to the Romans, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for god, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of *God's* righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Romans 10:1-4).

Failing "Home Economics 101"

In the Old Testament account of Adam and Eve, there is a vivid imagery of these two kinds of righteousness. After Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, they hid in the bushes in shame. They took out needle and thread, and began sewing fig leaves together to clothe themselves with some kind of garment or covering. God came walking in the cool of the garden, desiring

His regular fellowship with them, but Adam was in the bushes with Eve. . .flunking the first home economics course ever offered! God looked at the flimsy, pathetic clusters of fig leaves which had been hastily sewn together by the guilty couple, and in short, thoroughly censored their effort.

The account goes on to say that God took animals and made garments from their skins for Adam and Eve. While morality and human goodness are to be commended, God makes it clear from the very beginning that man, in his own efforts, does not have the ability to make himself presentable before God.

It was Charles Haddon Spurgeon who said "Man is basically a silkworm. A spinner and a weaver… trying to clothe himself … but the silkworm's activity spins him a shroud."

So it is with man. Philosophy, philanthropy, asceticism, religion, ethics, or any other system which seeks to gain the approval of God is the "fig leaf" approach. This was the error of those fellow Israelites for whom Paul grieved, those who were trying to establish their own righteousness, without recognizing that another kind of righteousness was available them by faith: ". . .and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, lest any man should boast"(Ephesians 2:8,9). "Works" righteousness is what religion is all about. Works righteousness is spelled **"DO!"** "Faith" righteousness is what Christianity is all about. Faith righteousness is spelled **"DONE!"** Jesus cried triumphantly from the cross, "It is finished!" The work which the Father had given Him to do was completed at the cross. A bridge, a way of access—by His sacrificial death—had been constructed between God and man, and it was now open for business.

That is why the cross is so important to each individual. If one can find God through his own efforts and good deeds, then God made a terrible mistake at Calvary. He allowed His Son to die a substitutionary death for the world that was not truly needed. The choices of approaching God are then left to each

person. One can accept the death of Christ on his behalf, or he must pay with his own death. How presumptuous for anyone to think himself qualified to provide salvation for himself when the standard each must meet is God's perfection. Who can match that? It is a goal so far away that no one can reach it. The Grand Canyon is 6 to 18 miles across, 276 miles long, and one mile deep. The world's record in the long jump, set by Mike Powell at the 1991 Olympics, is 29′ 4 ".

Yet the chances of a man jumping from one side of the Grand Canyon to the other are greater than the chance of a man establishing fellowship with God through his own efforts.

A "God-Original"

What God has to offer is *free*. It is a gift which is not deserved by any man, nor could any man ever *repay* what the gift is worth. Man has been dealt with in grace and love. The only thing that man is asked to do is acknowledge that he has broken the laws of God, to acknowledge that God made things right through His son at the cross, and accept His forgiveness.

He is requested to lay aside his own fig-leaf garment and to be clothed with a "God-original" garment made possible by the slaying of the Lamb. God wants to clothe every person with the righteousness of *Christ.*

This is what Jesus was referring to in a parable concerning a wedding feast which a king was having for his son: "So the servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, *both good and bad:* and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment. And he said unto him, Friend, how come you are here not having a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then said the King to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be

weeping and gnashing of teeth!'" (Matthew 22:1-13).

In a society where the hue and cry is "take it off¾take it all off," it is ironic that God is saying the very same thing. He does not want us to cover ourselves—to hide what we really are. He wants us to acknowledge what we are and accept with a thankful heart what He has provided in Christ.

As a gracious Host, He stands there holding the most costly garment in the universe—the righteousness of Jesus Christ—and He eagerly desires to wrap *you* up in it, safe and warm and happy and secure:

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10)

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"Isn't the Old Testament Just a Rip-Off of Older Tales From Other Cultures?"

Dear Mr. Williams,

I'm curious on your thoughts toward the common charge that the Old Testament did nothing more than rip off older tales from other cultures. Have you read the *Genesis of Justice*? I'm very curious on your thoughts, Sir. . .

Thank you for your recent e-mail. Let me try to give you a little background on this question and then offer an explanation.

It is true that there are some documents relating to events recorded in Genesis which **predate** the projected time of the writing of the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy), commonly known among the Jews as the ***Torah.***

By way of background, first of all, we must acknowledge that the Hebrew Old Testament is an ancient Semitic book and bore a close relationship to the environment out of which it came. The setting for the first eleven chapters of Genesis, which record the primeval history of mankind, is laid in "the cradle of civilization," the Tigris-Euphrates River Valley (part of the Fertile Crescent). Archaeologists and Anthropologists all agree that here we find the first and earliest major civilization.

The controversy surrounding the question you have asked came about with (1) the discovery and decipherment of the Babylonian- Assyrian cuneiform script in 1835, and (2) the subsequent excavations at Nineveh (the ancient capital) between 1848 and 1876, which yielded various clay tablets which made up the Library of Ashurbanipal (668-626 B.C.) Among them were seven tablets of the great Creation Epic known as "*Enuma Elish,*" or "When Above." Although these tablets date to the 7th century B.C., they were composed much earlier in the days of Hammurabi (1728-1676 B.C.). Also found at the same site was *"The Epic of Gilgamesh"* which incorporates an account of the Flood. There are other resemblances to Genesis 1-11 as well, but these are the two main ones. And there is no question that these documents came **before** the writing of the Semitic Pentateuch. There is also no question that there is a relationship between these two traditions, but there are both *similarities* and stark *differences*.

In the **creation story** they are similar in that both accounts

(1) know a time when the earth was "waste and void", (2) have a similar *order* of *events* in creation, and (3) show a predilection for the number *seven*.

They are very *different*, however, in that one account is (1) intensely *polytheistic*, the other strictly *monotheistic*; (2) and one account confounds *spirit* and *matter*, while the other carefully *distinguishes* between these two concepts. Merrill Unger says,

> *As a result of this salient difference in the basic concept of deity, the religious ideas of the two accounts are completely divergent. The Babylonian story is on a low mythological plane with a sordid conception of deity. . .The great gods themselves plot and fight against one another.*
>
> *Genesis, in striking contrast, is lofty and sublime. The one God, supreme and omnipotent, is in superb control of all the creatures and elements of the universe. . . the crude polytheism of the Babylonian creation stories mars the record with successive generations of deities of both sexes. . .(producing) a confusing and contradictory plurality of creators. (Archaeology and the Old Testament, pp.32-33).*

I have just been reading Augustine's *City of God.* The first half of the book (about 300 pages) addresses this same difference: the many Graeco-Roman gods, and the One True God:

> *We, however, seek for a mind which, trusting to true religion, does not adore the world as its god, but for the sake of God praises the world as a work of God, and purified from mundane defilements, comes pure to God Himself Who founded the world. . . . But if any one insists that he worships the one true God—that is, the Creator of every soul and of every body—with stupid and monstrous idols, with human victims, with putting a wreath on the male organ, with wages of unchastity, with the cutting of limbs, with emasculation, with the consecration of the effeminates, with impure and*

> *obscene plays, such a one does not sin because he worships One Who ought not to be worshipped, but because he worships Him Who ought to be worshipped in a way in which He ought not to be worshipped. (VII., Chapters 26 & 27)*

Augustine goes on to say that there *was* ONE nation—among all of the other nations—which gave testimony of this God through unique religious thought and practice: the *Hebrews. (VII., Chapter 32).* This is truly remarkable, historically, and I believe is a strong argument in support of Genesis over the Sumerian/Assyrian/Babylonian tradition. I will give another reason shortly, but let me turn to the Flood Stories.

Like the Creation Accounts, the Biblical and Babylonian *Flood Accounts* contain similarities and differences. Both accounts:

• Hold that the deluge was divinely planned;
• Agree that the impending catastrophe was divinely revealed to the hero;
• Connect the reason for the deluge with the corruption of the human race;
• Say that the hero was divinely instructed to build a huge boat to preserve life;
• Tell of the deliverance of the hero and his family;
• Acknowledge the physical causes of the flood
• Mention the duration of the flood;
• Include similar, striking details,
• Describe acts of worship after deliverance and the bestowing of special blessings.

The contrasts, or differences, include: A radical contrast (1) in their *theological* conceptions (Genesis attributes the Flood to an infinitely holy, wise and all-powerful God, while the Babylonian describes a multitude of disagreement—quarreling, self- accusing deities, who crouch in fear "like dogs"); (2) in their *moral* conceptions (Genesis presents the Flood as a divine, moral judgment, while the Babylonian account portrays

mixed standards of conduct on the part of the deities, a hazy view of sin, and the result of the caprice of the gods; (3) and in their *philosophical* conceptions (one of speculation confusing spirit and matter, finite and infinite, and ignorance of the first principles of causation. The Genesis account has no such ambiguity).

Now what can we make of all this? First, it is extremely unlikely that the Babylonians borrowed from the Genesis account. The relative dating of historical events will not allow it. And so we must concede that the Hebrews (Moses) were aware of these events and **may** have incorporated them into the Genesis account, either through direct knowledge of the Babylonian literature, or through oral transmission. Which leads us to a third alternative, namely, **that both the Biblical and Babylonian accounts go back to a *common source of fact*, originating from actual, historical occurrences!**

If the Genesis account is recording actual, historical events, then we should find some evidence of that across the world. Do we? Yes. Cosmologies from primitive and distant parts of the globe (Micronesians, Eskimos, New World Indians, Scythians, Celts, Australian Aborigines) contain stories about Creation and the Deluge. There are some 150 flood accounts across the world recording many of the things mentioned above (notwithstanding that the accounts become more inaccurate the farther away they are geographically from the Fertile Crescent).

The Babylonian accounts may antedate the writing of Genesis, but there appears to have been a strong, world-wide oral tradition concerning these events which preceded even their accounts created at the time of Hammurabi early in the Second Millenium B.C.

We also must focus on the entire question of inspiration of the Biblical documents. There is no question that these final, written records which now make up our Old and New Testaments

were revealed, recorded (written down), and preserved by a Divine Hand. In answering the above question, we must come back to either deny or affirm that God, in His own time, and in His own way, made Himself and His redemptive plan known to us (Hebrews 1:1). The purpose of both testaments was to demonstrate His holiness and justice, as well as His love and grace, and how He brought about Reconciliation for those of us who believe and accept His provision by faith.

The startling thing to me is the absolute **uniqueness** of the Judeo-Christian God in comparison with all of the bizarre alternatives we still find throughout all the world and throughout all of history. That uniqueness helps me to make my decision to trust the Genesis account rather than some other:

> *What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; and He made from one every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should see God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being. . .(Acts 17:24-28).*

Hope this helps answer your question.

Jimmy Williams
Founder, Probe Ministries

Thank you, Sir. Well written. I really appreciate the response. I've read about the Flood stories that are prevalent throughout history which seems really interesting (obviously something happened). But how do we know there wasn't simply a great flood and these stories were made by common folk (or

even the leaders of the time) and written down as their own interpretation? Curious, _____.

Glad you received the information. With respect to your question in this e-mail, I think the main issue is the widespread, global awareness of this event. Obviously the "tale was told" from generation to generation. The fact that it is present and widely-distributed among the folklore of so many cultures in describing their "distant past would argue for a real, historical basis. Sometimes this was handed down through oral tradition, and sometimes written. The fact that certain "particulars" vary in the accounts would indicate **some** interpretive innovations (this is to be expected) as the story moved on, but there is a basic "core" that seems to be consistently preserved, though some details are altered, or embellished.

There is no doubt that, sometime in the remote past, there was a gigantic flood. Theologians still argue as to whether it was global or local. What we **do** know, however, is that a very high percentage (I'm guessing at least 80%) of the earth's crust is *sedimentary* rock; that is, rock that was formed by the pressure and weight of *water*.

Warm Regards,

Jimmy

"I Find the Argument for a

Wednesday Crucifixion Most Compelling”

I receive the Probe-Alert and read an interesting response to another email: “If Jesus Was Crucified on Friday, How Was He Dead for Three Nights?” I use a Dake’s Bible and although I try to keep an open mind when studying his (Finis Dake) interpretations, I thought his explanation of the Wednesday crucifixion was quite compelling. Dake refers to many verses in support of his interpretation. I will endeavor to include as many of the pertinent ones (admittedly my opinion) as possible. If you have access to a Dake’s Bible, the references are included beside each verse.

Matt. 27:63 – “…after three days I will rise again.”
This shows how the Jews understood the three days and three nights of Matt. 12:40

Lev. 23:7
This verse refers to the special Sabbath two days before the weekly Sabbath.

Mat. 12:40 “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

John 19:31 “…for that Sabbath day was an high day.”
This is another reference to the special Sabbath.

Luke 9:22
Although this verse merely says that He will be raised on the third day, Dake gives another perspective on the three full days and three full nights interpretation:

• When days and nights are both mentioned, then it cannot be

parts of three days, but full days and nights (Ester 4:16 with 5:1; 1 Sam. 30:12 with 13; Jonah 1:17 with Mat. 12:40). See also Rev. 11:9-11.

• The Jews understood Christ to mean “after three days” or three full days and three full nights (Matt. 27:63), hence the soldiers had orders to guard the tomb at least that long.

• It was the custom to mourn for the dead three full days and nights, called “days of weeping,” which were followed by four “days of lamentation,” thus making seven days (Gen. 27:41; 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13; Job 2:13). According to rabbinical notion the spirit wandered about the sepulchre for three days hoping to re-enter the body, but when corruption set in the spirit left. This was believed to be on the fourth day when the loud lamentations began. Hence, on the fourth day Lazarus was supposed to stink (John 11:39).

• Herodotus testifies that embalmment did not take place until after three days when the spirit was supposed to be gone (Herod. ii. 86-89). This is why the women were taking sweet spices to anoint Jesus (Mk. 16:1; Lk. 24:1)

• The Jews did not accept evidence as to the identification of a dead body after three days, for corruption took place quickly in the East. Hence, this period of three full days and three full nights was wanted by God, so as to preclude all doubt that death had actually taken place, and shut out all suggestion that Christ might have been in a trance. Jews would legally have to conclude His death, should He remain dead the full three days and three nights.

Thank you for your e-mail.

As you may know there is some controversy/discussion about Passover meal and whether it was celebrated Wednesday night, or Thursday night, and some evidence which argues for both

days.

I am inclined to agree with the full three days, and the Wednesday night theory.

I appreciate your sending this information (some of which I already have) and your nice summary.

If you go with Thursday, you just have to accept the fact that the Lord was in the tomb some PORTION of three days (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday).

As far as theology and/or interpretation is concerned, either (in my judgment) is acceptable since the rudimentary facts of the death, burial, and resurrection are not affected.

Warm Regards,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

"Did Stalin Have a Deathbed Conversion? What About Trotsky?"

I am trying to check the validity of the following material. I came across one of your articles on the Web and thought you may be able to comment. I am not expecting you to research this, but just if you happen to know would you mind responding? It would be a help.

Question 1. The statement "Religion is a crutch for the weak. . ." and various variants of it I had heard attributed to

Joseph Stalin. Do you know if this is correct. Or was it Marx? I know Marx penned the famous "Religion is the opiate of the masses," but who is generally attributed as the author of the first quote. Possibly it was just a common atheist saying and thus picked up by most of the communists.

Question 2. I recall hearing it said that Stalin close to his death had said, "I cannot escape the overwhelming feeling that I am about to be cast into an ocean of the blood of the lives I have destroyed," or words to this effect. Do you know whether this is correctly attributed to Stalin, or was it another?

Question 3. I also recall reading somewhere that one of the old communists (again I thought it was Stalin) was the son of a Jewish father who upon moving to a new city changed to attending the Lutheran church, telling his son it was better for business. This contributed to the son rejecting God and adopting a strongly atheistic world view.

I am afraid I can't help you from my memory on these quotes. On #1, I know that Stalin attended an Orthodox Christian School for ten years. He was kicked out of seminary for his radical Marxist views. I checked the *Oxford Book of Quotations*, but found nothing there. I have heard the quote about religion being a "crutch" mentioned many times, but I have never related this to Stalin.

On Questions #2 let me offer the following: I am not inclined to think Stalin made this statement of regret. I found these words about Stalin's deathbed scene, as described by his daughter, Svetlana, in Allen Bullock's *Hitler and Stalin.* She says:

> *"The death agony was terrible. God grants an easy death only to the just. He literally choked to death as we watched. At what seemed like the very last moment he suddenly opened his*

> *eyes and cast a glance over everyone in the room. It was a terrible glance, insane or perhaps angry and full of fear of death. . .Then something incomprehensible and terrible happened that to this day I can't forget. . .He suddenly lifted his left hand as though he were pointing to something up above and bring down a curse on us all. The gesture was incomprehensible and full of menace. . .The next moment, after a final effort, the spirit wrenched itself free of the flesh."*

Bullock immediately adds,

> *"Like Hitler, Stalin preserved his image of himself intact to the end, without retraction or regret. Both men died defying their enemies." (pg. 968).*

With regard to #3, my first guess would be Trotsky. He was the son of a Russian Jew who settled in Ukraine, and there Trotsky was educated (Odessa on the Black Sea). His real name was Lev Bronstein. He took the name "Trotsky" at a time when he needed a forged passport to continue his underground activities undetected. I would start looking at his life first.

Hope this helps.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

"What Is the 'Sin Unto

Death’?” [Jimmy Williams]

I have always been puzzled with 1 John 5:16-17 and the meaning of the “sin unto death.” Can you explain exactly what John is referring to?

> *16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.*
> *17 All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.*

I would really appreciate any help you can give me on this.

Thank you for your e-mail and your concerns about “the sin unto death” mentioned in 1 John 5:16-17.

Let me see if I can give you an acceptable answer to your question. In doing so, we will first have to explore a number of factors which come from the Bible. Let me begin with a passage from Hebrews 12:

> *“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. . . Nor faint when you are reproved by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? . . . “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet. . .” (Heb. 12:5-13).*

Whether we are reading the Old Testament or the New, we find that God is at work to create a family for His own pleasure, a

company of sons and daughters who will commune with and look to Him for love, provision, guidance, and consolation. In the Gospel of John, chapters 1 and 3 make it clear that when we place our faith in Jesus Christ to be our Savior Who, through His death, can make us presentable to God, we join the family of God through a new spiritual birth and thus embark upon our personal Christian pilgrimage which ends on the day we die.

As newborns in this family, we are admonished by the Word to "Grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18), and "as newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the Word, that by it you may *grow* in respect to salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2).

All children, physical and spiritual, undergo a process of development which involves time. The theological term for this process is "sanctification," which means the **Christian life.** Along the way, as we saw above in the Hebrews passage, we observe that God, like any good father, disciplines us appropriately when necessary. The goal is *training*, not *punishment*. This training process may occur through circumstances we encounter, and which God allows, or it can come through knowledge of the Bible:

> *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17).*

We have a vivid example of this process in the Apostle Paul's life. He describes it this way:

> *"And because of the surpassing abundance of (my) revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me—to keep me from exalting myself…. Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for*

power is perfected in weakness'" (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

We don't have a clear picture what this "thorn" was. Most believe it was a physical ailment. There is some indication that it may have been an eye problem. But the point I make here is that God may allow all kinds of circumstances into our life which are designed for training purposes. This process is *the normal Christian Life.*

Another good example comes from 1 Corinthians 11:21-31. Paul writes this epistle to address several problems and/or abuses occurring among the church members there. One abuse was that when the believers came together to take communion, some of the members showed up to enjoy the food and some came *drunk!* Paul rebukes them saying, "Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry, and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. . . For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep."

This passage makes it clear to us that there are consequences to our disobedience. Some of these Corinthian believers evidently are disciplined by God through both illness and even death ("some of you sleep"). That is *not* to say that all illness and death are divine judgments, but some *are.*

In this particular instance, some of the disobedient Corinthians experienced the "sin unto death." (That is, some of them died).

With this background, we come to the heart of your question. The "sin unto death" is found throughout the Bible and seems to be connected to new eras of biblical history.

Here are some examples where people experienced death through disobedience:

- *Giving of the Law, Mount Sinai: Golden Calf (Exodus 32)*
- *Institution of Levitical Priesthood: "Strange Fire" (Leviticus 10)*
- *Conquest of the Land: Achan (Joshua 7)*
- *Beginning of the Church: Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5)*
  (See also Samson and Saul—God was longsuffering with both)

Speaking of the incident in Leviticus 10 where Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, offered "strange fire" which "consumed them, and they died before the Lord" (Lev. 10:2), Rev. Ray Stedman of Palo Alto Bible Church says:

> *This was a sin of presumption, not a sin of ignorance. They knew better and what incense they were supposed to burn. . . they had been told emphatically that God would be offended if they offered incense other than that which he had prescribed.* Second, it was a sin dealt with severely because it distorted God's revelation of Himself. All of these sacrifices and rituals were intended for us to learn what kind of God He is. Third, God used it to set an example. God is here teaching a lesson-to show how important it was for the priests at the beginning of their priesthood to follow explicitly what God commanded. And it only happened once. Similarly, though the sin of Ananias and Sapphira (deception, hypocrisy) was common among Christians of the early church and common ever since, God never visited death like that again. It is a manifestation of God's love and concern. At the outset, He is wanting to stop this kind of thing from happening again, and He is giving fair warning of the eventual consequences to anyone presumptuous enough to sin deliberately in this way." That is the way we human beings work. Unless an issue is vividly, dramatically, openly,*

> *symbolically made clear to us, we'll go right on and do the wrong thing. So God is stopping that, arresting it with his judgment at this point. But he really wants us to learn to refrain for the sake of his glory, not out of fear for our lives. *(Cf. elaborate instructions on incense, Exodus 30:34-38, particularly v. 38).*

Sin Unto Death (1 John 5)

Now let's look at the passage you have questioned. The first thing to note is the *context*. This major topic from 5:13-18 is prayer. We are given in verses 13-15 that God hears and responds to our prayers. The key word is "*anything*." Then John remembers there ***is*** an exception: praying for a disobedient, sinning brother or sister in Christ. What to do? How do we pray for that one? Here is the sequence we must keep in mind for such a one as we pray.

First of all, the Apostle John tells us that there is a sin **not** leading to death (physical). In verse 16, he tells us that it is possible for Christians to fall into this sin not leading to death. [See also 1 John 2:1,2—the ideal is to "sin not." But if anyone sins (*and we will*), we have an Advocate, a defense attorney.]

When Christians observe disobedience in brothers and sisters, they *are* to pray for him/her (16b); as a result of these prayers, God may choose to preserve, prolong, extend the person's physical life (not eternal life, since that life is determined by one's personal faith decision).

This intercession is effective only in the case of sin **not** leading to death (16c): that is, the person has not reached the end limits of God's patience and grace (His "last straw"). See also v. 17 where John says, "All unrighteousness is sin, but there is a sin which is not unto (physical) death."

Secondly, there **is** a sin which results in physical death—the

sin unto death (v. 16d): This is the death of a believer characterized by persistent, willful sinning in which "the flesh is destroyed [physical death—1 Cor. 5:1-5] so that the *spirit* might be saved."

John tells us that this is a sin ***not*** to be prayed for, because God's immutable law concerning this final, "last straw" disobedience is involved and will be unaltered by intercessory prayer (16e), and frankly, we do not know another's heart condition before the Lord. We are not encouraged to speculate about the cause of any believer's untimely death. In our prayer life, we can continue to intercede for a wayward brother or sister, but we are not to draw any conclusions about what may, should, or has happened in regard to a believer's death.

Thirdly, when some Christian we know dies, we might be inclined to ask the question of ourselves, "Was this the sin unto death or not?" John is telling us in this passage not to speculate, because we just don't know.

All through this Epistle (1 John) the Apostle has been addressing sin in the life of the believer—yours and every Christian you know. It is fitting that John portrays the remedy of *habitual* sin on the part of a believer in the context of the new birth. The "black and white" contrast all through 1 John concludes with the same idea, and one that is also expressed in the book of James:

> *"Even so, faith, if it has no works is dead, being by itself. But someone may say, 'You have faith, and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.' . . Are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? . . . For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead." (James 2:17,18, 20, 26)*

The New Testament clearly teaches that "Faith alone saves

(Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5), but saving faith is never alone."

This leads us to a practical application in observing/evaluating another believer's life and imperfections. This verse comes to mind: "The Spirit Himself bears witness with *our* spirit that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16). What we learn from this verse is that we can know about *ourselves*, (i.e. that *we* have the Spirit, that *we* are born again), but ultimately we cannot know about *another*. In other words, I can know about *me,* but I can't know about *you.* You can know about *you,* but you can't know about *me.*

Practically speaking then, we should accept every person's testimony who claims to be a Christian. Actual Christian behavior is on a spectrum which John describes by saying, "all sin [big and little] is unrighteousness." Only God can rightly see the totality of a believer's obedience and disobedience over a lifetime, and rightly judge it. As a loving Father, He may bring discipline to get us "back on track." 1 John 1 and 2 speak to the way this may be accomplished—God's grace through the Blood of Christ providing daily cleansing through confession/acknowledgement (1 John 1:9) and thus, further potential opportunity to serve.

Since we cannot see the heart of another, we can only inspect the "fruit" (or lack thereof) we see in a life. The farther a believer appears to wander away from God, the more "bad fruit" we observe, and the more we wonder about the truthfulness of that believer's profession of faith. We cannot help being tempted to ask the question: "Is this person *really* a Christian?" We are to go no farther in our evaluation or conclusion; rather, we should *continue our intercession* for him or her.

> *John 21: 20-22: "And looking around, Peter saw the disciple whom Jesus loved (John the Apostle) following them. . .and therefore seeing him said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this*

> *man?' Jesus said to him, 'If I want him to remain until I come, what is that to you? **You** follow me!" (Old Aramaic Expression: "Stick to your knitting!" <smile>).*

I hope this answers your question, _____.

Sincerely in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

"How Can I Know I'm Going to Heaven?"

Some people know they're going to heaven, and I would like to be sure too. Can you help me?

Thank you for your e-mail requesting information about an assurance of your salvation. I will try to lay out some things which I hope will help. God wants us to have an assurance of our salvation, and until we do, we live life in uncertainty.

1. First of all, I would point out that the very fact you are concerned about this is an indication that you are in the Family of God. Non-Christians don't spend any time thinking about this or being anxious about their spiritual condition. That you are concerned, in my judgment is a "sign of life."

2. Secondly, we have the clear teaching of Jesus in John 3 in his dialogue wth Nicodemus, that salvation comes about by a new, or spiritual birth. The analogy is very clear: Jesus compares physical birth with spiritual birth. And with both, there must be a beginning, a birth before there can be life

and growth. In a number of passages we read of this new birth which brings about a transformation when we fine ourself IN CHRIST: “Therefore, if any man is IN Christ, he is a new creature; old things pass away and behold, all things become new.” (II Cor. 5:17).

Now Jesus did not say that we must be born again and again and again. We are born into God’s family once by faith, claiming Christ as our Saviour and Substitute, and we begin to trust in Him, and Him alone, to make us presentable to God the Father when we die. And Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:8-9 that this is a result of God’s grace to us, and it is totally apart from any good works that we could do to merit or attain heaven apart from Him and what He did on our behalf.

3. One of the things Paul warns the Galatians about is that they had originally understood salvation was by faith, but they started adding various works to make sure that they were saved. Paul asks, “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you. . .Having begun in the Spirit (by unmerited grace through faith), are you now being perfected by the flesh (works)?” (Gal. 3:1-5)

This is exactly the question you are asking, _____. Do we begin in faith + no works, but then have to keep on working in order to stay saved?

4. There is a place for good works in the Christian life, but it is very important where we position these good works. If we put them before we exercise faith in Christ, then we are working our way to heaven just like every other religion teaches. Good works become the means of achieving salvation. And if we could get to heaven by our good works, then God made a terrible mistake! He let His only Son come and die for our sins. By choosing our good works as the means of our salvation we negate, nullify what Christ accomplished on the Cross.

5. Where do good works have significance? After our new, or

spiritual birth. Good works are a sign of Christ's life within us. We do not perform them in order to remain in God's family. We do them out of grateful hearts because we find ourselves "accepted in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1:6).

If we take the Galatians approach, knowing that we were "saved by grace," but then turn right around and do our good works to stay saved, then we are right back on the old treadmill. Furthermore, the driving force/motivation to do good works with this approach is FEAR. We keep trying because we are afraid we will lose our relationship with God. We could never say with the Apostle Paul that "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." How could he say that? He wasn't perfect! He could say it because "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day." (II Tim. 1:12)

If we take Paul's approach, we are motivated, not out of Fear, but out of LOVE. We want to serve God and glorify Him in our lives. But there's a problem.

6. Sin is the problem. Christians still sin after their conversion. You know, God could have dealt another way with sinning Christians. When a person first heard and understood the Gospel, and then became a believer, God could have zapped him/her dead right on the spot! That would have taken care of sin in a believer's life!

But God chose not to do that. He chose rather to leave us here, imperfect though we are, to be His ambassadors. And He made provision for cleansing the believer by means of acknowledging our sin to Him in confession and claiming the forgiveness over it which Christ provided through the Cross.

Let me have you just focus on I John 2:1-3. There John says, "My little children, I am writing these things to you – (he's just talked about confessing our sins [I John 1:9] with the promise that God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and

cleanse us from all unrighteousness)– ” that you SIN NOT.” (This is the ideal) “But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

God does not want us to sin. But if we do, here is the provision for God’s forgiveness. We have an Advocate, a defense attorney who pleads our case and we are cleansed. Now I want you to just think about this for a moment. Does one sin, like being angry at your spouse, cause a loss of salvation? How about 10 times a week? Or 100 times a month? How much gossip? Or coveting what others possess? Do you see where I’m going with this? People who talk about being good enough or having (in their own estimation) done enough to retain their salvation in good standing really don’t have a very accurate picture of how pervasive our problem is.

7. If one sin isn’t enough for us to lose our standing in Christ, then how many and what kind of sins would be enough to push us over the edge and out of the Family of God? No one has answered that question to me satisfactorily We would never know the answer to that question. Martin Luther addressed this problem five hundred years ago. He, as a monk, had lived with this uncertainty about his soul until he came to understand that the “just shall live by faith.” The issue was not sins, it was a lack of righteousness. Being born into God’s Family means God has declared us righteousness through our identity with and trust in Christ.

I am not saying that good works are not important. They are. And people who know they have been dealt with in grace and are forgiven have a strong motivation not to sin. I think it’s kind of like the difference between a cat and a pig. A cat might fall into a mud puddle, but it immediately gets out and starts cleaning itself. That’s its nature. But a pig can lie all day in the mud and it loves it because that’s its nature. Another sign of “life” in a believer is that when we sin we

feel bad. It hurts us. We tend to be more sensitive to it. And sometimes when we decide to stay in the mud, God has another provision for us. We find it in Hebrews 12: “Whom the Lord loves, He chastens” (vs. 5-14). Our sin becomes a “family” matter when we have been born into the God’s family. Paul tells us in I Cor. 11 that “if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.” If we fail to get ourselves back in line and out of the mud, choosing to ignore the “warning lights,” our Father, though longsuffering, may have to take us to the “divine woodshed” and discipline us. But it is the discipline of a Father, not the punishment of a Judge. That is what Paul meant when he said to the Corinthians, “For that reason (disobedience) some of you are weak and sickly. . .and some of you sleep (have died under discipline.”

8. And that brings us to another problem connected to all of this, and that is the fact that we disappoint God, our family, and the body of Christ, and we see them disappointing us. We rarely wonder how we could act in an un-Christian way, but we sure do wonder about others! And then we begin to wonder if we are really “in the Family,” and we wonder the same about others.

Our problem here is that we, as the Bible says, “(man) looks on the outward appearance, while God looks upon the heart.” Paul says in Romans 8:16,17 “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.” This means that You can know about you, and I can know about me, but we can’t ultimately know by someone’s outward behaviour whether they are God’s children or not. We have probably made misjudgments on both sides. There are some who appear godly, upstanding, etc., who have been playing a clever charade. There are others whom we might assume not to be Christians that may well be. We can wonder. We can speculate. And if we see little or no evidence of the fruits of the spirit, we can wonder. But we cannot, should not judge. Because we just don’t know.

But here is what we DO know. “The one who believes in the Son of God has the witness in Himself. The one who has not believed God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the witness that God has borne concerning His Son. He who has the Son has the life. He who does not have the Son does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know (not think, hope, feel) that you have (present tense, not future, present! We possess it now!) eternal life.” (I John 5:10-13)

_____, I hope some of this will help answer your question. Someone has defined “faith” like this: “Faith is when you stop saying please to God, and you start saying, Thank You.” If we have asked Christ to be our Savior, and we have opened the door to our heart and our life to Him and we are trusting only in Him for our salvation, then we need to be saying “thank You” to Him, and then living our lives in a way which demonstrates a genuine gratitude to the One who has forgiven us. and prepared a way of access into God’s presence.

May God Bless you,

Jimmy Williams

Founder, Probe Ministries

“Why Did God Allow Animals to be Eaten and Sacrificed?”

Why did God allow animals to be sacrificed and to eat other animals if He loves His creation? They are innocent. (I am not an animal rights activist. I am a Christian.)

I think the answer must first be addressed in the reality with which we find ourselves. The cosmos according to Christians was created by God. In the early chapters of Genesis we find that everything God created is expressed over and over as being something GOOD.

The Cosmos is made up of minerals, plants, animals, and humans, the lower to the higher. We are told that only man was created in God's image. That does not mean the rest of creation is of NO value, but there is a hierarchy involved. We are told that all of the created order was intended for man. And that he was to have dominion over it. This does not mean the exploitation of everything for selfish purposes. But God provided a food chain involving plants and animals for man.

We see in the Hindu culture a good example of what happens to a culture when the food chain is distorted. Hindus, with their doctrine of reincarnation, believe that animals are just as valuable as human beings, and some, in a former life, may have actually been human beings. Therefore, all devout Hindus are vegetarians.

What makes this difficult is that now scientists are moving toward the position that even PLANTS have consciousness! Does God love the flora any less than the fauna He created? That leaves us with a diet for our existence totally dependent upon rocks!

Man was never intended to "rape the resources." Having "dominion" meant for man to be good stewards of the plant and animal world. "The Earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof," says the psalmist. (Ps. 24:1) We don't own the earth; we are to be good stewards of it.

The scriptures are filled with indications of God's love for that which He created. Jesus notices the beautiful lilies of the field. Men are not to abuse their animals, but rather care for them with kindness, not with harshness. He takes notice of

every sparrow who falls to the ground in death. God explicitly states that one purpose of plants and animals was to provide food for man. He even gave some instructions about *which* animals we were to eat and which we should not.

Consider this verse: Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not *worth much more than they?* (Matt. 6:27). Jesus goes on to say, "Do not be anxious saying, 'What shall we eat? Or what shall we drink?'…for…your heavenly Father *knows* that you have *need* for all these things." (Matt. 6:31-32).

Your question springs out of a matrix of thought which is very popular in the modern world. . .that all life is sacred (I agree). But the further notion held forth today is that the life of a dolphin or a sea otter or a spotted owl is equal in value to a human being.

The Bible does not teach this equality. Jesus didn't teach it, as we see above. All life is sacred because it came from the hand of God. But it is not all equal in value. Man is set apart as the recipient for which it was intended.

Those who would remove this distinction do not elevate man. If there is nothing special about man (which appears to be true in so many ways), then man is dragged down to the status of beast or animal, and an "open season" on man to cure overpopulation problems would make as much sense as an open season on whitetail deer each fall here in Texas to thin out the one half million which inhabit this state. My point here is that once you remove this line, man is not special in any sense and there is no reason we shouldn't live like the rest of the animals on the planet: "survival of the fittest." Hitler understood this. . .and practiced it!

I don't think you would agree that this is a solution to the problem.

Does this help any?

Sincerely,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

“Why Did the Book of Jacob Get Changed to the Book of James?”

By what authority did the translators of the KJV (and other translations) change the name of the book of YAAKOV (Jacob) to JAMES? The original Greek states this author’s name as “IAKOBOY”, or Jacob in English. Thank you.

You are correct in your awareness of the Old Testament designation “Yaakov” (Hebrew) and the New Testament designation, “Iakboy” (Greek).

Tracing the etymology of a word is a fascinating endeavor. And as it is translated from language to language, or even its development within a language, spelling and pronunciation often change. Beyond the Greek and the Hebrew, this word went through several stages of the Latin language (i.e., Old Latin, New Latin, Late Latin), and there were further influences of the word through the barbarian tribes that overran Western Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries. In England this involved two distinct blending of languages—the first by the Anglo-Saxons (Angles, Saxons, and Jutes), who overlaid their language on top of the (1) Latin & (2) Celtic (two dialects: Brythonic and Goidelic) amalgamation as they conquered much of

England between the fifth and seventh centuries, and second, by the Norman/Vikings, who overlaid their language upon all of that during the eleventh and twelfth centuries!

One of the reasons the English Language is such a rich one is because of the blending of these linguistic strains which created totally different words for identical things: for example: lamb-mutton, brotherly-fraternal, etc.

The words *Jacob* and *James* come out of this matrix. Jacob follows the French/Norman tradition (Jacobin, for example), and James comes out of the Anglo-Saxon tradition.

The use of "James" in the King James Version was not something they had to think about. It was already imbedded into their language as the equivalent of "James" or "Jacob." Since this translation from Greek and Hebrew involved putting the text into readable and understandable English, they chose the popular word already in circulation.

Actually, three common English names come out of this: James, Jacob, and Jack.

Hope this answers your question.

Thanks for writing.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

"How Should A Christian Think

About Alcohol?”

There are people who I am close to that believe having an occasional drink (keeping in mind that they aren’t drinking to get drunk) is okay.

Personally, in the short amount of time I’ve been alive, I have seen nothing but bad things produced from drinking alcohol (whether the purpose is to get drunk or not). Which is why I have made the decision to stay away from it. My fiance has a different opinion. I know I can’t push my convictions on others, but if we are to “become one” (which is what God has communicated to us both) then how is it possible for one of us to drink (just a little) and the other not drink?

Throughout the Bible it talks about wine; Jesus drank wine. How is the wine from back then different from now (if it is different)? Is it okay to drink alcohol upon occasion (New Year’s, weddings, celebrations)? What do you believe about people that are called into the ministry that drink (on occasion)? I would appreciate any advice or references that you could send my way.

Let me give you some thoughts which hopefully are an accurate assessment of the question from the Bible’s point of view.

First of all, the Bible never indicates that drinking wine (as well as other liquids with alcoholic content) is a sin. You have mentioned the fact that Jesus drank wine. In fact, He was accused by His enemies of being a “wine-bibber,” or wine-drinker; that is, He was habitually observed doing this. Jesus admits that He has. When He compares His ministry lifestyle with that of John the Baptist’s He says, “John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man and a wine-drinker, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!'” (Matthew 11:18,19).

We actually have an account in John 2 where John describes the wedding at Cana (which Jesus and the disciples attended) and lays out in detail the fact that the hosts had run out of wine. You know the story. At His mother's request for Him to help, Jesus ordered the servants to fill up seven huge clay pots with water, which He turned into wine.

Was this grape juice, or wine? The context tells us which. After this newly-created wine was served, the headwaiter came to the bridegroom and complimented him: "Every man serves the good wine first, and when men have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; but you have kept the good wine until now!" (John 2:10). Every bartender knows instantly what this man is saying: "Serve the good wine first, and then, when people have become affected by it, and their taste has been dulled, serve them the cheap, inferior wine."

Another instance which lets us know that these ancient wines contained alcohol is confirmed from the lips of Peter on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit has just fallen upon the believers and they were empowered miraculously to speak in other languages. Since there were Jews present from all over the Mediterranean world (cf. Acts 2:9-11) all of these different people who spoke different languages heard the gospel spoken in their own tongue. They are amazed at this and some of those present suggest that these Christians are drunk (2:13). But Peter comes to their rescue and says, "Men of Judea,. . .let this be known to you, and give heed to my words. For these men are **not drunk** as you suppose, for it is **only the third hour of the day!**" The Jewish day begins at 6:00 A.M., so it is only 9:00 in the morning and Peter is reminding them that it was too early for them, or any other men, to be drunk yet.

Fermentation is also implied in our Lord's discussion about not pouring new wine into an old wineskin (Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37). The process is as follows: You kill a sheep or a goat. You take the skin of say, the hind leg. You tie the

bottom tightly so it won't leak, and you have a nice flask. The skin is new and pliable, a "green skin." You bring freshly crushed grape juice from the winepress, and pour it into your wineskin. Then you tie the top. Inside, the grape juice ferments and becomes wine. Since the skin is pliable, it expands and the pressure builds up inside. Then it is hung up in a cool place, a cellar, just as wine is attended to today, and two or three years later, you drink it. During that storage time, the skin, in its expanded state hardens, and becomes rigid.

Jesus' point is that you would never take this old wine skin after you have drunk all the wine in it and recycle the wineskin with more new wine. The fermentation process would burst it. The application Jesus is making alludes to the fact that what He is proclaiming, the New Covenant, cannot be contained in the old "wineskin" of the Jewish Law system. The book of Hebrews personifies this same vivid contrast between the Old Mosaic Law system and its replacement with the Gospel of Grace found in Christ Jesus.

I hope with the above, we have proven our point that the wine in the days of Jesus did the same thing to those who drank it as it does to those who drink too much wine today.

Some Christians who do not wish to believe that there is any alcoholic beverage mentioned in the Bible and seek an alternative have suggested that "new wine" (*gleukos)* actually means "grape juice." However, this is the exact word used in Acts 2:13 associated with their accusation of "drunkeness."

On the other hand, while drinking wine is not a sin in the Bible, getting drunk definitely *is*. There is an extended passage in the Proverbs warning people about the danger of wine:

> *Who has woe? Who has sorrow?*
> *Who has contentions? Who has complaining?*

Who has wounds without cause?
Who has redness of eyes?
Those who linger long over wine,
Those who go to taste mixed wine.
Do not look on the wine when it is red,
When it sparkles in the cup,
When it goes down smoothly;
At the last it bites like a serpent,
And stings like a viper.
Your eyes will see strange things,
And your mind will utter perverse things.
And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea,
Or like the one who lies down on the top of a mast.
They struck me, but I did not become ill;
They beat me, but I did not know it.
When shall I awake?
I will seek another drink. (Proverbs 23:39-35)

Drunkenness is mentioned many times in both Old and New Testaments in a negative light. Get a concordance and look under "drink" and "drunk." You'll see what I mean. Drunkenness is also included in the list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. It is also mentioned by Paul in the context of Christian leadership in the Church. One of the qualifications for elders is "not *addicted to wine*" (1 Timothy 3:3). This is repeated in Titus 1:7. I take it that there is a distinction between drinking in moderation and addiction. I don't think Jesus was addicted to wine, do you? But He drank wine. And here is where it gets "fuzzy." When do you pass the point when you qualify as either drunk or addicted? I think the question that needs to be continually asked if one drinks is **"Do I have it, or does it have me?"** And there is a danger here, as we saw in the Proverbs passage above. We could ask the same question about money, or television, or food, or travel, or sports, or exercise, and on and on. The Bible seems

to call for *moderation*, for an awareness that things can *gain control* over us which will be detrimental to our life, our family, our ministry.

Most of us would like for the world to be black and white. Clear-cut. No gray. But gray is a biblical color. All of these things I have mentioned above fall not in a "yes/no" pattern, but a "maybe/maybe not" pattern. We could place these into an area we might call "doubtful things." The signature passage on this is Romans 14. And I think this passage speaks directly to the communication you have described you are having with your fiancé. Let's look at some verses:

"Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge another man's servant?" (14:1-4)

Use the word "wine" or "alcoholic beverage" and "drink" and re-read the passage. Both parties have a responsibility. The one who "eats" is not to look on the other with *contempt*. The one who does not "eat" is not to *judge* the one who does. God is able to bless both people though they do different things.

"One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. *Let every man be fully convinced in his own mind*"(v.5). It is okay to hold different positions on some of these things, and neither should judge the other.

But Paul brings in another factor: "Therefore let us not judge one another any more, but rather determine this—that no one is to put an *obstacle* or a *stumbling block* in a brother's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that *nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it IS unclean*" (13,14).

“For if because of food (or drink) your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what is for you a *good* thing be spoken of as evil, for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. . . So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food (or drink). All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats (drinks) and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to *drink wine*, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats (drinks), because his eating (drinking) is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin. . . .Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just *please ourselves.* Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself” (14:15-15:3).

What we have in this wonderful passage gives both freedom and restraint. God has provided many wonderful things for the human race, including wine “to make glad the heart of man” (Psalm 104:15). Yet we have additional responsibilities to behave in such a way that we might not offend another’s conscience. There is what we might call the “Law of Love” which would make us careful not to exercise our freedom at the expense of someone else’s expectation of us. A second law might be called the “Law of Expediency.” Paul says, “All things are *lawful*, but not all things are *expedient* (I Corinthians 6:12)” In other words, if I have freedom to have a glass of wine, I still have to look to the leading of the Holy Spirit to help me decide whether it would be expedient in a particular context for me to exercise my freedom.

So _____, I would suggest that you and your fiancé get

together and look at this material and have a good discussion about it. I would not make this issue the pivot upon which your shared life together will turn. If he wants a glass of wine at a meal at home, you do not have to have one too, but you also should not judge him for having one. If it becomes something habitual, and seems to be gaining greater control, I think you have a right to talk to him about it and express your concern. “Becoming one” in a marriage is not something based upon both people thinking the same things or doing the same things. It is about being open to one another and sharing your lives. It is possible for him to have a glass of wine and you deciding not to.

The word “becoming” is most important. It is a process. It takes many years for a couple to become one. Couples who have “pulled in the harness” for thirty or forty years together are the ones who best exhibit this “oneness,” since they know each other so well, and have fought their “fights,” and made their adjustments to each other, and there is a harmony between them that has been hammered out over their married life.

You are just embarking on that great journey called marriage. Realize that you both bring what you are to the relationship. You will discover that you are very different people Sometimes those differences will bring friction. You will rub on each other. This is part of the process of any meaningful relationship. Your differences should not be considered a threat, but rather a union which should be viewed as complementary, rather than competitive. Someone has said that marriage is like a tennis match. But it’s not singles; it’s doubles! You are both on the same side of the net giving all *you’ve* got—each of you, to make your relationship and your marriage a winner.

I hope this helps answer your question, _____.

Warm regards in Christ,

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

See Also:

- "Is It OK for Christians to Drink in Moderation? Didn't Jesus Drink?"
- "Jesus Contributed to Drunkenness!"

"You Are Gods"?

I have heard New Agers claim that even the Bible makes the claim that we (people) are gods. They use the words of Jesus in John 10:34. This verse has always puzzled me. What did Jesus mean when he quoted this scripture?

Thank you for your question. Let me see if I can shed a little light on it.

The contexts in both John 10 and the Old Testament Psalm which Jesus quoted (Psalm 82:6) are very important in understanding our Lord's answer to the Jews which were about to stone Him. As they pick up stones, Jesus says, "I've shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning me?" They say, "For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make Yourself out to be God." (John 10:32-33).

Then Jesus refers to Psalm 82:6 and says, "Hasn't it been written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say to Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming'; because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of my Father, do

not believe Me…” (John 10:34-37)

Now let us look at Psalm 82 to determine its context and the theme/purpose of the Psalm. The entire psalm is a scathing rebuke aimed at unjust judges in contrast to the just Judge of all the earth. In reality, Asaph, the author of the psalm, is crying out for God to do something about the corrupt judges of his day; they show partiality, they neglect caring for the downtrodden, the weak, the afflicted, etc. Then in verse 6, God Himself speaks, and says:

> *“I said, ‘You are gods (Elohim),*
> *And all of you are the sons of the Most High.”*

Some observations:

1. The words, “Elohim” (God),” and “Yahweh” (Lord), are the two major names of God in the Old Testament. It is Elohim that is used here in verse 6.

2. Its meaning in Psalm 82:6 does not imply that men are gods. It rather refers specifically to the fact that God has appointed judges to act in a dignified, God-like manner in the discharge of their God-appointed responsibilities.

3. Actually, the word “Elohim” is also used in verse 1 of both God and men:

“Elohim (God) takes His stand in His own congregation; He (God) judges in the midst of the Elohim (corrupt judges who are acting like Gods—said in sarcasm).”

Notice in John 10 that Jesus reminds these accusers from the first half of Psalm 82:6 that God is the one who appoints the human judges with their awesome responsibility: “Ye are gods.” He goes on in the second half of the verse to remind them that sons are supposed to resemble their Fathers: “And all of you are the sons of the Most High.” Neither the judges in the psalm nor the Jewish leaders confront Him were reflecting

this.

4. In jurisprudence there are two types of authority: *de facto* and *de jure*. The Most High God (Elohim Himself) has *de facto* authority. It is an un-derived authority. He has it because He is God. *De jure* authority, on the other hand, is derived, or delegated authority. And delegated authority makes one responsible to the one who did the delegating! The second half of verse 6 is a solemn reminder that these judges are called "Sons" of God, because they are to represent faithfully a justice which reflects their "Father," the Judge of all the earth.

5. Now the words of Jesus in John 10 make a lot more sense. If you or I had come to earth as the Messiah, we would probably have been moving about and taking every opportunity possible with people to verbally emphasize who we really were: Elohim. But Jesus didn't do that. He chose rather to imply His identity through the miracles, through the Parables, through His actions. It was as if He was careful that a person came to the conclusion that He was Elohim solely of their own accord, and with no pressure or persuasion on His part, though He was eager for them to come to this very conclusion.

6. Notice that in the dialogue in John 10 with these angry Jews, Jesus could have taken the "bait" and said, "I am Elohim!" But He doesn't. He claims identity with the second half of Psalm 82:6, the one that models a relationship to His Father exactly like what God is desiring from the judges in Psalm 82. Even though Christ is Elohim, He functions during the Incarnation in a *de jure* capacity to the Father and faithfully carries forth His responsibilities to His Father: accomplishing His mission to redeem the human race (John 3:16).

I hope this answers your question.

Jimmy Williams, Founder

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