

“What’s the Difference Between Moral Relativism and Pluralism?”

Moral relativism and pluralism: I said they are, in effect, the same. The Unitarian academics smiled and suggested that I am unlearned on the topic. What say you? □

The two terms are not necessarily linked. One could be a moral relativist and an atheist, which isn’t quite the same as a religious pluralist. Theologian John Hick is an example of a religious pluralist who accepts all major world religions as viable paths to what he calls the “Other.” However, he would reject the label of moral relativist, claiming that these belief systems cause followers to seek a good beyond themselves and that this lends to their behavior a certain ethical dimension not found in unbelievers.

The problem with John Hick’s system is in its rejection of what these religious systems claim to believe about salvation and humanity’s destiny in order to blend them into his pluralistic system. Harold Netland has written a helpful book for thinking through the problems of religious pluralism called *Dissonant Voices*.

For Him,

Don Closson
Probe Ministries

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“When Does Human Life Begin?”

I am in an exchange of views with someone in regard to the question of when life begins. He is a very well read and educated person, however I cannot vouch for what or who he reads! According to him, “There is no hard line to draw where life of a human being begins. We only know that as soon as the sperm cell and egg fuse, the resulting cell bears the genetic and biochemical potential to become a new human person. Everything else is an opinion, not science, only God knows at what stage the life of a human person really begins.” What recommendations might you have in dealing with this discussionspurred by the stem cell research issue during the election.

Your friend is essentially correct from a scientific perspective, but what he cites is very important. Having the full genetic and biochemical potential to develop into a baby in nine months is the only certain point of demarcation. Anything else will be an arbitrary point chosen largely for convenience. So why not establish fertilization as the point at which human life ought to be protected?

U.S. law was originally quite clear that where there was doubt, err on the side of life. Now we choose to err on the side of death just so we can pursue the next series of experiments. Nobody wants to worry about what if we're wrong? We just redefine life so we can proceed ahead. And those who think religious

perspectives should be
left out are fooling themselves. If scientifically we cant
make any other clear
point of reference then the point you do choose has been
chosen for reasons
other than science, which means personal values and beliefs.
This should be
a lesson that so-called personal values intersect with facts
all the time
and they truly cannot be separated.

Of course, biblically and theologically, the line of
demarcation is quite clear.

Beginning with Psalm 139:13-16,

*13 For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's
womb.*

*14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and
wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows
it very well.*

*15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in
secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;*

*16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your
book were all written The days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them.*

followed by Isaiah 49:1,

*Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from
afar. The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My
mother He named Me.*

Psalm 51:5,

*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother
conceived me.*

and Jeremiah 1:5,

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

The Scriptures clearly indicate that a person made in the image of God is present even before there is a biological manifestation of such.

I would basically tell your correspondent that he has helped make your case for protecting the earliest life. Fertilization is the only sure point of demarcation.

We were all once a blastocyst and even a fertilized egg. But none of us was ever just a sperm or egg cell.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, Ph.D.

Probe Ministries

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“Where Should We Give Our Tithe?”

Is there any specific biblical instruction that we give our tithe to where we regularly hear God’s word or the church we belong to? What if I feel like giving my tithe to churches that are in need even though I’m attending there?

Galatians 6:6 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18 seem to suggest that we should certainly help support those who teach and preach the word of God to us. Usually, this will be our local church. However, in 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul urges the Corinthians to share with the church in Jerusalem, which was currently in great need. The Bible also urges us to help support traveling missionaries, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Generally, I think that believers should give FIRST to those who are helping them grow in the faith and teaching them the Word of God, etc. Afterward, they should also give to other Christian organizations that they believe in and respect. However, there may also be occasions when the Lord moves His people to help other believers in other parts of the world.

The key issue, in my opinion, is first the readiness to give in obedience to God's word. And second, a sensitive spirit that is open to the Lord's leading in one's giving. Of course, as good stewards of God's resources we should also check out (as best we can) the churches or organizations receiving our money. Are they faithfully preaching and teaching God's word? Are they genuinely concerned to advance the cause of Christ in the world? Are they good stewards of the gifts they receive? Are they genuinely in need?

It's helpful to remember that the Old Testament pattern of giving was one of both tithes AND offerings. Offerings were gifts above and beyond the tithe (one-tenth of one's income). The circumstances of your question would suggest that if the Lord is calling you to give to struggling churches, making an offering on top of your regular giving to your local church would be an excellent solution.

There are other issues to consider, but these are some to keep in mind.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

See Also:

- [Probe Answers Our E-Mail: “What Does the Bible Say About Tithing?”](#)
- [Probe Answers Our E-Mail: “What’s the NT Understanding of Tithing?”](#)

“Is There a Spiritual Gift of Intercession?”

I’m confused about intercession. Is there a gift of intercession as well as it being a discipline? Some people certainly pray more often than others and some love doing it, yet there are those who don’t love it but get woken in the middle of the night to pray for hours anyway.

I also look at people sometimes and really want to pray for them, right then and there. I don’t because I’m a bit too scared to walk up to someone and say “I so want to pray for you” and I’m not really sure what I’d be praying about. I find this both amusing and confusing. Do you have any light to shed?

As far as I know, there is no “gift” of intercession, although people with the spiritual gift of faith (1 Corinthians 12:9) usually have a (super)natural affinity for praying for others. Whether we love doing it or not has nothing to do with whether God is using us as channels of His power.

One of my dear friends is a pastor. One weekend afternoon he was feeling rather "prickly and grumpy," to quote him, when he got a call from one of his congregants asking him to come to the hospital and pray for their daughter. She was supposed to have surgery but an infection had invaded her body and they couldn't do it until the infection was cleared up and her fever went down. Bob knew in his spirit that if he prayed for her, she would be healed, but he reeaaaalllllllly didn't want to go. He went anyway, just as prickly and grumpy as you please, laid his hands on the girl, and asked God to get rid of the infection so they could go ahead with the surgery. He left to go back home, and as he walked in the door, the phone was ringing; her temp was normal. That fast. He says it was quite humbling that God wanted to use him, as fleshly and uncooperative as he was feeling, but the issue wasn't the attitude of the channel, but the divine power that flowed through it.

When you get an impression in your spirit that you should/want to pray for someone, please give yourself permission to trust the Lord's leading on that. (And I would ask, are you being impressed to pray for them just internally, or does He want you to bless them by praying out loud? Consider that having someone pray for you out loud is an intense blessing for most people, and if you don't follow through, you may be depriving them of a blessing God wants to give them through you!)

What you're dealing with is discomfort over operating in the supernatural, and the more times you overcome your reticence, the easier it will become to follow through on His leading. You can go up to someone and say, "Excuse me, I know this may sound crazy, but I think the Lord wants me to pray for you right now. May I have your permission?" A number of years ago I decided I wanted to be the kind of person who would stop in the middle of a sidewalk and pray for someone right then and there if it was the right thing to do, but it was unfamiliar territory to me. So I told myself, "I need to get over the

discomfort of the unfamiliar, and then it will be familiar, and it will feel natural, and that's where I want to live! Where praying out loud at the drop of a hat feels natural and comfortable. So I will push past the discomfort to get to the place I want to be." It worked.

I heard a great story at one of the Exodus conferences. (Exodus International used to be the umbrella organization over many ministries that deal with the homosexuality issue; I serve with one.) Andy Comiskey, a former homosexual struggler (to whom God has brought great healing) and his wife were in New York on an anniversary trip. They took a walk to Greenwich Village and ended up in a park across the street from Stonewall, the bar where the gay rights movement was launched in 1969. It was a gay park, and they sensed a lot of demonic oppression in that place. Andy said, "Enough! We need to take authority right now!" and invited Jesus to be Lord of that park. He prayed, "Your kingdom come, Lord!" and so the two of them kept their eyes peeled for what God was going to do. They saw a lady who looked oppressed to them, so they walked up to her and Andy said, "Excuse me, but my wife and I are Christians, and we believe God wants us to pray for you. Would that be OK? If it isn't, we'll just pray for you as we leave." The lady's eyes filled with tears and she said, "This morning I prayed and said, 'God, if You're real, show me.'"

If you get the urge to pray for someone and don't know what to pray for, I would 1) trust that if you obey His prompting, God will impress you with what to pray for if He wants you to pray something specific, and 2) ask the Father to bless that person with His love and the awareness of His presence and His pleasure in them as a person He made in His image and sent Jesus to die for. Ask Him for His peace and a lingering sense of blessing on the person throughout the day. No matter what the person's issue is, you can bless them in Jesus' name and it is a REAL THING you are giving them! I would also suggest that you dive deep into God's word to grow your familiarity

with, and make a list of, His promises and truths that you can feel confident praying because He has already revealed it as His will. (One of my favorites is from Ephesians 3:18, that the person will have power “to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ” for them.)

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
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“Does Jesus’ Vine/Branches discourse in John 15 Mean You Can Lose Your Salvation?”

Does John 15:1-7 have anything to do with losing your salvation? I would like your input. Personally I believe it does not.

Thanks for your letter. John 15:1-7 definitely presents the interpreter with some difficulties. Nevertheless, I personally tend to agree with you and do not think that this passage teaches that a genuine believer (and this, of course, is important) can lose his/her salvation. Since my own studies are informed by the expertise of others, and since I share the viewpoint presented in the NET BIBLE, I have pasted their comments on this passage below:

The Greek verb *αιρω* (*airo*) can mean lift up as well as take away, and it is sometimes argued that here it is a reference to the gardener lifting up (i.e., propping up) a weak branch

so that it bears fruit again. In Johannine usage the word occurs in the sense of lift up in 8:59 and 5:8-12, but in the sense of remove it is found in 11:39, 11:48, 16:22, and 17:15. In context (theological presuppositions aside for the moment) the meaning remove does seem more natural and less forced (particularly in light of v. 6, where worthless branches are described as being thrown out an image that seems incompatible with restoration). One option, therefore, would be to understand the branches which are taken away (v. 2) and thrown out (v. 6) as believers who forfeit their salvation because of unfruitfulness. However, many see this interpretation as encountering problems with the Johannine teaching on the security of the believer, especially John 10:28-29. This leaves two basic ways of understanding Jesus statements about removal of branches in 15:2 and 15:6:

(1) These statements may refer to an unfaithful (disobedient) Christian, who is judged at the judgment seat of Christ through fire (cf. 1 Cor 3:11-15). In this case the removal of 15:2 may refer (in an extreme case) to the physical death of a disobedient Christian.

(2) These statements may refer to someone who was never a genuine believer in the first place (e.g., Judas and the Jews who withdrew after Jesus difficult teaching in 6:66), in which case 15:6 refers to eternal judgment. In either instance it is clear that 15:6 refers to the fires of judgment (cf. OT imagery in Ps. 80:16 and Ezek 15:1-8). But view (1) requires us to understand this in terms of the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ. This concept does not appear in the Fourth Gospel because from the perspective of the author the believer does not come under judgment; note especially 3:18, 5:24, 5:29. The first reference is especially important because it occurs in the context of 3:16-21, the section which is key to the framework of the entire Fourth Gospel and which is repeatedly alluded to throughout. A similar image to this

one is used by John the Baptist in Matt 3:10, And the ax is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Since this is addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming to John for baptism, it almost certainly represents a call to initial repentance. More importantly, however, the imagery of being cast into the fire constitutes a reference to eternal judgment, a use of imagery which is much nearer to the Johannine imagery in 15:6 than the Pauline concept of the judgment seat of Christ (a judgment for believers) mentioned above. The use of the Greek verb *meno* (meno) in 15:6 also supports view (2). When used of the relationship between Jesus and the disciple and/or Jesus and the Father, it emphasizes the permanence of the relationship (John 6:56, 8:31, 8:35, 14:10). The prototypical branch who has not remained is Judas, who departed in 13:30. He did not bear fruit, and is now in the realm of darkness, a mere tool of Satan. His eternal destiny, being cast into the fire of eternal judgment, is still to come. It seems most likely, therefore, that the branches who do not bear fruit and are taken away and burned are false believers, those who profess to belong to Jesus but who in reality do not belong to him. In the Gospel of John, the primary example of this category is Judas. In 1 John 2:18-19 the antichrists fall into the same category; they too may be thought of as branches that did not bear fruit. They departed from the ranks of the Christians because they never did really belong, and their departure shows that they did not belong.”

The NET Bible is a really great site. If you're interested in exploring the topic of salvation, they have a number of articles at www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=13. Articles specifically on the topic of "Assurance" can be found at www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=31.

Hope these resources prove helpful.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

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“My Son Curses”

I have a 17 year old son who is a Christian. I am having some trouble with him using curse words. He says it is not wrong as long as he does not use God's name in vain. I have told him he is not being a good witness and the Bible says to speak in ways to encourage and build people up. I told him is not suppose to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of his mind. And his mind can't be renewed with words coming out like curse words. He says he is not cursing at anyone but that it helps him to express his feelings. I told him he is supposed to be in control of himself including his tongue. He says he is in control and is able to not curse when he chooses not to. What can I say to him and back up with scripture to show him that it is wrong as a Christian to curse?

Dear friend,

Ephesians 4:29 says, Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

Other versions translate unwholesome as foul, dirty, corrupt, abusive, and rotten. Notice none of them have anything to do with taking Gods name in vain.

Its interesting when you look up the meaning of the Greek word translated unwholesome

- 1) rotten, putrefied
- 2) corrupted and no longer fit for use, worn out
- 3) of poor quality, bad, unfit for use, worthless

These all describe cursing, which has been rightfully called words used by angry people with stunted vocabularies.

You can offer all this to your son, but I think that as a parent, your power comes from providing him with the motivation to control his tongue like he says he can (and you KNOW he can!)like losing privileges when he loses control. You are the gatekeeper of the perks and privileges of living in your home, and you can encourage him to develop his self-control and character by choosing not to curse. Of course, the way to change is to displace the unwanted behavior with a new one, so be prepared to provide him with alternative words and phrases. You might even give him the assignment of Googling the phrase alternatives to cursing (after you do it first, so you know what hell encounter).

Hope this helps!

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“Is Faith Fact, or Are They Opposites?”

A fellow Christian friend and I recently got into a discussion over faith and facts, and I would like your opinion on the subject. It started by her asking me “Is faith fact?” Well I replied yes, because our faith is grounded in the fact of the resurrection, our faith has to be based on something true or our faith is in vain. She was arguing faith is not fact and it takes faith to believe in the resurrection in the first place and she said because we walk by faith not sight that facts are a “worldly” way of doing things. I feel the Bible teaches fact and reason as being viable and complimentary to faith. I would appreciate your biblical opinion on this subject.

Facts and faith are different things, and both are necessary. In Acts 17 and 1 Corinthians 15 Paul exhorts his readers and listeners toward an examination of the facts. Paul clearly believed that the facts of creation, Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, made his case for the deity of Christ reasonable. Facts rarely prove a point but they do indicate its reasonableness. (That is why in a court room you are asked to convict beyond a “reasonable” doubt, they don’t say beyond any doubt). What matters in faith is the object of our faith. I can believe the sun will not rise tomorrow, but the facts argue that this is not a reasonable faith. The same is true of our faith in Christ. I cannot prove that he lived, died, and rose from the dead, but I can gather facts of history which make that conclusion not only reasonable, but I believe, compelling. Based on my faith in the reality and person of Jesus Christ, I also have faith in the truth of what he said about spiritual things and future events. There are few facts if any to back up his statements, only those which verify his person and events which are significant enough to believe whatever he said, but there are no specific facts to back up

his claim that He will come again.

I hope this helps.

Ray Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“What’s Wrong with Masturbation, Anyway?”

What’s all the fuss about masturbation? It seems to me that Christians have decided it’s wrong and then go looking for Bible verses to back up their prejudice. The Bible doesn’t even mention it! It’s a legitimate way to get sexual release. Besides, I can’t stop it for any length of time, so it must be okay.

I asked Mike Cleveland, a friend in ministry at [Setting Captives Free](#), for his insight on this issue. As an overcomer in pornography and masturbation, Mike has what I believe is an excellent perspective on a biblical answer to this question. With a background in theology and practical ministry, plus the testimonies of thousands of people he has helped gain freedom from bondage to these sins, Mike is well-equipped to answer the question of why masturbation is wrong.

Be sure to read the powerful testimonies at the end. They also answer the question, “What’s wrong with masturbation?”

Sue Bohlin

Friend,

There is an untruth floating around Christian circles that masturbation is not a sin and that it is acceptable under certain circumstances. Some believe that masturbation is acceptable:

- For single people
- For married people who have to endure prolonged absences from their spouse
- As a preventative to the commitment of sexual crimes

One of the course members from the Pure Freedom Course [note: a free, Christ-centered online course to help people overcome an addiction to pornography and masturbation at www.settingcaptivesfree.com] recently sent us an article written by a pastor on the subject of masturbation. In his article, this pastor unhesitatingly recommended masturbation for people of all ages to “release stress for singles,” to “relieve pressure when away from a spouse,” and to “prevent sex crimes.” He also gave instructions on how to teach masturbation to young children and blatantly stated that God gave masturbation to us as a way “to enjoy sex before marriage.”

I wish this pastor could see some of the enrollments we receive from people who have become enslaved to gratifying their flesh by the act of masturbation—many without pornography! They are slaves to their own lusts; unable to break free from this debilitating habit that has crippled their walk with the Lord. Because they are unable to stop this behavior, they are guilty and some feel ashamed and frustrated. They have “low self-esteem” and have difficulty interacting in social situations because they know they have a secret—a dark secret that they are slaves to fondling themselves, caressing themselves, and to orgasm. Moreover, I wish this pastor could watch as God sets these captives free from masturbation and read their emails stating how depression, paranoia, stress...etc. disappeared when God set them free from masturbation and sexual impurity of all kinds.

Some Christians believe that because masturbation is not specifically mentioned in the Bible that God does not consider the presence or the absence of the activity important. But is this really accurate? Is God truly silent about masturbation? Is the absence of the word "masturbation" in Scripture God's way of giving His approval to men and women gratifying their flesh in masturbation? Remember, the word "pornography" itself is not in the Bible (though the root word is), but there are biblical principles dealing with both pornography and masturbation.

Though it is true that the Bible does not use the word "masturbation," I do not believe that Scripture has left us in the dark about whether masturbation is right or wrong. Masturbation is not a "gift of God" for single people and it is not a "preventative for sexual crimes." It is indulging the flesh, which leads to sin-slavery (John 8:34). Masturbation makes us begin to live according to the dictates of the flesh and to become slaves to the "misdeeds of the body." Scripture warns us about this kind of activity, "For if you live according to the flesh (by giving in to its desires), you will die" and tells us how to stop, "but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live" (Romans 8:13).

In reality, masturbation is a high expression of loving self and of sexual self-idolatry. It is deceiving and enslaving. Let us see these truths from Scripture:

"Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness" (Romans 6:19-20).

This verse teaches that "offering leads to slavery." When we "offer the parts of our body" to sin we become a slave to sin. Masturbation only "relieves the pressure" temporarily. The

pressure will soon be back and masturbation will need to occur again and again, and again. But if we offer the parts of our body for righteousness, we will become slaves of righteousness. So, present your body a living sacrifice; offer the parts of your body to God and your slavery to Christ will produce complete freedom from masturbation.

Another argument that some make in favor of masturbation is to say that it is much like eating food: if we indulge ourselves we can become slaves, but what we need to do is learn to control our appetite, not stop eating. So, in the same way, we need to control masturbation and not become slaves to it, but it is not sin to masturbate anymore than it is sin to eat. But there is a major problem with this argument: eating is a biological necessity. If we don't eat, we die. Sex is a biological desire, not a necessity. Many people live their whole lives without ever having sex.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires" (Romans 8:5).

Masturbation fixes the mind on the desires of the flesh, and burns the image of nudity and sex into the mind. With each occurrence of masturbation, that image becomes clearer and more intense, and can become a tool of the devil to set up a thought-stronghold (2 Corinthians 3:1-5).

"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8)

Here is the real problem of masturbation, and let me say this clearly: If you are masturbating, you are pleasing only yourself. Your actions are displeasing to God because you are "in the flesh" and a slave to lust. You are offering the members of your body in slavery to impurity and your mind is set on what the flesh desires.

“So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want”(Galatians 5:16-17).

Why is masturbation a sin? It is a sin because when we masturbate we “gratify the desires of the flesh,” which we would not do if we were walking in and living by the Spirit. Let us make this point clear. If we are walking in the Spirit and living by faith, we will not masturbate.

“So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

Masturbation is a sin because it does not come from faith. I cannot believe the promises of God to supply my every need (Phil. 4:19), to make a way out of every temptation (Hebrews 10:13), to keep me from falling (Jude 24), and masturbate at the same time. Masturbation is not of faith therefore it is sin.

About Jesus Christ, God the Father says, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And why? Because He lived a life of obedience unto death, even death on a cross. And we are unworthy to be called His disciples unless we daily take up the cross and follow Him. Taking up our cross means crucifying our flesh, not gratifying it. It means dying to self, not living to please the flesh. Oh, how we need the teaching of the cross of Jesus Christ in these instances.

The cross shows us One Whose flesh was crucified, not controlled. The cross shows us that we are not to “relieve the pressure” but endure to the point of shedding blood. Stating

that masturbation is acceptable “under certain circumstances” is a denial of the cross of Jesus Christ. And the truth of the matter is that it is so much easier to totally crucify than to attempt to control.

Right here let me quote from an excellent book from Pure Life Ministries on the subject of masturbation called *Tearing Down The Walls Of Sexual Idolatry* by Steve Gallagher. This book is highly recommended for its commitment to the truth of Scripture, rather than to worldly principles. In fact, Pure Life Ministries considers their ministry to be “an alternative to psychology.” They say, “Some of the leading Christian psychologists in the nation have said that masturbation is a normal function and unless carried on into marriage, usually proves to be harmless. I believe the reason that they have said this is to alleviate some of the guilt and condemnation associated with it. But you cannot condone something because it makes people feel guilty. It may be normal for fallen man, but that does not make it acceptable in the eyes of a holy God. Although masturbation is not specifically addressed in Scripture, the Bible gives us principles for leading a pure and holy life that clearly tells us that it is wrong.

- **Proper Sex**—The first and most obvious reason that masturbation is wrong is because it goes against God’s purpose for sex. Although our society has perverted sex to the extent that it has become a self-centered act, God created it to be a function of marriage. There is no room for sex outside of marriage! Worldly-minded teachers tell us though, that we have pent-up desires that must be ‘relieved.’ They say that God created us to need sex and would not expect us to go without it. What they do not realize is that sex is a desire that God gave us; not a need. People that have learned to walk in the Spirit have been overcoming these desires for thousands of years.

- **Feeding The Flesh**—Another reason why masturbation is wrong is because it is another form of self-gratification.

Throughout Scripture, self-gratification is denounced.

- **Lustful Fantasy**—It is virtually impossible to masturbate without fantasizing. What would a person think about who is trying to achieve orgasm if not sex with some person? Paul admonishes us about our thinking when he says, 'Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things' (Philippians 4:8-9).

- **Doorway To Other Sin**—The last reason that masturbation is wrong is that it opens the door for the enemy to lead the person deeper into sin. . . .[S]in is never satisfied. It always demands more and more of the person. As God told Cain, 'Sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you, but you must master it.'"

So, let us get practical on this subject. Many of us have children coming into puberty and we know they will masturbate. How do we converse with them on this topic? First, let us instruct them about the cross. I tell my son that Jesus Christ laid down His life for us, and He requires us to lay down our lives also. He presented His body as an offering to the Father and we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, offer our bodies a living sacrifice. We talk about Jesus refusing to gratify His flesh when tempted by the devil, and that His flesh was nailed to a cross. In the same way we should count ourselves dead to sin. I talk plainly with him about the enslavement that masturbation will bring, if he were to offer the members of his body for sin. I tell him that the desires he has are given by God to experience pleasure in marriage, and to procreate, not for selfish reasons. He understands that to follow Christ masturbation is not an option. It makes it so much easier on him, when the temptation comes, to not even consider it as a possibility, rather than try to decide if this is a time it must be "controlled" or if can he give in to the desire.

Finally, let me finish with a testimony we received awhile back. It is from a gentleman in his last week of the Pure Freedom Course and he is now set free from slavery to masturbation. He writes this testimony:

“My problems began when our youth pastor told me that the Bible does not mention masturbation, therefore God must not condemn it. He told us that as long as we were masturbating with thoughts of our future spouse then we were not sinning. My masturbation began slowly—only using it once a week or so. I felt guilty, like I was giving in to sin rather than denying the flesh, but my pastor said it was a helpful tool, and that it even prevented sex crimes when used correctly. Gullible as I was I believed him. I soon began discovering that offering the parts of my body to masturbation did not permanently decrease desire or relieve pressure—quite the opposite—the more I masturbated the more I enjoyed it and the more I engaged in it. I honestly do not know what happened—one day I had just finished masturbating along side a farm road, for the third time that day, when it dawned on me that I was a slave to masturbation. What started innocently, and with the full approval of a religious authority, trapped me into a vice that completely choked out all spiritual life in me. “Oh how I wish that pastor had preached the Word correctly, even if it would have made him less popular. I wish he had explained to me that unless I denied myself (not indulged myself) and took up my cross daily I would not be worthy to be His disciple. I wish he had told me about the principle of slavery—that we are slaves to whatever we offer ourselves to. I wish he had told me, plain and simple, that it is so much easier to totally and completely refuse masturbation—that it is not even an option for a Christian—than to attempt to “control it” and “only use it under certain circumstances.” If only he had not used that worn-out phrase “the Bible doesn’t mention it” and instead taught the principles of Scripture. I am not blaming him; my own deceptive heart loved hearing what he

preached, and I am responsible for my own actions. I just wish I would have had a man of God who could have helped me learn to deny and crucify rather than rationalize and justify.”

Another enrollment in The Freedom Course came in right as we were finishing this article. This 17-year-old young man writes:

“Every time I get the urge I can’t resist masturbation...I have tried to fight it for many years, and, although I have had a few temporary victories, I never completely defeated it. I desire to live all of my life for Christ, and this can’t be done until I defeat this fiend. I also want to remain pure for my future wife, and if I continue down this path I know that wish will not become true.”

Masturbation is a doorway to slavery! May God grant this young man freedom in Christ.

May God give us all grace to choose to please the Lord by offering our bodies a living sacrifice rather than pleasing ourselves through masturbation.

Grace,

Mike Cleveland

www.settingcaptivesfree.com

“The Bible is Full of Errors, So Why Do You Trust It?”

As a Christian fundamentalist group you believe the Bible is the Inerrant word of God and this highly prized book of

canonized scripture is your infallible authority and source of truth. (Please correct me if I'm wrong.) Now, with that thought in mind, read what Christian scholars are publicly saying about the sacred canon of biblical scripture, and not just a few. [Link to document called "The Apparent Inerrant Word Of God" included in letter] (Understand, as a Christian Latter-day Saint, I strongly value the Bible too.) Here, you have some serious credibility issues to overcome in making the Bible everything you want and clam it to be. Christian scholars are now reaching the same conclusion about the Bible that faithful Latter-day Saints have known all along and they are finally speaking out. The truth is, the Holy Bible has errors – lots of them! Obviously, God did not intervene and "supernaturally" protect the sacred canon of biblical scripture, as some people erroneously believed.

Our primary focus for understanding these errors in the biblical record is the result of discovering ancient manuscripts, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, that have recently been found in our time. These ancient biblical and historical texts, lost in antiquity, have recently come forth from out of the dust and date back in time to around the Common Era, (CE). All of these early documents predate any of the canonical writings of the New Testament by hundreds of years. There are NO original autographs existing from the New Testament record. All that remains today are generational copies of earlier manuscripts that were handed down throughout the centuries.

So, as I understand the common biblical record, the early Christian Saints should never have been separated or divided from their original apostolic teachings. Nevertheless, through the centuries of time and by a multitude of religious concepts that crept into the early church, this apparent division among the early Christian believers actually happened and today's Christian religious world is deeply divided.

But, whenever the Bible is being presented as authoritative, infallible, or Inerrant, I scratch my head and think to myself

- Hold On - Now wait just a minute! From everything that we know and with the myriads of scientific and archeological evidence, your particular views on biblical authority, inerrancy, and infallibility don't exactly add up with all the facts. Infallible or Inerrant? Well, that's hardly the case, because errors exist in the copied manuscript records! And, as for biblical authority? Just look around the Christian community and you will see a staunch Bible expert standing on nearly every street corner. Only, which one is right?

The common thread running through the biblical Christian community is the canonized Holy Bible and that's where the problem is. So, if the Bible is guilty of doing all that, I would strongly suggest that the highly prized biblical canon is anything but authoritative.

Christian scholars have sufficiently demonstrated that you have reached the wrong conclusion for your erroneous "supernatural" biblical beliefs and who among you can dispute the facts? Anyone attempting to believe such nonsense is going to eventually look like an idiot and that's not good for the image! But, the choice is freely yours to believe whatever you want; although, truth will be truth and error will be error, regardless of the disguise or package it comes in.

Thanks for your letter. Although your comments about the Bible are definitely weighted toward the moderate to liberal perspective of biblical scholarship, I would generally agree with much of what you wrote. Indeed, while I would disagree with some of the specifics in your letter, the general ideas expressed therein are well known to all of us here at Probe.

When conservative Christian theologians speak of "inerrancy," they are speaking with reference ONLY to the original writings—not the copies. Of course there are many variants in the copies we possess, but this can give a misleading picture of biblical reliability. Part of the reason there are so many variants is simply because we have so many copies. And this

wealth of manuscript evidence allows us, through the science of textual criticism, to accurately reconstruct the original documents with a high degree of accuracy. New Testament textual critics maintain that we can reconstruct the original documents to about 95-99% accuracy. The Old Testament is slightly less than this, but it can still be reconstructed with a high degree of accuracy.

It's important to realize how variants are counted. If a particular "error" occurs in 3,000 manuscripts (e.g. a definite article written twice rather than once), this counts as 3,000 errors. Most of these variants are quite insignificant (e.g. spelling differences, a word left out, an extra word inserted, etc.) and can be easily corrected on the basis of many other manuscripts which have the correct reading. None of these variants affects a significant doctrine of Scripture. Discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls actually reinforce the notion that the Masoretic scribes were very faithful copyists. The manuscript evidence for the NT is far, far superior to any other book from the ancient world (e.g. Tacitus, Livy, Pliny, Herodotus, etc.).

Archaeological evidence has repeatedly verified the reliability of the biblical accounts. And no responsible scholar would say otherwise. Although there may still be questions about some issues, archaeology has overwhelmingly served to confirm the Bible, not disconfirm it.

Thus, while I generally agree with what you've written, I certainly don't think your letter gives the whole picture concerning biblical reliability. An excellent, comprehensive resource on this issue (from a conservative Christian standpoint) is *A General Introduction to the Bible: Revised and Expanded Edition* by Norman Geisler and William Nix (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986). This text has numerous chapters and delves into great detail on such issues as the inspiration of the Bible, canonization, transmission of the text, and translation. Conservative scholars have repeatedly responded

to the charges of those who would like to discredit the general reliability of the Bible. I hope you'll give such scholars a chance to offer you another perspective on this crucial issue.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

“I Need Help Figuring Out the Meaning of MY Life”

Jerry Solomon,

I read your essay entitled, [“What’s the Meaning of Life?”](#) and was encouraged. I see that you wrote the piece over five years ago; but of course the content is ageless.

If you have a few minutes, I’d like to share my story with you and perhaps solicit some advice from you.

I’m 43. I became a believer when I was 8. I’ve walked closely with Jesus for most of those years. I have a wife of 22 years and three fantastic teenage children. Vocationally, I’ve been [details edited out]. In addition to many other blessings, God has blessed us financially—so much so that the financial need to work has diminished, leaving me time (and emptiness) to consider “meaning” questions.

I ask God, “What’s next?” but I don’t seem to be getting through at least I don’t understand His answer(s). Most men (including my believing dad) are very uncomfortable talking to me about “meaning” questions. I sense that it’s scary for them to face such crucial issues head on. I’ve read *Purpose Driven*

Life and am re-reading Piper's Desiring God. Purpose Driven Life was good; but it didn't offer me any new perspectives. Piper's book is challenging; but I'm not sure how to "activate" the whole idea of "enjoying God."

I'm taking a month off work to try to figure out what happens next. I would be honored if you would take time to comment or share spiritual insights you (or your staff) might have.

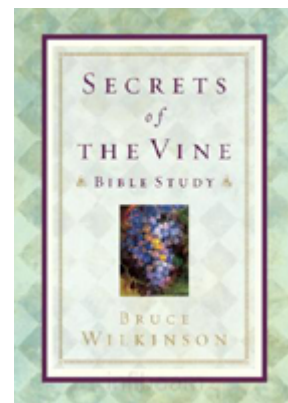
Dear _____,

Thank you for your comments and expression of gratitude upon reading Jerry's article. In a following paragraph to his article we explain that Jerry is no longer with Probe and that within 2 years of leaving Probe for an associate pastor's role in a local church, the Lord took him home after a 6 month battle with pancreatic cancer. I will respond to your query as best I can.

You are correct in your observation that many men are uncomfortable considering questions of meaning. Basically they are afraid of what they might discover and that their life has been focused on the wrong things. Who wants to discover that?! This is especially so for someone like your dad who is late in life with little time to correct his perspective.

You are also correct in your intuition that discovering life's meaning for you has to go beyond reading a book. *Purpose Driven Life* is great for those who have never even considered these things. But for those who have followed Him with some perseverance over many years will find the book a little stale and repetitive. It really is for baby Christians.

I would like to suggest a different book you can read in an hour or so but the application at the end could last several years. The book is Bruce Wilkinson's *Secrets of the Vine*. It's an exposition of John 15 that outlines four stages to a believers life: (1) little fruit, (2) no fruit due to discipline brought on by sin, (3) pruning to produce more fruit, and (4) full abiding. My suspicion is that you are desiring a fully abiding relationship with your Lord, and Wilkinson's description of his own crisis and his solution will be enlightening and empowering to you.



Unfortunately, in my experience, few Christians get to the place where full abiding is where they want to be. It scares them. It is a full relinquishing of ourselves to Him and Him alone. Abiding truly is just being with Him and not necessarily looking for more ways to serve, more things to accomplish. Abiding is getting to the point where we realize that if we simply pursue Jesus, all He wants from us will flow with almost no effort because we are yielded to Him.

This requires a sharpened sense of knowing His will. To do that one needs to spend time with Him, truly know Him. Wilkinson embarked on a journey of journaling his thoughts with the Lord. I am working on developing that skill. It's not easy for me, having grown up with a loving but non-communicative father. I'm still learning how to talk to my heavenly Father as a person and not some kind of heavenly czar.

I have led several groups of men through this book, and some get it and get it big. Most, however, are intrigued, enlightened, but non-committal.

Quite simply, yet frustratingly, the meaning of life is Jesus. "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Ultimately, knowing Him and pursuing Him is the only thing that can bring true

meaning, fulfillment, and joy in this life, no matter what we actually do, day in and day out.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, PhD

Thank you very much for your very thoughtful response. I was very encouraged by your comments and felt like you really understand the struggle. Wow, what a breath of fresh air, that another brother understands. I look forward to getting and reading Bruce Wilkinson's *Secrets of the Vine*. Thank you for taking the time to respond.

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