

# **“What Is the ‘Sin Unto Death’?” [Michael Gleghorn]**

**What is the sin unto death, according to 1 John 5:16-17? [If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.]**

The passage does not tell us what sort of sin leads to death, nor does it tell us what sort of death is in view here (e.g. physical or spiritual).

In my opinion, it seems best to understand the “death” in view here as physical, not spiritual. We actually have examples in the Bible in which believers sinned so grievously that God took their lives (see, for example, Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Corinthians 11:30 [in the context of verses 17-34]).

If your version of the Bible has the indefinite pronoun “a” before sin in these verses, you should know that this has been added by translators and need not be supplied in the translation. In other words, John is not necessarily talking about a particular sin. Rather, he is probably speaking of a category of sins which could (if committed) lead to physical death. This would be due to God’s judgment on the believer’s sin.

One final point. If this understanding is correct, it need not be understood to mean that the believer whose sin leads to physical death is therefore spiritually lost. The judgment would be upon the believer’s life in this world. It would not imply that such a believer also forfeits heaven. The believer so judged by God would still be saved. But he would probably

be like one of those believer's described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:15—"he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." Such a believer is saved, but appears to have suffered the loss of all possible heavenly rewards. If this is correct, then salvation is not at issue here, but rather the loss of rewards that could have been earned through obedience. Of course, salvation itself is by grace through faith, and not by our works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

I hope this helps. This is basically how I would understand the passage in 1 John.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **"Help Me Change From Gay to Straight"**

Hello Sue,

I am from Australia and I read your add about how you can help me to change from being gay to being straight.

Can you help me please?

I'm not sure what you meant about "reading my add" since I don't have any advertisements of any kind, but I have written about homosexuality on [Probe.org](http://Probe.org) and [www.livehope.org](http://www.livehope.org). My understanding about how true and lasting change can occur in people is all about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ,

who starts the process of setting things right when we put our trust and faith in Him and start the hard work of surrendering to Him. Daily. As a new way of life. Then change happens, all kind of change, because the fruit of the new life we receive from God is Christlikeness in us.

Some people who trust in Jesus discover that as they grow spiritually, receiving His great love and obeying the principles in His word the Bible, old wounds are healed, unmet needs are met through community with God's people, and they are led into new ways of seeing life, themselves, other people, and God Himself. They discover that they are changing, and they can finish growing up, which includes changing the way they think about people of the same sex and people of the opposite sex. They can develop attractions for the opposite sex. Or even just one person of the opposite sex.

There are no exercises for this kind of change. It is a result of a new orientation of submitting one's will to Jesus as boss (or Lord) of one's life, following Him and trusting in Him. The change that comes is the same as learning to move beyond self-centeredness to compassion and a desire to love and serve others. Or learning to move beyond anger to forgiveness. Or learning to move beyond fear and anxiety to the peace of trusting that a loving God is in control. These changes are all reflections of emotional and spiritual maturity and God's work inside us to make us like His Son.

Some people who walk in intimacy with Jesus never develop attractions for the opposite sex. There are several reasons for this, but the important thing is that God's intention for our lives is far bigger and far more important than sexual attractions. Nonetheless, when God sets all things right, that includes rightly relating to both our own gender and the opposite sex—whether that process comes close to completion in this life or the next.

So, to answer your question, I would point you to Jesus. Not

to religion—to Jesus Himself, which includes dynamic relationships with His people, those of us who truly know Him and are living in yieldedness and submission to Him. I would also invite you to investigate the free, confidential online support group for those dealing with unwanted homosexuality at Living Hope Ministries, [www.livehope.org](http://www.livehope.org).

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin

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## **“Are There Non-Christian Sources Denying Jesus Lived?”**

I was just reading Michael Gleghorn’s article [Ancient Evidence for Jesus from Non-Christian Sources](#). Are there any non-Christian sources saying Jesus didn’t live? How reliable are they?

**Are there any non-Christian sources agreeing that Jesus did live, but making claims about Him which oppose or contradict what is said in the New Testament?**

Thanks for your letter. Yes, on both counts. But notice that my article is dealing with *ancient* evidence for Jesus. This is the best evidence available, for it is closest in time to the actual life of Jesus. Thus, concerning your first question, the non-Christian sources which say that Jesus didn’t live would all be very late. I’m not sure what the earliest such source is, but such sources would not be considered reliable. Such sources occasionally appear in our day, though this is

very much a minority opinion among scholars. The fact is, the evidence for the life of Jesus is just too good to be competently denied. Those who deny that Jesus ever lived are really taking an extremely implausible (and even irrational) position.

Concerning your second question, there are a number of ancient sources along these lines. Such sources are not as ancient as the New Testament gospels or other New Testament documents (e.g. the letters of Paul, Peter, John, etc.). But such sources do exist. For one thing, some of the sources mentioned in my program would fall under this category. Think of some of the things said about Jesus in the Babylonian Talmud or in Lucian. But there would also be sources like the [Gospels of Thomas](#), Peter, Mary Magdalene, Philip, etc, as well as other such ancient sources. Here it's important to note that such sources are not as old as the New Testament documents, which were written in the first century. These documents typically date to the third and fourth centuries—long after the New Testament was written (and long after the writings of Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, etc.). Also, these documents are typically characterized by a Gnostic theology, which presents an unbiblical view of Jesus. The church fathers (teachers and leaders in the early church) were wise to reject these books from the New Testament canon. Although they claim to be written by people like Mary Magdalene, Philip, Thomas, etc., they were not written by the early Christian disciples who bore these names. For more information on these subjects, please see my article [Redeeming the Da Vinci Code](#) for a much fuller explanation.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

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# “Did the Church Create the Bible?”

**What would you say to a Catholic person who said “the church created the Bible”?**

In a very real sense, the person who says this is basically correct. But some qualifications are also needed.

First, the church did not create the Old Testament. These books preceded the church by quite a bit (assuming the church began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2).

Second, it's important to remember that the New Testament books (like those of the Old Testament) are both a divine and human creation. The books were authored by human beings, but their writings were superintended by the Holy Spirit (this is the doctrine of [inspiration](#)).

Third, it's important to remember that Protestants and Roman Catholics have a slightly different [canon](#) of Scripture. That is, Catholics include some books (e.g. the [Apocrypha](#)) which Protestants do not include in the canon of Scripture (i.e. authoritative, divinely inspired books).

However, once we make these qualifications, it is evident (I think) that the New Testament was written (and brought into its present canonical form) by the church. These writings weren't written by non-Christians after all, but by believers—who are part of the church. The same would go for the process of canonization. Of course, God was providentially guiding those leaders who ultimately decided which books should (and should not) be part of the New Testament. But the fact remains that this was also a decision of the church.

As a “bare bones” statement, then, I think the person who says this is essentially correct.

Shalom in Christ,  
Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Are the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha Writings Part of the Apocrypha? Why Aren't They Scripture?”**

**I can't find any solid information on the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha [Ed. note: (Greek, “falsely attributed”) Jewish writings of the period between the Old and New Testament, which were attributed to authors who did not actually write them] and why these books are not considered inspired scripture. I know they are considered false writings, but why? Are the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the Old Testament Apocrypha considered the same thing? Could the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha be just a branch of the Old Testament Apocrypha? And therefore the same principles are applied to the Pseudepigrapha and the Apocrypha about why they are not considered scripture?**

The books that you are referring to did not meet the standards of canonization. I suggest you read *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible* by Norman Geisler and William Nix. The [Apocrypha](#) is a different set of works that have traditionally been handed down along with the Old Testament by some Christians but not

Jews. It is recognized as canonical by the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox church, but not Protestants who acknowledge its importance as intertestamental literature and even consider it helpful to read for spiritual development, but do not accord it the same status as Scripture. There are multiple theological and historical problems with these books. And their authorship remains unknown.

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese

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## **“What Is the Prevailing Evolutionary Theory for the Origin of the Universe?”**

**What is the prevailing evolutionary theory for the origin of the universe? I would also like to know your views on the “Gap Theory.”**

The prevailing theory for the origin of the universe is the Big Bang Theory which suggests that the universe began as a particle that was infinitely dense and occupied no space. This particle came into existence essentially from nothing (actually a quantum fluctuation from nothing to something), and immediately exploded, thus beginning a process that led to the universe as we see it today. This happened approximately 12-13 billion years ago.

Astronomers, cosmologists, and astrophysicists alike will



admit they have a problem accounting for the origin of the initial particle. How does something come from nothing? The quantum fluctuation idea is a dead end since quantum physics is a property of the current universe. If there was no universe prior to the existence of the particle, how do we know that a quantum fluctuation was even possible? You must have a universe first!

In addition, the mechanistic process following the explosion that led to our current universe as we see it has difficulty explaining the many finely tuned characteristics of this universe seemingly designed for life with no purpose or design. How does a mechanistic process accomplish this? [Some Christians](#) believe that God ordered the initial particle in such a way to allow these finely tuned parameters to arise by His design by a seemingly mechanistic but preordained process. However, others like me see these properties requiring God's intimate involvement and perhaps even intervention. The other view seems more deistic (a distant God who wound up the universe initially and then left it alone) than theistic. It also seems difficult to reconcile Romans 1:20 where we are told we are without excuse of God's existence by simply observing what has been made. If it all looks like a mechanistic process, how are we without excuse?

The gap theory has been largely rejected by evangelical scholars since it requires a reading of Genesis 1:1-1:2 that seems to be ruled out by the grammatical construction of the sentence. The Gap Theory usually suggests that the earth BECAME formless and void, suggesting that God's original creation was marred (perhaps by the fall of Satan) and then God recreated it in six literal days. However, while the verb *was* is sometime translated as *became*, the Hebrew grammar of the sentence does not allow it in this case. Therefore the traditional translation that the earth WAS formless and void is preferred.

Hope this helps.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin, PhD

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## **“How Do I Get Over False Guilt About Watching Profanity on TV?”**

I had/have a conviction to not listen to TV profanity. So I bought a TV Guardian (a device which blocks out all of TV profanity). I was so happy, problem solved. However, I still sense a somewhat deep sense of guilt. I believe I am struggling with false guilt, because I am feeling guilty for doing something (using a TV Guardian) which I know to be godly and just. Is this a fair assessment? If so, how do I cure false guilt?

I applaud your desire not to expose yourself to profane language. That's commendable. Further, you took steps to ensure. That desire is for holiness and let me affirm that.

The fact that you feel guilty about it is difficult for me to assess without knowing precisely what it is you feel guilty about, or why. Answering these questions will help you determine whether your guilt is in fact false guilt, as you put it, or just good old fashioned conviction from the Holy Spirit.

Probe's president Kerby Anderson wrote an article on [False Guilt](#) which explores these very issues and can help you answer just such questions. Check it out. I pray it will bless you. I hope this is helpful ☐

Praying for you,

Paul Rutherford

**Thank you. Somebody else pointed out to me that maybe the problem is that I am remembering a little of the profanity. You see, I used to watch some of the same shows with no filter. God convicted me so I bought a TV Guardian. However, since I had already watched the shows without the Guardian I can still remember some of the curse words. What should I do?**

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

Allow me to “jump in” here and try to help you a bit. I think Paul did a good job of counseling you.

After reading your follow up to his response, I sense an uneasy pattern may be at work in you: a need to perform holiness for God and not mess up. This could be the root of the problem you are having—not understanding very fully the [grace](#) God offers.

Rather than focus on the curse words that you recall (or that fact that you recall them, which is no surprise, since God’s forgiveness does not mean He gives us a lobotomy), it would be more fruitful to concentrate on the enabling of God’s Holy Spirit for any believer to experience and live out holiness in our lives. It’s a subtle shift to talk about, but profoundly different in effect.

How might this look in your situation? Try applying some biblical principles to your thinking:

- *Make your mind up to fill it (your mind) with Scripture—the holy words of life. Read Scripture daily like your life depends on it (your spiritual life and health DO depend on it), but it’s not to get favor with God. That’s already yours if you put your faith in Him—Jesus took care of our relationship with His Father.*

- John 15:3-5 says, "Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." So, if you have believed in Jesus to forgive your sin and keep you from everlasting punishment that we all deserve, you are clean. He said so. Act like you believe it and move on.

- Abide in Christ (live, breathe, think about, aim your life at and depend on Him for everything). This doesn't mean you lay down and expect Him to do your living out of faith for you, but it means you have no confidence in yourself to either care about sin or defeat it. It's He who works in you to make you holy. (Notice those two verses linked to above are back-to-back in the same thought. You cooperate with God's work in your life by letting Him work and doing your part.) Your job is to let him, to yield, to put to death (stop feeding) the flesh. Getting TV Guardian seems like a great step—but it's Christ who has to work out the memories, etc. for believers.

- Speaking of memories of images (sexual or otherwise), curses / cuss words, violence, ungodly things, here is something that is effective for me: give them to God to bury them, to take them off your mental screen or from your mental "hearing." I base this on the verse: "We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). This applies a general principle to our own rebellious, fleshly thoughts that have gotten corrupted by things like bad language.

- Most of all, don't worry about it. "Don't worry about

*anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.” (Philippians 4:6, NLT)*

You seem to be obsessed with “doing it right” and “not messing up” (as I would put it). This is not trust, so it’s not God-centered or God-honoring—and it won’t work. Ephesians 1 says, “It was for freedom that Christ set you free.” You neither have to live in bondage to sin (like cursing) OR to having to keep the Law (keeping from cursing or thinking about those words). You’re free to rise above all of that by living a genuinely Spirit-led holy life—believe it and learn to live it. It takes practice and you *will* fail! Go back to God, ask forgiveness for this particular failure (you’ve already been saved from the penalty of sin if you believe Him for that) and start all over.

Ultimately, if you cannot get past this any other way, are you willing to give up the movies—even if your TV Guardian goes unused and you miss those fave movies? Giving them up could, for you, be part of putting the deeds of the flesh to death and picking up your cross to follow Him (“Then, calling the crowd to join His disciples, He said, ‘If any of you wants to be My follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow Me.’” —Mark 8:34)

Believe me as one who’s been asked to give up various things enough times in my 35 years of walking with Christ, when the Lord leads you to give something up, it’s well worth it.

I hope this provides some guidance. It goes deep. Read it and the Scripture passages many times, praying that the Lord will make things clear to you and apply them with others holding you accountable—share with mature Christians, your pastor, etc.

Praying with Paul for you, \_\_\_\_\_. Thanks for writing.

Byron Barlowe

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# **“Are Aliens Really Evil Angels? Why Did They Take the Book of Enoch Out of the Bible?”**

I was just wondering if so-called aliens are evil angels from the old times, or where do they fit into God's plans. I already know they have been here since the beginning of time and they are behind this new world order supporting the devil. I figured out that myself and the people are working for them and cover up lots of stuff in exchange for weapons and greed but in the end they will be the fools. Just wondering if I'm right and why did they take the Book of Enoch out of the Bible—what else are they hiding? They're trying to fool people into thinking they're God, but they hold a more insidious agenda. People need to know the truth! Am I right or wrong?

Thanks for writing to Probe.

1. We suggest that aliens actually do not exist, but demons (evil angels) successfully role-play aliens to deceive people. Satan has been a deceiver since he first approached Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the evil angels who rebelled along with him have been deceiving people ever since.

We have a couple of articles on aliens you may find helpful to shape your understanding on aliens from a biblical perspective:

## [UFOs and Alien Beings: A Christian Response](#)

### [Are We Alone in the Universe? A Biblical View of Aliens](#)

2. The Book of Enoch was never IN the Bible, so it was never taken out. One of our theologians answered a question about that book here: [“What Can We Know About Enoch?”](#)

Since you are curious about what is true (good for you!), let me encourage you to read this short answer to the question, [“How did the Church Recognize Which Books Were Inspired by God?”](#).

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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## **“Should We Give Our Tithes Directly to the Pastor?”**

A lady in our church said that God said to give all of our tithes and offerings to the pastor for him personally. He gets a weekly salary and works outside the church. Something did not feel right to give my tithes directly to a man and not to God's house per se. Am I wrong to feel not right in my spirit?

It's a bit difficult to know precisely what to say in a situation like this, since I am not familiar with all the details. However, you may be right to feel some discomfort in your spirit about this. Suffice it to say that while the laborer is worthy of his wages (Luke 10:7), there should also

be some structure for accountability. (Titus 1:7 indicates that those in church leadership are stewards over God's flock, and 1 Cor. 4:2 requires that stewards be found faithful.) It seems to me that there should be a group of leaders in the church who wisely and prayerfully make decisions regarding the use and allocation of church finances. This is what the church seems to have already done by providing a weekly salary to the minister for his services. At any rate, it seems to me that money should be given to the church and then wisely distributed by a group of leaders in the church. From the money given to the church, then, the pastor's salary would be paid, other church workers might be paid, missionaries might be supported, the poor might be helped, etc. This, it seems to me, is the wisest and safest way to handle the church's resources. So without knowing all of the details in this particular case, I am inclined to agree with your assessment of the situation.

Shalom,  
Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Does God Hear African Prayers?”**

I live in Nairobi, Kenya, and I have several questions about prayer. 1) Why does it take such a long time to answer our prayers? I have been asking God to give me sponsors to go to Bible College and I have been fasting all the time. 2) Why do many, many people in Africa suffer so much more than white people? Does God hear African prayers?



You ask some very important (and very profound) questions. As I think about your questions, they seem to fall into two categories: 1. Questions concerning petitionary prayer (i.e. making requests of God, or asking Him for something) and 2. Questions concerning the problem of evil and suffering.

Concerning prayer, I can safely begin by saying, Yes, God does hear the prayers of Africans. But if this is true, you want to know why it takes God so long to answer your requests. Now as I'm sure you already realize, I really cannot answer this question—for God has not told me why He is waiting to answer your request. However, there are a number of things that can be said about why (in general) God may take a long time to answer a person's request. First, of course, the answer may simply be "No." Just as we wouldn't give our children everything they asked for, so also God doesn't give His children everything they ask for. Of course, if His answer to a particular request is "No," then we can (and must) trust that He has very good, loving, and wise reasons for answering in this way.

Second, God's answer might be "Yes; but you need to wait." This can be hard to hear, of course. But again, my children sometimes ask me for something (like a snack) to which my answer is, "Yes; you can have a snack. But not right now. You need to wait until after dinner." In the same way, God sometimes has us wait a while before giving us what we have asked for. In my own case, I prayed that God would provide a particular kind of woman to be my wife. I prayed nearly every day for ten years before He finally granted my request. So sometimes, God does intend to grant our request, but he first requires that we wait a while. We can learn a lot of important spiritual lessons about trusting God, being patient, persevering in prayer, and so forth, as we wait upon the Lord. I'm not saying this is easy. But God wants to develop us into certain sorts of people. And one of the ways He does this is by having us wait a while before He grants our request. After

all, for many of us, if God granted our requests immediately, we wouldn't appreciate what He has given us nearly so much. By having us patiently and prayerfully wait upon Him for a time, before granting our requests, we often come to appreciate much more the blessings God has given us.

Third, God might be willing to grant a particular request immediately, but does not do so because we are harboring unconfessed sin in our hearts. We all struggle with sin in many ways. If we don't confess our sins, but continue to pursue that which the Lord hates, He may think it better not to grant us our request.

There are other reasons why God might not immediately grant a request as well. Some of these you can find in my article ["Problems and Promises of Petitionary Prayer."](#) I think you would find this article helpful, especially the last two sections on "Qualifying Christ's Promises."

Having said all of this, however, I want to reiterate that I do NOT personally know why God has not yet granted your request. Whatever the reason, we all need to learn to trust in the wisdom, love, and goodness of God toward us in Christ, whether He grants our requests quickly, slowly, or not at all. He has very good reasons for doing things as He does and we need to learn to trust Him.

Now concerning your second question, why so many people in Africa suffer so much more than white people, I must (once again) honestly confess that I do not know. This would be yet another instance of the problem of evil and suffering in the world. How can we reconcile the existence of an all-good, all-loving, all-powerful God (like Christians believe in) with all the evil and suffering in the world?

Now I want to be clear, Christian philosophers and theologians have proposed very good answers to questions such as these. But these answers essentially aim to show that God can have

very good, morally sufficient reasons, for allowing the evil and suffering that He does—even if we have no idea what those reasons are. As you can see, therefore, these answers (even if they're successful) will not be able to explicitly tell you why so many people in Africa suffer so much. Unless God tells us the answer to such a question, we simply do not know. And it would be dishonest for me to tell you otherwise.

Having said this, however, I do like what the Christian philosopher William Lane Craig has to say about such matters. He, along with many others, points out that there is a very strong statistical correlation between the amount of suffering in a particular area of the world and the number of people coming to Christ for salvation. That is, he observes that in those places where there is a lot of suffering, there are often a lot of people coming to Christ for salvation. But in that case, one of the very good reasons that God might have for allowing suffering and evil, is that it ends up being a very effective means of moving men and women to give their lives to Christ that they might be saved. And this, it is crucially important to note, ends up insuring THEIR ETERNAL WELL-BEING.

In this respect, it's important to bear in mind that this life is not all there is. People will continue to exist after they die physically either in fellowship and communion with God in heaven, or eternally deprived of such fellowship and communion in hell. If God knows that more people will freely repent of their sins and turn to Christ for salvation if He allows suffering to enter their lives, then (somewhat ironically) the most loving thing He can do is allow suffering to enter these peoples lives. For by doing so, God knows they will repent, trust in Christ for salvation, and be saved. And this means they will have all eternity to enjoy God, without any pain or suffering. If you would like to read more on the problem of evil, here are some links to articles you might find helpful: 1. [The Problem of Evil](#), 2. [Christ and the Human Condition](#), and

3. [The Value of Suffering](#). My colleague Sue Bohlin has also provided her speaking notes for a message [When God Says No: Reasons For Unanswered Prayer](#) at Bible.org.

At any rate, a great deal more could be said about the questions you have raised, \_\_\_\_\_. For the questions you have raised are very profound questions. But hopefully, this brief answer will give you some help and comfort as you continue to wrestle with these issues. As I have said, I really cannot specifically answer your questions. These are questions which no one knows the answer to but God—and it's very important to honestly say so. However, the Christian tradition does offer genuine wisdom in thinking through questions of this sort. And I've tried to share a bit of that with you in this letter.

Michael Gleghorn

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