

“Did Jesus Preach to the Cherokee Indians?”

Dear Sue,

I heard in a newspaper article a while ago that some time in his life Jesus travelled on a Phoenician sailing vessel to North America and ministered to the Cherokee Indians there. The article said that there was evidence of this because the Cherokee believe in a single, all-powerful God, which is something unusual in Native American religions; that the Cherokee believe many of the same things from the Gospels; and that they had drawings of a man with a beard (who looked like the stereotypical image of Jesus) in their art and that this was strange because no men in the tribe grew beards.

I really don't know if all this is true or not, it seems to be but I know that the newspaper I read this from is not a reliable source and is known for making phony stories to get sales, but I can't help but wonder if this one is true. Have you ever heard anything about this?

You know what you said about the newspaper being known for making up phony stories to get sales? There's your answer. <smile> I'm sure the article gave no documentation for their “story” (written from the perspective of the “Well, it COULD have happened!!” school of “journalism”). That's because there's nothing to it. . . they just stole some ideas from Mormon claims that Jesus came to North America. There is no New World archeology that supports such a claim.

Furthermore, Greek culture had absorbed the Phoenician civilization before Jesus was even born. Alexander the Greek took the Phoenician city of Tyre around 332 B.C. and it was all downhill from there, so the Lord Jesus couldn't have taken a Phoenician sailing vessel anywhere.

It's not surprising that native North American spirituality included the concept of one God—ever hear of the term “the Great Spirit”? Don Richardson's book *The Peace Child* shows that cultures and peoples all over the world are aware of biblical truth that has been handed down since the time of Noah and the tower of Babel when civilizations really began migrating all over the world.

If I were you, I'd stay away from the tabloids.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Is There a Second Chance to Believe After Death?”

Hi there Jim. We've spoken before and I found it quite helpful. Can I ask you a question on divine judgment? What about those who would come before God and who really weren't HONESTLY sure about it all and didn't become a Christian in life? When they stood in front of Him and God knew how they felt through life...would that be fair to send them to hell? Obviously they would have a sudden change of heart, right? Thanks, Jim.

If I understand you correctly, you are wondering if a person who is skeptical of the claims of Christ throughout life, didn't CLEARLY understand the gospel but you imply if they had, they would have placed their faith in Christ. And then you wonder if once dead and seeing that His claims were genuine, God would be unfair in sending that person to hell.

If I am not clear on your meaning here, please let me know.

First of all, the Bible says that "it is appointed unto man ONCE to die and afterwards comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27)." This seems to rule out any idea of a second chance, and the concept of reincarnation as well.

Furthermore, we are told in John 16:8-11 that the Holy Spirit is constantly convicting the world (including your hypothetical person) of "sin, righteousness, and judgment." What this means is that *no one* is left without an opportunity to respond to this prompting of the Spirit, repent, and place their faith in Christ.

And Romans 1:18-20 Paul tells us that God's **wrath** has been revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness (as we see above in the John passage), and "because that which is **known** about God is **evident within** them. . . For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been **clearly seen**, being understood through what has been made, so they are **without excuse**."

Luke 17 also gives us some things which bear on your question. Read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (17:19-31). The crux of the story is that both of these men died. The rich man found himself in hell, and was able to see Lazarus (the poor beggar) in heaven (Abraham's Bosom). The rich man is in torment, and now, "knowing" the truth of things, asks if he could be sent back to earth to talk to his five brothers and warn them so they don't join him in hell. (This is analogous to the man in your hypothetical). Look carefully at the Lord's answer. He tells the man it wouldn't do any good. The Lord says they *have* a witness: Moses and the Prophets. The rich man says, yes, but they would *listen* if someone came back from the dead and *told* them!

Jesus responds by saying if they didn't believe/respond to the light they already had (through Moses and the Prophets), they

wouldn't be persuaded even if someone came back from the dead to tell them! In short, the necessary information and guidance to enter the family of God is available to all during their lifetime. And faith must have an object worthy of its trust. Hebrews 11:6 tells us that "Without **faith** it is **impossible** to please God, for he who comes to God must **believe** that He is, and is a rewarder of those who **diligently seek** Him."

Now what would be fair about giving those who "sat" on the fence, ignored the evidence, and failed to **exercise faith** in Christ, and then, when dead, like the rich man, now **knowing** the truth, (no need to exercise faith) asking for another chance?

There are **no unbelievers** in heaven *or* hell. They are now **all** believers. They know the truth. Unfortunately, those who chose not to respond to all of the "signposts" God has given the world (which could be believed if any person desired), they must face the consequences of their "non-actions." It would not be fair of God to include the man you are suggesting along with those who pleased God by exercising their faith in Christ while faith was still the issue!

I hope this answers your question, _____.

Jimmy Williams, Founder
Probe Ministries

**“Why Didn’t God Just Not
Create the People Who**

Wouldn't Believe in Him?"

I have a question about God's omniscience versus the existence of hell. I know the Bible says (and I believe it) that God is good and loving, as well as holy and just. It also says that He is omniscient, knowing the end from the beginning, and knowing from eternity-past the choice that every human being that ever lived/will live will make – either to accept His offer of eternal life, or to reject it.

If both of these statements are true and biblical, my question is this: If God knew (even before creation) that millions of people would make the choice to reject Him (and thus end up in hell by their own choice), why did He simply not create them in the first place? I know this might sound simplistic, but why would He create all of those people who would ultimately reject Him and end up in hell, if He KNEW that would be their final and eternal destination? (A non-Christian friend of mine calls it "a cruel joke.")

This is a tough question. I was tempted to write back and say, "We just don't know," and ultimately that's probably true. "Why" questions are about motives, and unless someone tells us, it's awfully hard to read another person's mind. . . especially God's! But as I thought more about it, I realized that I COULD pass on the observation that our choice is a precious thing to God because choice is the foundation for true love. If God didn't create the people who wouldn't choose Him, then that would be the equivalent of removing the choice.

At any rate, He did, and He knows what He's doing, and I guess we just need to trust Him.

I think we need to see the Lord as reluctantly letting people choose hell instead of gleefully sending them there. He doesn't want ANYONE to perish (2 Peter 3:9), but some insist on it. That's not cruel on His part, it's a way of supporting

our choices.

Nonetheless, the bottom line is that it's a mystery. Non-believers aren't going to trust His heart when they don't trust anything about Him in the first place, are they?

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“My Christian Girlfriend Doesn't Want to Follow My Hindu Faith”

I read Rick Rood's [article on Hinduism](#) with interest; I am faced with a dilemma and was hoping if you could offer me some advice and solace. I am a Hindu and have received a proposal from a Christian girl – AG denomination; (she converted from Hinduism 3 years ago).

Whilst my parents expect her to follow my religion after marriage; I am of the view that she can follow her religion but she has to partake in all my Hindu religious activities; and that we have to have a Hindu marriage. I also respect Christianity and she can go to church etc. with myself accompanying her whenever possible.

She has come back to me saying that all the above will be a sin in Christianity and that she will be punished if she participates in my activities. I have been advised by my priest to participate in her activities where possible. I respect her choice of religion coz for me there is only one god; it's just that we all have our own ways of faith.

I also realize that there are other factors like children to be considered here. I like this girl and will find your advice invaluable.

It would also help if you could provide me the details of people who have been in a similar situation. And at the same time it would also help if you could look into the prospects of taking out a "best practices" manual for lets say hindu/christian; christian/muslim marriages etc. which would provide some sort of a guideline.

Thank you for your kind letter. I do not know which article of Rick's that you read, but if you haven't yet read his article entitled, [Do All Roads Lead to God? The Christian Attitude Toward Non-Christian Religions](#) I would encourage you to do so. I think it will help you better understand your Christian girlfriend's perspective on participating in your Hindu religious activities.

In the Bible, the second book is called Exodus. In Exodus 20:1-6 the Lord gives His people the first two of the Ten Commandments. These are: 1. To have (or worship) no other gods except the Lord, and 2. Not to make, or worship, any idols or images of anything in all creation. As you can probably see, these first two commandments would make it very difficult for your Christian friend to be faithful to her own religious convictions AND participate in Hindu religious activities.

Christians believe that Jesus is the only way to God. In fact, this is what Jesus Himself claimed in John 14:6. Jesus demands our exclusive devotion and allegiance. We are not allowed to worship anyone else but the one true God of the Bible.

Although I cannot tell you what to do about marriage, I do know that (statistically speaking) interfaith marriages are much more difficult and face many more problems than do marriages in which both partners have shared religious beliefs. I would encourage both of you to seriously consider

these difficulties BEFORE you get married. For example, in what religious tradition will your children be raised? What will they be taught about God, what happens after death, etc.?

Finally, if you're interested in learning what the Bible says about how a person can have a personal relationship with God, please visit the following web page: http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=276. This website also has the entire Bible available for you to read and study if you like.

Thanks again for writing.

Wishing you all the best for your future,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“What is a Biblical View of Transgendered People and Hermaphrodites?”

Hello, I would like to know the biblical insight on transgenderism [Definition: appearing as, wishing to be considered as, or having undergone surgery to become a member of the opposite sex] and other sexual defects of the human body. There are lots of issues like hermaphroditism and inter-sexualism [a set of medical conditions where the sex chromosomes, external genitalia, or an internal reproductive system are not considered “standard” for either male or female]. Please try to clear these issues up with sound doctrine.

There are really two issues here: 1) transgendered people and 2) the intersexed (new term) or hermaphrodites (older term).

The first is usually an emotional problem, not really a sexual one. The “transgendered” label reflects a sexual identity confusion and not a true condition. God doesn’t create a person with the genitals of a male and the consciousness and heart of a female. In Genesis 1:26, the Bible says, “And God created man in His image, in His likeness; male and female He created them and it was very good.” In addition, 1 Corinthians 14:33 says that “God is not a God of confusion but of peace,” so deliberately creating someone with self-contradiction appears to go against the very nature of God.

Maleness and femaleness are God’s choice, determined at conception. But growing into one’s masculinity or femininity and *embracing* it can be thwarted by very early events that prevent children from having a clear sense of their gender. Gender identity is a developmental issue, and it starts at birth. All the many, many layers of affirmation and validation of one’s personhood that contribute to self-understanding (of which gender is a part) start getting laid down the moment one is born, and they go on hour by hour, day by day, for years in childhood. No wonder so many people think they were born gay, lesbian, or transgendered! They can’t remember all the way back to birth when the messages they received about who they were, had yet to be delivered. In addition, some people perceive the messages of parents and family differently than what was intended, and those perceptions ARE their reality.

The biblical view is that [God’s intent](#) for every male is to grow into masculinity, and for every female to grow into femininity. When that doesn’t happen, the culture has come up with new labels to describe something new and different: transgendered, transsexual. I believe God isn’t affected by these new labels nor does He have to honor them: He sees the people behind the labels as His precious, broken children. It’s only recently that the culture has tried to suggest that “a woman in a man’s body” and vice versa is a variation of what is normal and right. The biology of sex alone tells us

that homosexuality (under which these other categories of emotional/sexual dysfunction should be put) is not normal. The Bible tells us (Genesis 1:26) that God's intent is heterosexuality, with definite boundaries between men and women in both appearance and behavior. (I can give you more information on this concept if you want.)

I recently attended a national Exodus conference, a gathering of about 900 people who are walking out of homosexuality and those who minister to them. It was interesting to me to see people there who would call themselves transgendered, as well as transsexuals who had had sex-change surgery. They were at the conference because of a growing awareness that they had interfered with God's plan for their lives; God had revealed His intent for their gender at birth. They had been living as the opposite sex in a false self that was tragically far from what God had intended for them, and that explained why the great pains to which they had gone to fix their brokenness didn't bring the peace and relief they thought they would get through assuming a new identity and/or having surgery.

Concerning intersexed people (hermaphrodites), allow me to share what my friend Rev. Mark Chalemin (now serving as Education Director at Coaches Outreach) and I collaborated on to answer this question for someone else:

By definition a hermaphrodite is "a person born with both male and female sex organs." Within this definition there are three labels; true, female pseudo, and male pseudo. The first category is extremely rare with only 350-450 known cases. The second type, and the most common, is female pseudo resulting in 1 of every 14,000 births. The main cause for this is a condition known as Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia. In these cases there is an overproduction of testosterone causing some "masculinized" features in the female. This does not mean that there is any real gender confusion. There is not. As with any female, her chromosome is XX. Any slight mutation, that may accompany is treated

early by corrective surgery. The same situation may occur in baby boys with the same treatment. (There is a movement to stop this surgery, which is being called genital mutilation by some of those who have had it, and allow children's bodies to grow and develop naturally, even if they are different.) It seems that even with ambiguous genitalia, these kids "know" if they are intrinsically male or female.

In either situation, the sexual identity, given by God, may perhaps reveal traits normally associated with the opposite sex. For example, the baby girl may grow up to be naturally more athletic or aggressive than the average woman, but she is very much a woman. Similarly, the baby boy may have a naturally heightened sensitivity and/or affinity towards the arts. Nevertheless, he is still very much a man.

What is God's take in all of this?

God views every individual as He made them. While He did not make clones, he did create males and females with certain unique sexual characteristics. He also intended for males to manifest primarily masculine characteristics, and for females to manifest primarily feminine characteristics, although both sexes reflect aspects of both the masculine and the feminine in varying degrees. Along with those traits, He has provided direction on how we are to relate to one another. There is no prohibition regarding a slightly more "masculine" female or a slightly more "feminine" man. God views them as he does anyone else, with love and delight, and He desires that they experience all the freedom all He designed them to have, within the boundaries of the sexual identity God gave to them. The fact that some individuals are born with evidence of mutations in their sex-determining genes doesn't change their value in God's eyes any more than someone born with the mutation that causes cystic fibrosis or sickle-cell anemia.

You asked for sound doctrine; I can only respond with the wise

and loving boundaries that God has established for sex (which is usually the issue here, right?). All sexual behavior is to be contained within marriage (see the many condemnations of fornication). Men are to act and appear as men, and women are to act and appear as women (Deuteronomy 22:5). Even those born with genital ambiguity are expected to submit to His boundaries. I realize this is a very politically incorrect perspective in a sex-saturated culture that declares sexual expression is a right for everyone. But it isn't. God wants every person, regardless of their genital or chromosomal condition, to submit his or her sexuality to Him and to glorify Him in whatever state we find ourselves.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

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I was moved by this email I received from someone who lives with the challenges of intersex every day, and wanted to share it here:

A pastor friend was removed from being a pastor due to the nature of his birth (intersexed) in having both male and female parts, but condition helped with surgery, now married with children.

I am at the foundational level of intersexed in being an XXY male, was 53 before learning of my condition, but had gone through the change of life and also excessive breast tissue for a male.

I am always offended when we as intersexed people are spoken of in the same breath with homosexuals or added to their agenda when those of us who follow Jesus are as much opposed to the gay lifestyle as any other who will not compromise God's Word to validate sin or lust. I also believe that a true

Eunuch is one who is unmarried and celibate which is only for those with the gift to remain that way.

To this day I have never heard a sermon or teaching regarding hermaphrodites in the church—covered by the same grace but forced into the basement due to ignorance and an imposed shame for being “so born from our mother’s womb,” something we had no choice about, unlike those acting on their homosexual feelings or those with a mental condition rather than a genetic defect which is temporary.

Your article about “transgendered” was interesting but I am more concerned about attitudes we encounter for being who we are which to me is just unique. Scars today only say that healing happened and no more open wounds. . . Just as Jesus is proud of His scars that say healing happened.

To me there is just the Natural man, Spiritual man and the carnal Christian, only three kinds of people on the planet with a variety of physical and mental differences. But attitudes we encounter as intersexed people would lead folks to think maybe there is an additional “type” who doesn’t fit any mold or classification or addressed in scripture. But again the only problem I see is attitudes springing from ignorance; one can not love God without loving all the people of God, yet the subject is rarely if ever addressed completely to make us at least feel as if we fully belong among other people more normal than we are and that we are not freaks. The real us is spirit!

I also received this email:

Hi Sue,

Just read your blog on transgendered issues. Agree wholeheartedly. There is a third category that appears as XY = Female. This occurs due to a hormone receptor deformity that

renders the fetus insensitive to androgen hormones. The degree of sexual formation differs between females with vagina and partially formed males—though not hermaphrodite. This category is considered Partial Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (PAIS) and Complete Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (CAIS). To your point, these children are fully female (perhaps extremely so) and there is no confusion regarding their design. Genetically, they test as XY, but physiologically they are female from birth. I should note that they are all sterile and many require a Y-V vaginoplasty to create a vaginal opening and open the musculature for the vagina itself. They also require hormone therapy to complete the appearance of a female (breasts), but remain without follicular body hair with the exception of their head. Most often, whatever gonads they possess are removed early due to the tendency to rapidly convert to cancerous tissue.

Again, I think your point is well made. God does things we may not anticipate, and sin corrupts the gene pool, but His design is male and female. We do not have the option to decide we do not like what he created us to be.

Updated June 2016

“Help! My Doubts Scare Me!”

Dear Sue Bohlin,

Hello. My name is _____. I e-mailed Ray earlier too. Anyways, I was reading an e-mail discussion you had with somebody, who didn't believe in God. You said something in it about how it's not an intellect issue, but a heart issue. This is hard for me to accept. I'm ashamed admitting this, but oh gosh its hard for me to admit. Maybe I won't. I could say that

I don't believe in God, but that just sounds way too harsh. Have you heard of anybody who was a Christian, but then they began to have doubts and became agnostic? That's how I feel. I asked Jesus into my heart when I was younger (I'm 18 now), but for a long time I've just been so skeptical. I guess I'm not a Christian, because a Christian knows that he or she is one, and I don't. I don't know how to express what I've been going through lately. Everyday I think about my doubt and it depresses me. I'm not sure if I'll ever get rid of it and that scares me. I desire to believe in God so much, but it's hard. I have so many questions. I wonder why God doesn't show himself to me so I know for sure that He is there. I don't know. Maybe He has but it's just not enough. Maybe I don't have enough faith.

Another thing that really doesn't help me is some of the stuff that I have read on the internet. Different books that I've read about have caused me to have even more doubt. Have you heard of *The Bible Unearthed...*, or *The Jesus Puzzle...*? I haven't read any of them, but read reviews. Anyways, the second one I think denies that Jesus was a historical person. That really bothers me. Earlier today I was reading something on the web where this person was being critical of Lee Strobel (who wrote *The Case for Christ*). I really like that book (not done with it yet), but after what I read on the internet about it, I wonder if it really shows that Jesus was a historical person. I don't know. Maybe I just let other people's conflicting views on Christianity get to me too much, but after reading these things, I start to wonder if maybe they are correct on what they are arguing.

Anyways, to me, my problem doesn't seem to be a heart issue because I really would like to believe in God. I desire to believe in Him and live for Him, but it's hard. Is there something that I lack? Do I just not have enough faith? I don't know, maybe I don't. Well I think I've made this long enough. If there's any advice you could give me I would

appreciate it. Maybe you could pray for me. Thanks a lot.

I know you don't know me, but I REALLY wish I could reach through this computer screen and put my arms around you and give you a big hug and tell you IT'S GOING TO BE OK!!!!!! It is so OK to have doubts, to wonder about where you stand spiritually, because, at 18, you are at the point you need to be—deciding for yourself what you should keep and what you should jettison of what you have been taught. You are an adult now but you probably don't feel that you have enough information to make an informed, committed adult choice about something as important as eternal destiny and one's relationship with God!

Good news—lots of other people are also in your shoes. But they don't ask for help, and bless you, you did, and there IS help for you!! There are good answers, and you'll be stronger and more confident for having voiced your doubts and questions, once you're on the other side of this spiritual crisis. It's OK, _____. . . .God is walking through it with you.

I guess I'm not a Christian, because a Christian knows that he or she is one, and I don't.

Well, no, actually that's not true. Many Christians have assurance that we are Christians, and many Christians fervently *hope* they are but they're not sure. That's an important issue all by itself: can we *know* we're saved and going to heaven? Can we lose our salvation? Our founder and first president, Jimmy Williams, addressed this issue in one of [his e-mails](#).

I don't know how to express what I've been going through lately. Everyday I think about my doubt and it depresses me. I'm not sure if I'll ever get rid of it and that scares me.

I wish you could see God's heart as He watches you wrestle with your doubts and fears. He loves you so much (man, I feel

like Monica on *Touched by an Angel* here!) and is very tender toward you as you experience these strong and scary emotions. I understand your fear that you'll never get rid of the doubt. But doubt is like darkness—you don't overcome it by pushing it away, you make it go away by bringing in light. As you seek light and truth and to know what is really true and real, God will show you the light. I am so grateful that you came to us at Probe instead of some New Age "all religions are the same" website!

I desire to believe in God so much, but it's hard. I have so many questions. I wonder why God doesn't show himself to me so I know for sure that He is there. I don't know. Maybe He has but it's just not enough. Maybe I don't have enough faith.

What's important isn't the amount or strength of our faith, but the *object* of our faith. God is strong enough to handle your doubts and to show you, in ways so intimate you will know it's HIM, that He is real and He loves you very much.

Another thing that really doesn't help me is some of the stuff that i have read on the internet. Different books that I've read about have caused me to have even more doubt. Have you heard of The Bible Unearthed..., or The Jesus Puzzle...? I haven't read any of them, but read reviews. Anyways, the second one I think denies that Jesus was a historical person. That really bothers me.

With good reason. Some of the best Christian apologetics books started out with the author's intention to disprove Christianity, and the facts overwhelmed the skeptics into belief. The entire world was affected by the life of Jesus Christ, in one way or another, but He didn't exist? Now THAT takes a lot of faith!

Earlier today I was reading something on the web where this person was being critical of Lee Strobel (who wrote The Case

for Christ). *I really like that book (not done with it yet), but after what I read on the internet about it, I wonder if it really shows that Jesus was a historical person.*

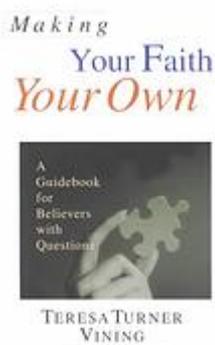
Did you know Lee Strobel started out as an atheist? I'm glad you're reading it; it was a wise choice. So is his second book, *The Case for Faith*. I found this statement from him in an interview online: "I have found that the testimony of history points compellingly toward Jesus Christ having returned from the dead in the ultimate authentication of His claim to be God. To me faith in Jesus is not blind or irrational. I have so much independent evidence that the New Testament writings are reliable that I would be swimming upstream against the evidence if I were to follow the teachings of the Koran or the Book of Mormon. The more I subject the New Testament to analysis, the more I pepper it with questions, the more I walk away utterly convinced of its trustworthiness."

I don't know. Maybe I just let other people's conflicting views on Christianity get to me too much, but after reading these things, I start to wonder if maybe they are correct on what they are arguing.

Just about every truth, especially those of eternal importance, will be countered with something counterfeit, because we're in a very real battle for our minds and souls. It's unfortunate that the counter-arguments can *appear* so compelling, but the issue is ultimate truth. Right now, you're on the right track in seeking truth and desiring to sort through the clamoring voices that attack it.

Anyways, to me, my problem doesn't seem to be a heart issue because I really would like to believe in God. I desire to believe in Him and live for Him, but its hard. Is there something that I lack? Do I just not have enough faith? I don't know, maybe I don't.

It's been said that the Christian life isn't hard, it's IMPOSSIBLE. You can't live for God in your own strength—not for any length of time, anyway, without burning out and getting majorly discouraged. The secret is to allow Jesus to live His life through you by yielding to Him. That, by the way, is one of the things that sets Christianity apart from every other religion: God inside us, offering to live His life through us, without any loss of our own individuality. But right now, the big issue is what to do with your head/heart conflict. Fortunately, there is a PERFECT book that I believe will make all the difference in the world to you.



It's called [*Making Your Faith Your Own: A Guidebook for Believers With Questions*](#) by Teresa Vining. I was privileged to read Teresa's manuscript and LOVED her book. One of its strengths is that she was in the exact place you are now, and she takes you through the questions AND the answers, and suggests you keep a journal as you work through the book so you can decide what you believe and commit to, and what you're not willing to. It is a terrific book on apologetics, and she is very respectful of the person with questions and doubts. I think you will love this book too.

Well I think I've made this long enough. If there's any advice you could give me I would appreciate it. Maybe you could pray for me.

I'd like to pray for you right now!

Father, I lift up _____ to You and I thank You for her intellect and her honesty in facing her doubts and questions. Thank You that You are not in the least bit troubled by them because You know You are real and true and able to take her through this time to a point where she will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that YOU ARE. I ask You to send her little intimate glimpses of You and open her eyes so she'll know it's

You saying "Hi." I ask that You give her a peace when she's pursuing truth and give her an uncomfortable restlessness when she's moving toward the darkness and deception that would seek to draw her away from You. Lord, I thank You for Your hand on _____'s life and on her heart and on her mind, and by faith I thank You for taking her to the place where she will joyfully serve You with all three. Lord, make her feel loved and protected and cherished by You.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Hope this helps, dear one!

Sue

"Are Pastors Bound to Marry Anyone Who Asks?"

As an ordained Baptist pastor, my question is this: Am I bound by the Bible to marry anyone who asks me to? If a couple comes to me to ask me to marry them, and they tell me they are not saved, but want to get married anyway, should I? If they are living together, am I supposed to marry them just the same? I am confused by what other pastors have told me, and have read scripture, but I still need some advice outside that of my denomination.

Thank you for your letter. As far as I'm aware, you are not biblically bound to marry anyone who asks you to. There are probably other pastors in your immediate area who would be willing to marry such people. If you really feel uncomfortable about it, you could probably refer such people to these other

pastors.

However, another Probe staff member made some really good points about this issue. This person's previous pastor, who had a genuine heart for God and for people, would usually marry unbelievers. His reasoning was as follows:

1. Once married, such people would no longer be living in sin.
2. When they had kids and looked for a church, they'd possibly come back to his.
3. It gave him a chance to share the gospel with them.

Also, if you require such couples to go through pre-marital counseling, it would give you extensive time with them to impart biblical principles about marriage and family.

Finally, marriage is a God-ordained institution for all people, not just believers. We want people to understand that God takes marriage very seriously and that He will hold them accountable for violating their marriage vows. We also want to be available to those who are struggling with marriage difficulties and contemplating divorce. Ultimately, however, people must bear a personal responsibility before God for what they do (or don't do) with their marriages.

Thus, I personally do not believe that it would be morally wrong for you to marry such people (generally speaking, at least. I suppose there might always be exceptions). However, if you don't feel comfortable before God, I would simply refer the people to another local pastor. You're not morally obligated to marry them either.

Hope this helps a bit.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“What is the Spiritual Gift of Discernment?”

I was reading some of Probe’s responses to e-mails and came across a message which touched on discernment as a spiritual gift ([“Do You Know Why My Dreams Come True?”](#)). Over the years I have noticed that I often get what I classify as a “gut reaction” to people, particularly in Christian settings. I seem to detect, almost immediately, whether a person is sincere or a phony. Amazingly, I am almost always correct in my initial reaction, though it sometimes takes years before that reaction is confirmed. However, rather than attribute such feelings to the Holy Spirit, I have always seen them as a prideful or fleshly response to some subconscious cue I get from the other person’s behavior. Could you elaborate on discernment as a spiritual gift? What exactly is it, how does it work and what is its purpose? And, most importantly, how can one determine whether they, in fact, have such a gift? Scripture references would be helpful.

I’m delighted to hear from you! I thank the Lord every time I hear a believer recognizes they have the gift of discernment because the body of Christ desperately needs this “early warning system.” Unfortunately, it’s been my experience that many people dismiss any spiritual gifts they can’t understand or grasp naturalistically—in other words, that are so supernatural in origin and manifestation they can’t be explained any other way. So we lose out BIG when they are not encouraged or exercised.

The gift of discernment (1 Cor. 12:10) is a supernatural ability to distinguish between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, between holiness and evil.

Just as counterfeit money experts can quickly distinguish phony money from the real thing, those with the gift of discernment can distinguish holy and unholy spirits and discern truth from lies. A person with this gift can spot a phony before others do. It's been my experience that they can also tell when someone is lying. When you ask them, "But how do you KNOW?" they just shrug and say, "I just know. I don't know how I know, it's just there in my spirit." Proof that it's the Holy Spirit's empowering is given when they are continuously validated in their assessment.

This is NOT the same thing as a "psychic ability." Deut. 18:10-14 sternly forbids any involvement with spiritism. Only believers in Jesus Christ have this supernatural ability from the Holy Spirit.

1 Tim. 4:1 says that in latter days, deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons will come, so the important role of the gift of discernment is to identify those spirits and doctrines.

A discerning spirit tests the spirits with this rule of scripture:

"By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God."
(1 John 4:2,3)

Leslie B. Flynn writes in his book *19 Gifts of the Spirit*, "Any relegating of Jesus Christ to an inferior spot less than the incarnate Son of God, the crucified and resurrected Savior, means that spirit is not of God."

This is helpful to know when we are analyzing and evaluating things we hear and see in the spiritual domain (for example, when watching Oprah's New Age friends on her show). But just as important, though, is the exercise of this gift in our everyday lives. Those who have the gift of discernment have

told me it's like an internal alarm bell going off. Some examples:

- Our church used to be located on a busy street where panhandlers often came by with a sob story about needing cash for their babies in the hospital or some other pretense. One of the people who worked in the office had the gift of discernment and, after spending just a couple of moments talking to these people, she could tell which ones really needed help and which ones were looking for money for booze. (If they were truly in need, there really would be a baby in the hospital, for example.)

- A friend took her 4-year-old son to see an art exhibit adjacent to art museum in Corpus Christi, Texas. The moment they entered the exhibits tent, her son stopped dead in his tracks. "Mommy, we can't go in there. This place is bad." Teri sensed the exact same presence of evil. They never saw a single piece of art before turning around and leaving. It turned out to be sponsored by a cult. Both mother and son later realized they have the gift of discernment.

- My husband Ray met a popular evangelical preacher at a dinner, but had a profoundly uncomfortable reaction to the man. (The word "slimeball" kept coming to mind.) There was no apparent reason, but it was a gut response. To be honest, this was before I realized he had the gift of discernment, and I dismissed his reaction as a critical spirit. The man was later removed from his pulpit for his unrepentant adulterous lifestyle.

We have found these questions helpful in determining if one has this gift:

- Do you have an internal alarm that goes off when you encounter something phony or evil?
- Even when you're the only one who senses something wrong, is your "intuition" eventually validated?

- Do you (and others) consider yourself a good judge of character?

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

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“Did Jesus’ Travels to the Far East Impact His Adult Teachings?”

Some people are teaching that Jesus traveled to the Far East and adopted some of what he “learned” into his adult ministry. What he “adopted,” of course, was nothing more than New Age concepts in sheep’s clothing. I need some hard facts and good discussion to answer this teaching.

This teaching has been around for quite a while but no scholar really takes this too seriously. The teachings of Jesus and the Eastern religions are contradictory and not compatible. The eastern pantheistic view of God as merely an impersonal energy or force is very different from what Jesus taught us about God as our Abba, personal creator and Father of His children. The doctrine of salvation is very different between the eastern religions and what Jesus taught. On teachings about eternity, Jesus does not teach anything about reincarnation. So on the very basic fundamentals, Jesus’ teachings are incompatible with Eastern theology. Therefore it is highly unlikely he went and studied under Hindu monks in the east during his teen years.

“Where DID Cain Get His Wife?”

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That’s a long standing question that unfortunately, most commentaries don’t offer much help answering. I assume a literal Adam and Eve as the first humans. Therefore for several generations the family tree has only one trunk. Seth and Cain could only have married daughters of Adam and Eve, their sisters.

That always causes some severe consternation. Francis Collins, an evangelical Christian and the new head of NIH, has written that that solution goes against numerous Old Testament laws. How could the God of the Bible allow for such things? Collins opts for an evolved human race and a figurative Adam and Eve. He also seems to think, though he doesn’t explain, that Cain marrying his sister goes against the plain reading of the text.

The main societal taboo against incest is a practical one since offspring from these unions, even among distant cousins, carry an increased risk of birth defects. This is a well-known result of what geneticists call inbreeding. BUT Adam and Eve were completely without genetic mutation, the source of inbreeding birth defects. Therefore there was no biological risk from sister/brother marriages.

In the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it was still the

practice of marrying within one's family, at least twenty generations after Adam and Eve if you assume no extra generations in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11.

In Genesis 20:12 Abraham tells Abimelech that he was not completely lying when he told Abimelech that Sarah was his sister; "Besides, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother." Sarah was Abraham's half-sister.

When Isaac needed a wife, Abraham tells his servant to go to his country and even his own family to find a suitable wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:4). Genesis 24:15 tells us that Rebekah was the daughter of Bethuel, who is the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother.

Isaac then tells Jacob to seek a wife from the daughters of Laban, Rebekah's brother. (Genesis 28:2). So Jacob married two of his first cousins, Leah and Rachel.

Before the Law of Moses, these kinds of unions were the norm. But over 400 years later, mutations have accumulated in all populations and such marriages are quite risky. Therefore, I think, that is why you read in Leviticus 20:17 that if you marry your sister who is either the daughter of your father or the daughter of your mother (thus including half-siblings) they shall be cut off. So a marriage like Abraham and Sarah's was specifically outlawed in the Law of Moses. I think times have changed and the offspring of these once-normal arrangements are at significant risk.

Also, there still may have been a reticence to marry a brother or sister with whom one grows up. But when you realize that Seth was born when Adam was 130 years old, certainly there were many more children between Cain and Abel, and Seth. Therefore Cain very conceivably could have married a sister who was twenty or thirty years younger than he was, and therefore they did not grow up together, so there wasn't the

same degree of familiarity as with a same-age sibling.

Bottom-line, I find no difficulty either theologically or biologically with Cain and Seth marrying their sisters. Marrying within the family remained the normal practice for over twenty generations.

Respectfully,

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