

“Does God Love Us All Differently?”

Does God love us all differently? I always thought He loves us all equally, but what about Scriptures like “Jacob I have loved, Esau I hated” and how John was the beloved disciple? Does God love some of us more or less than others?

Great question! It would seem that certain verses would indeed support the idea that while God does love everyone (John 3:16—“God so loved the world. . .”), there are also degrees of love and favor. In Deuteronomy 7:6 Moses tells the children of Israel, “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, His treasured possession.” Drawing on several Old Testament passages, Peter makes a similar proclamation to the Church in 1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.”

And then there are individuals, as you have pointed out. In Malachi 1:2-3, God does say, “Jacob I have loved, Esau I hated.” It’s important to understand what God means here, because God talks about hating individuals in the Old Testament, and the Lord Jesus calls us to hate our families in the New (Luke 14:26). These biblical uses of hate means “to love less.” [For a compelling argument and explanation, see this article on Bible.org, “How To Hate Your Wife” at <https://bible.org/seriespage/49-how-hate-your-wife-luke-1425-35>.]

John does describe himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” but do note that Jesus never calls him that. Jesus loved *all* His disciples. John reveled in being loved by Jesus, and gave himself that anointed description, a description we can all ascribe to ourselves. It is a stunning light bulb moment when

a believer realizes, “Wow! I too am a disciple whom Jesus loves!”

In Jesus’ high priestly prayer in John 17, He tells the Father that He has “loved them [the disciples], even as You have loved Me” (23). The idea that the Father loves the Church as much as, and in the same way as He loves the Son is amazing. I can find no such statement about unbelievers. I think that God’s love for all people is outrageously powerful and huge, but there seems to be a special component to the relationship between God and His people. Maybe that’s because there IS an actual relationship. . .?!

One more thing. Acts 10:34 says that “God is no respecter of persons,” but this does not mean he loves everyone equally. It means (and this is made clearer by checking the origin of the Greek word for “respecter”) that God is not impressed by anyone’s position, wealth, power or beauty. These things do not affect the way He judges with fairness and justice, the way a human judge can be “a respecter of persons.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“How Can I Teach Pluralism Wisely?”

I am teaching *Life of Pi*, by Yann Martel, in my Advanced Placement English class.

As an evangelical Christian working in a public school, I want

to evoke discussion about pluralism as we read. The book does discuss Christianity (through the Catholic tradition), Hinduism, and Islam. The main character in the book explores all three and converts to Islam and Christianity while still a Hindu.

I think this is the “ultimate pluralist” created by Martel. □

Keep in mind that my students are freshmen, and my definition of religious pluralism would need to be somewhat simple.

Whatever I teach focuses on whomever I teach. How can I, as a Christian teacher, probe their minds and hearts to think about deeper issues?

Thanks for writing. It’s great that you want to help your students think about pluralism. It’s probably safe to say that many teachers are quite happy with pluralism and wouldn’t think to challenge the notion.

Since you can’t promote Christianity, I can think of two ways to approach the subject: making clear the differences between the major religions, and talking about the nature of truth.

First, a lot of people say all religions are the same without knowing what they teach. It would be instructive to put up a chart or make a list of the beliefs of the different religions. For example, regarding God or ultimate reality:

- *Hindus are pantheists or polytheists.*
- *Buddhists are atheists or pantheists.*
- *Muslims are theists and unitarian.*
- *Christians are theists but trinitarian.*

There’s a pamphlet called [“The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error”](#) which you might find at a Christian bookstore that lists a lot of differences.

The point is that they teach contradictory ideas. How can they

all be true?

If the students respond with the “it’s true for them” line, ask why they think so? The only ways that could be so would be if 1) there really is no god; religion is just something people make up, or 2) there is a god, but no one can really know anything about him. Whichever of these they might believe, you can ask why they think so.

You may even want to back up a little and talk about truth itself. Talk about its exclusive nature. If it’s true that I’m typing on a keyboard, for example, it has to be false that I’m typing on a tree or an elephant. Logic reflects the way the world is. A thing (like a keyboard) can’t be another thing (at the same time and in the same sense). And, a thing can’t both exist in reality and not exist. You can extend this to moral issues as well. Ask if it’s okay for one set of parents to beat their child blue with rods when they don’t get their homework done (or use another example they’ll find horrendous). If they say it’s wrong, say something like, “But it’s true for them, then it’s good.”

You can also talk about whether it’s important to make distinctions between true and false. This and the above are more preparatory kinds of things that make it possible for people to believe one religion can be true and others false. You have to relate these questions to real life. Talk about other things in their lives that have to be either true or false (including moral issues, if not religious ones). The main point is to get the students thinking about the nature of truth, using things in their world where they know true and false in the classical sense apply. That can raise in their minds a conflict. They’re used to the “true for me” thinking, but in their lives they don’t and can’t live that way. You can then relate this to the matter of religion.

Finally, they may talk more about social matters, about the need to respect all people. To this you can pose this problem.

Ask what, say, a Muslim might think if you tell him you respect his religious beliefs even though no one can really know what God (or Allah) is like, or if you say that there really is no God, but that religion is something that people make up to meet their needs. Would a Muslim feel gratified and respected by this “inclusive” attitude? I know as a Christian it doesn’t make me feel more respected when someone claims that Jesus really isn’t the only way to God, because that is central to my beliefs. Students need to know that people can disagree about ideas without hating each other. Unfortunately, that idea (that disagreement equals hatred) is so often fostered today. To think someone is wrong means you hate them and will do harm to them. That’s all part of the tolerance nonsense being taught today.

If all this is clear as mud, write back and we’ll talk some more.

Rick Wade

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“Christianity Teaches Four Gods, Right?”

The Bible clearly states that there is only one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 states, “Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.” The Father is obviously called God as seen throughout the Bible. No one will argue that point. So there is one member of the Trinity, the Father.

Jesus the Son, is a separate person but He is also called God. John 1:1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word

was with God, and the Word was God.

The Holy Spirit is also a separate person, and He is also called God.

Let me see if I got this right. Please correct me if I'm wrong.

God is a trinity, composed of three divine persons, namely, the Father, Son, and holy spirit. God is also the Father, the first person of the first God who is a trinity. God is also the Son, the second person of the first God who is a trinity. God is also the holy spirit, the third person of the first God who is a trinity.

All of this means that there are four Gods. One three-person God and three single-person Gods. But to avoid the stigma of polytheism, all four Gods are really one God.

Did I get that right?

I don't know if you really wanted a response or not, since it seems like you may have just been trying to have some fun. But obviously no orthodox trinitarian Christian would subscribe to the doctrine as you have characterized it.

Actually, you basically got it right when you wrote: "God is a trinity, composed of three divine persons, namely, the Father, Son, and holy spirit." In other words, God just "is" the unity of the three divine persons. Traditionally, this has been expressed by saying that God is one in essence, three in subsistence. Trinitarian Christians do not propose the absurd (and logically contradictory) notion that there is only one God, and yet (somehow) there are three Gods. That would clearly be incoherent. Rather, we maintain that there is only one God (monotheism) who mysteriously subsists as three distinct persons (Trinitarianism).

Consider an analogy (which I take from the Christian

philosopher William Lane Craig). Cerberus was a three-headed dog that guarded the entrance to Hades in Greek mythology. Cerberus, therefore, was one dog with three heads. Now we could imagine that each head constituted a distinct center of consciousness. We could even give them names, say, Spike, Bowser, and Rover. Spike would be conscious of being Spike, but also of being Cerberus. He would also be conscious of not being either Bowser or Rover. The same could be said, in an appropriate way, regarding the conscious experience of both Bowser and Rover. Now consider Cerberus as a spiritual, disembodied entity. You have one being, Cereberus, who has three distinct centers of consciousness (i.e. Spike, Bowser, and Rover). This is something akin, I think, to what the Trinitarian maintains about the nature of God, recognizing, of course, that God is an infinitely higher being than any merely finite being. I could write more, but you get the idea. Hopefully this analogy will help you better understand what Christians maintain about the nature of God. Of course, it's only an analogy—and to ridicule it for that reason would really be rather petty. I offer it solely as a way of making this doctrine a bit more comprehensible, while nonetheless acknowledging that there is genuine mystery here as well.

Best wishes as you continue to explore and examine Christian doctrine!

Michael Gleghorn

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“What About Ghosts in a

Haunted House?"

I've found your site helpful as I create a bible study on spirituality and dangerous "spiritualties." I read over Michael Gleghorn's ["Communicating with the Dead,"](#) but I felt it didn't deal directly with my question for my Sunday School class this week: What does the Bible want us to think about ghosts and supposed ghostly encounters? Several people in our church have experienced what they call ghosts in their homes, and I want to explore what the Bible says about that during our class. Michael's essay spoke about the small chance that souls from heaven, like Lazarus's and Abraham's, could return for very special occasions; what about the weird things that fall outside of human experience in a so-called haunted house? Should we always assume those are evil spirits parading as ghosts? What Bible verses help us to understand those things?

As I argue in my article, the Bible seems to suggest that it is a very rare event for a person who has died to return to earth to communicate some message to those still living. Also, given that the rich man was not able to return to warn his brothers (even though he wanted to), it seems that a dead person could only return with the permission of God (as one supposes was the case with Samuel returning to Saul to pronounce God's judgment upon him, or with Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration). If this is correct, then I think that we would have to regard the vast majority of ghostly sightings, etc., to be either visions (caused by God or some other power), or hallucinations (caused by drugs, lack of sleep, sickness, psychological problems, a close emotional bond with the deceased, etc.), or demons. Of course, as I said, there may also be the rare instance when God allows a deceased person to return for some reason. In addition, I suppose a ghostly encounter could also be explained in terms of an angelic visitation.

The bottom line, I think, is this: when it comes to questions

of this sort, I don't think the Bible speaks clearly (or explicitly) enough to the issue for us to be dogmatic. There are many possible options for the sort of phenomena you mention—and each would have to be carefully considered on a case-by-case basis.

Morally and spiritually speaking, the Bible seems much more concerned to warn us against trying to communicate with the dead than it does in answering our questions about the nature of ghostly encounters, etc. This, I think, is the really important point: we are forbidden to attempt to make contact with the dead. If God wants to send someone back with a message, that's His business. Ours is to obey His commands. Having said this, however, I personally think that most ghostly sightings are probably either visions or hallucinations. Some may be demonic, others angelic. Rarest of all, I think, is the actual return of a dead person, but even this (as I've said) is not impossible—assuming that God commands it for some reason.

I hope this helps a little.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“Why Is God Allowing Me to Suffer?”

I don't know what to think anymore. I am a Christian (or thought I was a child of God) and go to church weekly, tithe weekly and try to live my life according to God's Word.

I was downsized by my company last June, I have gone thru my severance and my retirement money, I am losing my home and my life. I am just weeks away from being a homeless person because I will have to walk away from my home and possessions. I have applied to over 140 jobs with nothing panning out. I have a college degree and a medical certificate and was at my company for over 12 years—I am not a slouch by any means.

I just don't know how to think about God anymore. I have talked to Him daily, confessed all known sin, studied until I am cross-eyed, I have asked daily for His help, what He wants me to learn from this, what He would like me to do for Him while I am waiting, etc. I am at a loss here and it appears He is going to allow me to be taken down and die this way. I have never been so discouraged in my life and have even considered taking it because it would end all the pain and misery. I only haven't because I am too scared of Him to do so. So where is the loving God I have been worshipping all these years? I really don't think I was saved after all because I don't think He would do this to a child of His. I have seen other Christians in my community go thru job loss and He has helped them through it all and they are back to their lives, but not me. What is wrong with me that He won't help me?

Discouraged and alone,

I am so very, very sorry for what you have been experiencing in this huge trial. It sounds like you are so discouraged and hopeless that you are questioning if you are actually saved at all because God seems to be treating you differently than what you've seen with other Christians. You sound frustrated and panicky because God appears to be allowing everything to go down the drain. And who can blame you for feeling this way? I am so sorry.

It's especially hard in our culture where we tend to equate

God's goodness and love with Him keeping us comfortable. So when we lose the things that have made our lives comfortable and livable, we question if God is still loving and good. And then we're open to the enemy's suggestion that God is neither loving nor good, and that He owes it to His children to keep us comfortable. Then, when we focus on a resulting sense of entitlement, it's easy to let a spirit of anger and bitterness grow inside.

You are not alone. Job had the exact same feelings and the exact same questions. And that is why I am so grateful for that book, because it provides a perspective we couldn't possibly know through our reason or our experience. When you've done everything right, when you've sought to examine yourself to see if there is any unconfessed sin, when you've prayed and submitted to God and still things don't change, there may well be a drama unfolding in the spiritual dimension that you can't possibly see right now. Satan was the source of attacks on Job, but God allowed it for His glory and for Job's ultimate benefit.

I don't know what God is doing in you, _____. But I do know that He is good, and that He loves you, and that He has a plan for these horribly difficult times in your life. Even if it entails losses you could never imagine. A hundred years from today, when you are with Him in heaven, it will make sense. This is not the end, even if it can feel like it.

I think more and more Christians will find themselves in similar situations, where we become dependent on other members of the Body of Christ to survive difficult financial seasons in our lives. I believe this is why the Word says that it is important to stay connected to the Body in community, because community helps us with both discouragement and the isolation of aloneness. The Body of Christ is His "aloneness-fighter" for each other. And I pray you will be able to find resources for support in your church, or a church in your area that follows the Bible's pattern for taking care of each other.

I wish I had a solution for you, _____. All I know is that God is still God, and love is still driving all His dealings with you. I know that He wants to bless you and glorify Himself, even if His definition of blessing is not what you would choose right now. I send this with a prayer that you will experience His provision and His love in new and deeper ways, regardless of how He provides for you, and regardless of how He shows His love for you.

With sincere concern,

Sue Bohlin

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“Why Did Jesus Have to be Baptized?”

If Jesus is truly God, then why did he have to be baptized?

You ask a very good question. Indeed, John the Baptist also wondered about baptizing Jesus (Matthew 3:14). John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3). But Jesus had no need for repentance or forgiveness (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 3:5). Why, then, did Jesus seek to be baptized by John?

There may be a clue in how Jesus responds in Matthew 3:15: “Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Baptism is a form of identification. Although Jesus had no sin to repent of, He seems to have wanted to be identified with John's message of the need for repentance. This seems to be supported by Jesus' own message (Matthew 4:17; Mark 2:15; etc.). Also, Jesus

probably wanted to be identified with those receiving John's baptism, namely, sinners. After all, Jesus came to be identified with us, and to die as a substitute for our sins (see 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Interestingly, Jesus' death and resurrection, which is the basis for our forgiveness, is linked with baptism in passages like Romans 6:3-4.

At any rate, these are some of the reasons why I think Jesus sought to be baptized by John. I hope this information helps a bit.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

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“Does God Really Know All?”

Ex 16:4“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.’”

Deut 13:3“You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

I have a problem responding to those verses; at first glance, they seem to make his point because they seem to imply that God tests people so that He “might know” if they love Him. Deut. 13:3 is especially difficult for me. This does not seem to change in the different versions of the Bible I have

referred to. Is there something about the definition of the terms or something else that I might be missing in the text?

There are two primary ways of responding to this issue. First, we must point out that other passages of Scripture speak of God's omniscience, including His knowledge of the future (see Psalm 139:1-4, 16; Psalm 147:5; Isaiah 46:9-10; Acts 1:24; Romans 8:29-30; Hebrews 4:13; etc.). If Scripture does not contradict itself, then there must be some way to reconcile these apparent discrepancies.

Second, as Geisler and Howe point out in *When Critics Ask*, "What God knows by cognition, and what is known by demonstration, are different." The Bible often speaks from a human perspective. Consider Geisler and Howe's analogy: "A math teacher might say, 'Let's see if we can find the square root of 49,' and then, after demonstrating it, declare, 'Now we know that it is 7,' even though she knew from the beginning what the answer was" (p. 52). I think it's the same way with God.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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"Your Comments About Eating Animals Are Unintelligent and Illogical"

I read your response to the question ["Why Did God Allow Animals to be Eaten and Sacrificed?"](#) and found it to be one of

the most unintelligent arguments on any subject that I have ever read. Your "logic" draws conclusions in very convoluted ways. Recognizing an animal's right to life does not drag man down to the level of a beast. If ALL life is valued then human life is valued more. There would be no "'open season' on man to cure overpopulation problems..." as you suggest. There is no ultimate NEED for humans to get their diet from animals. Even Daniel recognized that he could be as healthy as [email ends here]

Thanks for writing. Jimmy isn't able to respond to your email, so I'll take a shot at it.

I'm really surprised you found this "the most unintelligent arguments on any subject [you] have ever read." You should read some of the letters we get!

Upon what do you base an animal's right to life? The answer to that will depend in a significant way upon your worldview. We are Christians, so our authority is the Bible where we learn about the places of humankind and other living beings in God's order.

Because we're to be good stewards of God's creation, we are not to destroy life willy nilly. As Jimmy wrote in his article, there is a hierarchy. I think you'd probably agree that we needn't shed tears over pulling up plants when they are being a problem. Killing animals should be for good reasons, not just for killing's sake. You said we don't need to eat animals. Maybe not, but I don't see why we need to eat animals in order to do so. If God gave us that freedom, we can engage in it (Gen. 9:1-3).

Jimmy's concern about man being pulled down has historical precedent. The loss of a belief in the sacredness of human life has given us abortion and euthanasia. Can you imagine a hundred years ago having to pass a law to prevent doctors from sticking sharp objects into the skulls of partially-delivered

babies to suck their brains out and kill them? That would have been unthinkable. But people think they should be able to do that. What does that say about the value of human life? And if Darwinism is correct, then there is no qualitative difference between humans and animals, just a difference of degree.

Yes, Daniel and his friends did well on a vegetarian diet. But there's no hint in the text that he did that because he thought it wrong to eat meat. The Babylonians' meat could very well have been obtained as a part of idol worship.

The bottom line is that we have been given permission to eat any living (non-human) thing. Animals don't have the same "rights" we have. To make a case that animals shouldn't be used for food because they have a right not to, requires a reason for such a right. On what do you base such a right?

Rick Wade

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“Will Greater Evil Merit Greater Punishment in Hell?”

Will those who have done greater evil on earth receive greater punishment in Hell?

I think so. Luke 12:47-48 seems to lend some justification to this view.

“That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.”

And consider Matthew 11:21-24:

“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

Of course, there is no reason that anyone need be sent to Hell. Even the most vile sinner can be cleansed and forgiven through genuine repentance and faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16, etc.).

But for those who reject Christ and persist in their sin and disobedience, there does seem to be a biblical basis for believing that there are gradations of punishment in hell—just as there are different levels of reward in heaven (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, etc.).

Hope this helps.

Shalom in Him,

Michael Gleghorn

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