

# “Body Building”: Edifying Thoughts about Our Bodies

## Why Should I Care About This?

Our culture is obsessed with the human body. Have you turned on the television or stood in the supermarket checkout line recently? Images and information about the human body bombard our senses from almost every direction. And what we believe about the body can make a huge difference for our daily life, and for the life beyond! That’s why we need to think carefully about a Christian view of the body. For when our ideas about the body go wrong, a lot of related Christian beliefs can also be affected.



For example, in the early centuries of the Christian church there were some religious groups called Gnostics. Their name derived from the Greek term *gnosis* which means “knowledge,” because they thought that salvation came through secret knowledge. In their view, reality consisted of two primary components: matter (which was evil) and spirit (which was good).<sup>{1}</sup> Since matter was evil, the human body was likewise viewed as “intrinsically degenerate.”<sup>{2}</sup>

The Gnostics’ negative beliefs about the human body influenced their thinking in other areas as well. Their ideas about the incarnation, the afterlife, and human sexuality, were all affected. Consider the incarnation. Christians believe that God the Son became a real human being with a real human body. But this view was repulsive to some of the Gnostics. While some believed that the divine Christ temporarily assumed a human body, they did not think this state was permanent. And

others denied that Jesus had a physical body at all. They believed that Jesus only *appeared* to be human.[{3}](#) In reality, he was a completely spiritual being. This was especially true after his resurrection, which Gnostics generally held to be a purely spiritual (and not physical) event.[{4}](#)

The Gnostic view of the afterlife was similar. After death, Gnostics believed, they would be reunited with God in the spiritual realm. Unlike Christians, they had no desire for the resurrection of the body. The body was a prison from which they would gratefully escape at death.

Consider finally their views about human sexuality. Although some Gnostics may have lived a sexually immoral lifestyle, the majority seem to have rather been ascetics.[{5}](#) They treated the body harshly and rejected sexual activity and procreation as earthly, physical, and unspiritual. Such activities kept one in bondage to this evil material world.

Unfortunately, these Gnostic beliefs about the body influenced Christianity to some degree. But if we look at what the Bible teaches, what we find is much more interesting and exciting.

## **The Goodness of the Human Body**

What do you believe about your body? Is it something good—or evil?

In striking contrast to the Gnostics, who believed both the material world and human body were intrinsically evil, the biblical writers present a positive conception of both.

The first verse of Genesis declares, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). A few verses later we learn that God created human beings in His image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). And at the end of chapter one we’re told that everything God made “was very good” (Gen. 1:31). So unlike the Gnostics, who believed the material world was the

work of an evil, inferior deity, the biblical writers viewed the physical universe and human body as part of the good creative work of the one true God.

Moreover, in the biblical view humanity occupies a very special place in the created order. Having been made in God's image, men and women are viewed as the crown of creation. But what does it mean to say that we are made in God's image? As one might expect, this is a question that has been given extensive consideration throughout the history of the church.

On the one hand, we probably shouldn't think of the divine image primarily in *physical* terms, for God is a *spiritual* being. Still, it's probably also a mistake to think that our bodies aren't *in any sense* made in God's image. Genesis 1:27 says that God created man in His image. Reflecting on this statement, some scholars have noted that it's "not some part of a human or some faculty of a human, but a human in his or her wholeness [that] is the image of God. The biblical concept is not that the image is *in* man and woman, but that man and woman *are* the image of God." [\[6\]](#) Since God created man in His image as an embodied personal being, it seems quite natural to suppose that the material (as well as immaterial) aspects of our being are *both* included in what it means to be made in God's image.

In Genesis 2 we have a more detailed account of the creation of man and woman. In verse 7 we read that "the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." This verse indicates that there are both material and immaterial components of man's being—and each *in some sense* bears God's image. This is why in the Christian view human beings have inherent worth and dignity. It's also why in contrast to the Gnostics we believe in the goodness of the human body.

# The Importance of the Incarnation

Did you know that your beliefs about the human body can affect your view of Jesus and why He came? As we've seen, the biblical writers saw the human body as God's good creation (Gen. 1-2). Naturally enough, such radically different views of the body influenced how Gnostics and Christians understood the doctrine of the incarnation as well.

The term "incarnation" means "'to enter into or become flesh.' It refers to the Christian doctrine that the pre-existent Son of God became man in Jesus."[\[7\]](#) Our first hint that something like this would happen comes shortly after man's fall into sin. In Genesis 3:15 God tells the serpent, the agent of temptation in the story, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel." The verse promises a coming Champion or Deliverer, who would be born of a woman, and who would deliver the decisive death-blow to Satan. Later we learn that this Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ, redeems humanity from the tragic consequences of sin and death by giving His own life as a substitute in our place (1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10). The death of God's Son for the sins of the world was possible because of the incarnation. By becoming a real man, with a real body, He experienced a real death on the cross.

One of the clearest statements of the incarnation is found in the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us" (1:1, 14). This Word made flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ, told His followers that He had come "to give His life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). While Gnostics generally regarded the death of Jesus as irrelevant for salvation, Christians see it as absolutely essential.

In Revelation 5:9 a song is sung in praise of Christ, who through His death "purchased men for God from every tribe and

language and people and nation.” In the early church, some theologians said that what Christ did not assume, neither did He redeem. They meant that if Christ did not really have a human body, then neither did He redeem our bodies. This is why the incarnation is so important. By becoming fully human and dying for our sins, Christ secured the complete redemption of all who put their trust in Him.

## Human Sexuality

Those unfamiliar with the Bible might be surprised to learn how much it has to say about sex. And what it says is neither prudish nor out of date. On the contrary, its counsel is both supremely wise and eminently practical. [{8}](#)

In fact, unlike the ancient Gnostics, the Bible has a very positive view of human sexuality. An entire book of the Bible, the Song of Solomon, is largely devoted to extolling the beauty and wonder of sexual love within the God-ordained covenant of marriage. Sex was God’s idea and is rooted in His original creation of man and woman as sexual beings (Gen. 1:27). While one of God’s purposes in creating us this way was for procreation (Gen. 1:28), it certainly wasn’t His only purpose. God also intended sex to be a pleasurable and meaningful expression of intimacy and love between husband and wife (Prov. 5:18-19).

According to Jesus, the biblical ideal of marriage is a lifelong, exclusive commitment of one man to one woman (Mk. 10:2-9). Citing the Genesis creation account He says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Mk. 10:7-8; cf. Gen. 2:24). As one writer has observed, “Here we have a blueprint for human sexual love: through the sexual act the man and woman have a wonderful new kind of intimacy. This is called being ‘one flesh,’ and it is designed to be exclusive and faithful.” [{9}](#)

Unfortunately, man's fall into sin brought about the misuse and abuse of God's good gift. And as one might expect, the Bible doesn't shy away from addressing such things. Essentially, the biblical view is that sex is to be fully enjoyed as a wonderful gift from God, but *only* within the sacred bonds of marriage between one man and one woman. Every other kind of sexual activity is lumped into the category of "sexual immorality." And this we are told to flee, for as Paul told the Corinthians, "he who sins sexually sins against his own body" (1 Cor. 6:18).

But Paul then went even further. He called the believer's body "a temple of the Holy Spirit." He said that Christians have been "bought at a price" and should "honor God" with their bodies (1 Cor. 6:19-20). This reveals something of the value which God places upon the human body. And He encourages us to do the same.

## **Bodily Death and Resurrection**

Did you know that your view of the human body affects your view of eternity?

Throughout history humanity has entertained a variety of ideas about what happens after death. Some think that physical death is the end of our personal, conscious existence. While we might "live on" in people's memories, we don't live on in any other sense. Others believe that while the body dies, the human soul or spirit continues to exist—perhaps on a higher spiritual plane, perhaps in a spiritual heaven or hell, or perhaps somewhere else. According to this view, our bodily existence is only temporary. Once we die our bodies are discarded, but our souls go on living forever.

In the early years of the church, many Gnostics believed that people would experience different fates at death. Some would just cease to exist. For them, death was the end. Others could

enjoy some sort of afterlife through faith and good works. From a Gnostic perspective, these people were the Christians. Only a few, however, namely, the Gnostics themselves, could expect a truly fantastic afterlife in which they would be reunited with God in the divine realm.<sup>{10}</sup> In other words, the Gnostics anticipated being liberated from this evil material world, including their bodies, and being reunited with God in a completely spiritual existence. Interestingly, although there are differences, many Christians seem to expect an afterlife that's very similar to that envisioned by the Gnostics.

But what the Bible teaches is really quite different. Although it comforts Christians with the reminder that to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8), this is not the believer's final state. Instead, we're told to eagerly await the resurrection of our bodies, which will be modeled after Jesus' resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 42-49). As Christians, we don't look forward to a purely *spiritual* (in the sense of *non-physical*) afterlife. Instead, we await a *bodily* existence in a new heaven and new earth which is completely free from the presence and power of sin (2 Pet. 3:10-13)! Just as Christ was raised *physically* from the dead, so one day He will likewise raise all men from the dead. Some will enjoy His presence forever; others will be shut out from His presence forever (Matt. 25:46; Jn. 5:28-29). Which experience shall be ours depends entirely upon our relationship to Christ (Jn. 3:36; 2 Thess. 1:8-10). So why not put your trust in Him and enjoy forever the new heavens and new earth in a new, resurrected body? You're invited, you know (Rev. 22:17).

## Notes

1. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: Christian Scriptures and the Battles Over Authentication*, Course Guidebook, Pt. 1 (Chantilly, Virginia: The Teaching Company, 2002), 20.
2. Mary Timothy Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand

Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 9.

3. J. Ed Komoszewski, M. James Sawyer, and Daniel B. Wallace, *Reinventing Jesus: What The Da Vinci Code and Other Novel Speculations Don't Tell You* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 2006), 200.

4. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 29.

5. Ibid., 21.

6. *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, eds. Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), s.v. "Image of God."

7. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (1st ed.), ed. Paul J. Achtemeier (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), s.v. "Incarnation" by Frank J. Matera.

8. A number of ideas in this section were informed by the article "Sex, Sexuality," in *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*.

9. Amy Orr-Ewing, *Is the Bible Intolerant?* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 113.

10. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 21.

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## **"How Do the Health-and-Wealth Believers Rationalize Their Beliefs?"**

I read your [Stairway to Heaven article](#) on materialism and still can't understand why people (and especially these new mega churches) are still so into it. People have actually told me that God wants us to have wealth, and I keep receiving "religious" email chain letters about being "blessed" monetarily. I would prefer blessings of a more loving



type . . . !!

My question is always, what kind of "wealth" does that necessarily mean? It is all so contradictory to Jesus' teachings as well as to His overthrowing of the merchants' tables in the Temple. How do they rationalize this way of thinking?

Thank you for your thoughtful response to my essay on materialism.

I also have difficulty understanding the "health and wealth" gospel that some profess in the name of Christ. I find no justification for it in Scripture. In fact, I find just the opposite in passages like 1 Peter 4:12-16:

"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."

Paul, in Romans 5, points out that suffering is an integral part of developing the character we need to serve Christ effectively. As to where this "health and wealth" gospel comes from, I suppose it begins with the very popular view that "God wants me to be happy" rather than the biblical admonition to be holy as God is holy. Fortunately, many churches (both large and small) work hard to overcome this form of hedonism.

For Him,

Don Closson

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## **“Did Jesus Have a Sinful Nature?”**

**Did Jesus have a sinful nature? It is clear that he did not sin, but he was 100% human. Is it that he did not choose to sin but it was possible for him to do so? If the answer is yes, would this imply that we are being punished for the sins that we do and not just because we have a sinful nature?**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

Thanks for your question. No; Jesus did not have a sinful nature. It's true that He was fully human, but like Adam before the Fall, His humanity was not in any way tainted with sin. Whether it was possible for Jesus to have sinned or not is a matter of debate. I do not think it was possible for Jesus to sin, for Jesus was not only fully human, He was also fully God and God cannot sin.

As believers, God does discipline us (and this can certainly be painful at times) as we learn in Hebrews 12:4-11. And yes, the Lord does discipline us for the things that we do, and not just because we have a sinful nature. Of course, it's important to remember that the Lord is very gracious and patient with us as well. But He will also discipline us out of love and in order to help conform us to the image of His Son.

Shalom in Christ,  
Michael Gleghorn

## “Do Animals Have Souls?”

My name is C\_\_\_\_\_ and I am 13 years old in the 8th grade. A classmate told me she was a Christian but she didn't believe some of what the Bible says. I asked her for an example and she told me that the Bible said that animals don't have souls and how she believed that they did have souls. I would be very appreciative if you would help me on my quest to find out what the Bible says about that.

Dear C\_\_\_\_\_,

We have an answer to email about animals and souls and going to heaven: [www.probe.org/do-our-pets-go-to-heaven/](http://www.probe.org/do-our-pets-go-to-heaven/).

I would ask your friend where in the Bible it says animals don't have souls. Lots of people have heard things they repeat as true but they don't really know. When you ask [powerful questions like](#), “How do you know that?” and “Where do you get your information?” the answer is really, “Well, I heard. . .” or “They say that. . .” Which doesn't go very far in being persuasive, does it? <smile> In reality, the Bible doesn't anywhere say, “Animals don't have souls.” It's a much bigger issue than that, and it comes down to the fact that animals are not made in the image of God, like people are. (Note that angels are not made in the image of God either. Not being made in the image of God doesn't mean something doesn't have great value.) And it also matters how you define “soul.” If you mean “personality,” then of course some animals have souls. If I ask our Irish Setter Pele, “Pele, do you have a soul?” with a smile on my face and energy in my voice, he'll respond by breathing fast, wagging his tail, and smiling his doggy smile.

If you mean, “the spiritual place inside you where God can dwell,” then no they don’t. If I ask our dog, “Pele, who made you? Do you know who God is? Did you know Jesus is Lord?” he’ll just keep on wagging his tail. . . or sleeping. . . or looking at me blankly—because those questions have no meaning to him. He is not a moral creature like we are. He cannot respond to the truth of the gospel because he has no understanding and no choice. He does, however, glorify God by his “dogginess.” He brings glory to God by just being the dog God made him to be. He has a place in God’s creation, and a very important place in our hearts. . . but he cannot become a part of the Kingdom of Heaven or the family of God like we are. Any more than he can choose to become a fish.

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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## **“t’s Not Fair to Punish People with Hell for Believing What They Were Taught to Believe”**

If all people are following the teachings of what have been taught to believe, how can any be punished? By punishment, I mean that some religions (Christianity) claim that if you don’t believe what they believe, you will go to hell.

Good question!

Two aspects to my answer: first, this question is coming from a man-based perspective, as if all religions were equally valid and only about what people are taught. (In other words, leaving God out of the equation.)

Philosopher J.P. Moreland gives this illustration: let's say I am with a group of people and I ask them to describe my mother. They all say, "I don't know your mother," and I say, "Go ahead and give it your best guess." One says, "52 and blue eyes and brown hair." Another says, "58 and slender, with silver hair." A third says "55, hazel eyes and blonde highlights." The problem is, they are all shots in the dark. They are nothing more than guesses. I'm the only one who knows what my mother looks like.

All religions are like that, with the exception of one. They are all shots in the dark, sheer guesses about the nature and character of God. Except for Christianity, since Jesus says He came from heaven to tell us what God is like because God is His Father. It wasn't a guess for Jesus to tell us about God, it was a reporting of fact. Which is why Christianity is bold enough to say, "This is what God is like, and all other truth claims about God are mere guesses."

The second part of my answer is that in Romans 1, God says that He has revealed enough about Himself in creation that men are without excuse:

*...because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to 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 that they are without excuse.  
(Romans 1:19-20)*

Christianity is about our broken relationship with God being reconciled and restored through Jesus Christ, and only through Jesus Christ. God has spoken to us about His relationship with

us, through His written communication (the Bible) and through His Son leaving heaven to come to earth and show us. Its true that if we try to get to God any way except through the one way He has provided—the death and resurrection of His Son—the relationship will remain broken. Which means an eternity separated from God. . . which is hell.

How is it people can be punished for not believing (actually, the Bible's language is about trusting) in Jesus? Because regardless of what religion people are taught, God has still spoken through His creation: of the earth, of the cosmos, of the moral nature of human beings. And He holds everyone accountable for responding to the evidence He planted in His creation, even if it is contradicted by the teachings of the various world religions.

It's like a teacher telling her class that there will be a test on Friday, but rumors sweep throughout the class: that the test has been cancelled, or the test will be postponed to the next week, or that tests have been done away with altogether. Regardless of what rumors students may have heard, they are still responsible for what the teacher told them.

Hope you find this helpful.

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## **“Why Can't God and Satan Settle Their Differences?”**

Why do not all the religions of the world pray to God asking him and the Devil to get together and settle their

differences? It is widely held that God answers prayers.

This type of praying would surely head the list of really important things to pray for. I believe it is written at one time God and the Devil were very good friends existing in Heaven together. I also believe it is written while they were living together they had a big argument. The devil lost, and was tossed out. Would not the World be a better place if they improve their relationship?

I am thinking of all the people killed during the Crusades, the 30 years war, the Holocaust, the Civil War, the list is endless. I am also thinking about future babies, who will be born in the future, with their souls, not subject to future damnation. At least their chances would be better.

I believe God has written "blessed are the peacemakers." Would it be too much to ask for this? I have seen no answer to this question, your answer would be appreciated.

Interesting question!

I don't think it would do any good to pray that God and Satan get together to settle their differences for several reasons:

1. God is 100% good; Satan is 100% evil. Good and evil cannot peacefully co-exist, because good will eventually destroy evil.

2. We need to read the Bible as our only resource on what is true in the spirit realm because God gave us this information (as revelation). From what we can gather of what the Bible says about angels and demons, these powerful spirit beings do not have the capacity to repent as we humans do. They don't even understand what it is like to be forgiven and accepted back into friendship with God. Thus, to ask for Satan and the demons to change is like praying that black become white or negative become positive. It won't happen.

3. God already knows what the future holds, and He has told us a certain amount of that information. He has declared that at the end of time, He will throw Satan and the demons into a lake of fire for all eternity. What God has declared and has recorded in scripture will not change because God already knows what He will do.

God cannot improve his relationship with Satan because Satan cannot and will not become other than what he is. And just as the nature of sunlight is to destroy mold, and the nature of boiling water is to destroy harmful bacteria, the nature of God's holiness is to destroy rebellion and sin. They cannot be reconciled.

Hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

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## **“What Do You Think of The Message Bible?”**

I've seen some articles online claiming that *The Message Bible* is not true to the original Greek and that it is secretly part of the New Age Movement. I enjoy reading it and I have not felt that it is heretical. Do you have a comment?

Thanks for your letter. I've also heard some rather negative things about *The Message Bible*. However, there is at least one Probe staff member who also enjoys reading *The Message* – so you're not alone there! I'm afraid that I personally don't know much about it. I really doubt that it is part of the New Age Movement or Neo-paganism. Probably *The Message* is intended to be something more like a paraphrase of the Bible (like The



Living Bible), rather than a translation (like the NASB or [NET Bible](#)). This CAN (and usually DOES) result in much more interpretative freedom for the one doing the paraphrasing (in this case, Eugene Peterson). Thus, the choice of words *may not always accurately reflect the Hebrew and Greek texts*. It's important to bear this in mind. But this does NOT mean that it's secretly purveying New Age philosophy.

I think that *The Message* could be a great resource for reading, but I don't think it would be best for studying the Bible. If your goal is devotional reading, it's probably great. If your goal is to get (as best you can) at the original meaning of the text, you're better off reading the NASB or NET Bible. Of course, it's best of all if you can read Hebrew and Greek! But not many people can. At any rate, there's certainly nothing wrong with reading *The Message*. And if you like reading it, more power to you!

Hope this helps a bit.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn  
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## **“If Child Sacrifice Is Sinful, Why Did God Require It of Abraham?”**

According to Deut 18:10-12, “Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire...” OK, so at least

as far back as Moses' time, human sacrifice was wrong – sinful.

But...why then would God test Abraham by asking him to make a human sacrifice of Isaac? It seems to me that God is asking him to do something sinful to prove his obedience and devotion. That goes against God's character, doesn't it?

Thanks for your question. Much has been written about Gen. 22. Let me mention a few important points and refer you to some more extensive answers.

First, notice Gen. 22:5: "So he said to his servants, You two stay here with the donkey while the boy and I go up there. We will worship and then return to you.

The NET Bible comments, "It is impossible to know what Abraham was thinking when he said, We will. . .return to you." When he went he knew (1) that he was to sacrifice Isaac, and (2) that God intended to fulfill his earlier promises through Isaac. How he reconciled those facts is not clear in the text. Heb 11:17-19 suggests that Abraham believed God could restore Isaac to him through resurrection."

Second, notice vv. 7-8, "Isaac said to his father Abraham, My father? What is it, my son? he replied. Here is the fire and the wood, Isaac said, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? 22:8 God will provide for himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son, Abraham replied. The two of them continued on together."

Again, the NET Bible comments, "*God will provide* is the central theme of the passage and the turning point in the story. Note Paul's allusion to the story in Rom 8:32 (how shall he not freely give us all things?)" (See [http://www.bible.org/netbible/gen22\\_notes.htm](http://www.bible.org/netbible/gen22_notes.htm)).

Finally, we must remember that God never allowed Abraham to actually carry out the sacrifice. God never intended that he

actually sacrifice his son. He apparently intended to test Abraham's faith in, and love for, God. It's a radical test, to be sure, but one which God never intended for Abraham to actually carry out.

For more information, please visit:

1. [www.tektonics.org/gk/humansac.html](http://www.tektonics.org/gk/humansac.html)
2. [www.christian-thinktank.com/qkilisak.html](http://www.christian-thinktank.com/qkilisak.html)
3. [www.tektonics.org/whatis/whatfaith.html](http://www.tektonics.org/whatis/whatfaith.html)

Shalom,

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## **“What About Household Salvation?”**

**What is your view on Household Salvation? (I am thinking of two scriptures: Acts 11:14–“...and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household” and Acts 16:31–“They said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”)**

Thanks for your letter. My view on Household Salvation is that each member of the household, upon hearing the Gospel message, can be saved on the one condition of personal faith in Christ. Acts 11:14 MAY be predictive (i.e. predicting that everyone in the household would respond positively to the Gospel with personal faith in Christ). Acts 16:31 makes it clear that personal faith is the necessary condition for salvation. I

think this verse is just a shorthand way of saying that whoever believes can likewise be saved. To hold that an entire household could be saved on the basis of one member's faith in Christ would flatly contradict all the New Testament passages that speak of the necessity of personal faith in Christ for salvation.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn  
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## **“Is It Judging Others to Call Them Evil?”**

**Is it judging others to call them evil? For example, if someone rapes children, is it OK to say that person is evil unless he/she repents? Or is that judging others?**

There is little to gain by referring to individuals as “evil” whether it is spoken directly to someone or just thought to yourself. Calling someone evil would certainly be considered inflammatory. The concept of evil is sometimes unnecessarily avoided or swept under the rug in our culture. However, calling someone evil rather than referring to their actions as evil is probably not necessary in most cases. Ultimately, sin is sin and everyone is capable of great evil. The example you gave, rape, is certainly evil and the one who commits such an act could properly be referred to as evil. There are no “little sins” in God's sight, however, so the liar and glutton could also be called evil. So, no, it is not wrong to refer to

someone as evil but it will probably prove counter-productive to actually call someone evil. A less inflammatory approach would be better.

If you do a word search for evil, you will find that the Lord Jesus did not hesitate to call some men evil if that's what they were. But then, He had the right to judge the thoughts and intentions of their hearts, being God and being informed by the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, the apostle Paul is the only NT writer who calls men evil, and that only occurs twice—and neither time is he referring to specific individuals. The rest of the time the NT writers talk about evil as a force and a chosen behavior, and the evil one (Satan). Given this perspective, we believe it would be wiser to rephrase the judgment of evil as applying to the beliefs and actions rather than calling an individual evil.

Sue Bohlin

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