5 Things You Need to Know About Jesus

Tom Davis provides an overview of 5 extremely important aspects of Jesus' life: His birth, baptism, claims to deity, death and resurrection, and ascension.

The Birth of Jesus

Knowing about Jesus, who he was, what he did, and what he taught is essential for Christian discipleship. By studying Jesus, we know how we ought to live and what the redemption that he provides for us means. In this article we discuss five things you need to know about Jesus, starting with the meaning of the birth of Jesus.



The story of His birth is found in Matthew chapters 1 and 2, and in Luke chapters 1 and 2. Matthew gives us his understanding of what Jesus' birth meant in the angel Gabriel's proclamation to Joseph and in an Old Testament prophecy.

When the angel appeared to Joseph the angel told him that Jesus will "save his people from their sins."{1} Jesus left heaven to come down to His people at His birth.

In order for His people to be saved from their sins Jesus must come to His people. The virgin birth of Jesus is directly linked to His death and resurrection.

The first prophecy is, "See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel."{2} This prophecy comes from Isaiah 7:14. In Isaiah this prophecy is a promise to King Ahaz of Judah that God will defeat His enemies. Immanuel is an important name because it means "God with us." Matthew is telling us that through the virgin birth

of Jesus God is with us, and is a sign that sin and death will be defeated.

In Luke, the praise of a man named Simeon and the proclamation of the heavenly host helps tell us what Jesus' birth means.

When Simeon saw Jesus in the temple he prayed, "For my eyes have seen your salvation. You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples-a light for revelation to the Gentile and glory to your people Israel."{3} Simeon tells us that Jesus will reveal God to all people. God's salvation is for all people, not only for the Jews.

When the heavenly hosts appeared to the shepherds out in the fields they proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to people he favors!"{4} The proclamation of the angels tells us that the people Jesus favors, those who follow and trust Him, will have peace.

To recap, we see that the birth of Jesus is God coming down to be with us, and to save us from our sins. This salvation is not only for the Jews, but is for all people.

Jesus' Baptism

Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention that when Jesus was baptized the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove.{5} A voice from heaven said, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."{6}

Jesus was sinless, so why does he receive baptism from John? Jesus told John it was to fulfill righteousness. Jesus is identifying with Israel, and all mankind, and fulfilling righteousness for our sake. Because Jesus identifies with us and our sins, His baptism is the beginning of His ministry of atonement that is accomplished at His crucifixion.{7}

All the gospels mention that the Holy Spirit descended in the

form of a dove. Have you ever wondered why in the form of a dove? In Genesis when God created the heavens and the earth the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. This signifies God's presence at creation. Some biblical scholars think that Noah sending the dove out from the ark signifies a kind of new creation after God destroyed the world with a flood. In the same way, the Spirit appearing in the form of a dove and descending on Jesus means that Jesus is the beginning of new creation.{8}

At Jesus' baptism the Father pronounced, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well-pleased."{9} What does this mean? Most Bible scholars think this statement references Psalm 2:7{10} and Isaiah 42:1.{11} Psalm 2 is a Psalm that was used at the coronation of a new king. Isaiah 42 is about God's suffering servant who will bring "justice to the nations." Biblical Scholar Craig Blomberg concludes, "Therefore it would appear that God is forthrightly declaring Jesus to be both kingly Messiah and suffering servant."{12}

Jesus' baptism means that Jesus identifies with us. Jesus is the beginning of new creation and begins His ministry of atonement for our sins. God's voice from heaven also declares that Jesus is the kingly Messiah and the suffering servant.

Jesus' Claims to Deity

Jesus claimed to be God in several ways. He not only used words to make these claims, but His actions also made a claim to deity.

Jesus' actions showed that he had authority over evil spirits by repeatedly casting out demons. Jesus commanded the weather. This is something mortal men do not do, but God and heavenly beings do. Jesus was a man, but this event shows that he was more than a man, he was God in human flesh.

But let's look specifically at how Jesus claimed to be the

divine Son of Man during His trial by the Jewish authorities. The night before His trial Jesus was arrested and tried by the Jewish authorities. There were many who accused Jesus of various things. The problem was that the testimony of the witnesses who were accusing Jesus did not match. This led to the high priest asking, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" Jesus answered, "I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming with clouds of heaven." The Jewish authorities then condemned him for blasphemy.{13} Why?

Jesus was condemned because he identified himself with the Son of Man in Daniel 7. In this chapter the Ancient of Days, God the Father, is sitting in judgment when the Son of Man comes with the "clouds of heaven" and approaches the Ancient of Days. The Son of Man is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom that will not be destroyed. The Son of Man is a human and divine figure who seems to sit in judgment alongside the Ancient of Days. When Jesus claims to be the Son of Man he is claiming to be a human and divine figure. Jesus is claiming that he will be vindicated and that the Jewish authorities will be condemned by God.{14}

Jesus claimed to be God by casting out demons, calming a storm, and by claiming to be the Son of Man in Daniel 7.

Jesus' Death and Resurrection

Jesus' death and resurrection is the foundation of Christianity. The death and resurrection of Jesus is a climactic confrontation between God and Satan that involves forgiveness of sin, the abolition of death, and the defeat of evil.

The narratives of this event are found in all four gospels. However, the most important passage that helps us understand the meaning of the resurrection is not in one of the Gospels;

it is in one of Paul's letters, 1 Corinthians 15.

In verse 3, Paul states that "Jesus died for our sins." In Hebrews 9 and 10, the author explains that in the Old Testament sacrificial system bulls, goats, and sheep had to be sacrificed every year to purify the people. However, Jesus only had to die once to cover the sins of all people. Therefore, the death of Jesus for our sins is superior to the sacrificial system and makes it obsolete.

Paul states, "For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive."{15} We live life knowing that someday we will die. We live in the shadow of death's approach. Jesus confronts death on the cross, then returns from the grave three days later. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, death has been abolished. New Testament scholar Craig Keener states, "As death in every case is established in Adam, so life in all cases is established in Christ."{16}

In Colossians 2:15 Paul is addressing the implications of Jesus' resurrection. He writes, "He (Jesus) disarmed the rulers and the authorities and disgraced them publicly; he triumphed over them in him." The rulers and authorities that Paul mentions are Satan and his demons.{17} Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, Satan and his demons are defeated publicly. When Christians proclaim the resurrection, these rulers and authorities are humiliated publicly for everyone to see.

The death and resurrection of Jesus cleanses us of our sins, pays the penalty for our sins, abolishes death, and defeats Satan and the forces of evil.

Jesus' Ascension

Jesus' return to heaven is described in Acts 1:9-11. After His resurrection Jesus spent forty days with His disciples. After forty days the disciples watched Jesus ascend into heaven in a

cloud. But what does this mean?

In John chapter 16 Jesus told His disciples that he will be leaving them. Jesus said, “It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don’t go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you.”{18} The Counselor that Jesus referred to is the Holy Spirit. Jesus’ promise to the disciples is fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus told His disciples “When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.”{19} When Jesus ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to us. The Holy Spirit does not only counsel us; he guides us to truth and intercedes for us.

Jesus’ ascension has other implications as well. Paul tells us, “Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.”{20} There are two things to pay attention to in this verse. First, Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus is on His throne, which means he is ruling now. Second, Jesus also prays for us. There are many other things that could be mentioned in a discussion of things we need to know about Jesus. One example is Jesus’ temptation in the desert. When Adam and Eve were tempted in the Garden of Eden, they failed to resist Satan’s temptation. Jesus succeeded in resisting Satan.

When we consider Jesus’ birth, baptism, claims to deity, temptation, casting out evil spirits, death, resurrection, and ascension, we have an image of a God that became man. God rescues us from our sin and from the evil powers and principalities that are active in this world. Jesus will return and make all things new with the new creation and new Jerusalem in Revelation 20 and 21. The first Christians saw all of this. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright sums things up this way, “The first Christians saw the message and accomplishment of Jesus as the long-awaited arrival of God’s kingdom, the final dealing-with sin that would undo the powers

of darkness and break through to the ‘age to come.’”{21}

Notes

1. Matthew 1:21
2. Matthew 1:23
3. Luke 2:30-32
4. Luke 2:14
5. Jesus’ baptism is found in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22, and is alluded to in John 1:29-34.
6. Mark 1:11 CSB
7. Keener, Craig S., *Matthew* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press,1997), 85.
8. Evens, Craig A., *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew-Luke*, (Colorado Springs, Victor, 2003) 78.
9. Mark 1:11 CSB
10. I will declare the Lord’s decree. He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father. – Psalm 2:7 (CSB)
11. This is my servant; I strengthen him, this is my chosen one; I delight in him. I have put my Spirit on him; he will bring justice to the nations. – Isaiah 42:1 (CSB)
12. Blomberg, Craig L. *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville, Broadman & Holman Press, 1997), 222.
13. Matt. 26:62-65; Mark 14:60-6
14. Quarles, Charles L. “Lord or Legend: Jesus as the Messianic Son of Man,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Vol. 62, No. 1* (2019) 103-124. Heiser, Michael S. *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham Press), 249-151.
15. 1 Corinthians 15:22 CSB
16. Keener, Craig S., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IVP Academic 2014) 494. Gilbrant, Thoralf Ed. *The Complete Biblical Library: The New Testament Study Bible Romans-Corinthians* (Springfield, World Library Press 1986) 465.
17. Ibid., 574.
18. John 17:7 CSB
19. John 16:3 CSB

20. Romans 8:34 CSB
21. Wright, N. T. *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* (San Francisco, HarperOne, 2016), 280.

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Body and Soul in the New Testament

Dr. Michael Gleghorn draws on John Cooper's book Body, Soul and Life Everlasting *to provide an overview of what the New Testament teaches about the body-soul connection.*

The Teaching of Jesus

What does the New Testament teach about the nature and destiny of human beings? In a previous article, I discussed what the Old Testament has to say about these issues, giving special attention to the human body and soul. In this article, we'll consider what the New Testament has to say.



About 400 years separate the end of the Old Testament from the beginning of the New. During this so-called "intertestamental" period, Jewish biblical scholars, like the Pharisees, continued to teach and write about what God had revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. According to John Cooper, the Pharisees taught that when a person dies, the soul leaves the body to continue its existence "in an intermediate state, already enjoying or lamenting the anticipated consequences of God's judgment."{1} Interestingly, both Jesus and the Apostle Paul also seem to have held this view.{2}

Consider, for example, some of the last words spoken by Jesus just prior to His death on the cross. You may remember that Jesus was crucified between two criminals. While one of these men railed against Jesus, the other (aware of his guilt), asked Jesus to "remember" him when He came into His kingdom (Luke 23:39-42). Jesus responded by promising *this* man that he would join Him "in Paradise" that very day (v. 43). Paradise, in the Jewish thinking of the time, was understood to be a pleasant and refreshing place where the souls of the righteous continue their existence between the death and resurrection of the body.{3}

The body, in other words, may die, but the soul, or person, continues to exist apart from their body. Although this criminal had only hours left to live, his elementary confession of faith in Jesus resulted in Jesus promising him that they would be together in Paradise that very day! This ought to encourage all of us who have put our hope in Christ for salvation. Our bodies may wear out and die. But when they do, we shall go to be with Christ, awaiting the resurrection of our bodies while enjoying the presence of the Lord!

But what about the other criminal, the one who mocked and insulted Jesus? Although we're not told what happened to him, we know from elsewhere in Scripture that the souls of the unrepentant also continue to exist after the death of the body. In the next section we'll take a closer look at the fate of the righteous and unrighteous dead.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

What happens to us when we die? Do we continue to exist in some sense? Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus appears to offer some answers to these questions (see Luke 16:19-31). The story concerns a rich man, who lacks for nothing, and a poor beggar, named Lazarus, who is laid at the rich man's gate (v. 20). The story implies that the rich man could have helped

Lazarus, but never did so.

Eventually, both men died. Lazarus is said to be "carried by the angels to Abraham's side" (v. 22). Essentially, he is depicted as being with the Jewish patriarch Abraham in Paradise. Paradise, you'll remember, was considered a place of rest and refreshment for the righteous dead. By contrast, the rich man, his body having been buried, finds himself in "torment" in Hades (vv. 22-23). Seeing both Abraham and Lazarus at a great distance, he pleads with them for help. Abraham, however, tells him that this just isn't possible (vv. 24-31).

What might this story teach us about the nature and destiny of human beings? Though we should perhaps be careful about reading the story too literally, it seems to teach that we will each continue to exist (in some sense) even *after* the death of our body. Moreover, this existence will be experienced as either joyful or sorrowful, depending on our relationship with God. Although the story seems to depict the rich man and Lazarus as if they still have bodies of some sort, John Cooper offers several reasons for believing that the story is using figurative language to describe a time in which these men exist apart from their bodies.{4} This would be the period between the death and resurrection of the body. What are some of the reasons that Cooper offers for this view?

First, at the time Jesus tells this story, He regarded the resurrection as a still future event (see Luke 20:34-36). It is thus unlikely that the story here concerns some sort of literal bodily existence. Second, the story locates the rich man in "Hades"—and this term appears only to be used of the intermediate state, between the death and resurrection of the body.{5} The story thus appears to depict the rich man and Lazarus as consciously existing persons between the death and resurrection of their bodies. And if this is so, then we are *more* than just our bodies (as we'll see more fully in the next section).

Paul's Heavenly Vision

Do you view yourself as *more* than just your body? Might you also have a soul? We've previously considered evidence for the human soul in the teachings of Jesus. In this section, we'll consider further evidence from the writings of the Apostle Paul. In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul recounts an extraordinary experience which he had fourteen years earlier (see 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, 7). He describes being "caught up . . . into paradise" and hearing "things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (vv. 2-4).

For our purposes, the most important element of this experience concerns a peculiar detail mentioned twice by the apostle. According to Paul, he was unsure whether he had this experience while "in the body or out of the body" (vv. 2-3). That is, Paul was unsure whether he had been "caught up into Paradise" (v. 3) in his body, or out of it. But why is this important? Because it shows that Paul regarded the "out of body" option as a genuine possibility.{6}

You see, many scholars have argued that Paul did not believe in any sort of conscious existence apart from the body. The great New Testament scholar F. F. Bruce claimed that Paul "could not conceive" of a situation in which he might exist and have experiences apart from his body.{7} Now you might be thinking, "Well wait just a minute. Didn't you say that Paul was unsure whether this experience had occurred while in the body or out of it? Maybe he remained in his body and the experience was just a *vision* of Paradise, occurring while he was in some sort of trance-like state on earth."{8}

Yes, you're right. That *is* possible (although it doesn't seem consistent with what Paul actually says).{9} And here's the thing: the very fact that Paul was unsure whether this experience occurred while he was in (or out of) his body, tells us that he regarded the "out of body" explanation as a genuine possibility. And if this is so, then contrary to what

some scholars have said, Paul most certainly *could* conceive of conscious existence apart from his body. Indeed, he thought he may have had just such an experience himself.

But we can take this argument further. For as we'll see in the next section, Paul (like the Pharisees and Jesus), seemed to think that we'll continue to exist and have experiences between the death and resurrection of our bodies.

Our Heavenly Dwelling

When I was a child, our family would occasionally go camping. Although we usually went in a camper, with air-conditioning and beds, I've also spent a few nights camping out in a tent. Most of us have probably had such an experience (though whether we enjoyed it or not is another matter). A tent is basically a portable structure that provides a temporary place to stay while we're away from our permanent home.

In 2 Corinthians 5 the Apostle Paul has a fascinating discussion that touches on some of these issues (see vv. 1-10). The discussion is challenging, but if we consider it step by step, I think we can get a handle on what the apostle is saying. He begins, "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (v. 1).

When Paul writes of "the tent that is our earthly home," he is referring to our physical bodies here and now. If our body is "destroyed," and we die physically, "we have," says Paul, "a building from God . . . eternal in the heavens" awaiting us. According to John Cooper, this "building" can plausibly refer to one of two things.{10} It *might* refer to our future resurrection body. However, it may also refer simply to "being 'with Christ'." If the second option is meant, then Paul is speaking about going to be "with Christ" at the time of death, in which we are (as he later puts it), "at home with the Lord"

(2 Corinthians 5:8; see also Philippians 1:23).

Paul characterizes our present "earthly" state as one of groaning, "longing to put on our heavenly dwelling" that "we may not be found naked" (1 Corinthians 5:2-3). Although these verses are difficult to interpret, it is probable that "nakedness" refers to temporarily existing without a body when we die. If so, then Paul is saying that when we die, we go immediately to be "with Christ." There we are "at home with the Lord," awaiting that day in which we will "put on our heavenly dwelling" (v. 2). This likely refers to our resurrection body. At the time of the resurrection, our souls will be united with a glorious new body, so that we might eternally enjoy life with Christ ad fellow believers in the new heaven and new earth. We will consider these issues more fully in the next section.

The Resurrection of the Body

The Bible envisions a future time in which all who have died will be raised from the dead into some sort of physical, bodily existence. The New Testament writers refer to this as "the resurrection of the dead" and it will include both believers and unbelievers. Hence Jesus, referring to His own unique role in executing divine judgment, claims that "an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear His voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29). Although evidence elsewhere in the New Testament suggests that different groups of people may be raised at different times, the key point here is that this event has not yet taken place. It's still in the future.

Paul says much the same thing in several of his letters. To cite just one example, he tells the Philippians that "we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables

Him even to subject all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21). Elsewhere Paul tells us that our resurrection bodies will be "imperishable," "powerful," and glorious (1 Corinthians 15:42-43). It's incredibly exciting to contemplate the fact that the Lord intends to give his people marvelous new bodies, patterned after his own resurrection body, so that we might enjoy eternal life with him forever. When that day dawns, our joy will truly be complete!

So how might we attempt to summarize our discussion in this article? First, both Jesus and Paul seem to have taught that human beings are (in some sense) composed of both a body and a soul. John Cooper describes the relationship of soul and body as one of "functional holism." Our body and soul *function* as a thoroughly integrated *whole* during our present earthly lives. But when our body dies, our soul continues to exist, awaiting the resurrection of our body at some future time.{11}

On that day, our soul will be united with our resurrection body, either to enjoy eternal life with Jesus, or face eternal judgment in hell. This, it seems to me, is what the New Testament has to say about the nature and destiny of humanity. In Christ we are offered a sure and steadfast hope for both our soul—and our body!

Notes

1. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), Kindle Loc. 1208.
2. J. P. Moreland, *The Soul: How We Know It's Real and Why It Matters* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 55, Kindle.
3. This becomes a bit complicated. John Cooper points out that Jewish thinking about the afterlife continued its development during the intertestamental period. While some Rabbis conceived of "Paradise" as a special place for the righteous dead within Sheol, others began to think of Paradise as outside Sheol altogether. Regardless of such differences, however, Cooper reminds us that "Paradise" was understood as

the place “where the blessed dwell with the Lord” (see Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1175-1200).
4. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1605; see also Loc. 1592-1607.
5. Again, see Cooper’s discussion in *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1592-1607.
6. Cooper makes this point emphatically in *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1880-86.
7. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 313; cited in John Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1840.
8. This possibility is also mentioned in *Cooper, Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1871.
9. Again, see Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1872.
10. See Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 1837.
11. See Cooper’s discussion in *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting*, Kindle Loc. 699-712.

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The Value of Suffering: A Christian Perspective

Sue Bohlin looks at suffering from a Christian perspective. Applying a biblical worldview to this difficult subject results in a distinctly different approach to suffering than our natural inclination of blame and self pity.

This article is also available in Spanish.

There is no such thing as pointless pain in the life of the

child of God. How this has encouraged and strengthened me in the valleys of suffering and pain! In this essay I'll be discussing the value of suffering, an unhappy non-negotiable of life in a fallen world.

Suffering Prepares Us to Be the Bride of Christ



Among the many reasons God allows us to suffer, this is my personal favorite: it prepares us to be the radiant bride of Christ. The Lord Jesus has a big job to do, changing His ragamuffin church into a glorious bride worthy of the Lamb. Ephesians 5:26-27 tells us He is making us holy by washing us with the Word—presenting us to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. Suffering develops holiness in unholy people. But *getting there* is painful in the Lord's "laundry room." When you use bleach to get rid of stains, it's a harsh process. Getting rid of wrinkles is even more painful: ironing means a combination of heat plus pressure. Ouch! No wonder suffering hurts!

But developing holiness in us is a worthwhile, extremely important goal for the Holy One who is our divine Bridegroom. We learn in Hebrews 12:10 that we are enabled to share in His holiness through the discipline of enduring hardship. More ouch! Fortunately, the same book assures us that discipline is a sign of God's love (Heb. 12:6). Oswald Chambers reminds us that "God has one destined end for mankind—holiness. His one aim is the production of saints."{1}

It's also important for all wives, but most especially the future wife of the Son of God, to have a submissive heart. Suffering makes us more determined to obey God; it teaches us to be submissive. The psalmist learned this lesson as he wrote in Psalm 119:67: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so

that I might learn your decrees."

The Lord Jesus has His work cut out for Him in purifying us for Himself (Titus 2:14). Let's face it, left to ourselves we are a dirty, messy, fleshly people, and we desperately need to be made pure. As hurtful as it is, suffering can purify us if we submit to the One who has a loving plan for the pain.

Jesus wants not just a *pure* bride, but a mature one as well—and suffering produces growth and maturity in us. James 1:2-4 reminds us that trials produce perseverance, which makes us mature and complete. And Romans 5:3-4 tells us that we can actually rejoice in our sufferings, because, again, they produce perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope. The Lord is creating for Himself a bride with sterling character, but it's not much fun getting there. I like something else Oswald Chambers wrote: "Sorrow burns up a great amount of shallowness."{2}

We usually don't have much trouble understanding that our Divine Bridegroom loves us; but we can easily forget how much He longs for us to love Him back. Suffering scoops us out, making our hearts bigger so that we can hold more love for Him. It's all part of a well-planned courtship. He does know what He's doing . . . we just need to trust Him.

Suffering Allows Us to Minister Comfort to Others Who Suffer

One of the most rewarding reasons that suffering has value is experienced by those who can say with conviction, "I know how you feel. I've been in your shoes." Suffering prepares us to minister comfort to others who suffer.

Feeling isolated is one of the hardest parts of suffering. It can feel like you're all alone in your pain, and that makes it so much worse. The comfort of those who have known that same pain is inexpressible. It feels like a warm blanket being

draped around your soul. But in order for someone to say those powerful words—"I know just how you feel because I've been there"—that person had to walk through the same difficult valley first.

Ray and I lost our first baby when she was born too prematurely to survive. It was the most horrible suffering we've ever known. But losing Becky has enabled me to weep with those who weep with the comforting tears of one who has experienced that deep and awful loss. It's a wound that—by God's grace—has never fully healed so that I can truly empathize with others out of the very real pain I still feel. Talking about my loss puts me in touch with the unhealed part of the grief and loss that will always hurt until I see my daughter again in heaven. One of the most incredibly comforting things we can ever experience is someone else's tears for us. So when I say to a mother or father who has also lost a child, "I hurt with you, because I've lost a precious one too," my tears bring warmth and comfort in a way that someone who has never known that pain cannot offer.

One of the most powerful words of comfort I received when we were grieving our baby's loss was from a friend who said, "Your pain may not be about just you. It may well be about other people, preparing you to minister comfort and hope to someone in your future who will need what you can give them because of what you're going through right now. And if you are faithful to cling to God now, I promise He will use you greatly to comfort others later." That perspective was like a sweet balm to my soul, because it showed me that my suffering was not pointless.

There's another aspect of bringing comfort to those in pain. Those who have suffered tend not to judge others experiencing similar suffering. Not being judged is a great comfort to those who hurt. When you're in pain, your world narrows down to mere survival, and it's easy for others to judge you for not "following the rules" that should only apply to those

whose lives aren't being swallowed by the pain monster.

Suffering often develops compassion and mercy in us. Those who suffer tend to have tender hearts toward others who are in pain. We can comfort others with the comfort that we have received from God (2 Cor. 1:4) because we have experienced the reality of the Holy Spirit being there for us, walking alongside us in our pain. Then we can turn around and walk alongside others in their pain, showing the compassion that our own suffering has produced in us.

Suffering Develops Humble Dependence on God

Marine Corps recruiter Randy Norfleet survived the Oklahoma City bombing despite losing 40 percent of his blood and needing 250 stitches to close his wounds. He never lost consciousness in the ambulance because he was too busy praying prayers of thanksgiving for his survival. When doctors said he would probably lose the sight in his right eye, Mr. Norfleet said, "Losing an eye is a small thing. Whatever brings you closer to God is a blessing. Through all this I've been brought closer to God. I've become more dependent on Him and less on myself."{3}

Suffering is excellent at teaching us humble dependence on God, the only appropriate response to our Creator. Ever since the fall of Adam, we keep forgetting that God created us to depend on Him and not on ourselves. We keep wanting to go our own way, pretending that we are God. Suffering is powerfully able to get us back on track.

Sometimes we hurt so much we can't pray. We are forced to depend on the intercession of the Holy Spirit and the saints, needing them to go before the throne of God on our behalf. Instead of seeing that inability to pray as a personal failure, we can rejoice that our perception of being totally needy corresponds to the truth that we really are that needy.

2 Corinthians 1:9 tells us that hardships and sufferings happen “so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”

Suffering brings a “one day at a time-ness” to our survival. We get to the point of saying, “Lord, I can only make it through today if You help me . . . if You take me through today . . . or the next hour . . . or the next few minutes.” One of my dearest friends shared with me the prayer from a heart burning with emotional pain: “Papa, I know I can make it through the next fifteen minutes if You hold me and walk me through it.” Suffering has taught my friend the lesson of total, humble dependence on God.

As painful as it is, suffering strips away the distractions of life. It forces us to face the fact that we are powerless to change other people and most situations. The fear that accompanies suffering drives us to the Father like a little kid burying his face in his daddy’s leg. Recognizing our own powerlessness is actually the key to experience real power because we have to acknowledge our dependence on God before His power can flow from His heart into our lives.

The disciples experienced two different storms out on the lake. The Lord’s purpose in both storms was to train them to stop relying on their physical eyes and use their spiritual eyes. He wanted them to grow in trust and dependence on the Father. He allows us to experience storms in our lives for the same purpose: to learn to depend on God.

I love this paraphrase of Romans 8:28: “The Lord may not have planned that this should overtake me, but He has most certainly permitted it. Therefore, though it were an attack of an enemy, by the time it reaches me, it has the Lord’s permission, and therefore all is well. He will make it work together with all life’s experiences for good.”

Suffering Displays God's Strength Through Our Weakness

God never wastes suffering, not a scrap of it. He redeems all of it for His glory and our blessing. The classic Scripture for the concept that suffering displays God's strength through our weakness is found in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, where we learn that God's grace is sufficient for us, for His power is perfected in weakness. Paul said he delighted in weaknesses, hardships, and difficulties "for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Our culture disdains weakness, but our frailty is a sign of God's workmanship in us. It gets us closer to what we were created to be—completely dependent on God. Several years ago I realized that instead of despising the fact that polio had left me with a body that was weakened and compromised, susceptible to pain and fatigue, I could choose to rejoice in it. My weakness made me more like a fragile, easily broken window than a solid brick wall. But just as sunlight pours through a window but is blocked by a wall, I discovered that other people could see God's strength and beauty in me because of the window-like nature of my weakness! Consider how the Lord Jesus was the exact representation of the glory of the Father—I mean, He was all window and no walls! He was completely dependent on the Father, choosing to become weak so that God's strength could shine through Him. And He was the strongest person the world has ever seen. Not His own strength; He displayed the Father's strength because of that very weakness.

The reason His strength can shine through us is because we know God better through suffering. One wise man I heard said, "I got theology in seminary, but I learned reality through trials. I got facts in Sunday School, but I learned faith through trusting God in difficult circumstances. I got truth from studying, but I got to know the Savior through

suffering."

Sometimes our suffering isn't a consequence of our actions or even someone else's. God is teaching other beings about Himself and His loved ones—us—as He did with Job. The point of Job's trials was to enable heavenly beings to see God glorified in Job. Sometimes He trusts us with great pain in order to make a point, whether the intended audience is believers, unbelievers, or the spirit realm. Quadriplegic Joni Eareckson Tada, no stranger to great suffering, writes, "Whether a godly attitude shines from a brain-injured college student or from a lonely man relegated to a back bedroom, the response of patience and perseverance counts. God points to the peaceful attitude of suffering people to teach others about Himself. He not only teaches those we rub shoulders with every day, but He instructs the countless millions of angels and demons. The hosts in heaven stand amazed when they observe God sustain hurting people with His peace."{4}

I once heard Charles Stanley say that nothing attracts the unbeliever like a saint suffering successfully. Joni Tada said, "You were made for one purpose, and that is to make God real to those around you."{5} The reality of God's power, His love, and His character are made very, very real to a watching world when we trust Him in our pain.

Suffering Gets Us Ready for Heaven

Pain is inevitable because we live in a fallen world. 1 Thessalonians 3:3 reminds us that we are "destined for trials." We don't have a choice whether we will suffer—our choice is to go through it by ourselves or with God.

Suffering teaches us the difference between the important and the transient. It prepares us for heaven by teaching us how unfulfilling life on earth is and helping us develop an eternal perspective. Suffering makes us homesick for heaven.

Deep suffering of the soul is also a taste of hell. After many sleepless nights wracked by various kinds of pain, my friend Jan now knows what she was saved from. Many Christians only know they're saved without grasping what it is Christ has delivered them from. Jan's suffering has given her an appreciation of the reality of heaven, and she's been changed forever.

I have an appreciation of heaven gained from a different experience. As my body weakens from the lifelong impact of polio, to be honest, I have a deep frustration with it that makes me grateful for the perfect, beautiful, completely working resurrection body waiting for me on the other side. My husband once told me that heaven is more real to me than anyone he knows. Suffering has done that for me. Paul explained what happens in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

> *"Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*

One of the effects of suffering is to loosen our grasp on this life, because we shouldn't be thinking that life in a fallen world is as wonderful as we sometimes think it is. Pastor Dick Bacon once said, "If this life were easy, we'd just love it too much. If God didn't make it painful, we'd never let go of it." Suffering reminds us that we live in an abnormal world. Suffering is abnormal—our souls protest, "This isn't right!" We need to be reminded that we are living in the post-fall "Phase 2." The perfect Phase 1 of God's beautiful, suffering-free creation was ruined when Adam and Eve fell. So often, people wonder what kind of cruel God would deliberately make a world so full of pain and suffering. They've lost track of history. The world God originally made isn't the one we

experience. Suffering can make us long for the new heaven and the new earth where God will set all things right again.

Sometimes suffering literally prepares us for heaven. Cheryl's in-laws, both beset by lingering illnesses, couldn't understand why they couldn't just die and get it over with. But after three long years of holding on, during a visit from Cheryl's pastor, the wife trusted Christ on her deathbed and the husband received assurance of his salvation. A week later the wife died, followed in six months by her husband. They had continued to suffer because of God's mercy and patience, who did not let them go before they were ready for heaven.

Suffering dispels the cloaking mists of inconsequential distractions of this life and puts things in their proper perspective. My friend Pete buried his wife a few years ago after a battle with Lou Gehrig's disease. One morning I learned that his car had died on the way to church, and I said something about what a bummer it was. Pete just shrugged and said, "This is nothing." That's what suffering will do for us. Trials are light and momentary afflictions . . . but God redeems them all.

Notes

1. Oswald Chambers, *Our Utmost for His Highest,* September 1.
2. Chambers, June 25.
3. *National and International Religion Report,* Vol. 9:10, May 1, 1995, 1
4. Joni Eareckson Tada, *When Is It Right to Die?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 122.
5. Tada, 118.

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Heresy: Nothing New Under the Sun

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of some ancient Christian heresies that are still being embraced today: legalism, gnosticism, mysticism, and marcionism.

In this article we address ancient heresies that still exist in only a slightly different form today. Jesus warned us in Matthew 13:24-25 that the "kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field." But then there is a twist in the story.

> "But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also."



Later Jesus explained the parable. The wheat is the "people of the kingdom." The tares are the "people of the evil one." The illustration would make sense to people living in the first century. There was even a Roman law against sowing tares in another person's field. Some have called it a "primitive form of bioterrorism."

Jesus is teaching that both true Christians and false Christians will live together. They both may even go to church and seem like Christians. But the false Christians believe and spread heresy within the church and into society.

Paul also warned about false teaching and heresy. In what might have been his last epistle, he warned Timothy that: "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn

aside to myths." (2 Timothy 4:3)

Peter also gave a warning that these false teachers will come from inside the church. "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words." (2 Peter 2:1)

Notice that these heresies and false teachers will arise from among you. They will secretly introduce these heresies. And they will use greed and sensuality to seduce Christians. Jude (1:4) also adds that these false teachers "have crept in unnoticed" and "turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

In this article we look at heresies in the past that can be found in a slightly altered form today. Just as believers in the first century were warned about false teachers and destructive heresies, so we need to warn each other today about these heresies in the 21st century.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 reminds us that there is "nothing new under the sun." As we will see below, that is true of these ancient heresies.

Legalism

Legalism is an ancient heresy going all the way back to the first century. Paul in his letter to the Colossians (2:16-17) said, "Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath-day things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." He warned them about those in their midst who were taking them captive through the

subtle lies of legalism.

You might notice that what is listed in these verses are not instructions on purity or righteousness. Rather they are specific Old Testament practices that were given to Israel before the coming of Christ. The Passover is a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice as the Lamb of God. While the deliverance of Israel is significant, consider how much more significant is Christ's death which provides us with deliverance from the slavery of sin and separation from God. The previous feasts and festivals are no longer necessary now that we have Christ in our lives.

Jesus addressed legalism among the Pharisees and scribes. They established all sorts of rules and regulations that were binding on all Jews. Starting with the law, they set out to compile the various oral traditions and even began to develop interpretations of these laws. In the end, they even had interpretations of the interpretations that were collected in numerous volumes.

By the time of Christ, the Pharisees and the scribes were actually following the traditions of men rather than the law of God. Jesus pointedly asked them, "Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3) Jesus also condemned the Pharisees by saying, "You also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:28). Jesus therefore accused them, on numerous occasions, of being hypocrites.

Legalism is our attempt to produce righteousness apart from God. We are challenged to follow additional rules and regulations that we believe will merit favor before God. But in the end, these unbiblical rules bind us and drain the joy from our lives.

When we give people an ever expanding "to-do list" that is uncoupled from God's power, we wear people down and ultimately

drive people away from the gospel. Paul warned Timothy that in the last days there would be people “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5). He counsels him to avoid such people.

Gnosticism

Gnosticism is an ancient heresy that surfaced in the last century, partially because of the discovery of the Gnostic Gospels. The Gnostics were prevalent in the first few centuries after the time of Christ. The word *gnosis* means “knowledge.” The focus was on hidden knowledge that contradicted biblical revelation.

For example, the Gnostics denied the existence of sin. Instead, they proposed that the world was corrupted by the demiurge who created it and rules over it. If they believed in sin, they would say that the only sin is ignorance.

The Gnostics taught that Jesus came not to save the world but to impart special knowledge that would lead us to what they called a “divine pleroma.” If you were fortunately to find this knowledge, then you would achieve salvation.

In the first centuries, the Gnostics presented themselves as Christians and worked to popularize their ideas among the growing church of believers. They also produced their own texts (Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Judas).

Iraenaeus was a church father who wrote a critique of Gnosticism in AD 180. He explained that the Gnostics used the Bible alongside their own texts to demonstrate their “perverse interpretations” and “deceitful expositions.” They also reinterpreted parables and allegories from the Old Testament in a fraudulent manner.

Nevertheless, Gnosticism appealed to many Christians in the first centuries because it had many elements that were very similar to Christianity. They believed in Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. They quoted from the Bible. They practiced some of the sacraments.

Many of these same heretical ideas appeal to Christians today. Leaders of progressive Christianity argue that they have a more mature view of God and the Bible. These leaders believe they have special knowledge that allows them to set aside the standard interpretations of biblical passages. One evangelical pastor said: "The church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense."{1}

The Gnostics and modern heretics claim sources of knowledge outside the Bible. They say we know so much more now that the early Christians. C.S. Lewis refers to this as "chronological snobbery." They assume they know better than any believer in the past.

Today, we have people claiming to know what the Bible really means and invite you to join them as they impart their "special knowledge" to you. More than ever we should be alert to such leaders who will ultimately lead us away from the true Gospel.

Mysticism

Mysticism is another ancient heresy that we still see today. When Paul wrote to the Colossians (2:18-19), he warned them about false teachers who would attempt to seduce them into mystical ideas: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God."

The word mysticism comes from the Greek word (*mystes*) for the

mystery religions that existed at the time Paul was writing to these Christians. He is describing someone who is “taking his stand on visions he has seen.” In other words, this is a person who has had some vision and is mixing that vision with the revelation of Scripture.

At the time Paul was writing to a church that was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Many were young Christians and may have brought their pagan ideas into the church. This would include the idea that you receive spiritual revelations by entering into an ecstatic state. These Christians also lived in a culture where many claimed they were receiving visions from the gods. If these young Christians did not have discernment, they might actually believe that someone who has these visions was spiritually superior to them.

Mysticism has been a major area of cultural captivity both in church history and even in our present day. We see in Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, that believers were confused about speaking in tongues and other spiritual manifestations. Some of the believers were essentially “babes in Christ” who could not handle the solid food of God’s word. He reminded them that when they were pagans, they had been led astray (1 Corinthians 12:1-3). Because of their previous exposure to paganism, they were vulnerable to false doctrine.

Throughout church history, certain churches and denominations have brought mystical rituals and practices into their worship experience. They may take the form of chants, icons, or prescribed practices not found in Scripture but part of a tradition that borrows heavily from mystical ideas. And many of these practices are found today not only in North American churches but in churches in other parts of the world.

Mysticism is quite prevalent outside of the church and can have a strong cultural influence on Christians. Many of the books on the best-seller lists over the last few decades dealing with spirituality are not books that promote biblical

Christianity but rather books that promote an Eastern philosophy of religion or the New Age Movement.

Marcionism

Marcionism was taught by a theologian named Marcion in the second century. Although some of his ideas parallel Gnosticism, he made a distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. He taught that the benevolent God of the gospels who sent Jesus was inconsistent with the mean, vindictive, malevolent God of the Old Testament. Hence, he concluded they were two different deities.

He also considered himself a follower of Paul, who he preached was the only true apostle of Jesus Christ. In fact, he even created his own "Scriptures" that included ten of Paul's epistles and the Gospel of Marcion (which was a shorter version and highly edited version of the Gospel of Luke). He emphasized Paul because he felt he freed Christianity from the Jewish Scriptures.

He also rejected most of the orthodox teachings of Christianity. For example, he rejected the ideas of God's wrath and rejected the ideas of hell and judgment. Those ideas, according to him, were tied to the God of the Old Testament, whom he called the Demiurge. That God was merely a jealous tribal deity of the Jews and represented a legalistic view of justice.

A similar idea exists even today. For example, one evangelical theologian said this: "The Bible is an ancient book and we shouldn't be surprised to see it act like one. So seeing God portrayed as a violent, tribal warrior is not how God is but how he was understood to be by the ancient Israelites community with god in their time and place."{2}

We might add that an increasing number of pastors and

Christians no longer want to talk about God's wrath and refuse to teach what the Bible does say about hell and judgment. Books and articles are being written denying the existence of hell. Instead, they teach universal salvation for all.

Jesus talked more about hell than he talked about heaven. In Luke 16 he describes it as a great chasm that does not allow people to cross to the other side. In Matthew 25 he predicts a future in which people will be separated into two groups. One will enter heaven. The others will be banished to "eternal fire."

We live in a world where heresy, false teaching, and a false gospel are proliferating. That is why we need to develop biblical discernment. Paul said he was amazed that some of the early Christians adopted "a different gospel" which he said was a distorted gospel of Christ. He added, "If we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-8).

These ancient heresies are being preached today. We need to return to the essential gospel and sound biblical teaching.

Notes

1. "Rob Bell Suggests Bible Not Relevant to Today's Culture | CBN News," www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2015/February/Rob-Bell-Suggests-Bible-Not-Relevant-to-Todays-Culture accessed 2/5/2023.
2. Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (NY: Harper One, 2014).

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Friendship with Jesus

Dr. Michael Gleghorn draws on a work by Dr. Gail R. O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John,"{1} to explore the perspective of Jesus Christ as a Friend.

What a Friend We Have in Jesus{2}

In his book, *The Problem of Pain*, C. S. Lewis offers four analogies of God's love for humanity.{3} These include the love of an artist for a great work of art, the love of a human being for an animal, the love of a father for his son, and the love of a man for a woman. Interestingly, he does not consider the analogy of friendship, or love between friends. In one sense it's surprising, for Lewis would later write quite perceptively about friendship in his book, *The Four Loves.*



Of course, at this time in his career, Lewis may not have even thought about the love of friendship in the context of discussing analogies of God's love for humanity. After all, on the surface, the Bible appears to say little about friendship between God and human beings. But saying little is not the same as saying nothing, and the Bible does speak about the possibility of enjoying friendship with God. In fact, the Gospel of John offers a great illustration of this in the life and teaching of Jesus, whom Christians regard as God the Son incarnate. John presents Jesus as a true friend, one who is willing to speak the truth to those He loves and to lay down His life for their benefit.

Consider Jesus' words to his disciples in John 15: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the

servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (vv. 12-15).

In this brief passage, Jesus surfaces several important elements of friendship which would have been readily recognized by people in the ancient world. We'll carefully consider each of these elements in this article. For now, however, the key point to notice is that Jesus explicitly refers to His disciples as "friends." Moreover, He also holds out to them the possibility of deepening their friendship with both Him, and one another.

In what follows, we'll unpack many of these ideas further. First, however, we must get a better understanding of how friendship was viewed in the ancient world.

Friendship in the Ancient World

Of course, John's discussion of friendship in his gospel does not occur in a cultural or historical vacuum. Indeed, he seems to have been aware of other such discussions and even enters into a dialogue (of sorts) with some of them. So how was friendship understood in the ancient world?

The most important discussion of friendship in antiquity is probably that found in Aristotle's *Ethics.* As one philosopher observes, "Aristotle's treatise on friendship is comprehensive and confident, as well as undeniably profound."{4} Aristotle views friendship as something like the glue of a community, binding people together in relations of benevolence and love. Such relations are indispensable for the community's health and well-being.{5}

Aristotle describes friendship as "*reciprocated* goodwill" and claims that the highest form of friendship occurs between "good people similar in virtue." The primary virtue of real friends is "loving" one another. And such love is expressed in

practical actions, for the virtuous person "labours for his friends" and is even willing to "die for them" if necessary.

Finally, the ancients also viewed "frank speech" and "openness" as essential elements of friendship. According to Plutarch, "Frankness of speech . . . is the language of friendship . . . and . . . lack of frankness is unfriendly and ignoble."{6} The language of friendship thus involves something like "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Friendship should allow, and even encourage, frank speech. And yet, such speech should always be characterized by love and a genuine desire for the friend's best interest.

Putting this all together, we can see how Jesus' remarks about friendship correlate with the ancient ideals expressed in the writings of men like Aristotle and Plutarch. Just as Aristotle viewed friendship as the glue of a community, so also Jesus seems to envision the formation of a community of friends, who are bound together in love by their shared allegiance to Him. As biblical scholar Dr. Gail O'Day observes, "The language of friendship provided language for talking about the construction of a community of like-minded people informed by a particular set of teachings."{7}

Below, we'll consider how Jesus both models and encourages the ancient ideals of friendship in His life and teaching.

The Language of Friendship

One of the ways in which John shows Jesus demonstrating friendship is through his frank and honest speech. We've seen that in the ancient world, open and honest speech was regarded as one of the hallmarks of friendship. And there are several occasions in which such speech is attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John (e.g., 7:26; 10:24-30; 11:14; 16:25-33; 18:19-20).{8}

Of course, this doesn't mean that everything Jesus had to say

was easy to understand. It wasn't, and even his disciples often misunderstood Him. Nor does it mean that Jesus never taught truths about God by using parables or figurative language. Indeed, He often did. What it does mean, however, is that throughout his Gospel, John repeatedly portrays Jesus as speaking and teaching the truth about God openly and honestly to all who care to listen.

For example, Jesus is described as "speaking openly" while teaching the people in the temple at the Feast of Booths (John 7:14, 26). Moreover, after His arrest, when Jesus is being questioned by the High Priest, He frankly declares to those present, "I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret" (John 18:20). Dr. Gail O'Day observes that Jesus here claims that His entire public ministry has "been characterized by freedom of speech throughout its duration." She writes, "Jesus has not held anything back in His self-revelation but has spoken with the freedom that marks a true friend."{9}

Finally, we must not forget what Jesus says to His disciples in John 15: "No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (v. 15). Here Jesus explicitly refers to His disciples as "friends," claiming that He has "made known" to them everything that He has heard from the Father. Not only does Jesus call His disciples "friends," He also speaks to them in the language of friendship, openly and honestly revealing to them the heart and mind of the Father.

Judged by the criterion of "frank and honest speech," Jesus thus reveals Hmself to be a true friend to His disciples. And as we'll see next, He is willing to do much more than this, for Jesus is willing to lay down His life for the benefit of others.

The Ultimate Demonstration of Friendship

In John 15 Jesus declares, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (v. 13). Earlier we saw that Aristotle, in his writings on friendship, maintained that the true friend, actuated by genuine goodness, would even be willing to “die” (if necessary) for the sake of a friend.{10} Of course, as any reader of the Gospels knows, Jesus soon does this very thing, thus demonstrating the greatest possible love according to the ancient ideals of friendship. As Dr. O’Day observes, “Jesus did what the philosophers only talked about—He lay down his life for His friends.”{11}

This event is foreshadowed by Jesus in His claim to be the Good Shepherd in John 10. “I am the good shepherd,” He says. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (v. 11). This claim is one of the seven “I Am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John, and it likely involves an implicit claim to deity, for as Edwin Blum has noted, “In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd of His people (Psalm 23:1; 80:1-2; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10).”{12} One thinks of the way in which David begins Psalm 23: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want” (v. 1). The Lord Jesus, as the Good Shepherd of His people, is willing to lay down His life for their benefit (John 10:11).

But Jesus goes further than this, for as Paul tells us, Jesus not only gave His life for His “friends,” but even for His “enemies.” “For while we were still weak,” writes Paul, “at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). “While we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8), and even “enemies,” “we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10). If dying for one’s friends epitomizes the ancient ideal of friendship, dying for one’s enemies far transcends this ideal. It demonstrates the sacrificial love of God for all humanity. While we were spiritually dead, mired in

sin and rebellion (Ephesians 2:1-3), God “sent his Son to be the savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

Aristotle referred to friendship as “reciprocated goodwill.” Jesus demonstrated the greatest possible love and “goodwill” of God by giving His life for the sins of the world (John 1:29). He commands His disciples to reciprocate His goodwill by loving “one another” as He has loved us (John 15:12, 14). By following His command, a community of friends is formed, bound together in love for one another and a shared commitment to Jesus.

A Community of Friends

Jesus calls His disciples “friends” and commands them to “love one another” as He has loved them (John 15:12). Jesus wants His followers to regard themselves not only as *His* friends, but as friends of one another as well. He intends for them to be a community of friends, bound together in their love for one another because of their shared devotion to Him. The sort of love to which Jesus calls them is a costly love, for He desires that His people’s love for one another be an imitation of the love that He has already demonstrated toward them. And what sort of love is this? It’s the kind of love that is willing to give one’s life for the benefit of others, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends (John 15:13).

Now this, I think we can all agree, is a very high calling. Indeed, if we’re honest, I think that we must all admit that, humanly speaking, it is frankly impossible. If some degree of discomfort does not grip our hearts in considering this commandment, then we probably aren’t considering it in all due seriousness. Very few of us will probably ever reach the level of truly loving other believers just as Jesus has loved us, and if any of us do reach it, we probably won’t be able to consistently maintain such love in our daily practice. But Jesus commands us to do it, and we must at least begin trying

to do so. But how?

Dr. Gail O'Day, I think, strikes the right tone when she comments: "The disciples begin with the explicit appellation, 'friend,' and the challenge for them is to enact and embody friendship as Jesus has done. The disciples know how Jesus has been a friend, and they are called to see what kind of friends they can become. Jesus' friendship is the model of friendship for the disciples, and it makes any subsequent acts of friendship by them possible because the disciples themselves are already the recipients of Jesus' acts of friendship."{13}

We must remember that Jesus is our friend, that He loves us and provides all that we need to live a holy and God-honoring life. Indeed, He has sent the Holy Spirit to indwell and empower His people for just this purpose. As we trust in Jesus, giving ourselves to Him (and one another) in genuine love and friendship, we will find that we are increasingly obeying His commands and bearing fruit that brings Him glory. So let's commit ourselves to friendship with Jesus, and to those who compose His body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:24).

Notes

1. Much of the content of this article is indebted to the prior work of Gail R. O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," *Interpretation*, 58(2):144-157.
2. The title for this day is indebted to the song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." The words to this song were originally penned by Joseph Scriven in the 19th century; they were set to music by Charles Converse in 1868. For a brief history of Scriven and the hymn, please see Terry, L. (2004, July-August). Joseph Scriven's: "What a Friend We Have in Jesus": What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! *Today's Christian*, 42(4), 16.
3. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Macmillan,

1962), 42-48.
4. Michael Pakaluk (Ed.), *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1991), 28.
5. I am drawing from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing, 1985), 1155a23-27.
6. Plutarch, *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, 61; cited in Gail O'Day, "Jesus as Friend in the Gospel of John," *Interpretation* 58(2):147.
7. O'Day, 147.
8. See the discussion in O'Day, 152-57.
9. O'Day, 156.
10. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing, 1985).
11. O'Day, 150.
12. Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament Edition*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1989), 310.
13. O'Day, 152.

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Satan Loses—Every Single Time

Someone commented on one of our articles about Satan. They said that many people, both believers and non-believers, feel that Satan holds the upper hand in life over Christ. Many reasons exist that could lead one to believe the devil has the world in his hands. Nothing could be further from the truth. What humanity witnesses on a day-to-day basis as Satan winning, I'll provide some additional proclamations that would challenge the notion. I wouldn't say he's winning by any means. He's not even losing.

In fact, Satan lost. When? First, he lost when he rebelled

against the Living God. That's the first "L." The second huge loss took place through Jesus Christ, when He died on the cross at Calvary. Jesus snatched the keys of death and Hades from Satan. With that, people now have a way to access God's peace and intimacy through the risen Savior. Then why does it seem like the devil has the upper hand in life? It *seems* that way because (1) he knows he has little time left (Revelation 12:12) in influencing this side of eternity, and (2) the devil remains consistent on his path of destruction (John 10:10; Job 1:7, 2:2).

Some may ask, "Why doesn't God do something about what's happening in the world?" He did. First, let's remember that Jesus Christ reigns as Lord over all things. Second, after His death and resurrection, Jesus sent the world His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, or God the Spirit, the third Person of the Triune Godhead, holds a distinct function on earth. So today, Jesus lives *among* us through the Holy Spirit, but only through faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior does His Spirit live *in* us. The Living God sometimes chooses to work *through* people, sometimes *alongside* people, and other times outside of the influence of people.

For example, a Christian, having the Holy Spirit living *in* them, can demonstrate God's love and forgive the same way Jesus did. The Lord can then empower or work *upon* this same Christian (because teaching and preaching are spiritual gifts) to preach a sermon on love and forgiveness. The Holy Spirit, through the Christian, then *convinces* listeners (by working *upon* the heart) to come to faith in Christ by allowing Him *in* their hearts to believe. Yet, the Lord, in His omnipotence, works self-sufficiently to wake the Christian and the listeners up, who depend on God to see the new day. Only then can the Christian love and forgive like Jesus, preach the Gospel, and the listeners hear the message to consider eternal life.

With that said, God provided enough to the world to ensure the

world looks the way it should, despite the existence of Satan and His influence in the world. The Lord God gave us Himself. In the book of Genesis, the Lord told Cain to do and live right, while exposing a tactic of sin. God told Cain that sin "crouches" at his door (Genesis 4:7). Sin doesn't display itself as a loud and formidable opponent. Comparable to 1 Peter 5:8, sin, like Satan, takes a clandestine approach to trap and devour the lives of people. It desired to control Cain's life, but God commissioned Cain to master and control sin's advances. The Bible also tells us to resist and flee from sin (1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Timothy 2:22, James 4:7). Today, sin holds an attractive appeal to the eye of those mastered by sin. Rejecting Jesus Christ and the Bible also holds significant popularity. Society encourages sin. The media aims to normalize it. People make excuses for it. The world embraces it.

Sin seems and *feels* good until it leaves you empty, left to address the dire consequences or irreparable damage, ones that can take years to repair if even possible. But that does not matter to those who have handed their calling from God to take dominion on the earth over to Satan. What Jesus rejected in the wilderness, the world has freely accepted. Those in submission to the flesh and its desires can only crave the wrath placed on the flesh after the Fall in Eden—to surely die and return to the dust (Genesis 2:17, Genesis 3:19).

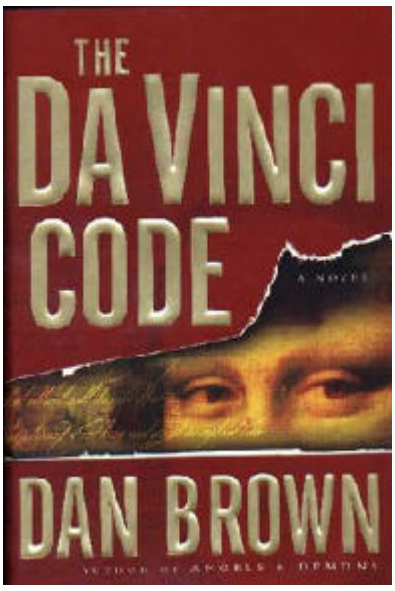
So, when we see a world that seems like Satan is winning—he's not. The world continues and aims to find value in digging itself into the same hellhole that Satan and his demons put themselves in and will not get out of. Satan isn't winning. For every prince answers to a king—and Satan still answers to the King of kings. Yet, despite Jesus giving us everything we need to master sin and overcome Satan, the world, unfortunately, has decided that it's best that they, not Christ, surrender and bow to this defeated foe. Remember, Satan always broadcasts a counterfeit reality. Jesus Christ

has the victory now and forevermore.

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What Happened at Nicaea

The identity of Jesus of Nazareth is central to the beliefs of Christianity. Christianity does not call a person to join a philosophy, or a set of practices. Sure, there are philosophical ideas and practices that are consistent with Christianity. However, the central part of the Christian faith is a call to be in a relationship with Christ Jesus. Christian apologist Michael Ramsden once remarked, "Without Christ the Christian is left with the letters I A N and Ian cannot help you." While this is simplistic, saying it does convey the importance of Jesus to the Christian religion. This is exactly the question that many bishops were called to answer in the city of Nicaea in A.D. 325.



Some skeptics claim that no one claimed that Jesus was not seen as divine until the council of Nicaea. In 2003 this view was popularized in Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code* and in the movie that followed. In this novel Brown uses a fictional story to make factual claims about the origin of Christianity and the person of Jesus. While investigating a murder, several of Brown's characters make some disturbing discoveries. One character states, "Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet…A great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless."{1} Another character says that "Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries *after* Jesus'

death."{2} While most of Brown's claims have been disregarded, the claim that the divinity of Jesus was something invented is still floating around. So it is still important to understand what happened at the Council of Nicaea.

One interpretation of the Council of Nicaea is that it was a "local dispute…eventually judged by the ecumenical councils."{3} The result is that the issue of this local dispute was influenced by cultural issues that was then imposed on all Christians by an ecumenical council. An examination of the facts reveals that this interpretation is the result of imposing philosophical presuppositions onto the historical narrative instead of looking at the facts.

Before the battle of Milvian Bridge in 312, Constantine was praying when he saw a cross in the heavens with the inscription, "CONQUER BY THIS." Constantine had that sign painted on the shields of all his soldiers before the battle. Constantine won the battle and became co-emperor of the Roman Empire with Licinius. From that point Constantine worked to promote the Christian religion in the Roman Empire.

In 318 Arius, a presbyter (priest or elder) in Alexandria, began to teach that Christ was a divine being that was created by the Father. Christ then created the world. This view made Christ "a kind of divine hero: greater than an ordinary human being, but of a lower rank than the eternal God."{4} The Bishop of Alexandria disagreed with this view. The conflict led to a council meeting in Alexandria where Arius was excommunicated. Arius, who had the support of Eusebius, the Bishop of Nicomedia, spread his teachings through the empire. Several more meetings were held, but the controversy continued.

Constantine believed that it was his duty to promote unity in the Christian religion for the sake of the empire. Constantine wrote "My design then was, first, to bring diverse judgments found by all nations respecting the Deity to a condition, as

it were, of settled uniformity …and, second, to restore a healthy tone to the system of the world, then suffering under the power of grievous disease."{5} Constantine called the council of Nicaea to "adjudicate the meaning of Jesus' divinity"{6}so that there could be cultural unity in the empire. The controversy may have started as a local dispute between a bishop and a presbyter, but it spread through the empire and caused enough division to get the attention of the empire. This was not just a local dispute any more, and involved more than just cultural influence. Theological questions that defined the very nature of Christianity were at the heart of the controversy.

Arius' argument had a logical component, and a component based on Scripture. The logical argument, or "logic of monotheism,"{7} focused on the Father's unity. Arius reasoned that if God was perfect, transcendent, and changeless, and the sustainer of all things, then everything and everyone is separate from God. If everyone is separate from God, then Jesus is separate from God. Jesus has a special role in creation and redemption but cannot be God because there is only one God. This means that Jesus is a created being. Because Jesus was created, he is subject to change. Therefore, Jesus was not God.

To popularize his argument, Arius wrote easily memorized, catchy songs set to familiar tunes, which allowed his teachings to spread across the empire. One song had the lyrics:

> And by adoption had God made the Son
> Into an advancement of himself.
> Yet the Son's substance is
> Removed from the substance of the Father:
> The Son is not equal to the Father,
> Nor does he share the same substance.{8}

Arius also used Scripture as part of his argument. Arius

identified wisdom with Christ. He cited Proverbs 8:22 which says, “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old.” Jesus states that “the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). Luke states that “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). This indicates that Jesus changed, something God cannot do. Paul writes that Jesus is “the firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). Paul also states that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn among all creation” (Colossians 1:15). Arius argued that these verses meant that Jesus was the first created being. John writes, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Paul writes to Timothy about God, “who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6:16). Arius taught that these verses taught that God was totally set apart from creation, which includes the Son.

Arius’ opponents thought that he was “reading meaning into innocent passages.”{9} To show this, these bishops looked to the Scripture to find their own proof texts. Paul writes of Jesus “though he was in the form of God, did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Philippians 2:6). This verse identifies the Son with the Father. John opens his Gospel with, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus was not only *with* God, he *was* God. The author of Hebrews writes that Jesus “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by his word and his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is identified as the exact imprint of the Father and the sustainer of the universe. Paul calls Jesus the “Lord of Glory” (1 Corinthians 2:8). The author of Hebrews states that “Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Jesus does not change and neither does the Father.

The opponents of Arius countered his argument that Proverbs 8 showed that wisdom was created by pointing to verse 30, “Then I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily in his delight, rejoicing before him always.” They argued that this verse showed that wisdom was always with God.

The orthodox bishops also responded with an argument called the “logic of salvation.”{10} The argument is that if Christ is not truly God, then Jesus cannot save mankind from sin. If Jesus is less than God, and is subject to sin, then his sacrifice is insufficient to redeem mankind of their sin. Paul taught this when he wrote, “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ cannot make us the righteousness of God if he is not of the same substance as the Father.

In his novel Brown portrays the outcome of the Council of Nicaea as coming down to a close vote. The vote was 300 to 2. In any election this would have been called a landslide. The council instated what later became the Nicene Creed. Its statement is as follows:

We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven;
he became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary,
and was made human.
He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered and was buried.
The third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead.
His kingdom will never end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life.
He proceeds from the Father and the Son,
and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified.
He spoke through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.
We affirm one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look forward to the resurrection of the dead,
and to life in the world to come. Amen.

Constantine did not decide that Jesus should be made a God, nor did he participate in the vote. The deity of Jesus was not what was at issue at this council either. The issue before the council was the nature of Jesus' relation to the Father.

The Council of Nicaea may have decided against Arius' view, but the controversy was not over yet. The Arians were exiled after the council. Eusebius of Caesarea was recalled after writing a theology that made Constantine the "earthly image of the *Logos*."{11} Arius was recalled from exile after giving a statement of faith that Constantine did not understand, but died unexpectedly the day before taking communion with the faithful.

Athanasius took the office of bishop of Alexandria after Alexander, the previous bishop, died. Athanasius was

Alexander's advisor at the time of the council in 325. Athanasius did not welcome the Arians back into the Church, putting him in conflict with Constantine. The Arians tried to dispose of Athanasius at Tyre in 335. Athanasius was accused of abusing clergy that disagreed with him and of cutting off food to Constantinople by instigating a dock strike. Constantine banished Athanasius to Trier in Gaul.

When Constantine died, Athanasius and Marcellus, who taught that the Father and the Son were of a similar substance, were allowed to return from exile. The Eastern Empire was ruled by Constantius, and the West by Constans. The Nicene Creed was still the official doctrine, but the Arians outnumbered the orthodox Christians. To advance their cause the Arians convinced Constantius to banish Athanasius and Marcellus again. In 340 Bishop Julius recalled Athanasius and Marcellus. Marcellus' teachings were declared orthodox. However, in 341 there was a council at Antioch that rejected the teachings of Arius and Marcellus. Athanasius was not allowed a hearing at the council. The creed that was affirmed by this council excluded Arianism and condemned Marcellus. Constans and Constantius decided to call a council in Sardica. This council ended in schism between the eastern and western parts of the Empire. Athanasius abandoned Marcellus and was allowed to return to Alexandria.

In 350 Constantius gained control over the western Empire. He allowed the Arians power in the Church. Bishops were forced to turn on Athanasius. In 356 Athanasius was banished again. A creed was published in 357 that banished the philosophical language that was used in Nicaea. Basil, Marcellian's successor, taught that the Son was of the same substance as the Father; this development was encouraging to Athanasius.

When Emperor Justine ascended to power, he permitted all exiles to return. A council was held in 362 in Alexandria where the Nicene Creed was affirmed. Another council was held in 381 in Constantinople where a modified version of the

Nicaea Creed was affirmed and all bishops were assured that the three persons of the Trinity were not three Gods. Three persons formed the one Triune God. It took 66 years of conflict after the Council of Nicaea for the Church to reach a conclusion about the issue.

There were four main affirmations that resulted from the Council of Nicaea. First, Christ was "very God of very God."{12} Jesus is God in the same sense that the Father is God. Second, Christ is "of one substance with the Father."{13} On this point the distinction was one Greek letter. Arianism taught that Jesus was of a similar substance (*homoiousios*) with the Father. Athanasius and the orthodox Christians believed that Jesus was of the same substance (*homoousios*) with the Father. It can be said that the whole dispute was over one letter. Third, Jesus was "begotten, not made."{14} Fourth, Jesus "became human for us men, and for our salvation."{15} Without the work of Jesus there is no salvation of mankind.

Athanasius spent most of his life defending the truth of Christian doctrine. He was exiled five times. He placed himself on the line to fight the good fight. Athanasius deserves to be remembered as one of the greatest theologians and defenders of the truth. Even when his name is forgotten, the fruit of his work will remain.

There are many misconceptions about the Council of Nicaea in the larger culture. Constantine did not decide to declare Jesus divine. He called a council to attempt to resolve a dispute among Christians. From Constantine's point of view, the stability of the Empire stood on the stability of the Christian religion. The Christians did not decide to declare that Jesus was divine at this council. This was a belief that was already held by the majority of Christians. The primary question that was being discussed transcended cultural boundaries. If Christ is fully God, then this transcends all cultural boundaries. If Christ is fully God, then all of

mankind will be united once again to worship their king.

Notes

1. Quoted by Hank Hanegraaff and Paul L. Maier, *The Da Vinci Code: Fact of Fiction?* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishing 2004), 15.
2. Ibid. 32.
3. Virginia Burrus and Rebecca Lyman, "Shifting the Focus of History," in *A People's History of Christianity Vol. 2: Late Ancient Christianity*, Ed. Virginia Burrus, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 18.
4. Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 100.
5. Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2000), 51.
6. Ibid. 48.
7. Ibid. 54.
8. Ibid. 53.
9. Ibid. 54.
10. Ibid. 55.
11. Tim Dowley, Ed. *Introduction to the History of Christianity*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 169.
12. Noll, 57.
13. Ibid. 58.
14. Ibid. 58.
15. Ibid. 58.

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Is Satan Equal to Jesus? 6

Biblical Truths You Need to Know

Is Satan equal to Jesus? Many people assume he is the opposite force of Christ—but Scripture tells a very different story. Terrence Harris reminds us why Satan and Jesus are not equally matched enemies.

My heart goes out to people who believe Satan is the equal opposite of Jesus Christ.

He is not.

Is Satan Equal to Jesus? Satan Is Created, Not Equal to God.

Many people still ask, "Is Satan equal to Jesus?" especially when influenced by media portrayals of Satan and demons having their way with people.

The Lord God created Lucifer along with all the angels in heaven.{1} Contrary to popular belief and culture, the artist holds deference over the artwork, just as the potter commands deference over the clay.

Satan Fell Through Pride, Not Power.

God changed Lucifer's title to Satan (which means *adversary*) through his own pride, when he opposed God with the very gifts God gave him. Satan was so impressed with his own beauty and wisdom, I guess in his mind that made him a qualifying contender for God's throne.{2} But obviously (well, not as obvious to demons, apparently), Satan would never match the eternal power of the Almighty Living God.

Is Satan Equal to Jesus? Satan Is Already Defeated and Limited.

A third of the angels followed him in his rebellion, while two-thirds remained loyal to the Lord.{3}

The Lord stripped Lucifer of his glory, along with the other rebel angels, and threw them out of heaven down to the earth.{4} Satan caused many other angels to fall with him, who also chose to rebel against God. Since then, Satan and his demons have wreaked havoc on humanity, but that does not mean victory for our enemy.

The media often portrays Satan and demons (known as *fallen angels*) as having more authority and power than they truly possess. Movies tend to show a priest fidgeting with a cross and holy water, facing a demon-possessed person who boldly declares, "You have no authority over me." To that point, scripture actually gives a similar example of contending against the demonic realm in vain.

In Acts 19:13–16, the sons of Sceva tried to cast out demons "in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches." This phrase alone communicates a lack of intimacy that these traveling Jewish exorcists had with Jesus Christ. The Bible says the demon replied, "Jesus, I know, and Paul, I know, but who are you?" Then the possessed man overpowered them, beating them and sending them away naked and wounded."

This brings us to the fourth critical point regarding the topic, "Is Satan Equal to Jesus?"

Knowing About Jesus ≠ Knowing Jesus.

Take note of this important reminder: It's not enough to just know *about* Jesus; Satan and his demons know *about* Jesus. Satan and demons can read the Bible, too. Satan tempted Jesus with a Bible verse in the wilderness, one that many Christians may

not even know where to find. However, the true authority is in *knowing* Jesus *and* Jesus knowing you. *Knowing* Christ—instead of just knowing about Him or just knowing scripture—the intimacy with the Word of God—gives birth to godliness that pleases the heart of the Father.

Authority Comes From a Relationship with Christ.

Apart from Christ, humanity is "dead in trespasses and sins" and follows "the prince of the power of the air."{5} But for the blood-bought believer, the story is entirely different. Those who are filled with God's Spirit, who confess Jesus Christ as Lord, who believe He died for their sins, rose by the power of the Holy Spirit, and now sit at the right hand of the Father{6}—these are the ones who stand in the Lord's authority and victory.

Believers Share in Christ's Victory.

So the believer doesn't face the demonic realm alone. We stand in and by the authority of Christ Jesus and do not need to question whether Satan is equal to Jesus. Scripture assures us that "Greater is He Who is in you than he who is in the world."{7} Through Christ, we are more than conquerors.{8} Satan is the opposition, but never the equal opponent. The living God dwells within His people, and by His Spirit, they walk in victory and authority over the powers of darkness.

Did this article help you understand why Satan is not equal to Jesus? Please tell us your thoughts or questions in the comments below.

For more Biblically inspired articles like "Is Satan Equal to Jesus?" please visit us at Probe.org.

Also visit these helpful links:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=CamYtVpoTNk

Notes

1. Ezekiel 28:13-15
2. Isaiah 14:12-15
3. Revelation 12:4
4. Luke 10:18
5. Ephesians 2:1-2
6. Romans 8:11; Hebrews 1:3
7. 1 John 4:4
8. Romans 8:37

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The Truth About Satan and Demons

Terrence Harris exposes the growing influence of Satan and the demons in the world today.

Today we live in a world that gravitates more and more toward demonic influences, particularly what we hear from the entertainment industry: the media, the music, and everything else in between. We see these ritual-like performances and symbolic messages by artists and entertainers showing up everywhere that give antichrist vibes,{1} encouraging society to live for themselves, worship themselves, and telling people they can "do and live however they want."{2}

As Christians, we must ask: why would anyone choose to live in submission to demons and Satan himself?{3} From Scripture, we clearly see the habits and motives of these fallen and corrupted beings. We learn what they think of humanity,{4}

what their possession of people looks like.{5} They oppress and seek to destroy anything that reflects God's image and the work of His hands.{6} The Bible also tells us where they come from,{7} their methods,{8} and that their end is coming—praise be to God.{9}

So why would anyone make allegiance to something that hates them? The demonic realm hates God, including His creation. They cannot destroy the Living God, so people are the next viable option.

Some may say, *"Well, I have a good life, I have everything I need, never prayed to anyone nor begged for anything. I did the work to get to where I am. That tells me that I never needed God."* And this is the position the devil wants you in.{10} Like Peter and Judas, Satan aims to expose and exploit our weaknesses{11}—to kill, steal, and destroy our lives{12}—at an opportune time.{13} God owns the breath in our bodies.{14} Our pride regarding life can blind us to this truth, taking God's grace, love, and patience for granted.{15} Satan banks on us declaring that we are "the masters of our fate and the captains of our own souls"{16}—minimizing Jesus to a non-essential.

And just like the devil and his angels, the messaging from the entertainment and media worlds tempts humanity to sin against God—right along with them.{17} How? Disguising sin and its consequences with things that entice the natural senses.{18} Some want fame and fortune, some desire success, power, and influence. Having only the natural desires of humanity in mind, they presume to offer people these in exchange for our God-given thoughts, talents, gifts, resources, etc. Everything the Living God gives us, Satan wants for his purposes,{19} while excluding the One who gave us life from our lives.{20}

My goal is not to glorify demons but to expose them.{21} It's time for Christians to pull back the veil and expose the truth: people who want to live in submission to Satan and his

demons are literally asking for the same coming judgment of God—a judgment not originally meant for people.{22}

Every believer must understand these biblical truths concerning Satan and demons in order to navigate a world where demonic influence seems both rampant yet clandestine. But more importantly, I want to point to the greater reality: victory, true life, and authority belong only to those who place their faith in the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.{23} Jesus holds all power and authority over every created being—forever and ever.{24}

Notes

1. 1 John 2:18
2. Judges 21:25
3. Ephesians 6:12
4. John 8:44
5. Mark 5:2-5
6. Genesis 1:27; 1 Peter 5:8
7. Isaiah 14:12-15; Revelation 12:7-9
8. 2 Corinthians 11:14; John 10:10
9. Revelation 20:10
10. Luke 12:16-21
11. Luke 22:3-4, 31
12. John 10:10
13. Luke 4:13
14. Acts 17:25
15. Romans 2:4
16. William Ernest Henley, *Invictus*
17. Genesis 3:1-6; Revelation 12:9
18. James 1:14-15; 1 John 2:16
19. Matthew 4:8-10
20. John 1:3-4
21. Ephesians 5:11
22. Matthew 25:41
23. Romans 8:37; 1 John 5:4-5
24. Philippians 2:9-11; Colossians 2:15

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C.S. Lewis as Evangelist

Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides an insightful examination of how legendary Christian author C.S. Lewis used his writing to invite his readers to put their faith in Jesus Christ.

Lewis and Evangelism

"C. S. Lewis never invited unbelievers to come to Jesus. He was a very successful evangelist." So begins Michael Ward's essay "Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis's Depictions of Conversion." Ward follows up this provocative comment with others like it. For example, "Einstein failed his entrance exam to the Federal Polytechnic. He was a very successful physicist."{1} What is Ward wanting us to see here?



While he recognizes that his initial statement about Lewis needs some qualification, he's nonetheless put his finger on something very important about Lewis's evangelistic style. For while Lewis had a heart for evangelism, and desired to see men and women surrender their lives to Christ, he's not the sort of person one would typically think of when hearing the term "evangelist." One might readily describe Lewis as a Christian apologist or imaginative storyteller, a literary scholar or skillful debater, but "evangelist" would probably not top the list. Nevertheless, it's important to remember that Lewis engaged in evangelistic activity in a variety of ways. While

he was certainly not a “preaching” or “revivalistic” sort of evangelist, he was a “very successful evangelist” all the same.

Philip Ryken has helpfully described Lewis as a “teaching evangelist,” a “praying evangelist,” and a “discipling evangelist.” Most important of all, however, he refers to Lewis as a “writing” or “literary evangelist.” And this is surely correct, for Lewis’s greatest “evangelistic impact” has been felt through his books and essays.{2}

Not long before his death, Lewis was interviewed by Sherwood Wirt of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. When asked if the aim of Christian writing (including his own writing) was to bring about an encounter between the reader and Jesus Christ, Lewis responded by saying, “That is not my language, yet it is the purpose I have in view.”{3} Moreover, in his “Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger,” Lewis frankly confesses that most of his popular Christian books “are evangelistic” in character, and addressed to those outside the Christian faith.{4}

Of course, Lewis was not *merely* a “literary evangelist.” While such terminology captures the fundamental way in which Lewis shared his faith, it was certainly not the only way. Moreover, evangelism was not something Lewis did simply because he enjoyed it. He felt an obligation, even a burden, to make Christ known to others.{5} And as we’ll see later, these evangelistic concerns and motivations came with a very real cost to Lewis in terms of his professional career and friendships.{6}

The Significance of Lewis’s Conversion

If there’s one thing Lewis makes clear about his *own* conversion, first to theism and then to Christianity, it’s that he felt himself to have been *pursued* by God and *drawn*

into relationship with Him. While in one sense he saw his conversion as arising from a "wholly free choice" on his part, he also saw it as resulting from a kind of Divine necessity.{7} Lewis makes this clear in his spiritual autobiography, *Surprised by Joy.*

Consider the description of his conversion to Theism: "You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet." Eventually, Lewis tells us, he "gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed," describing himself as "perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England."{8}

Interestingly, before this, Lewis had described God as offering him "a moment of wholly free choice"—an opportunity to either "open the door or keep it shut." He tells us that he chose to open it, but almost immediately relates that "it did not really seem possible to do the opposite." He goes on to speculate that perhaps "necessity" is not "the opposite of freedom."{9} All of this reveals how significant Lewis found God's involvement in his conversion to actually be.

His conversion to Christianity is similarly, if less dramatically, narrated. He writes of feeling "a resistance almost as strong as" his "previous resistance to Theism."{10} But having been through something similar already, the resistance was "shorter-lived." While being driven to Whipsnade Zoo, Lewis came to believe "that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." He once again speculates about whether this momentous event resulted from freedom or necessity and concludes that maybe the difference in such a case is inconsequential.{11}

But why is this important for a discussion of Lewis and evangelism? Because it helps us understand how Lewis (on the one hand) could work tirelessly for the salvation of others,

while also (on the other) recognizing that God was so powerfully involved in the conversion of a human soul that he (i.e., Lewis) need never worry that such weighty matters depended solely on him. He could thus be a relaxed evangelist, using his gifts to point others to Christ, while also recognizing that salvation is ultimately a work of God.

The Importance of "Translation" in Lewis's Evangelistic Work

So far, we've seen that the most important of Lewis's evangelism was through his writings. Indeed, the first book Lewis wrote, after becoming a Christian, was *The Pilgrim's Regress*. Published in 1933, the book bears the rather lengthy subtitle: "An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Romanticism, and Reason." And as with so many of the books that followed Lewis's conversion, it was concerned to commend Christianity to others.

In 1938, Lewis published the first volume of his "Cosmic Trilogy," titled *Out of the Silent Planet*.{12} In this book, Lewis communicates elements of Christian theology within the context of a science-fiction adventure story. In 1940, he published *The Problem of Pain*, a work of Christian apologetics concerned to address the problem of evil and suffering. As I've noted elsewhere, this book "attracted the attention of James Welch, the Director of Religious Broadcasting for the . . . BBC."{13} Welch wrote to Lewis, asking if he might be willing to compose a series of broadcast talks for the BBC. Lewis accepted the invitation, and the talks he composed eventually became the first book of his now classic statement of basic theology, *Mere Christianity*.{14} These influential talks were delivered during the years of World War II.

In addition to these now-famous "broadcast talks," Lewis also spoke to the men and women of the Royal Air Force during the war. Such experiences helped teach Lewis the importance (and

even necessity) of "translating" Christian doctrine into terms the average layperson could readily understand. Lewis wanted to communicate Christian truth to his audience, and he realized that to do so effectively, he needed to learn their language.{15} He thus described his task as "that of a *translator*—one turning Christian doctrine . . . into language that unscholarly people would attend to and could understand."{16}

It was Lewis's skill as a "translator" that made him so successful as a "literary evangelist." Few writers have been so effective at communicating the essential truths of Christianity to a broad, general, and often unbelieving audience, as C. S. Lewis. Indeed, Lewis placed so much importance on "translating" Christian truth into the language of the average layperson that he thought every ordination exam ought to require that the examinee demonstrate an ability to do it.{17} And in *Mere Christianity* (along with other works), we get a glimpse of Lewis doing this very thing.

Evangelism in Lewis's Fiction

In discussing the evangelistic work of C. S. Lewis, we've seen how Lewis's evangelistic concerns impacted his work as a popular Christian apologist. Now it's time to consider how these same concerns find expression in his fiction. In his essay, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said," Lewis discusses a major motivation for his fictional work. He tells us:

> "I wrote fairy tales because . . . I thought I saw how stories of this kind could steal past a certain inhibition which had paralysed much of my own religion in childhood. Why did one find it so hard to feel as one was told one ought to feel about God or about the sufferings of Christ? I thought the chief reason was that one was told one ought to. An obligation to feel can freeze feelings. And reverence

> itself did harm. The whole subject was associated with lowered voices; almost as if it were something medical. But supposing that by casting all these things into an imaginary world, stripping them of their stained-glass and Sunday school associations, one could make them for the first time appear in their real potency? Could one not thus steal past those watchful dragons? I thought one could (OOW, 37).{18}

Through his fiction, Lewis helps his readers personally experience the potency of Christian truth. Consider *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.* In that story, Edmund (one of the four Pevensie children who enter Narnia through the wardrobe) initially sides with the White Witch against the great lion Aslan. The Witch has all Narnia under her spell, making it "always winter and never Christmas."{19} In his desire to one day be king of Narnia, Edmund betrays his brother and sisters. According to the Deep Magic that governs Narnia, he thus deserves to die.{20}

But Aslan, the true king of Narnia, intercedes for Edmund, and the Witch renounces her claim on his life. The catch is that Aslan must give his own life in place of Edmund's. This he willingly does. But like Jesus in the Gospels, death cannot hold him in its power, and he returns to life again. According to one scholar, "the desired response" to this is not so much "to believe in the vicarious suffering of Christ, but to *taste* it."{21} Lewis thus used his fiction as a vehicle for evangelism, helping his readers to "taste" Christian truth in powerful (and even delightful) ways.

The "Cost" of Lewis's Evangelistic Witness

Although Lewis was not the sort of person one would typically think of when hearing the term "evangelist," he nonetheless had a heart for evangelism and was motivated to labor for the conversion of others. In fact, Christopher Mitchell has

observed that “Lewis perceived evangelism to be his lay vocation, and the means by which he expressed this evangelistic impulse were his speaking and writing.”{22}

While Lewis was not the sort of person to preach a conventional “Come to Jesus” sort of evangelistic sermon, he was nonetheless (as Michael Ward has noted) “a very successful evangelist.”{23} When one considers the vast literary output of Lewis, so much of which had evangelistic intentions, combined with his speaking, preaching, and debating on issues of vital concern to the Christian faith, along with his many prayers for the conversion of others, and generous financial assistance rendered for the cause of Christ, it is clear that the whole tenor of Lewis’s post-conversion life was driven by a strong evangelistic impulse for the salvation of souls. And this in spite of the very costly nature of this witness.

According to Mitchell, Lewis’s evangelistic commitments fostered “ridicule and scorn . . . among his non-Christian colleagues” at Oxford.{24} Indeed, even some of Lewis’s closest friends occasionally felt embarrassed by his “zeal for the conversion of unbelievers.”{25} Many of his colleagues were scandalized by the fact that Lewis used his academic training to write popular-level books in theology and Christian apologetics. No doubt some were also jealous of his ever-increasing popularity with the general public, for Lewis had an uncanny ability to write one book after another that people actually wanted to buy and read.

So *why* did Lewis do it? That’s the question Mitchell asks near the end of his essay on this topic.{26} Why did Lewis persist in evangelistic writing and speaking that aroused such scorn from academic colleagues, and occasional embarrassment from friends? Mitchell suggests that it likely had something to do with Lewis’s conviction that “There are no *ordinary* people.”{27} Hence, while his evangelistic activities created difficulties for him, difficulties that might easily have been avoided, Lewis was convinced that bringing glory to God

through the saving of human souls was “the real business of life.”{28} And whatever abuse, scorn, or discomfort this might cause him personally, he was apparently willing to endure it in order to be found faithful.

Notes

1. Michael Ward, “Escape to Wallaby Wood: Lewis’s Depictions of Conversion,” in *Lightbearer in the Shadowlands: The Evangelistic Vision of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Angus J. L. Menuge (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 143.
2. See Philip G. Ryken, “Winsome Evangelist: The Influence of C. S. Lewis,” in *Lightbearer in the Shadowlands*, 62.
3. C. S. Lewis, “Cross-Examination,” interview by Sherwood E. Wirt, in *God in the Dock*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 262.
4. C. S. Lewis, “Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger,” in *God in the Dock*, 181.
5. This would seem to be implied by Lewis’s remarks in his sermon, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1980), 18-19.
6. See Christopher W. Mitchell, “Bearing the Weight of Glory: The Cost of C. S. Lewis’s Witness,” in *The Pilgrim’s Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids, MI: Eeerdmans, 1998), 3-14.
7. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1955), 224-25.
8. Ibid., 228-29.
9. Ibid., 224-25.
10. Ibid., 237.
11. Ibid.
12. For readers interested in reading my prior article on this book, please see Michael Gleghorn, “Smuggling Theology into Out of the Silent Planet,” Probe Ministries, October 29, 2023, probe.org/smuggling-theology-into-out-of-the-silent-planet/
13. Please see Michael Gleghorn, “C. S. Lewis, the BBC, and Mere Christianity,” Probe Ministries, April 24, 2016,

probe.org/c-s-lewis-the-bbc-and-mere-christianity/

14. For a helpful discussion of all the issues and concerns surrounding these events, please see Justin Phillips, *C. S. Lewis in a Time of War: The World War II Broadcasts that Riveted a Nation and Became the Classic Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002).
15. C. S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock*, 94, 98.
16. Lewis, "Rejoinder to Dr. Pittenger," in *God in the Dock*, 183.
17. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock*, 98-99.
18. C. S. Lewis, "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to be Said," in *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1975), 37.
19. C. S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 16.
20. Ibid., 138-39.
21. Doris T. Myers, *C. S. Lewis in Context* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1994), Kindle edition, loc. 2640.
22. Christopher W. Mitchell, "Bearing the Weight of Glory: The Cost of C. S. Lewis's Witness," in *The Pilgrim's Guide: C. S. Lewis and the Art of Witness*, ed. David Mills (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 3.
23. Ward, "Escape to Wallaby Wood," 143.
24. Mitchell, "Bearing the Weight of Glory," 7. Note: The whole of this paragraph is indebted to Mitchell's discussion in this chapter.
25. Ibid., 6-7.
26. Ibid., 9-14.
27. C. S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," 19.
28. C. S. Lewis, "Christianity and Culture," in *Christian Reflections*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 14.

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