

God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally

Dr. Michael Gleghorn



Dr. Michael Gleghorn offers an introduction and overview of Doug Pollock's book by the same title. Those who want to learn more about how to have natural and effective spiritual conversations are encouraged to read (and apply) Pollock's book for themselves.

Creating God Space

If you're a Christian, you probably wrestle from time to time with how best to share your faith with non-Christian friends and family. I mean, let's face it. We often *want* to share our faith. But we're a bit confused (maybe even overwhelmed) with how to go about it in a natural and non-threatening way. *Is there a way to have spiritual conversations naturally?*



According to Doug Pollock, the answer is “Yes”—and it all begins with something he calls “God Space.” “I often wonder,” he says, “what would happen if . . . the body of Christ could create low-risk, high-grace places for people to pursue their need to have spiritual conversations.”[\[1\]](#) But Doug not only wonders about it, he's also spent the better part of his adult life actually doing it—and training others to do it too. Although he's had many roles, he's probably best known for his

work as an author, speaker, and evangelism trainer for Athletes in Action.^{2} His passion, however, is pointing people to Christ through spiritual conversations in which people have the freedom to simply be themselves.

You see, Doug believes that people actually want (and even need) to have such conversations. Moreover, they're often even willing to have them. The problem, of course, is that such conversations can often seem intimidating—even threatening—to both Christian and non-Christian alike. So Doug advocates creating a “safe space” in which to have such conversations. But he warns us that for many non-Christians in our world today, the church is often *not* perceived as safe.^{3} Hence, he says, if we want to reach people for Christ, then *we've* got to go to *them*—and help create a “safe space” for spiritual conversations right where they are.

Doug calls it “God Space” —a space where “God is . . . encountered in . . . ways that address the longings and cries of the heart.” In God Space “the ‘unworthy’ feel safe enough to bring their real selves . . . into the light, and to journey, one step at a time, toward the magnetic pull they sense deep in their souls.” It’s a space where “spiritual curiosity is aroused, and the message of Christianity becomes plausible.”^{4}

Does this sound like something you'd be interested in learning more about? Then keep reading as we consider Doug's book in more detail.

Spiritual Conversation-Killers

Doug Pollock offers some great advice about how to have natural, non-threatening spiritual conversations with those who don't know Christ. Before discussing this advice in more detail, however, we first need to pause and consider some of the ways in which we might unintentionally shut-down, or “kill,” a spiritual conversation before it even has a chance to get going.

Doug describes ten “spiritual conversation-killers” in his book. Although we can't

discuss them all, we'll at least mention a few of them. To get started, think of the non-Christian people you know and interact with on a somewhat regular basis. How many of them would be interested in having a "low-risk, high-grace" spiritual conversation with you? If your answer is few to none of them, then you might be guilty of the most basic spiritual conversation-killer of them all: "an unbelieving heart." {5} If we assume that the non-Christians we know aren't interested in talking about spiritual things, then we probably won't have many spiritual conversations with them.

And Doug says this is a big mistake. "I've had spiritual conversations with people all over the world," he writes, "including the supposed 'tough places.' I think it's because the Holy Spirit has given me a conviction that if God has put eternity in every person's heart, which is what Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us, then *all* people were made for spiritual conversations." {6} So let's not "kill" an opportunity for spiritual conversations because of unbelief. Instead, let's assume that if we approach such conversations wisely, we'll find people eager to talk with us.

Okay, so how do we approach such conversations wisely? In my opinion, the best way to have good *spiritual* conversations is simply to apply some of the very same principles that go into having good conversations of any sort. {7} For example, how well would my conversation go if I was disrespectful of the other person's beliefs or opinions? Or what if I came across as harsh, combative, or domineering? Would such conversations be successful? Probably not. And if that's the case with everyday conversations, then it's probably the case with spiritual conversations too. So if we want to have good spiritual conversations, we need to be humble, gracious, kind and polite. If not, we'll probably "kill" whatever spiritual conversations we might otherwise have had. And when that happens, no one wins.

Wondering Your Way Into Spiritual

Conversations

In *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally*, Doug has four great chapters on *noticing, serving, listening, and wondering* your way into spiritual conversations. For our purposes, let's direct our attention to that final chapter, which involves "wondering" our way into spiritual conversations. "Of all the things you'll read in this book," Doug tells us, "this chapter holds the most promise if you truly want to see the quality and quantity of your spiritual conversations increase." [{8}](#)

So how does it work? How do we *wonder* our way into spiritual conversations? As Doug lays it out for us, there are essentially two steps. First, we have to be really good listeners. [{9}](#) If we're not actively listening to what people are telling us, then we're not going to have much to wonder about. That's because we *wonder* our way into spiritual conversations by asking good questions about what another person is telling us. That's step two. After listening carefully to what the other person is saying, we begin to wonder "out loud" by asking questions that are relevant to the conversation we're having. [{10}](#)

According to Doug, "good wondering questions" will "flow naturally out of your context and . . . conversations." They reveal "that you have listened thoughtfully." They "are open-ended and promote more dialogue and reflection." They "probe sensitively and reflectively into someone's belief systems." And finally, such questions encourage "others to investigate the Christian life" for themselves. [{11}](#)

So by listening carefully and asking good "wondering" questions about what you're being told, you can open the door to all sorts of spiritual conversations. Doug even offers some examples of "good ways to start wondering." [{12}](#) Suppose your conversation partner has made an interesting claim or expressed an intriguing perspective on some issue. You might respond by saying, "That's an interesting perspective; I'm wondering how you arrived at that conclusion?" [{13}](#) Notice how such a question not only demonstrates an interest in, and respect for,

the other person and their views—it also serves to keep the conversation moving forward in a positive direction. Indeed, once you get a knack for listening carefully and asking good wondering questions, who knows how many spiritual conversations you might find yourself having!

Bringing the Bible Into Your Conversations

Let's now discuss Doug's advice about bringing the Bible into our conversations. [{15}](#)

The word of God is powerful. Paul describes it as “the sword of the Spirit.” [{16}](#) And the author of Hebrews tells us it can “judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” [{17}](#) Indeed, it's partly because the Bible *is* so powerful, that we need to be careful about the way in which we bring it into our conversations.

As Doug reminds us, “If people sense you're trying to use the Bible as an authoritative ‘crowbar’ to beat them into submitting to your viewpoint, your conversation is likely over. However, if you humbly ask for permission to introduce the Scriptures into your dialogue, ‘deep spiritual magic’ begins to happen.” [{18}](#) The key point here, of course, is *asking for permission*. This is important and Doug encourages us to always make a habit of it. [{19}](#) After all, if the person has given you permission to share something from the Bible, then they won't feel awkward or threatened when you do so. And if they *haven't* given you permission, then it's probably better just to wait and pray for a more opportune time.

Okay, that sounds good. But how can we know when it's right to ask for permission? Here we need a measure of wisdom and even plain common sense. In general, however, when the person expresses an *interest* in some issue about which the Bible speaks, it might be a good time to ask for *permission* to share what the Bible says. Doug gives the example of talking with some non-Christian college students about the meaning of love. [{20}](#) The students were

intensely interested in this topic, but they were having a hard time defining what the word even meant. After discussing the issue for a bit, Doug asked for permission to share what the Bible has to say about love. Having gotten their permission, he directed them to the famous love passage in 1 Corinthians 13. Primed and ready, the students eagerly listened to what the Bible had to say. Its message had suddenly become relevant to them, for it spoke directly to an issue about which they cared deeply.

If we could learn how to introduce the Bible like *that*, our non-Christian friends might be more eager to hear what it says. In the next section we'll conclude our discussion of Doug's book by considering "missed opportunities" and "burned bridges." [\[21\]](#)

Missed Opportunities and Burned Bridges

We've considered several ways to improve our conversations, but it's easy to make mistakes. So now we'll consider Doug's advice about "missed opportunities" and "burned bridges." Can "missed opportunities" be reclaimed and "burned bridges" be rebuilt? And if so, then how do we do it?

Let's first consider missed opportunities. Suppose you had a conversation with a neighbor who made a comment that left a wide-open door for spiritual conversation—and you said . . . nothing. We've probably all had conversations like this. Maybe the comment caught us off guard, and we just weren't sure how to respond. Or maybe we felt too tired, or scared, or something else. Whatever the reason, we can "reclaim" such missed opportunities. It's often not even that hard. Doug tells of missing out on a great opportunity because he just wasn't sure what to say. About a month later, however, he got another opportunity. He told the person that he'd been thinking a lot about a comment which they had previously made. Intrigued, the person asked what it was—and almost immediately they were right back where they had left off a month earlier! [\[22\]](#)

Okay, that's the easy one. But what if we *didn't* remain silent. What if we said the *wrong* thing— and now feel like we've burned our bridges with another person? Granted, this is more difficult. But Doug throws down a challenge. For once we recognize and admit our mistake to ourselves, we can then confess it to God and bring the issue before Him in prayer. After praying about it, Doug says, we can actually go to the person and let them know that we've been thinking about how we "come across" in spiritual conversations. We can even ask if they'd be willing to give us "some honest feedback" about how others might perceive us in this area. And if so, then we can listen carefully and apologize for any mistakes we might have made. Of course, we can't predict how the other person will respond. But by taking this approach, we can go a long way toward restoring the relationship. [{23}](#)

If you'd be interested in creating some "God Space" for your own conversations, then I encourage you to get (and read) Doug's book for yourself. I think you'll be really glad you did.

Notes

1. Doug Pollock, *God Space: Where Spiritual Conversations Happen Naturally* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2009), 11-12.
2. For more on Doug, check out his website: www.godsgps.com/
3. Pollock, *God Space*, 16.
4. The citations in this paragraph can be found in Pollock, *God Space*, 20-21.
5. This is "Killer 1" in Doug's view. See Pollock, *God Space*, 24.
6. *Ibid.*, 25.
7. In what follows, I briefly mention several of the spiritual conversation-killers which Doug discusses on pp. 29-32. Specifically, Doug mentions conversation "killers" like disrespect, control, judgment and combativeness.
8. Pollock, *God Space*, 65.
9. See Doug's chapter, "Listening Your Way Into Spiritual Conversations," in Pollock, *God Space*, 53-64.

10. Ibid., 14.
11. All of the quoted material in this paragraph comes from a section on “Good Wondering Questions” in Pollock, *God Space*, 73.
12. See the examples under this section heading in Pollock, *God Space*, 73.
13. Ibid., 73.
14. This is one way in which Doug likes to refer to non-Christians. See Pollock, *God Space*, 16.
15. See Pollock’s chapter 9, “Bringing the Bible into your Conversations,” in *God Space*, 87-99.
16. Ephesians 6:17.
17. Hebrews 4:12 (NASB).
18. Pollock, *God Space*, 95.
19. Ibid., 93.
20. See the discussion in Pollock, *God Space*, 90-94.
21. Doug discusses this topic in chapter 10, “Reclaiming Missed Opportunities and Rebuilding Burned Bridges,” 100-106.
22. Doug shares this story on pp. 101-103.
23. The citations in this paragraph come from Doug’s discussion on p. 106.

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Spiritual Disciplines and the Modern World

Don Closson

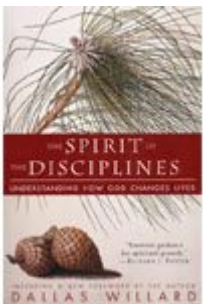


The spiritual disciplines help us cooperate with God in our transformation into the likeness of Christ. Don Closson discusses disciplines of abstinence and of engagement.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Spirituality and the Body



As a seminary student I was given the assignment to read a book on Christian spirituality called the *Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard.^{1} I obediently read the book and either wrote a paper on it or took a test that covered the material (I can't recall which), but the book didn't have a major impact on my life at that time. Recently, over a decade later, I have gone back to the book and found it to be a jewel that I should have spent more time with. In the book, Willard speaks to one of the most important issues facing individual Christians and churches in our time: "How does one live the Spirit-filled life promised in the New Testament?" How does the believer experience the promise that Jesus made in Matthew 11:29-30: "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light"?



Willard argues that modernity has given us a culture that offers a flood of self-fulfillment programs in the form of political, scientific, and even psychological revolutions. All promise to promote personal peace and affluence, and yet we suffer from an “epidemic of depression, suicide, personal emptiness, and escapism through drugs and alcohol, cultic obsession, consumerism, and sex and violence . . .” {2} Most Christians would agree that the Christian faith offers a model for human transformation that far exceeds the promises of modern scientific programs, but when it comes to delineating the methods of such a transformation there is often confusion or silence.

Christians frequently seek spiritual maturity in all the wrong places. Some submit themselves to abusive churches that equate busyness and unquestioning subservience with Christ-likeness. Others look for spirituality through syncretism, borrowing the spiritualism of Eastern religions or Gnosticism and covering it with a Christian veneer.

According to Willard, Christians often hope to find Christ’s power for living in ways that seem appropriate but miss the mark; for example, through a “sense of forgiveness and love for God” or through the acquisition of propositional truth. Some “seek it through special experiences or the infusion of the Spirit,” or by way of “the presence of Christ in the inner life.” Others argue that it is only through the “power of ritual and liturgy or the preaching of the Word,” or “through the communion of the saints.” All of these have value in the Christian life but do not “reliably produce large numbers of people who really are like Christ.” {3}

We evangelicals have a natural tendency to avoid anything that hints of meritorious works, works that might somehow justify us before a holy God. As a result, we reduce faith to an entirely mental affair, cutting off the body from the process of living the Christian life.

In this article we will consider a New Testament theology of human

transformation in order to better understand what it means to become a living sacrifice to God.

A Model for Transformation

Faith in Jesus Christ brings instant forgiveness along with the promise of eventual glorification and spending eternity with God. However, in between the believer experiences something called sanctification, the process of being set apart for good works. Something that is sanctified is holy, so it makes sense that the process of sanctification is to make us more like Christ.

Even though the Bible talks much of spiritual power and becoming like Christ, many believers find this process of sanctification to be a mystery. Since the Enlightenment, there has been a slow removal from our language of acceptable ways to talk about the spiritual realm. Being rooted in this age of science and materialism, the language of spiritual growth sounds alien and a bit threatening to our ears, but if we want to experience the life that Jesus promised, a life of spiritual strength, we need to understand how to appropriate God's Spirit into our lives.

According to Willard, "A 'spiritual life' consists in that range of activities in which people cooperatively interact with God—and with the spiritual order deriving from God's personality and action. And what is the result? A new overall quality of human existence with corresponding new powers." [\[4\]](#) To be spiritual is to be dominated by the Spirit of God. Willard adds that spirituality is another reality, not just a "commitment" or "life-style." It may result in personal and social change, but the ultimate goal is to become like Christ and to further His Kingdom, not just to be a better person or to make America a better place to live.

The Bible teaches that to become a spiritual person one must employ the *disciplines* of spirituality. "The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken to bring our personality and total being into effective

cooperation with the divine order.” [\[5\]](#) Paul wrote in Romans 6:13 that the goal of being spiritual is to offer our body to God as instruments of righteousness in order to be of use for His Kingdom. Moving towards this state of usefulness to God and His Kingdom depends on the actions of individual believers.

Many of us have been taught that this action consists primarily in attending church or giving towards its programs. As important as these are, they fail to address the need for a radical inner change that must take place in our hearts to be of significant use to God. The teaching of Scripture and specifically the life of Christ tells us that the deep changes that must occur in our lives will only be accomplished via the disciplines of abstinence such as fasting, solitude, silence, and chastity, and the disciplines of engagement such as study, worship, service, prayer, and confession. These disciplines, along with others, will result in being conformed to the person of Christ, the desire of everyone born of His Spirit.

Salvation and Life

When I first read in the Bible that Jesus offered a more abundant life to those who followed Him, I thought that He was primarily describing a life filled with more happiness and purpose. It does include these things, but I now believe that it includes much more. Salvation in Christ promises to radically change the nature of life itself. It is not just a promise that sometime in the far distant future we will experience a resurrected body and see a new heaven and new earth. Salvation in Christ promises a life characterized by the highest ideals of thought and actions as epitomized by the life of Christ Himself.

Although there is no program or classroom course that can guarantee to give us this new life in Christ, it can be argued that in order to live a life like Jesus we need to do the things that Jesus did. If Jesus had to “learn obedience through the things which he suffered” (Hebrew 5:8 KJV), are we to expect to act Christ-like without the benefit of engaging in the disciplines that Jesus did?

In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard argues that there is a direct connection between practicing the spiritual disciplines and experiencing the salvation that is promised in Christ. Jesus prayed, fasted, and practiced solitude “not because He was sinful and in need of redemption, as we are, but because he had a body just as we do.” {6} The center of every human being’s existence is his or her body. We are neither to be neo-Platonic nor Gnostic in our approach to the spiritual life. Both of these traditions play down the importance of the physical universe, arguing that it is either evil or simply inferior to the spiritual domain. But as Willard argues, “to withhold our bodies from religion is to exclude religion from our lives.”

Although our spiritual dimension may be invisible, it is not separate from our bodily existence. *Spirituality*, according to Willard, is “a relationship of our embodied selves to God that has the natural and irrepressible effect of making us alive to the Kingdom of God—here and now in the material world.” {7} By separating our Christian life from our bodies we create an unnecessary sacred/secular gulf for Christians that often alienates us from the world and people around us.

The Christian faith offers more than just the forgiveness of sins; it promises to transform individuals to live in such a way that responding to events as Jesus did becomes second nature. What are these spiritual disciplines, and how do they transform the very quality of life we experience as followers of Jesus Christ?

The Disciplines of Abstinence

Although many of us have heard horror stories of how spiritual disciplines have been abused and misused in the past, Willard believes that “A discipline for the spiritual life is, when the dust of history is blown away, nothing but an activity undertaken to bring us into more effective cooperation with Christ and his Kingdom.” {8} He reminds us that we discipline ourselves throughout life in order

to accomplish a wide variety of tasks or functions. We utilize discipline when we study an academic or professional field; athletes must be disciplined in order to run a marathon or bench press 300 lbs. Why, then, are we surprised to learn that we must discipline ourselves to be useful to God?

Willard divides the disciplines into two categories: disciplines of abstinence, and disciplines of engagement. Depending on our lifestyle and past personal experiences, we will each find different disciplines helpful in accomplishing the goal of living as a new creature in Christ. Solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice are disciplines of abstinence. Given our highly materialistic culture, these might be the most difficult and most beneficial to many of us. We are more familiar with the disciplines of engagement, including study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, and fellowship. However, two others mentioned by Willard might be less familiar: confession and submission.

Abstinence requires that we give up something that is perfectly normal—something that is not wrong in and of itself, such as food or sex—because it has gotten in the way of our walking with God, or because by leaving these things aside we might be able to focus more closely on God for a period of time. As one writer tells us, “Solitude is a terrible trial, for it serves to crack open and burst apart the shell of our superficial securities. It opens out to us the unknown abyss that we all carry within us . . .” [\[9\]](#) Busyness and superficial activities hide us from the fact that we have little or no inward experience with God. Solitude frees us from social conformity, from being conformed to the patterns of this world that Paul warns us about in Romans 12.

Solitude goes hand in hand with silence. The power of the tongue and the damage it can do is taken very seriously in the Bible. There is a quiet inner strength and confidence that exudes from people who are great listeners, who are able to be silent and to be slow to speak.

The Disciplines of Engagement

Thus, the disciplines of abstinence help us diminish improper entanglements with the world. What about the disciplines of engagement?

Although study is not often thought of as a spiritual discipline, it is the key to a balanced Christian walk. Calvin Miller writes, “Mystics without study are only spiritual romantics who want relationship without effort.” [{10}](#) Study involves reading, memorizing, and meditation on God’s Word. It takes effort and time, and there are no shortcuts. It includes learning from great Christian minds that have gone before us and those who, by their walk and example, can teach much about the power available to believers who seek to experience the light burden that abiding in Jesus offers.

Few Christians deny the need for worship in their weekly routines, even though what constitutes worship has caused considerable controversy. Worship ascribes great worth to God. It is seeing God as He truly is. Willard argues that we should focus our worship through Jesus Christ to the Father. He writes, “When we worship, we fill our minds and hearts with wonder at him—the detailed actions and words of his earthly life, his trial and death on the cross, his resurrection reality, and his work as ascended intercessor.” [{11}](#)

The discipline of celebration is unfamiliar to most of us, yet Willard argues that it is one of the most important forms of engagement with God. He writes that “We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, in conjunction with our faith and confidence in God’s greatness, beauty, and goodness. We concentrate on our life and world as God’s work and as God’s gift to us.” [{12}](#) Although much of the scriptural argument for holy celebration is found in the festivals of the Old Testament and the book of Ecclesiastes, Jesus was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard because he chose to dine and celebrate with sinners.

Christian fellowship and confession go hand in hand. It is within the context of fellowship that Christians build up and encourage one-another with the gifts that God has given to us. It is also in this context that we practice confession with trusted believers who know both our strengths and weaknesses. This level of transparency and openness is essential for the church to become the healing place of deep intimacy that people are so hungry for.

Walking with Jesus doesn't mean just knowing things about Him; it means living as He lived. This includes practicing the spiritual disciplines that Jesus practiced. As we do, we will be changed through the Spirit to be more like Him and experience the rest that He has offered to us.

Notes

1. Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).
2. *Ibid.*, viii.
3. *Ibid.*, x.
4. *Ibid.*, 67.
5. *Ibid.*, 68.
6. *Ibid.*, 29.
7. *Ibid.*, 31.
8. *Ibid.*, 156.
9. *Ibid.*, 161.
10. *Ibid.*, 176.
11. *Ibid.*, 178.
12. *Ibid.*, 179.

Dealing with Doubt in Our Christian Faith

Dr. Michael Gleghorn



Dr. Michael Gleghorn points out that it is not having doubts about our Christian faith that is an issue, but rather how we respond to that doubt. Attacking this issue from a biblical worldview perspective, Michael helps us understand our doubts and respond to them as an informed Christian.

Help! My Doubts Scare Me!

Have you ever doubted your faith? We all have doubts from time to time. We may doubt that our boss *really* hit a hole-in-one at the golf course last weekend, or that our best friend *really* caught a fish as big as the one he claimed to catch, or that the strange looking guy on that late night TV show was *really* abducted by alien beings from a distant galaxy! Sometimes the things we doubt aren't really that important, but other times they are. And the more important something is to us, the more personally invested we are in it, the scarier it can be to start having doubts about it. So when Christians begin to have doubts about something as significant as the truth of their Christian faith, it's quite understandable that this might worry or even frighten them.



Reflecting on this issue in *The Case for Faith*, Lee Strobel wrote:

For many Christians, merely having doubts of any kind can be scary. They wonder whether their questions disqualify them being a follower of Christ. They feel insecure because they're not sure whether it's permissible to express uncertainty about God, Jesus, or the Bible. So they keep their questions to themselves—and inside, unanswered, they grow and fester . . . until they eventually succeed in choking out their faith. [{1}](#)

So what can we do if we find ourselves struggling with doubts about the truth of Christianity? Why do such doubts arise? And how can we rid ourselves of these taunting Goliaths?

First, we must always remember that sooner or later we'll probably *all* have to wrestle with doubts about our faith. As Christian philosopher William Lane Craig observes, "Any Christian who is intellectually engaged and reflecting about his faith will inevitably face the problem of doubt." [{2}](#) Doubts can arise for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes they're largely intellectual. We might doubt that the Bible is *really* inspired by God or that Jesus was *really* born of a virgin. But doubts can take other forms as well. If a person has experienced great sorrow or disappointment, such as personal wounds from family or friends, the loss of a job, a painful divorce, the death of a loved one, or the loss of health, they may be seriously tempted to doubt the goodness, love, and care of their heavenly Father. [{3}](#)

Whenever they come and whatever form they take, we must each deal honestly with our doubts. To ignore them is to court spiritual disaster. But facing them can lead ultimately to a deeper faith. As Christian minister Lynn Anderson has said, "A faith that's challenged by adversity or tough questions . . . is often a stronger faith in the end." [{4}](#)

It's Not All in Your Head!

Sometimes people have sincere doubts about the truth of Christianity, intellectual obstacles that hinder them from placing their trust in Christ. In such cases, Christians have an obligation to respond to the person's doubts and make a humble and thoughtful defense for the truth of Christianity. Nevertheless, as Craig observes, it's important to realize that "doubt is never a purely intellectual problem." Like it or not, there's always a "spiritual dimension to the problem that must be recognized." {5} Because of this, sometimes a person's objections to Christianity are really just a smokescreen, an attempt to cover up the *real* reason for their rejection of Christ, which is often an underlying moral or spiritual issue.

I once heard a story about a Christian apologist who spoke at a university about the evidence for Christianity. Afterward, a student approached him and said, "I honestly didn't expect this to happen, but you satisfactorily answered all my objections to Christianity." The apologist was a bit startled by such a frank admission, but he quickly recovered himself and said, "Well that's great! Why not give your life to Christ right now, then?" But the student said, "No. I'm not willing to do that. I would have to change the way I'm living, and I'm just not ready to do that right now."

In this case all the student's reasons for doubting the Christian faith had, by his own admission, been satisfactorily answered. What was really holding him back were not his doubts about the truth of Christianity, but a desire to live life on his own terms. To put it bluntly, he didn't want God meddling in his affairs. He didn't want to be morally accountable to some ultimate authority. The truth is that a person's intellectual objections to Christianity are *rarely* the whole story. As Christian scholar Ravi Zacharias observed, "A man rejects God neither because of intellectual demands nor because of the scarcity of evidence. A man rejects God because of a moral resistance that refuses to admit his need for God." {6}

Unfortunately, Christians aren't immune to doubting their faith for similar

reasons. I know of a young man who had converted to Christianity, but who's now raising various objections to it. But when one looks beneath the surface, one sees that he's currently involved in an immoral lifestyle. In order to continue living as he wants, without being unduly plagued by a guilty conscience, he must call into question the truth of Christianity. For the Bible tells him plainly that he's disobeying God. Of course, ultimately no one is immune to doubts about Christianity, so we'll now consider some ways to guard our hearts and minds.

I Believe, Help My Unbelief!

As He came down the mountain, Jesus was met by a large crowd of people. A father had brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus' disciples, but they were not able to cast the demon out. In desperation the father appealed to Jesus, "If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" Jesus answered, "If You can! All things are possible to him who believes." The father responded, "I do believe; help my unbelief." {7}

Can you identify with the father in this story? I know I can. Oftentimes as Christians we find that our faith is in precisely the same state as this father's. We genuinely believe, but we need help with our unbelief. It's always been an encouragement to me that after the father's admission of a faith mixed with doubt, Jesus nonetheless cast out the demon and healed the man's son. {8} But of course no Christian should be content to remain in this state. If we want to grow in our faith and rid ourselves of doubts, what are some positive steps we can take to accomplish this?

Well, in the first place, it's helpful to be familiar with the "principle of displacement." As Sue "Archimedes" Bohlin, one of my colleagues, has written:

The Bible teaches the principle of "displacement." That is, rather than trying to make thoughts shoo away, we are told to replace them with what is good, true, and perfect (Phil. 4:8). As the truth comes in the lies are

displaced—much like when we fill a bathtub too full of water, and when we get in, our bodies displace the water, which flows out over the top of the tub. [{9}](#)

Once we grasp this principle, a number of steps for dealing with doubt quickly become evident. For one thing, we can memorize and meditate upon Scripture. We can also listen attentively to good Christian music. Paul speaks to the importance of both of these in Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

In addition, we can read good Christian books that provide intelligent answers to some of the questions we might be asking. Great Christian scholars have addressed almost every conceivable objection to the truth of Christianity. If you have nagging doubts about some aspect of your faith, there’s almost certainly a work of Christian scholarship that speaks to it in detail. Finally, we must never forget that this is a spiritual battle. So let’s remember to put on the full armor of God so we can stand firm in the midst of it! [{10}](#)

Faith and Reason

How can we [know if Christianity is really true?](#) Is it by reason, or evidence, or mystical experience? Dr. Craig has an answer to this question that you might find a bit surprising. [{11}](#) He distinguishes between *knowing* Christianity is true and *showing* that it’s true. Ideally, one attempts to *show* that Christianity is true with good arguments and evidence. But Craig doesn’t think that this is how we *know* our faith is true. Rather, he believes that we can *know* our faith is true because “God’s Spirit makes it evident to us that our faith is true.” [{12}](#)

Consider Paul’s statement in Romans 8:16, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.” Since every believer is indwelt by God’s Spirit, every believer also receives the Spirit’s testimony that he is one of God’s children. This is sometimes called the “assurance of salvation.” Dr. Craig comments on the

significance of this:

Salvation entails that God exists, that Christ atoned for our sins . . . and so forth, so that if you are assured of your salvation, then you must be assured of . . . these other truths as well. Hence, the witness of the Holy Spirit gives the believer an immediate assurance that his faith is true.[{13}](#)

Now this is remarkable. For it means we can *know* that Christianity is true, wholly apart from arguments, simply by attending to the witness of the Holy Spirit. And this is so not only for believers but for unbelievers, too. For the Spirit convicts the unbelieving world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, particularly the sin of unbelief.[{14}](#) So when we're confronted with objections to Christianity that we can't answer, we needn't worry. First, answers are usually available if one knows where to look. But second, the witness of the Spirit trumps any objections we might encounter.

Consider an illustration from the Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga. Suppose I'm accused of stealing a document out of a colleague's office. Suppose I have a motive, an opportunity, and a history of doing such things. Suppose further that someone thought they saw me lurking around my colleague's office just before the document went missing. There's much evidence against me. But in fact, I didn't steal the document. I was on a walk at the time. Now should I doubt my innocence since the evidence is against me? Of course not! For I *know* I'm not guilty![{15}](#)

Similarly, writes Dr. Craig, "I needn't be shaken when objections come along that I can't answer."[{16}](#) For my faith isn't ultimately based on arguments, but on the witness of God's Spirit.

Stepping into the Light

We've seen that both Christians and non-Christians can have doubts about the

truth of Christianity. We've also seen that such doubts are never *just* an intellectual issue; there's *always* a spiritual dynamic that's involved as well. But since we'll probably never be able to fully resolve every single doubt we might experience, I would like to conclude by suggesting one final way to make our doubts flee before us, much as roaches flee to their hidden lairs when one turns on the light!

In John 7:17 Jesus says, "If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own." Here, Jesus frankly encourages us to put His teachings to the test and see for ourselves whether He really speaks for God or not. As biblical scholar Merrill Tenney comments, "Spiritual understanding is not produced solely by learning facts or procedures, but rather it depends on obedience to known truth. Obedience to God's known will develops discernment between falsehood and truth." [{17}](#) Are we *really* serious about dealing with our lingering doubts? If so, Jesus says that if we resolutely choose to do God's will, we can know if His teaching is really from God!

Sadly, however, many of us will *never* take Jesus up on His challenge. No matter how loudly we might *claim* to want to rid ourselves of doubt, the truth is that many of us just aren't *willing* to do God's will. But if you are, then Jesus says that "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." [{18}](#) In other words, we can know by *experience* that Jesus is from God, that His teachings are true, and that He really is who He claimed to be!

As Christian philosopher Dallas Willard observes, the issue ultimately comes down to what we *really* want:

The Bible says that if you seek God with all your heart, then you will surely find him. Surely find him. It's the person who wants to know God that God reveals himself to. And if a person doesn't want to know God—well, God has created the world and the human mind in such a way that he doesn't have

to. [{19}](#)

The psalmist encourages us to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” [{20}](#) If we do, we can know not only that God is good, but also that He exists. And even if we still have some lingering doubts and unanswered questions in the back of our minds, as we surely will, they’ll gradually fade into utter insignificance as we become more intimately acquainted with Him who loves us and who reconciled us to Himself through the death of His Son! [{21}](#)

Notes

1. Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), 316.
2. William Lane Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 31.
3. Lynn Anderson, interviewed in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, 322.
4. *Ibid.*, 326.
5. Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 33.
6. Ravi Zacharias, quoted in Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, 343. See also John 3:19-21.
7. Mark 9:14-24.
8. See Mark 9:25-29.
9. Sue Bohlin, “I’m Having a Terrible Battle in My Mind,” Probe Ministries, probe.org/im-having-a-terrible-battle-in-my-mind/.
10. See Ephesians 6:10-20.
11. This section is largely just a summary of the discussion of faith and reason in Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 35-39.
12. *Ibid.*, 35.
13. *Ibid.*, 36.
14. See John 16:7-11.
15. Alvin Plantinga, “The Foundations of Theism: A Reply,” *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 310; cited in Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 38-39.
16. *Ibid.*, 39.
17. Merrill C. Tenney, “The Gospel of John,” in *The Expositor’s Bible*

Commentary, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 84.

18. John 8:32.

19. Dallas Willard, quoted in Strobel, *The Case for Faith*, 352.

20. Psalm 34:8.

21. See 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

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Why Bible Study Matters

Tom Davis



Tom Davis builds a case for why we should study the Bible, drawing on both the Old Testament and New Testament scriptures.

Does it matter if we study the Bible?

I recently encountered an article claiming it doesn't. The author claimed that Christians are not feeding the poor, helping the downtrodden, seeking justice for the persecuted, or evangelizing people, because we are too busy studying our Bibles. (Interestingly, the article has since been removed, but the question remains.)

Is his concern valid? Approximately 16% of people in the United States read their Bible most days during the week.^{1} A 2014 article in *Christianity Today* states, “The average length of time spent studying the Bible was between 10 and 20 minutes per session.”^{2} According to Probe’s 2020 religion survey, “Only one out of five Born Again Christians ages 18 through 29 pray daily, attend church at least monthly, and read the Bible at least weekly.”^{3} The statistics indicate that the average amount of time Christians spend reading their Bible cannot be what is keeping Christians from sharing their faith, helping those in need, or helping the homeless.

Another issue that the author raised is that the early church did not have an authoritative list of New Testament books for more than three hundred years after Jesus’ resurrection. I am unsure how these historical facts show that anyone today is spending too much time reading their Bible. Are we better off when we have all the books of the Bible? Would these early Christians have preferred having all the books of the Bible? Would they want to stick with having parts of the Old Testament, a Gospel or two, and a few of the epistles? I think they would be confused why this pastor thinks that Christians are spending too much time studying their Bible.

What the Old Testament Says About Reading the Bible

One way we can figure out the role that studying the Bible should play in the life of the Christian is to look at what the Bible says about reading the Scriptures. We should start with the Old Testament. The first passage to examine is:

These words I am commanding you today must be kept in mind, and you must teach them to your children and speak of them as you sit in your house, as you walk along the road, as you lie down, and as you get up. You should tie them as a reminder on your forearm and fasten them as symbols on your forehead. Inscribe them on the doorframes of your houses and gates. (Deuteronomy

6:6-9 NET)

God is preparing to lead the Hebrews into the promised land. He tells the people that they are to remember the covenant, teach the covenant to their children, and place inscriptions from the covenant in prominent places in their homes. Knowing and teaching the commands of God is so important that this charge is repeated in Deuteronomy 11:18-23.

Peter Cousins states, “Not only is it to be upon the heart . . . it must take first place in training children, in conversation (at home and outside) from the beginning to the end of the day; it should govern the senses, control behavior, and direct life in the home and community.” [\[4\]](#) The words of the covenant between God and the Hebrew people are so important that the words have to be known and understood. That requires study. Knowing the covenant is so important that the Hebrew people are commanded to decorate their walls, doorframes, and gates. The people are even commanded to have the words of the covenant on their clothes. All of this indicates that God intends for His people to know and follow His commands, and that this is done by studying them. Even the people who could not read would memorize the law. (Ancient cultures operated from an oral tradition; people were used to hearing, memorizing, and repeating stories and passages from verbal input alone.) To be fair, few Jews would have been able to recite the first five books of the Bible from memory, but they would have been able to recite long passages of Scripture.

The most common passage that was most often recited was the Shema, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You must love the LORD your God with your whole mind, your whole being, and all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Jesus said this is God’s greatest commandment (Matthew 22:36-40). Jews would pray the Shema several times a day. This is the passage most often found on doorposts and in houses in archaeological digs.

As the people prepare to enter the land promised to them, God makes provisions

for a future King. The responsibilities and conduct of the king are:

When he sits on his royal throne he must make a copy of this law on a scroll given to him by the Levitical priests. It must be with him constantly, and he must read it as long as he lives, so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and observe all the words of this law and these statutes and carry them out. (Deuteronomy 17:18-19 NET)

Here we can see that the king does not make the law. God gave the law to Moses. The Levitical priests were to copy the law and teach it to the people. The priests were also tasked with giving the king a copy of the law so that the king could carry out God's law. The King is under the authority of the priests and of God. The king is not allowed to make his own law, he must be obedient to God. [\[5\]](#)

As Joshua leads the people into the promised land God tells him, "This law scroll must not leave your lips. You must memorize it day and night so you can carefully obey all in it. Then you will prosper and be successful" (Joshua 1:8 NET). Even before a king was installed over the people, the leaders of Israel were to lead God's people according to the law so they could be successful in following God.

As Israel moved into the land God had promised them, they became corrupt. The priests did not teach the kings or the people. God sent prophets to the people to call them back to living faithfully to the covenant. The people would not keep the covenant they made with God, and the priests would not teach the law to the people. God, in the book of Hosea, tells the priests:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I will reject you from serving as my priest.
Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I will also forget your sons. (Hosea 4:6 CSB)

Despite all of these warnings, Israel was not faithful in following God. David Allan

Hubbard summarizes the situation, “The collapse of the priests and prophet, key ministers of law and word, leads inevitably to the disastrous destruction.” {6} The priests were not teaching the people or the kings. This led to God sending the people into exile and the destruction of the Temple in Israel. As a result of a lack of faithfulness and a lack of knowledge of God’s law, Israel was separated from God.

What the New Testament Says About Reading the Bible

The Gospels tell us that after his baptism Jesus has a 40-day fast followed by a confrontation with Satan. This involved Satan tempting Jesus by quoting scripture, and Jesus rebukes him by quoting Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). New Testament Scholar Craig Keener gives the following description: “This text also shows that Jesus does not just use Scripture to accommodate contemporary views of its authority; he uses it as his authority and the final word on ethics even when dealing with a supracultural adversary.” {7} While the Bible was written by people living in cultures that existed in real places and real times in the past, the morality taught within scripture is not restricted by those historical and cultural settings. As Jesus’ followers, we need to understand what is expected of us morally. In order to know Christian morality, we must study the Bible.

The Gospels also show that Jesus had debates concerning what was taught in the Scriptures. These debates often included not just morality, but the identity of the Messiah, and the power of God. In one debate Jesus tells the Sadducees, “You are deceived because you don’t know the scriptures or the power of God” (Matthew 22:29 NET). The Sadducees did not know the scriptures because they only studied the first five books of the Bible. They didn’t know the power of God because they rejected the resurrection. Stanley Horton writes, “Those who do not really know what the scriptures teach, nor God’s omnipotent power cannot avoid going

astray.”[{8}](#)

In another debate with the Pharisees Jesus said, “You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and it is these same scriptures that testify about me, but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life” (John 5:39, 40 NET). The Pharisees rejected Jesus because they saw him as a threat. Jesus had undermined their authority and threatened their position in the culture, so they were obstinate. Keener states, “They believed that one had eternal life through the scriptures; but Jesus says that the Scriptures witness to him, hence to reject him is to disobey the Scriptures.”[{9}](#) By rejecting Jesus, the Pharisees unintentionally rejected the Scriptures. By rejecting Jesus, they could not possess eternal life.

In the book of Acts, we see Jesus’ disciples proclaiming to everyone who will listen that Jesus is the Messiah and was raised from the dead. This led to debates and conflicts with the Jewish authorities. In Acts chapter seven Stephen accuses the Jewish council that they failed to follow the scriptures. In chapter eight Philip leads an Ethiopian eunuch to faith by starting with a passage in Isaiah and telling him about the gospel of Jesus. Later in Acts Paul met repeatedly with a group of Jews. Acts

describes the Bereans as “more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they eagerly received the message, examining the scriptures carefully every day to see if these things were so” (Acts 17:11 NET). The reaction of the Bereans is not emotional. They investigated the scriptures intellectually to see what was true.[{10}](#)

In his letters Paul addresses why God gave us the scriptures. In Romans Paul writes, “For everything that was written in former times was written for our instruction, so that through endurance and through encouragement of the scriptures we may have hope” (Romans 15:4). John Murray comments, “In Paul’s esteem Scripture in all its parts is for our instruction, that the Old Testament was designed to furnish us in these last days with the instruction necessary for the

fulfillment of our vocation to the end, and that it is as written it promotes this purpose.” [{11}](#) Part of being on fire for Christ is fulfilling our vocation. The primary way we know what our vocation is and how we can fulfill it is through studying our Bible.

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul doubles down on the benefits of studying scripture. Paul reminds Timothy that he was taught the scriptures while he was a child. Then Paul writes, “Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul is reminding Timothy that scripture has authority because it comes from God. Scripture is good for learning about God and ethics. The Jews have this benefit, but the Christians have a better understanding because Jesus taught the Apostles, which gave them a better understanding of the scriptures than that of the Jews. [{12}](#)

The last passage that I would like to examine is in Revelation. “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy aloud, and blessed are those who hear and obey the things written in it, because the time is near!” (Revelation 1:3). While this verse is speaking specifically about people who read Revelation, by logical extension we are blessed any time we read any part of the scripture. All scripture is given by God, therefore when you read any part of scripture you will be blessed. What does it mean to be blessed by reading scripture? Earl F. Palmer answers, “It does not express superficial sentiment but instead the rugged and tested assurance that it is a good thing to be walking in the pathway of God’s will.” [{13}](#) Our obedience to scripture brings blessing. We cannot be obedient to scripture without studying the Bible.

Conclusion

In one sense the author of the article I mentioned was correct. If we spend so much time studying the Bible that Christians never feed the hungry, help the

poor, make disciples for Christ, or work to bring justice to the downtrodden then we are neglecting part of what we were commanded to do. But how can we even know that Christ commands us to do those things if we do not study the Bible?

In the examination of what the Bible says about Bible study, we can see that Bible study is an indispensable part of the Christian life. We can see in Deuteronomy that God commanded the Hebrews to memorize and obey the Law. When they failed to do this, they were ultimately exiled by God. Jesus reprimanded the Sadducees and the Pharisees for not knowing and believing the scriptures. Paul and John taught that Christians would be blessed by studying the scriptures.

The reason we are blessed when we study the Bible is that when we study, we develop and form a Christian worldview. The story shapes our values, our morals, and the way we live. The way we think about the people and the world around us is changed by studying scripture. One other aspect is that when we study the Bible, we enter into the glory of God. When we study the Bible, we are in God's presence in the same way as when we are praying. Studying the Bible is an act of worship. [{14}](#)

Finally, studying the Bible is how we obey the command in Ephesians 5:10 to "find out what pleases the Lord." Since the greatest commandment is to love God (Matthew 22:37) as noted above, how can we love Him without knowing what pleases Him? And since we find that God's love language is obedience (John 14:15), how can we discern what to obey without studying His word? How can we avoid sin if we have never studied the Bible to find out what sin is?

How can Christians implement Bible study into a busy 40-hour work week and taking care of kids and spending time with their spouse? You do not have to spend hours a day studying. Spend ten or fifteen minutes in the morning or at night to read the Bible. Take five minutes of your lunch break to read a chapter. If you are so busy that you cannot study during the work week, find fifteen minutes to study on your day off. Whatever amount of time you spend studying the Bible, God will

honor and bless you for
that time.

Notes

1. [State of the Bible 2021: Five Key Findings - Barna Group](#)
2. [Evangelicals admit struggling to find time for daily Bible reading and prayer \(christiantoday.com\)](#)
3. [Probe 2020 Survey Report 3: Religious Practices & Purpose for Living](#)
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10. Marshall, I. Howard, 1980. *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Acts*, 280. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing.
11. Murray, John, 1968. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans Vol 2*, 199. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing.
12. Guthrie, Donald, 1957. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on the New Testament: The Pastoral Epistles*, 163-164, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing.
13. Palmer, Earl F. 1982. *The Communicator's Commentary: 1, 2, 3, John, Revelation*, 114, Word Inc.

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Your Work Matters to God

Sue Bohlin

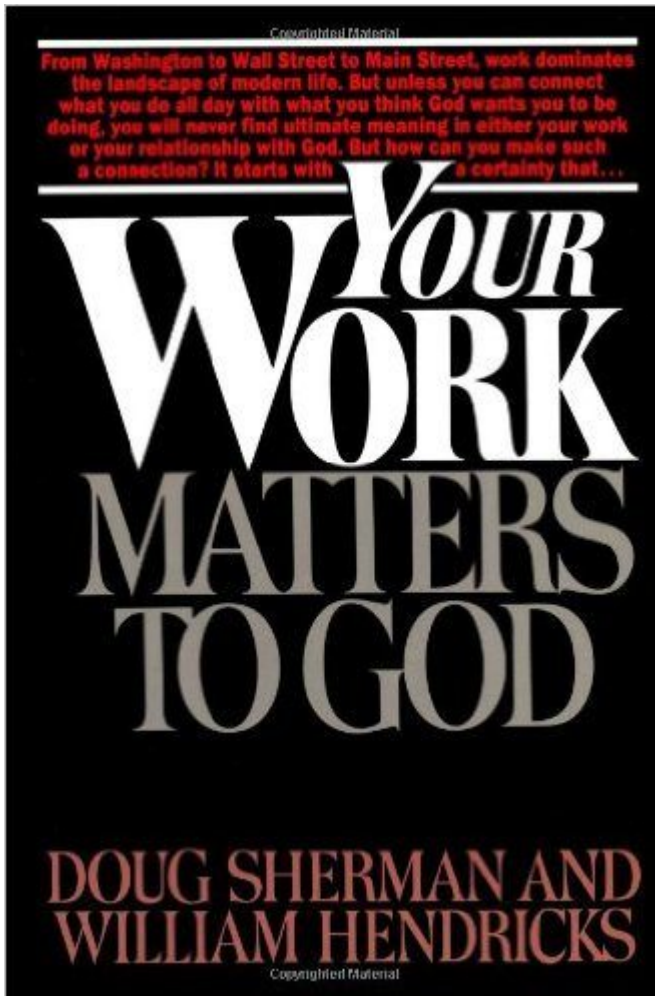


Sue Bohlin helps us look at work from a biblical perspective. If we apply a Christian worldview to our concept of work, it takes on greater significance within the kingdom of God.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Many Christians hold a decidedly unbiblical view of work. Some view it as a curse, or at least as part of the curse of living in a fallen world. Others make a false distinction between what they perceive as the sacred—serving God—and the secular—everything else. And others make it into an idol, expecting it to provide them with their identity and purpose in life as well as being a source of joy and fulfillment that only God can provide.



In their excellent book *Your Work Matters to God*,[\[1\]](#) Doug Sherman and William Hendricks

expose the wrong ways of thinking about work, and explain how God invests work with intrinsic value and honor. Rick Warren echoes this idea in his blockbuster *The Purpose Driven Life* when he writes, “Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God and perform it with an awareness of his presence.”[\[2\]](#)

First, let’s explore some faulty views of work: the secular view, some inappropriate hierarchies that affect how we view work, and work as merely a platform for doing evangelism.

Those who hold a secular view of work believe that life is divided into two disconnected parts. God is in one spiritual dimension and work is in the other *real* dimension, and the two have nothing to do with each other. God stays in His corner of the universe while I go to work and live my life, and these different realms never interact.

One problem with this secular view is that it sets us up for disappointment. If you

leave God out of the picture, you'll have to get your sense of importance, fulfillment and reward from someplace else: work. Work is the answer to the question, "Who am I, and why am I important?" That is a very shaky foundation—because what happens if you lose your job? You're suddenly a "nobody," and you are not important because you are not employed.

The secular view of work tends to make an idol of career. Career becomes the number one priority in your life. Your relationship with God takes a back seat, family takes a back seat, even your relationship with other people takes a back seat to work. Everything gets filtered through the question, "What impact will this have on my career?"

The secular view of work leaves God out of the system. This is particularly unacceptable for Christians, because God calls us to make Him the center of our life.^{3} He wants us to have a biblical worldview that weaves Him into every aspect of our lives, including work. He wants to be invited into our work; He wants to be Lord of our work.^{4}

Inappropriate Hierarchies: Soul/Body, Temporal/Eternal

In this article, we're examining some faulty views of work. One comes from believing that the soul matters more than the body. We can wrongly believe that God only cares about our soul, and our bodies don't really matter. The body is not important, we can think: it is only temporal, and it will fade and die. But if that view were true, then why did God make a physical universe? Why did He put Adam and Eve in the garden to cultivate and keep it? He didn't charge them with, "Go and make disciples of all nations which aren't in existence yet, but they will be as soon as you guys go off and start making babies." No, He said, "Here's the garden, now cultivate it." He gave them a job to do that had nothing to do with evangelism or church work. There is something important about our bodies, and God is honored by work that honors and cares for the body—which, after all, is

His good creation.

Another wrong way of thinking is to value the eternal over the temporal so much that we believe *only* eternal things matter. Some people believe that if you work for things that won't last into eternity—jobs like roofing and party planning and advertising—you're wasting your time. This wrong thinking needs to be countered by the truth that God created two sides to reality, the temporal and the eternal. The natural universe God made is very real, just as real as the supernatural universe. Asking which one is real and important is like asking which is real, our nine months in our mother's womb or life after birth? They are both real; they are both necessary. We have to go through one to get to the other.

Those things we do and make on earth DO have value, given the category they were made for: *time*. It's okay for things to have simply temporal value, since God chose for us to live in time before we live in eternity. Our work counts in both time and eternity because God is looking for faithfulness *now*, and the only way to demonstrate faithfulness is within this physical world. Spiritual needs are important, of course, but first physical needs need to be met. Try sharing the gospel with someone who hasn't eaten in three days! Some needs are temporal, and those needs must be met. So God equips people with abilities to meet the needs of His creation. In meeting the legitimate physical, temporal needs of people, our work serves people, and people have eternal value because God loves us and made us in His image.

The Sacred/Spiritual Dichotomy; Work as a Platform for Evangelism

Another faulty view of work comes from believing that spiritual, sacred things are far more important than physical, secular things. REAL work, people can think, is serving God in full-time Christian service, and then there's everything else running a very poor second. This can induce us to think either too highly of ourselves or too lowly of ourselves. We can think, "Real work is serving God, and

then there's what others do" (which sets us up for condescension), or "Real work is serving God, and then there's what I have to do" (which sets us up for false guilt and a sense of "missing it").

It's an improper way to view life as divided between the sacred and the secular. ALL of life relates to God and is sacred, whether we're making a business presentation or changing soiled diapers or leading someone to faith in Christ. It's unwise to think there are sacred things we do and there are secular things we do. It all depends on what's going on in our hearts. You can engage in what looks like holy activity like prayer and Bible study with a dark, self-centered, unforgiving spirit. Remember the Pharisees? And on the other hand, you can work at a job in a very secular atmosphere where the conversation is littered with profanity, the work is slipshod, the politics are wearisome, and yet like Daniel or Joseph in the Old Testament you can keep your own conversation pure and your behavior above reproach. You can bring honor and glory to God in a very worldly environment. God does not want us to do holy things, He wants us to be holy people.

A final faulty view of work sees it only as a platform for doing evangelism. If every interaction doesn't lead to an opportunity to share the gospel, one is a failure. Evangelism should be a priority, true, but not our *only* priority. Life is broader than evangelism. In Ephesians 1, Paul says three times that God made us, not for evangelism, but to live to the praise of His glory. [{5}](#) Instead of concentrating only on evangelism, we need to concentrate on living a life that honors God and loves people. That is far more winsome than all the evangelistic strategies in the world. Besides, if work is only a platform for evangelism, it devalues the work itself, and this view of work is too narrow and unfulfilling.

Next we'll examine at how God wants us to look at work. You might be quite surprised!

How God Wants Us to See Work

So far, we have discussed faulty views of work, but how does God want us to see it? Here's a startling thought: we actually work for God Himself! Consider Ephesians 6:5-8, which Paul writes to slaves but which we can apply to employees:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, *as if you were serving the Lord, not men*, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

It's helpful to envision that behind every employer stands the Lord Jesus. He sees everything we do, and He appreciates it and will reward us, regardless of the type of work we do. I learned this lesson one day when I was cleaning the grungy bathtub of a family that wouldn't notice and would never acknowledge or thank me even if they did. I was getting madder by the minute, throwing myself a pity party, when the Lord broke into my thoughts. He quietly said, "I see you. And I appreciate what you're doing." Whoa! In an instant, that totally changed everything. Suddenly, I was able to do a menial job—and later on, more important ones—as a labor of love and worship for Jesus. I know He sees and appreciates what I do. It forever changed my view of work.

God also wants us to see that work is His gift to us. It is not a result of the Fall. God gave Adam and Eve the job of cultivating the garden and exercising dominion over the world *before* sin entered the world. We were created to work, and for work. Work is God's good gift to us!

Listen to what Solomon wrote:

After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is

the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! [6](#)

Being happy in our work doesn't depend on the work, it depends on our attitude. To make the most of our job and be happy in our work is a gift God wants to give us!

Why Work is Good

In this article we're talking about how to think about work correctly. One question needs to be asked, though: Is all work equally valid? Well, no. All legitimate work is an extension of God's work of maintaining and providing for His creation. Legitimate work is work that contributes to what God wants done in the world and doesn't contribute to what He doesn't want done. So non-legitimate work would include jobs that are illegal, such as prostitution, drug dealing, and professional thieves. Then there are jobs that are legal, but still questionable in terms of ethics and morality, such as working in abortion clinics, pornography, and the gambling industry. These jobs are legal, but you have to ask, how are they cooperating with God to benefit His creation?

Work is God's gift to us. It is His provision in a number of ways. In *Your Work Matters to God*, the authors suggest five major reasons why work is valuable:

1. Through work we serve people. Most work is part of a huge network of interconnected jobs, industries, goods and services that work together to meet people's physical needs. Other jobs meet people's aesthetic and spiritual needs as well.
2. Through work we meet our own needs. Work allows us to exercise the gifts and abilities God gives each person, whether paid or unpaid. God expects adults to

provide for themselves and not mooch off others. Scripture says, “If one will not work, neither let him eat!” [{7}](#)

3. Through work we meet our family’s needs. God expects the heads of households to provide for their families. He says, “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” [{8}](#)

4. Through work we earn money to give to others. In both the Old and New Testaments, God tells us to be generous in meeting the needs of the poor and those who minister to us spiritually. [{9}](#)

5. Through work we love God. One of God’s love languages is obedience. When we work, we are obeying His two great commandments to love Him and love our neighbor as we love ourselves. [{10}](#) We love God by obeying Him from the heart. We love our neighbor as we serve other people through our work.

We bring glory to God by working industriously, demonstrating what He is like, and serving others by cooperating with God to meet their needs. In serving others, we serve God. And that’s why our work matters to God.

Notes

1. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987.
2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. p. 67.
3. Philippians 1:21
4. Romans 12:1, 2
5. Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14
6. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19, *The Message*.
7. 2 Thess. 3:10
8. 1 Tim. 5:8
9. Leviticus 19:10—Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the

fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. Ephesians 4:28—Let him who steals, steal no longer but rather let him labor performing with his own hands what is good in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. Gal 6:6—The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.

10. Matthew 22:37-39

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Living With an Eternal Perspective

Sue Bohlin



Sue Bohlin considers several ways to develop a way of seeing our earthly life as part of the much bigger picture that extends into eternity.

What Does It Mean To Live With an Eternal Perspective?

Years ago, after spending his whole life on the mission field, a career missionary made his final trip home on a passenger ship. One of the other people on his sailing was a celebrity, and as the ship made its way into the harbor, all those on

board beheld a huge throng of well wishers at the pier with signs and instruments to celebrate the famous person's return.

The missionary stood at the railing, watching wistfully, knowing that not a soul was there for him. He said, "Lord, I've served You my whole life. Look at all the recognition and revelry for that famous person, and there's nobody here for me. It hurts, Lord."



He heard the still, small voice say, "You're not home yet, son."

I love this story that helps me keep in mind the big picture that includes the eternal, unseen realm, and the long picture that extends into the forever that awaits on the other side of death.

The apostle Paul had a firm grasp on what it means to live with an eternal perspective. We can especially see this in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18—

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

In these verses, Paul provides three aspects of an eternal perspective that kept him from losing heart, despite living with profound physical persecution and assault such as being hammered with stones, whipped by a cat-o'-nine-tails, beaten with rods, and shipwrecked. He knew what it was to go without sleep, food or drink, sometimes he was cold and naked. The man *knew* what it was to suffer! (2 Corinthians 11:23-29)

But Paul had a sort of spiritual periscope that allowed him to "see above" into the spirit realm while continuing to "live below" in this physical world. He saw the

contrast between our bodies and our souls, how earthly affliction prepares us for glory, and the need to focus on the unseen and eternal rather than the seen and temporary.

Paul's Eternal Perspective

The apostle Paul showed us in 2 Corinthians 4 that he understood what it was to live with an eternal perspective. He understood that our bodies can be growing older and weaker on the outside, while our spirits are growing stronger, brighter, and more mature on the inside. I get that; as a polio survivor who has also needed both my hips replaced, I am very aware that I keep getting weaker the longer I live in this compromised body. But I also know the beauty and glory of Jesus making me more and more like Himself, day by day, so by His grace I can keep growing in vitality and joy on the inside! I may have diminishing energy in my body, but my spiritual energy capacity keeps getting bigger!

Paul also understood that the hard parts of living in a fallen world, much less living with the pains and trials of persecution, are merely a “light and momentary affliction” compared to what’s waiting on the other side: an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Even horrible pain on earth is still “light and momentary” compared to the infinite length and glory of eternity with Christ. We can see how the Lord Jesus modeled this understanding as He faced the cross, and Hebrews tells us that He “despised its shame” because He was valuing the glory of the joy set before Him (12:2)

And Paul understood that we can shift our focus from the visible and temporary things of this world, to the unseen and eternal things of the spirit realm. We have to work at seeing the unseen and eternal. We do that with the eyes of our hearts (Ephesians 1:18). We do that by training ourselves to view everything through the lens of God’s word.

I’ve been working at developing an eternal perspective for years. For me, it’s

about connecting the dots between earthly things and heavenly things.

I look at earthly things and wonder, “How does this connect to the spirit realm? How does this connect to what is unseen and eternal?” For examples, look at my blog posts, such as Glorious Morning Glories [probe.org/glorious-morning-glories/], Back Infections and Heart Infections [probe.org/back-infections-and-heart-infections/], Cruise Ships, Roller Coasters and Attitudes [probe.org/cruise-ships-roller-coasters-and-attitudes/], and Blowing Past Greatness [probe.org/blowing-past-greatness/].

Jesus’ parables are the world’s best examples of using the physical to provide understanding of the eternal. He was always connecting the dots between the things He was surrounded by—different types of soil, lost coins and sheep and sons, a wedding banquet—and explaining how these things related to the Kingdom of Heaven.

One of the most important prayers we can ask is, “Lord, help me see Your hand at work”—and then intentionally looking for it. For years I have kept a “God Sightings” Journal where I recorded evidence of God intervening in my life and the lives of others I have seen. I love to ask my friends and mentees, “Do you any God Sightings to share?” to help them identify the hand of God in their lives.

An Eternal Perspective on Suffering

As we talk about living with an eternal perspective, let’s remember that we live in a permanent battle zone of spiritual warfare. We have an enemy who hates us because He hates God. He and his fellow demons continually attack us with lies and deceptions. Some are personal, but many of them constitute the cultural water we swim in.

When we forget that we live in a culture of anti-God, anti-truth, it’s like going out in our underwear, needlessly exposing ourselves. Living with an eternal

perspective means staying vigilant, donning our spiritual armor (Ephesians 6:10-18) and using it to fight back against the lies of the enemy.

Spiritual warfare is HARD. It means suffering. Sometimes physical, most often mental—because spiritual warfare is waged on the battlefield of the mind. But the suffering of spiritual warfare is temporary, because the vast majority of the believer’s life will be spent in heaven where warfare of all kinds will be a distant memory.

But for right now, suffering is still part of life, and developing and maintaining an eternal perspective really helps us remind ourselves of the larger truth. Romans 8:18 says that “our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Being faithful when we’re suffering means glory in the future.

My friend Holly has battled cancer three times on top of the horribleness of cystic fibrosis. She suffers literally every day of her life. Yet, with a beautiful, godly stubbornness, she reminds herself of what is true: “What if the worst thing happens? Oh wait, it can’t. The worst thing that can possibly happen to anyone is to die apart from Christ and spend eternity in torment. For me, to die means instant joy and relief in the arms of my Savior!”

Like [Joni Eareckson Tada](#), my friend Chris has lived with quadriplegia for almost fifty years. What comes to mind when I think of Chris is two words: “sweet joy.” Because of his eternal perspective, Chris knows his suffering is temporary, and he chooses not to give into self-pity. People are drawn to him like honey because of how he radiates Jesus.

And then there’s me. I’ve lived with a disability my whole life. As a polio survivor, I have walked every step with a [very noticeable limp](#). Living with an eternal perspective means that, by the grace of God, I know I will receive a beautiful, strong, perfectly healthy resurrection body in heaven. My polio days are limited,

but my resurrection body days will be unlimited! Meanwhile, I get to see God use my disability for His glory and others' good in ways I never would have imagined. It really is okay!

Remembering the Long View

Another aspect of living with an eternal perspective is focusing on the reality that our time on earth is short, especially compared to the never-ending life on the other side of death.

One of my favorite questions is to ask, "A hundred years from now, when you are face to face with Jesus in heaven, what do you want to be glad you chose today? Indulging your flesh and doing whatever you think will make you happy right now, or making choices that honor God and bless other people?"

Probably my favorite question remains an essential part of my eternal perspective: passing everything through the grid of the great question, "In the scope of eternity, what does this matter?" [probe.org/in-the-scope-of-eternity/]The frustrations of traffic? Not getting our way? A loved one who does not know Christ? The answer determines what is worth getting upset about, what we should just let go, and where we should be investing time in prayer.

We can remember the long view by pre-deciding now that we will use our earthly days fully, engaged in ministry, as long as God gives us breath.

Years ago, my view of living with an eternal perspective was shaped by the story of a lady who decided to start college in her 70s. When they asked her why she would do such a thing when her life was basically over, she said, "Oh no! It's not over! I'm preparing for the next part of my life in heaven! The more equipped I can get on earth, the more ready I'll be for what the Lord has for me on the other side!"

Another lady was homebound because she was so disabled. She got the word out that every afternoon, her home was open for anyone who needed prayer. Some days it was like there was a revolving door, so many coming and going! She had a vibrant ministry in the waning days of her life because she was determined to use her remaining earthly days fully, to the glory of God.

One of my friends is a TSA [Transportation Security Administration, part of the U.S. Government] agent at a major airport. She diligently reminds herself daily that every traveler who comes through the security line is infinitely valuable because they are made in the image of God, and Jesus died for them. She showers kindness on them because they are so important. One of her co-workers, for whom work is just a job where he punches a time clock, once told her, “In twelve months you’ll stop being nice to everyone.” We don’t think so. (Especially since she’s already had this job for several years.) She works at maintaining an eternal perspective, seeing the unseen.

In the time you have now, live well, to the glory of God. Keep reminding yourself that everything we do now has an eternal impact. Our choices, our behaviors, our words, ripple into eternity. Which is why we need to seek to do everything for the glory of God.

Eternal Perspective is What God Sees

As a mom of littles, Nicole Johnson was feeling sorry for herself when she met with a friend who had just returned from Europe. She writes,

“My friend turned to me with a beautifully wrapped package, and said, ‘I brought you this.’ It was a book on the great cathedrals of Europe. I wasn’t exactly sure why she’d given it to me until I read her inscription: ‘With admiration for the greatness of what you are building when no one sees.’

“In the days ahead I would read—no, devour—the book. And I would discover

what would become for me, four life-changing truths, after which I could pattern my work:

“1) No one can say who built the great cathedrals—we have no record of their names.

“2) These builders gave their whole lives for a work they would never see finished.

“3) They made great sacrifices and expected no credit.

“4) The passion of their building was fueled by their faith that the eyes of God saw everything.

“There’s a story in the book about a rich man who came to visit the cathedral while it was being built, and he saw a workman carving a tiny bird on the inside of a beam. He was puzzled and asked the man, ‘Why are you spending so much time carving that bird into a beam that will be covered by the roof? No one will ever see it.’

“And the workman replied, ‘Because God sees it.’ [\[1\]](#)

Living with an eternal perspective as we make choices and invest our time to glorify God is like building a cathedral that we won’t be able to see finished.

It means living with the long view in mind, aware that the things we can see, hear, and feel are temporary, but the spiritual realm is permanent.

An eternal perspective means that the things you do that no one sees but God—the unseen and eternal—*they matter!*

God tells us in Isaiah that our purpose in life is to glorify Him (43:7). Paul puts a point on this in 1 Corinthians 10:31: “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”

And that's the key to living with an eternal perspective.

Notes

1. thejoysofboys.com/monday-motivation-the-invisible-mom/

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How to Kill Sin: John Owen's The Mortification of Sin

Paul Rutherford



Paul Rutherford provides an overview of the Puritan John Owen's classic book The Mortification of Sin.

In my early twenties I confessed to a friend an ongoing battle with sin. He suggested I read John Owen's book, *The Mortification of Sin*^{1}. I wish I had read it back then. It would have saved me so much pain in my battle against sin.

So I want to help you in that same way by sharing some of Owen's key insights in the battle against sin.



Let's begin with the title. Mortification, what does that word mean? Broadly speaking, it means to kill or put to death. The Latin root from which this English word is derived, "mort-" or "mors" means death. *Mortificare*—to kill.^{2} Other examples of this root include mortuary, mortician, and mortgage.

Simply put, mortification means death, but note the dictionary also lists "shame" and "humiliation" as definitions as well. So mortification involves death. More to the point, Owen wants you to kill *sin*. More importantly, he makes a case that Scripture commands you to kill sin.

This message today is not for everyone. It's only appropriate if you believe in Jesus. Early in the work Owen gravely warns those who would mortify sin, but do so without first believing in Jesus.

I would warn you as well. Please don't sit here and read another minute if you have not put your faith in Jesus Christ for your righteousness, for your salvation. If you're reading this right now and have never made a confession of faith, and you're ready, please do so now. Just talk to God and tell him you believe that Jesus is Lord, that He died for your sins, was buried, and raised from the dead, and you are putting your trust in Him. Then tell someone you know who already believes. It will be the most important thing you do, ever.

If you're still reading, then let's press on. Owen discusses at length what it means to kill sin, how to do it effectively, and why you should do it.

But before we jump in, remember John Owen was a 17th century English pastor and theologian. This is not his first book, and at the time he composed it, he was Vice-Chancellor at the University of Oxford. Owen has academic credentials. But

this book is more devotional than academic. Owen draws from personal experience. It is not merely intellectual. He meant for it to be practiced.

What is Mortification?

John Owen wrote *The Mortification of Sin* in England in 1656. Mortification means death, or in this case to kill. . .sin. That's what we covered in the previous section. This matters because your life is at stake here. In chapter two, Owen warns us with this now famous quote, "Be killing sin or it will be killing you." That is probably the most famous quote from that book.

Did you catch the significance of that quote? Sin will kill you. That's why this is a big deal. That's why this matters. That's also why sin's presence requires such a drastic response. It must be killed. James tells us that "[S]in when it is fully grown brings forth death." {3}

Your best option—the most effective option—your only real option is to *kill* sin. Just like John Owen said. Kill it. Or it will kill you. Because trust me. It will kill you—in every way: physically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually—every way.

Owen quickly reminds us this is impossible in a complete, ultimate, or perfect sense, until Jesus comes back, not before. {4} So until then we mortify sin. {5}

Now let's talk about mortification. Let's talk about killing sin. What exactly does that mean? Sin is an abstract thing, not a biological organism. How do you kill an abstract thing? Owen's instruction is clear: "utterly destroy it" or, make it cease to be.

Owen defines the process of mortification three ways: sin gets weaker, you fight against it constantly, and you have full success over it. {6}

So then mortification means to weaken sin, or drain it of its power. It means the desire to sin decreases in degree, frequency, and

quality. That comes as you “crucify the flesh with its passions and desires,” as we read in Galatians 5:24.

Mortification also means to fight sin constantly. You have an enemy. Employ any means necessary to destroy his work. The contest will be vigorous and hazardous.

Finally, mortification is success against sin in any given moment. This isn’t merely resisting temptation. Owen has more in view here; it is recognizing temptation, bringing it before Christ, pursuing sin to its root, and conquering it in Jesus’ strength.

Before we discuss how to do this, for clarity let’s talk about how not to mortify sin.

How NOT to Mortify Sin

Mortification means to kill, and the point of John Owen’s book *The Mortification of Sin* is to kill sin. Nothing short of your life is at stake here since sin always leads to death.[\[7\]](#)

Sin is not to be trifled with. It cost Jesus His life.

Owen himself covers what mortification is NOT in the book, before he defines what it is. So now we will follow his lead.

Mortification is commonly mistaken. It is tricky to identify properly. Four things frequently masquerade as mortification, when they are in fact not. These four are: faking it, having a calm disposition, cross-addiction, and behavior modification.

Faking it, the first instance of false mortification, is making yourself look good on the outside, instances where outward signs of sin are obvious—compulsive spending, for example. You may choose not to buy something the next time you’re tempted, but that outward choice is not the root of sin. The root is inside. It goes deeper.

The root is the belief that material will fill that void inside. Owen further points out hypocrisy as a real danger here. Not only did you not mortify the sin, you are now making it look as if you have.

Mortification is also not simply a calm disposition. Some sins are obvious, visible, even violent in nature. In these cases if you become more calm, more quiet, more gentle, it could appear on the outside as if the sin is gone. In fact it is not. Owen reminds us that mortification is more than a simple change in disposition.

Mortification is also not replacing one vice for another. For example, if the presenting sin is addiction to pornography, keeping yourself from erotic material may appear as victory unless you pick up the bottle. Now you simply exchanged pornography for alcohol. You exhibit a cross-addiction. This, too, is not mortification.

Mortification is also not mere change in behavior. Surely you have made a big change before—created a new habit, lost weight, something, even a New Year's resolution. You can force the behavior for a while—maybe even through February! You can make yourself do what you've resolved. But eventually, that old habit creeps back; unless some real changes are made, it's merely a shift in behavior. This also is not mortification.

What is mortification, then? How do you do it?

How to Mortify Sin

After all this preliminary discussion, you probably want to know how you can kill sin, conquer it, and be victorious, because if you don't it will kill you, as Owen himself says in the book.

Here's the bad news, though. *You* can't mortify your sin. You will have no victory over sin by employing any method I recommend to you. Now, don't despair! This doesn't mean you can't experience victory! God forbid. Rather, it is God's will for

you to find victory over the curse of sin. What I mean here is that mortification is not something *you* do. It is instead something God does, namely the Holy Spirit.

Only the Holy Spirit can mortify sin, kill sin in the flesh. Only He is strong enough to put to death the old man.

So what do you do, then? Here are Owen's words. "Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin. His blood is the great sovereign remedy for sin-sick souls. Live in this, and thou wilt die a conqueror. Yea, thou wilt, through the good providence of God, live to see thy lust dead at thy feet." [\[8\]](#)

The way to mortify sin is to set *faith* at work. Put your faith to work. Believe in the work Jesus did on the cross. His sacrifice is your remedy. That's how you kill sin—you don't. You believe in the power of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross, and let Christ kill it for you.

It's freeing really. Would you want the responsibility of killing the broken flesh within you? I don't. Owen goes on to add two more points of substance. First "fill your soul" with the provision of Christ. I might call that meditation. Meditate on Christ. Fill your mind with His provision.

The second point is to *expect* relief in Christ. Owen reasons that if Christ's blood is enough to make you righteous—and if the Spirit is strong enough to mortify your flesh, then expect it's going to happen. It may not be instantaneous. Anyone who's been walking with Christ for some time will affirm this. It's a slow and difficult, often *painful* process, but definitely a good one.

So that is how you mortify sin. You don't. You let the Spirit do it. Your job is to believe by faith.

Conclusion

What have we learned so far? If you are following in the footsteps of Jesus, you

need to mortify, or put to death, sin in your life. If you don't it will kill you.

This is not a popular message. I admit. Sin is not a fun topic. But Scripture is clear. Sin must be put to death. Owen's book, while dating over three hundred years back, could be neither more timely nor more appropriate for you today.

Owen admonishes the sincere believer to kill indwelling sin without delay. He warns the unbeliever this is impossible without Jesus Christ. Jesus is absolutely essential to the success and continued process of mortification. To do otherwise is the "soul and substance of all false religion in the world." [{9}](#)

If you believe in Jesus and you are stuck in your sin, maybe you're trapped in addiction, this book is for you. Mortify sin.

"Set faith at work on Christ for the killing of thy sin." [{10}](#) You believe in His Son for salvation. Believe Him now for the deliverance of your soul from the power of indwelling sin.

It is not easy. You will struggle every day against sin. The bad news here is that you carry the problem with you. Your flesh is broken. It remains unregenerate until the day of Christ. Your soul is secure eternally by the blood of Christ, and one day you will receive a gloriously new body. But for now, we struggle.

But consider Jesus' promise in that struggle: "I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." [{11}](#)

Mortification is not for the faint of heart. But it is good. Your sin does not define you. God does. And he says you are fearfully and wonderfully made. [{12}](#) He paid the price of your sin. It was an awful lot. But he loves you that much.

Trust him today. Trust in his Word. And trust in the community of saints He provided for you. Confess your sin to them today. Do you want to fully live? Then kill sin.

Notes

1. John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*. (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, Geanies House), 1996.
2. *American Heritage Dictionary*, 2000.
3. James 1:15.
4. 1 Corinthians 15:50-54.
5. Colossians 3:5.
6. Owen, p.64.
7. James 1:15; Proverbs 14:12; Genesis 2:17.
8. Owen, p.161.
9. *Ibid.*, p.23.
10. *Ibid.*, p.161.
11. John 16:33.
12. Psalm 139:14.

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The Professor: Why Are You a Christian? - When Challenged, Can You Defend Your Faith in Christ

Dr. Ray Bohlin



Are our adults ready to give a defense of the gospel? When challenged, can they give a reasonable explanation of their faith? Dr. Bohlin presents a sobering view of this question based upon years of experience questioning high school and college-age students on the basis for their belief in Christ. By exposing their lack of cogent answers to questions they may be asked, he challenges them to spend time exploring the questions and developing biblical worldview-based answers.

The Professor

Over the last ten years, I have used a very effective technique to help teens realize their unpreparedness for the step toward college. It seems our young people are heading into public and even Christian colleges thinking they are ready for the challenge to their faith that higher learning can be.

✘ Probe Ministries has sponsored a [college prep conference](#) since 1991 that was designed to help young people gain some insights and even some knowledge on how to address the intellectual challenges that college will provide.

If you remember the thousands of college radicals who protested and picketed in the '60s and '70s, they found their push for change was not very effective. Instead, many of them stayed in college, obtained Masters Degrees and PhDs. After all, it was easier than getting a real job! As a result, they are now your children's professors!

The college campus was an anti-Christian breeding ground several decades ago and now it is even worse. Christianity is not so much openly mocked as it is marginalized and deemed a false and mischievous mythology.

If you haven't already heard some of these statistics, you need to hold onto your hat.

In 2007, LifeWay surveyed 23- to 30-year-olds and found that seventy percent had taken at least a one year break from church during their college years.[{1}](#) Now, almost two-thirds of these return to some level of church attendance, but mainly to please family or friends who encouraged them to return. That means that most of our church youth are making many of their life decisions, including marriage and career, apart from a church context. Even many who return carry numerous scars from bad choices during those years.[{2}](#)

With this statistical background, it's plain our young people need some preparation before going on to college or the military. But as most parents of teens know, just telling them they need this is less than likely to be convincing.

Enter the Professor. The technique I mentioned at the beginning is to impersonate an atheistic college professor doing research on the religious beliefs of young people. Sometimes the students know I am playing a role with them, but occasionally I play the professor and the students are none the wiser.

A Simple Question

When I step to the front of the room, I introduce myself as Professor Hymie Schwartz (a name borrowed from my late colleague Jerry Solomon who played this role far better than I do). I tell the group that, since I am conducting research on the religious beliefs of young people, their youth pastor, counselor, principal, teacher—whatever, has allowed me to visit with them.

I begin the conversation something like this: "Since this is a church or Christian school I presume you are all Christians. Is anyone not a Christian?" Of course no one raises their hand. But I am always aware that some may indeed not be believers and may not appreciate my questioning so I am always paying attention.

At this point I simply call on someone, usually someone who isn't really paying attention or is engrossed in conversation with a neighbor. "You! Are you a Christian?" No one has ever answered no. Upon receiving an affirmative answer, with hands casually stuck in my pockets, I demand, "Why?"

Students are paying attention now. This is for real. Now consider my question for yourself. If Peter warns us to always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks to give a defense for the hope that we have, this is a pretty basic question. In our highly secular culture, if someone finds out you're a Christian, they may indeed ask you why. Peter says you ought to have an answer.

But this simple question why is usually something our young people, and even their parents, have never really considered. Their Christian faith is certainly something they would claim is central to their lives, but the dumbfounded looks on their faces tells me repeatedly that this question is a new one.

It's usually about this time that any parents sitting in the back are suddenly quite relieved I'm not talking to them!

By asking such questions, I can get them pretty riled up and confused. The point is not to have fun but to help them see that they need to be prepared and think a little about why Christianity is important to them and why they think it's true.

"I Asked Jesus into My Heart!"

Having their Christianity questioned usually comes as a surprise and even shock. Rather than directly answering the question, they try to tell me *how* they became a Christian. It usually takes the form of confidently saying they asked Jesus into their heart.

The professor quickly fires back, "You asked Jesus into your heart?! That sounds pretty gross, really. What's he doing in there with all that blood? Yuck!" That

always gets a surprised reaction and a little befuddlement. The student typically tries to recover by saying something like, “No, I mean it’s like I trusted Jesus as my Savior.”

Again the professor will fire back quickly with a question like, “Why did you do that?” or “Savior? What did you need saving from?” I think you can see where this is going. It really is not difficult to pick something from what he or she said and challenge it. I either pretend I don’t understand what they said, forcing them to better explain themselves (which is rare), or I deliberately ask them why they think that way, or how they know that.

In answer to “How do you know that?” I am often told that “It says so in the Bible!” They usually can’t tell me where the Bible says that. I also ask if the Bible is true, and they say it is. But when I ask, “How do you know it’s true?” the blank stare reemerges.

Sometimes a student will say, “Because it’s the word of God!” Now I can really dig a little deeper. In response to further questioning, they usually can’t tell me where the Bible says it’s the Word of God nor can they tell me why the Bible is different from The Book of Mormon or the Qur’an. If there is a youth pastor or chaplain present there is usually an embarrassed look on their face or a head buried in their hands.

By this time the class is very tense and full of nervous laughter. When I reach a dead end with a student—for instance when they say, “I don’t know” with a very resigned and defeated voice—I look for one of the laughing students and ask, “What about you?” Of course that gets everybody’s attention again and off we go.

While I admit I have a little fun playing this role, it never ceases to break my heart at how ill-prepared our young people are to follow Peter’s advice to always be prepared with an answer. I have yet to find a student in ten years who is willing and able to go toe-to-toe with the professor.

“You’re a Narrow-Minded, Self-Righteous Bigot!”

Here are three other directions our conversations have frequently taken.

When I have challenged students to tell me why they think or believe Christianity is true, some will turn to their own subjective experience. Technically, there is nothing wrong with this, specifically when speaking to a Christian audience. But someone who doesn’t even believe in God will frequently find ways to truly make fun of this element.

A student may describe that Jesus speaks to them in their prayer time, to which I quickly ask what His voice sounds like or how they know it was Jesus and not indigestion. The blank stares usually resume at this point. We have become so comfortable in our Christian bubble sometimes that we frequently don’t see how unintelligible our language is to those outside the community of faith. It’s tough to share the gospel that way.

Sometimes a student will interject that they believe in Jesus because that’s what their family has taught them or it’s what they learned in church. I usually pounce on that pretty quickly and repeat that this student believes Christianity is true because their parents told them so. The student usually agrees. After commending them for honoring their parents I tell them that’s really pretty stupid. Pausing a second for the shock to register, I go on about the boy raised in India whose parents are Hindu and he respects his parents and believes Hinduism is true, so the boy in India and this student are both headed to heaven because they trusted their parents!

One time a student stammered around and eventually agreed with my statement as his youth pastor put his head in his hands.

Finally in talking about salvation I ask what happens to those who don’t believe in Jesus. Most will hesitatingly say they go to hell. The professor predictably rants, “Just because I don’t believe the same fairy tale as you, I’m going to hell?” When

they predictably shake their head yes, I get down eye to eye and spit out, “You’re a narrow minded, self-righteous bigot!”

Always Be Ready to Give an Answer, with Gentleness and Respect

Students enjoy the interactive nature of this routine even though they are routinely embarrassed by their inability to handle the challenge. When Peter admonished all of us to always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that we have, yet with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15), they fail miserably. Perhaps as a parent, you may be glad that I don’t do this with adult groups.

Often students will try to turn the conversation in their favor by asking the professor a question. I quickly dismiss that idea by simply answering that *I’m* asking the questions. But when we’re done, if time allows I attempt to leave them with hope by quickly summarizing how I, Dr. Ray Bohlin, Vice-President of Probe Ministries, would answer the same question.

Here’s the outline of my response. In a calm voice I quickly assert that I know there is a God. As a scientist I look principally at how marvelously our universe, galaxy, solar system, and planet are designed for complex life here on earth. The number of highly improbable coincidences rules out chance and strongly implies design. This is reinforced by the evidence from biology of the incredible complexity of life, particularly the coded information in DNA. This remarkable molecule with its accompanying system of transcription and translation screams for intelligence.

The fact that all people have some sense of right and wrong, even though we may disagree sometimes, tells us we are comparing our morality to some invisible standard outside ourselves that must come from a supreme Law Giver. I am

convinced there is a supernatural God.

If this God exists, then has He spoken to man? I quickly tell about the uniqueness of Scripture, written by forty authors from eight countries over fifteen hundred years in three languages and all with a consistent and unique message of a God of love who ransomed us from our sins. Where we have archaeological evidence it consistently confirms the accuracy of biblical events. I am convinced the Bible is the true and unique Word of God.

The Bible throughout is about Jesus, who repeatedly claimed to be the unique divine Son of God and offered his death and resurrection on behalf of mankind as proof. That Jesus bodily rose from the dead is the only rational conclusion of the evidence of the empty tomb. On top of that, my personal experience of the last thirty-seven years has shown me again and again the unique love and power of God.

So what about you? Why are *you* a Christian?

Notes

1. "LifeWay Research Uncovers Reasons 18 to 22 Year Olds Drop Out of Church," 2007, www.lifeway.com/article/165949/, accessed May 15, 2010.
2. Youth Transition Network has researched this problem over the last ten years and has excellent resources, videos, research, and books and DVDs for purchase. Take a look at www.ytn.org.

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Current Events and the Currency of Truth: “Test Everything”

Byron Barlowe



Byron Barlowe opens a series on biblical discernment for dark days, likening wise discernment of current events and abiding issues to examining bills and coins to verify their authenticity. Being able to tell the difference between good vs. bad, right vs. wrong, fruitful vs. unfruitful, and subtle lies that captivate believers is a long-term discipline that is a Christian’s duty and privilege to walk out as God provides Scripture, counsel, reflection, and field experience.

***“In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”
Colossians 2:3***

As Christians, should we really concern ourselves with discerning real vs. fake, better vs. best, profitable vs. unprofitable, lies and half-truths vs. truth and wisdom? To help answer that question, and as an introduction to a coming series on discernment, let’s look at a historical example from over 70 years ago.

Adolph Burger, a Jewish printer sentenced to a Nazi concentration camp in 1942, was shocked to find himself released and forced to use his printing skill for Germany’s war effort. In a perversion of the tabernacle artisans whom God gifted during Israel’s exodus from Egypt, [\[1\]](#) Burger was forced to facilitate a brilliant secret plan to ruin Britain.

His and fellow Jewish craftsmen's work would be dropped by German bombers over English cities and towns. But these were no explosive devices. They potentially held much more devastating power than any number of bombs. They were even made of paper!

Fifty-five years later, investigative TV show *60 Minutes II* hired a deep-sea recovery team to search the 350-foot depths of Lake Toplitz in Austria. Why? In the final days of WWII, when the Russians and Allied troops were pinching Hitler's regime from opposite sides for an inevitable victory, some Nazi holdouts hoped the diabolical plan could yet be implemented. So, they sunk the work of the Jewish artisans in remote Lake Toplitz.

The plan, dubbed *Operation Bernard*, would seize upon human greed and sheer numbers to ruin the British economy. It would go like this:

- Drop exquisitely forged English pound notes from Luftwaffe planes causing widespread distribution, then refuse to honor the phony money by banks and businesses, and resultant economic panic among citizens, thus
- Radically undermining the value of the British pound, hence
- Destroying the economy, hopefully driving England to its knees and ensuring victory.
- Key to the plan: human nature. Money falling from the sky is just too tempting! It would definitely lead to hoarding and general circulation, they thought.

Most forgers do as little as they can to mimic genuine currency—only enough to get a pass on a cursory look. “But by using the world's finest craftsmen and supplying . . . the most modern tools and machinery, the Germans solved this problem Once the bills were in circulation, it would be difficult for even experts to know genuine from counterfeit; amateurs would have no hope.” [\[2\]](#)

Judging counterfeit claims and deceit, like the bogus bills the Nazis created, is a complex project, requiring great skill and training. Much of godly discernment

emerges from self-discipline, a facet of the fruit of the Spirit. According to Tim Challies, author of *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, every disciple of Jesus is morally obligated to discern between truth and lies and to pass on the former while resisting the latter.

Whatever the person's level of maturity in Christ, wisdom and its application of discernment to specific issues is available for every Christian. "His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the *knowledge* of him who called us . . ." (1 Peter 1:3-4, emphasis mine). "Yet when I am among mature believers, I do speak with words of wisdom, but not the kind of wisdom that belongs to this world or to the rulers of this world, who are soon forgotten" (1 Corinthians 2:6 NLT). All born-again believers possess potential discernment. Mature ones seek and develop it.

The biblical command to "test everything" (1 Thessalonians 5:21) means carefully weighing inputs from culture, family, and even personal thoughts. It monitors—somewhat like antivirus software on a computer—our beliefs and decision-making in light of Scriptural truth, Spirit-illuminated meditation and thoughtfulness, godly counsel, and experience in situational discernment.

Gaining wisdom, the entire point of the book of Proverbs, is lifegiving and sweet! "Know also that wisdom is like honey for you: If you find it, there is a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off" (Proverbs 24:14).

Often this lifelong process seems burdensome, but spiritual warfare is indeed warfighting, which is often excruciating. The Body of Christ has always been in *a war of ideas*, battling for truth. However daunting, constant discipline and practice takes over and knowledge grows into wisdom which, by God's grace, produces discernment. Discernment becomes a progression not unlike basic education from kindergarten to secondary graduation. The seasoned soldier of Truth can see potential danger approaching and react with muscle memory, but not prematurely or with overkill. Better weapons in trained hands win. [\[3\]](#)

Lies, subtle and blatant, emerge daily on every front like perhaps never in our history. Brazenly hostile and self-contradicting misinformation and propaganda avalanches too quickly to keep up with.

Renowned Christian philosopher Dr. J.P. Moreland insists that “the fundamental fight today is not primarily about truth claims” themselves but rather how we can know truth at all. The prevailing assumptions question the very “nature of knowledge itself.” [{4}](#) People say, “How can you know that?” or simply dismiss Christian faith statements and reasoned, Scriptural argumentation as groundless, mostly due to their faith in scientific naturalism as the only source of actual truth. [{5}](#) Postmodernism creates a widespread belief that truth can only be tribal, eschewing appeals to absolute or universal truth claims—chiefly, the metanarrative of the Biblical record. [{6}](#)

This moment in American history is witnessing pervasive efforts to deceive and shut down alternative views. Pressure groups, several with Marxist underpinnings, actively initiate strategies designed to dismantle and remake American culture, its history and education system, the nuclear family, negotiated policy creation, America’s founding principles, the role of the press, and to suppress individuals and groups who do not hew to certain views. Some big businesses, “woke” and supportive of such moves, provide financial, advertising, and distribution aid as de facto gatekeepers and worse.

Thanks to federal law granting them special protections, social media platforms and search engines (Big Tech) are uniquely free, compared to broadcast radio and TV, to blacklist and block anyone with whom they disagree. It’s a matter of public record that Google, Facebook, Twitter, and others exercise these tactics of massive influence more each week. Industry leaders who skew Leftward politically have bound together to influence the outcome of the 2020 Presidential election. [{7}](#) Calls from members of Congress unconstitutionally imply, even threaten, to “research” individuals who were associated at all with the former president or the movement he represented. Understanding the roots of radical

notions like these helps recognize and rebut them.

This seems to be our generation's time of testing. But, as Jesus taught, believers don't target even our human enemies.[{8}](#) Rather, "we destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). We fight for their sake and ours against destructive lies. During dark days, such a keen battle-ready mindset and *heartset* seems all the more urgent.

What's Our Part in Deciphering Truth in All This Chaos?

Did you know that you can refuse a suspicious piece of currency? But if you accept it, you're legally responsible. If it's funny money, you're left holding the bag.

The Bank of Canada's solution to a rampant counterfeiting problem was a campaign drumming into the public the watchwords: "touch, tilt, look at, look through." That publicity campaign taught citizens how to test official currency compared to forgeries. Likewise, Christ followers must hold up any claim or trend to the light to see if it's genuine truth or a fake. On religious claims and trends, examine carefully any doctrine or teaching or you could be led astray.[{9}](#)

Therefore, if legal tender requires examination and the recipient is legally responsible for analyzing all received cash payment, then certainly Paul's admonition to "examine everything"[{10}](#) applies even more to citizens of God's kingdom. We will answer for our spiritual savvy, our *saltmanship*, and our lighting of the world, as well as how wisely we led our families, fellows and flocks.

Everyday life examples of the need for vigilant discernment are replete. Recently I was digitally fed news from an online newspaper I found valuable. After a quick search I discovered that this newspaper is owned by a mystical religious cult

founded in China. I found out through reporting sources I didn't fully trust, though, so I provisionally entered that new fact into my matrix of personal filters. Only recently was that claim confirmed when I saw the name of the religious group spelled out on the publication's web site.

The point of the story: few things are jet black and snow white, so layers of discernment are required. When things get gray, more work is needed with the help of others. Wise discernment discovers distinctions within the knowledge we gain, it assesses known patterns, and advises the heart and mind on levels of trust to agree to or the need to reject.

In the case mentioned, I determined that the enemy of my enemy (the Chinese Communist Party) is my friend, in a way. However, I have an eye out on journalistic balance and am especially on guard reading their newspaper's spirituality section (if I ever read it). All of this took a grand total of less than fifteen minutes, then an abiding mindfulness as I hunted for other things. Awareness and practice are key. Biblical and cultural perception paves the way. Make your own wise assessments.

You, as a growing or seasoned Christian, can use wise discernment to serve as an "elder in the gate" for others. Or, as a seeker you can begin to plumb the depths of God's twin revelations in Creation and the Bible. The book of Proverbs emphasizes a desperate and greatly rewarding pursuit of wisdom and its seasoning with age. We are here to help equip you and answer your questions. [{11}](#)

The best antidote to spiritual and worldly confusion is simply Holy Spirit-led discernment. (And that's not just for those gifted with special discernment.)

In future posts I will address several angles on discernment in the world and Church. Following is a list of upcoming topics as I envision them today.

Upcoming in This Discernment Series

The How of Discernment—I’ll dive deeper into biblically defining discernment and address how worldview as a concept helps reveal and classify untrue and dangerous assumptions among philosophies that affect one’s view of the universe and the Creator, human value and business, and more. Also, to be discussed: How can we distinguish true from untrue (or the insidious half-true), good, better and best, and right from wrong or disputable matters of conscience? What is the relationship of knowledge, wisdom, and discernment as the Bible frames it?

Spiritual & Mental Triage—How can I handle sustained, varying and rapid information, claims and counterclaims, and policies that force me to either endure, protest, or free myself from them? (I may write some about conscientious objection vs. following authorities.) How can one fend off attack, especially the arrows aimed at religious freedom, biblical values and God’s revealed will? What if repression or persecution happens anyway?

Distinguishing Between God’s Ways and God’s Enemy’s Ways—It bears emphasizing that, though the cosmos (world) and human sin nature (flesh) are capable of ruin on a global scale, there’s a cosmic battle pre-dating man and Creation—and, yes, politics. The traits and track records, if you will, of both God Almighty and the original Rebel help to immediately test a message’s likely origin and flag the source.

Discerning and Dealing with False Dichotomies—With so many events and “empty philosophies of men,” [{12}](#) the unified biblical narrative of how life works and biblical guidance gets distorted by oversimplified false choices—a favorite trick of the Liar and his worldly, often unwitting, disciples. It’s either “material things are all that matters” or “spiritual and mystical things are the only really real things,” etc. Competing goods are confusing for good-willed people, too. How do I better notice these and find either a middle way or a third way? What false *splits* have I bought into that keep both unbelievers and believers from discerning biblically: facts vs. feelings, truth vs. emotions, oppressors vs. the oppressed only, and so on?

Giving Essentials Their Proper Due—How do I and those I spiritually lead avoid unconsciously discounting a high view of Scripture, theology, and God? We not only need to elevate our game but lift our eyes to the heavens.

Realize and Embrace the Need for Testing—Even the scariest of crises, such as an epidemic or a cultural revolution, may constitute a test God uses for us. Such events provide a perfect laboratory for gaining discernment from general knowledge and a growing understanding gained by “rightly handling the word of truth.” [\[13\]](#) The disciplines you hone through a sincerely perseverant search for a divine source of wisdom gains immediate insight for daily situations, news, and cultural developments that touch your life.

Discernment and the Human Heart, Mind and Will—What did Solomon receive after asking for discernment to govern God’s people, and how does that apply to me? Did that guarantee wise living? What’s the difference between the heart and head in biblical and scientific terms? What does Scripture say about the heart and how elevated is its role?

Are You and Your Sources Asking the Hard Questions?—Yesterday’s conspiracy theory increasingly becomes today’s headline and tomorrow’s policy. Did you detect a curious new spirit of control, perhaps a taste by governments for unreasonable and unrelenting regulations in the initial stages of the Covid-19 response? [I did in March 2020.](#) Skilled observers like Dennis Prager asked early on about the balance of our national response. Discerning people were justified in their caution and predictions about the tradeoffs between several goods: fighting a novel virus for everyone weighed against economic, medical, and psychological damage, not to mention governments’ tendency to retain emergency measures beyond need. Asking the hard questions can enable us to see and respond to the shifts and movements around us from whichever side. Asking early enough can avoid hazards.

Avoiding Logical Pitfalls and Inappropriate Judgment—Thinking can be

flawed or downright incorrect, so how can I avoid that? What are some common logical fallacies and how can I spot them? Are sound arguments always true?

Judging: Is it a Forbidden Act or a Necessary Tool?—One of the most famous but misused quotes of Jesus is, “Judge not, lest you be judged” (Matthew 7:1). Was He teaching never to make assessments of anyone or anything, or did His and other New Testament teachings offer a nuanced approach?

Discernment must stem foundationally from an outside Observer or its interpretations will be captive to its own small circle of knowledge, assumptions, and influencers. Think of it! God intervened in human form and keeps speaking into it by his illuminating Spirit. “But the one who is spiritual discerns all things . . .” (1 Corinthians 2:15).

As ministers of reconciliation and ambassadors, we speak his truth as if from a foreign country.^{14} How do we gain a hearing? Partly from making sense of things from an objective, authoritative, out-of-this-world point of view, relying on knowledge and wisdom that the unredeemed can only dream exist.

Notes

1. Exodus 36:1.
2. Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, (Wheaton, IL, Crossway Books 2007), 14. I owe this well-researched story and many concepts to Challies.
3. 2 Corinthians 10:4; 1 Timothy 4:8; Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12
4. Dr. J.P. Moreland, on a Zoom conference call sponsored by Baylor University apologetics club Oso Logos (tied to Ratio Christi), streamed live on March 2, 2021. I attended that online meeting.
5. See probe.org/atheist-myths-and-scientism/. Note: this belief sneaks into the minds and convictions of Christians, too, who don't see its influence.
6. See probe.org/worldviews-part-2/ and probe.org/truth-what-it-is-and-why-we-can-know-it/.
7. See a mainstream media article detailing a “conspiracy” to “save the [2021

Presidential] election” through a “shadow campaign” led by a “cabal” of Big Tech leaders at time.com/5936036/secret-2020-election-campaign/. See also an expose (speech transcript) detailing very recent and alarming systematic message controlling methods by giant social media platforms: imprimis.hillsdale.edu/control-need-rein-big-tech/.

8. “Love your enemies . . .”, Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 12:31.

9. Acts 17:11. More to come on general as well as spiritual discernment to via [Probe.org](https://probe.org), Probe radio and our [Head & Heart podcast](#).

10. 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

11. Visit our answers to visitor queries at [Probe.org/answers/](https://probe.org/answers/) and [Ask Probe](#).

12. Galatians 2:8.

13. 2 Timothy 2:15.

14. Hebrews 11:16.

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The Value of Christian Doctrine and Apologetics

Dr. Michael Gleghorn



Dr. Michael Gleghorn makes a case for why Christian doctrine and apologetics

are important for spiritual growth and maturity.

Just prior to beginning college, I committed my life to Christ. Naturally, as a new believer wanting to grow in my faith, I embarked upon a program of daily Bible reading. When I came to Paul's letter to Titus in the New Testament, I was both struck and inspired by a particular command, which I found nestled among others, there in the first chapter.



Paul reminded Titus, whom he had left on the island of Crete, that he wanted him to “straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders” in the local churches which had been established (Titus 1:5). After listing various spiritual and moral qualifications that an elder was to have, Paul went on to insist that he must also “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9). When I first read those words, it was as if a light went on inside my head and I thought, “That’s exactly what I would like to do! I want to be able to ‘encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it’” (Titus 1:9). Paul’s words thus encouraged me to take up, in a serious way, the study of Christian doctrine and apologetics.

But what exactly do I mean by “Christian doctrine” and “apologetics”? At its most basic level, Christian doctrine is essentially the same thing as Christian teaching. Such teaching aims at providing a logically consistent and “coherent explication of what the Christian believes.”^{1} Apologetics is a bit more complicated. It comes from the Greek term, *apologia*, and means “defense.” It was often used in law courts in the ancient world.^{2} Indeed, the book of Acts records several instances in which the Apostle Paul was called upon to “make a defense” of himself before various governing authorities, like Felix, Festus, and Agrippa (e.g., Acts 24:10; 25:8; 26:1-2).

Of course, when we’re talking about *Christian* apologetics, we’re concerned with

“making a defense” of the truth-claims of Christianity. The Apostle Peter tells us, “Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15). Christian doctrine and apologetics play an important role in the life and health of the church. So please keep reading as we delve more deeply into these issues.

The Value of Christian Doctrine

Why is Christian doctrine important for the life and health of the church? The Apostle Paul told Titus that he wanted him to appoint elders in the local church who would be able to “encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9). The teaching of sound Christian doctrine is important for several reasons, but for now let me simply mention two. First, sound Christian doctrine helps us to learn what is true about both God and ourselves. Second, it reminds us of the right way to live in light of such truths. And both of these are essential for the life and health of the church.

First, it’s important to know what is true about God and ourselves. Indeed, our eternal destiny depends on it! Not only must we know that God is holy and righteous and will punish all sin, we must also realize that we are sinners (Numbers 14:18; Romans 3:23). But this, in itself, would lead to despair. Hence, we must also understand that God loves us and sent his Son to be the Savior of the world (John 3:16; 1 John 4:14). We need to grasp that forgiveness and reconciliation with God are freely available to those who turn to Christ in repentance and faith (Acts 3:19; 16:31). Sound Christian doctrine is thus essential for salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 John 5:9-13; 2 John 1:9). Without it, true spiritual life and health is impossible.

But this does not exhaust the importance of Christian doctrine. For once we are saved through faith in Christ, God then calls us to grow up and become like his Son—and this would be exceedingly difficult apart from instruction in sound

Christian doctrine. As Christian philosopher Bill Craig observes, “If we want to live correctly for Christ . . . we need to first think correctly about Christ. If your thinking is skewed and off-base, it is going to affect your life and your Christian discipleship.”^{3} Indeed, the Apostle Paul contrasts Christian *maturity*, characterized by genuine “knowledge of the Son of God,” with spiritual *immaturity*, characterized by a lack of such knowledge and a proneness to being deceived (Ephesians 4:13-14).

God calls us to Christian maturity—and instruction in Christian doctrine plays an important role in our spiritual growth. But there is also a role for Christian apologetics—and we must now turn to consider that.

A Defense of Christian Apologetics

Many people question the value of Christian apologetics for the life and health of the church.^{4} They contend that it’s impossible to “argue” anyone into becoming a Christian. Instead of making a defense for the truth of Christianity, we ought rather to invest our limited resources in preaching the gospel of Christ, trusting that God will open people’s hearts and draw them to himself.

Now while I certainly agree that we should be preaching the gospel, and trusting that God will use it to draw men and women to himself, this negative view of apologetics is frankly unbiblical, untrue, and shortsighted.

In the first place, such a view is unbiblical. Both Jesus and the Apostle Paul used arguments and evidence to convince their listeners of particular theological truths (Matthew 22:15-46; Acts 17:16-34). Moreover, the Apostle Peter tells us to always be ready to “make a defense” (or offer an apologetic) to those who ask about our hope in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). A negative view of Christian apologetics thus runs counter to the teaching of Scripture.

Second, it's simply untrue that no one ever comes to Christ through apologetic arguments and evidence.[{5}](#) Indeed, sometimes the Holy Spirit actually uses arguments and evidence to draw people to Christ![{6}](#) And while such people may admittedly be in the minority, they can be extremely influential in commending the faith to others, for they are often prepared to offer good reasons for believing that Christianity is really true!

Finally, a negative view of Christian apologetics is shortsighted. The great theologian J. Gresham Machen argued that we should aim to create “favorable conditions for the reception of the gospel.” Along these lines, he noted the difficulty of attempting to do evangelism once we’ve given up offering an intellectually credible case for the truth of Christianity. “We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer,” he said, “and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation . . . to be controlled by ideas which . . . prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion.”[{7}](#) Machen understood that neglecting apologetics is shortsighted. For unless we offer arguments and evidence, we make it that much easier for people to simply shrug their shoulders and continue ignoring Christianity’s truth-claims.

Having now dismantled the arguments *against* apologetics, we’ll next consider its *benefits* for the life and health of the church.

The Value of Christian Apologetics

Christian apologetics is concerned to offer a robust defense for the truth of Christianity. Hence, training in Christian apologetics can be of great value for the life and health of the church. This is because such training helps to instill within believers a deep confidence that Christianity is really true. And when one becomes convinced that Christianity is really true, one is typically more likely to share one’s faith with others—and less likely to abandon the faith when

confronted with various social, cultural, and intellectual pressures.

Let's consider that first point, that when one becomes convinced of Christianity's truth, one is more likely to share this truth with others. Many Christians admit to being hesitant about sharing their faith because they're afraid someone will ask them a question that they are ill-prepared to answer.^{8} Training in apologetics can help counteract this fear. Granted, one may still be asked a question that is difficult to answer. But apologetics training can help alleviate the fear associated with such situations by helping believers understand that good answers are available—even if they can't remember what those answers are! To give an illustration, if I learn that there is excellent evidence that a particular drug can cure some disease, then I will be far more confident about sharing this fact with others—even if I can't answer all their questions about *how* the medicine works. I may not remember exactly *how* it works, but I do know that there is very good evidence *that* it works. And knowing this, I will naturally be more confident telling others about it, even if I can't answer all their questions about how or why.

Moreover, training in apologetics can help insulate believers from abandoning the faith, for they now know that there are good reasons to believe that Christianity is really true. Of course, most people who abandon the faith do so for *non*-intellectual reasons. Still, as Paul Chamberlain observes, "A number of vocal critics who have moved from Christianity to atheism cite intellectual difficulties with Christianity" as a prime reason for quitting the faith.^{9} While apologetics training can't completely prevent such outcomes, it can make them less likely. After all, it's far more difficult to abandon a view once you've become sincerely convinced of its truth.

Our Witness to the World

Over a hundred years ago, the theologian J. Gresham Machen forcefully argued that, for the faithful Christian, all of life—including the arts and sciences and

every sphere of intellectual endeavor—must be humbly consecrated to the service of God.[{10}](#) Indeed, this should be true not only for every individual Christian in particular, but for the entire church in general. Our witness to the world depends on it.

Machen wrote:

Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but . . . all of human thought. The Christian, therefore, cannot be indifferent to any branch of earnest human endeavor. It must all be brought into some relation to the gospel. It must be studied either in order to be demonstrated as false, or else in order to be made useful in advancing the Kingdom of God. . . . The Church must seek to conquer not merely every man for Christ, but also the whole of man.[{11}](#)

In this article, we've been considering the importance of Christian doctrine and apologetics for the life and health of the church. And clearly, Machen's proposal cannot be effectively implemented apart from a healthy understanding of these issues on the part of the church. After all, how can "all of human thought" be brought "into some relation to the gospel" unless we first understand what the gospel is? How can views "be demonstrated as false" unless we first have some idea of what's true—and how to reason correctly about it? How can views "be made useful in advancing the Kingdom of God" unless we first understand such views, along with how and why they can be useful in advancing God's kingdom? If we are ever to have a hope of carrying out a project like this, in a manner that is both practically effective and faithful to our God, then sound Christian doctrine and apologetics must occupy a central role in our endeavors.

Christian doctrine and apologetics are not antithetical to the life and health of the church. They are rather of fundamental importance. Only by knowing what we believe, and why it's really true, can we fulfill Peter's injunction to always be ready "to make a defense" to anyone who asks about our hope in Christ (1 Peter 3:15). And only thus can we progress to true spiritual maturity, avoiding the

“craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4:13-14). So if we care about the life and health of the church—along with its witness to the world—we must encourage a healthy dose of respect for sound Christian doctrine and apologetics.

Notes

1. Molly Marshall-Green, “Doctrine,” in *Holman Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Trent C. Butler (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 374.
2. Steven B. Cowan, “Introduction,” in *Five Views on Apologetics*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 8, Kindle.
3. William Lane Craig, “Foundations of Christian Doctrine (Part 1),” *Reasonable Faith*, October 22, 2014, accessed August 22, 2018, www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-foundations-of-christian-doctrine/foundations-of-christian-doctrine-part-1/.
4. Many of the points made in this section are indebted to the discussion in William Lane Craig, “Foundations of Christian Doctrine (Part 2),” *Reasonable Faith*, October 29, 2014, accessed August 29, 2018, www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-foundations-of-christian-doctrine/foundations-of-christian-doctrine-part-2/.
5. See, for example, the “Testimonials” section of the Reasonable Faith website, accessed August 29, 2018, www.reasonablefaith.org/testimonials.
6. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 192.
7. J. Gresham Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” *Princeton Theological Review* 11 (1913): 7.
8. Indeed, entire books have been written to help believers feel better prepared for such conversations. See, for example, Mark Mittelberg, *The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask: (With Answers)* (Tyndale, 2010).
9. Paul Chamberlain, “Why People Stop Believing,” *Christian Research Journal* 41, no. 4:11.
10. Machen, “Christianity and Culture,” 5.



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11. Ibid., 6.

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