

The All-Present God

“As Charles Haddon Spurgeon once observed, there are very few things as uplifting for the heart and the mind as a serious study of the being and attributes of God. Hopefully, this little article on God’s omnipresence will encourage some others to take up such studies for themselves. They won’t be disappointed.” –Dr. Michael Gleghorn

Introduction



We can never get away from God. To some, this is quite threatening. To others, it is merely irritating or annoying. But for those who know and love God, it is deeply comforting and consoling, for it means that we are never alone.

In this article, I want to discuss an attribute of God that is often referred to as *omnipresence*. It’s a big word, but all it means is that God is present everywhere. It was while meditating on this attribute that David was led to pen the oft-quoted verses of Psalm 139:

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast (vv. 7-10).[\[1\]](#)

Clearly David took comfort in the fact that he could never get away from God, that there was nowhere he could go where God was not.

In a similar manner, King Solomon also spoke of God's omnipresence in his prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. He said, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Here, Solomon recognizes that unlike human beings, God's presence cannot be localized to merely one place on the earth. Indeed, the universe itself is not sufficient to contain the being of its Creator!

So how is the doctrine that God is everywhere present to be understood? And what practical applications might this have for our lives?

To begin, it is helpful to observe that just as the doctrine of God's eternity attempts to explain how God is related to time, the doctrine of omnipresence attempts to explain how He is related to space. Does God completely transcend space? That is, might He exist completely "outside" or "beyond" our spatial universe in some sense? Or is it better to think of Him as existing everywhere throughout all space? Then again, could it be the case that He somehow exists both within *and* beyond the created order? Obviously, these are deep and difficult questions. But since thinking through such things is part of what it means to love God with our minds, let us ponder these matters as carefully as we can (Mark 12:30).

God and Space

Other Scriptures certainly seem to affirm God's omnipresence. God asks the prophet Jeremiah, "Am I only a God nearby . . . and not a God far away? . . . Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (23:23-24). Here the Lord affirms that He is present everywhere, that there is nowhere in heaven and earth where He is not. But how should we understand this?

Should we think of God as "spread out" through the universe like an invisible gas? Although this might be the mental image

which most naturally suggests itself to our minds, we should carefully avoid embracing it. After all, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). And a spirit, unlike a gas, is a *non-physical* entity.{2} If we think of God as being spread throughout the universe like an invisible gas, then we might be tempted to think of God as only *partially present* at any one place. For instance, we might come to believe that there is a small amount of God in our bedroom, even more of Him throughout our house, and more still in the three-mile radius around our house. And this, I'm sure you would agree, is crazy!{3} We *don't* want to think of God's omnipresence in *these* terms.

Instead, if we want to think of God as existing everywhere in space (and many theologians would caution us against this), then we ought to think of Him as being *fully present* at every point of space *at the same time*. Now admittedly, this is a difficult concept to grasp. But an analogy may help to clarify the point.

A number of Christian theologians and philosophers have suggested that we should think of God's relationship to the world as similar to the soul's relationship to the body. On one construal of this view, the soul is held to be "spatially present in the body," but "not extended throughout it." Instead, it's thought to be "somehow wholly present at all points in its body." In a similar way, it is said, we can also think of God as being "spatially located in the universe" and yet "wholly present at every point in it." {4}

Of course, it must be emphasized that this is *only* an analogy. I'm certainly *not* suggesting that the world really *is* God's body!{5} The analogy is intended simply to help us understand *one way* in which God might be thought of as omnipresent. But it's not the only way.

God and Spacelessness {6}

Many Christian philosophers do not believe that we should

think of God as *literally present in space*. Instead, they believe that God completely transcends space, existing “beyond” or “outside” the spatial universe which we inhabit. But if this is so, then how do they think the doctrine of God’s omnipresence should be understood? Moreover, *why* do they believe that God is not present in space?

Let’s take the second question first. Why think that God isn’t present in space? Well, say these thinkers, consider the doctrine of creation. God created the universe *ex nihilo*, or “out of nothing.” Literally nothing existed (except God) “before” He brought the universe into being.[{7}](#) In other words, prior to creation, not even space existed. Rather, space is brought into being by God at the moment of creation.[{8}](#) But if God does not exist in space *prior* to creating the universe, then why should we think that He is located in space *after* bringing the universe into being? According to this view, there just isn’t any good reason for thinking that He is.

But wait a minute! If God isn’t located in space, then how can it still be said that He’s present everywhere? Doesn’t this amount to a denial of God’s omnipresence? According to proponents of this view, we should understand God’s omnipresence to mean that He both *knows* what is happening everywhere in space and that He is *active* at every point in space.[{9}](#) In other words, God not only knows what is happening everywhere on earth, He also knows what is happening elsewhere in our solar system and in every galaxy of the universe. Moreover, He is continually exercising His power to sustain the universe in being and He is able to act anywhere He desires throughout this vast cosmos which He has created. Hence, even if God is not *literally* present in space, advocates of this view still insist that He both knows what is happening and is able to exercise His power anywhere in the world at any time He chooses.

Having now considered the two major views regarding how we

should understand the doctrine of God's omnipresence, we'll briefly look at some of the difficulties that are raised by this doctrine.

Difficulties with Omnipresence

Recall how David in Psalm 139 affirms that there is nowhere he can flee from God's presence, for God is present everywhere. But this raises a difficulty, for elsewhere in the Bible David says something which seems to directly contradict this sentiment.

Pursued by Saul in the Desert of Ziph, David, who had the opportunity to kill Saul but humbly refused, pleaded with Saul not to shed his blood "far from the presence of the Lord" (1 Sam. 26:20). But wait a minute! If God is present everywhere, as David elsewhere affirms, then what sense does it make to speak of dying far from the presence of the Lord? How can one be far from the presence of the Lord if the Lord is present everywhere?

It seems to me that the best way of handling these difficulties is to make an important distinction regarding the way in which God is everywhere present. What I mean is this. Although God is present everywhere, He is *uniquely present* at certain times and places when He desires to reveal Himself in some special way.

The best example of this is the unique incarnation of God the Son in the man Christ Jesus. Jesus was one person with two natures, one divine and one human. According to His divine nature, He remained omnipresent even during His time on earth. Yet in his human nature, Jesus was limited (like all other men) to a particular time and place. And it was in this more limited sense that God specially chose to reveal Himself to us. Hence, in the Gospel of John we learn that God's grace and truth, His love and salvation, His blessing and glory, are all uniquely revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. [\[10\]](#)

In a similar way, concerning the example of David above, we can say that while God was certainly present in the Desert of Ziph, He had chosen to specially reveal Himself to the people of Israel. He was thus present to the people of Israel in a way that He was not present to the other nations. It is in this sense that David pleads with Saul not to shed his blood “far from the presence of the Lord.”

The Importance of Omnipresence

Let’s think about this in terms of a “good news/bad news” approach, beginning with the “bad news” first. Although God’s omnipresence, considered in itself, is really only good news, there is certainly a sense in which sinful men and women, much like you and me, might be tempted to regard this doctrine as bad news. Why is that?

Well, if God is always present, then like it or not, every evil thought, word, or deed that we think, say, or do is always done directly in His presence! That’s a sobering thought, isn’t it? There is literally *nothing* that we can ever do in a hidden or secret way. Whenever we lie or steal, commit adultery or take God’s name in vain, we do so in the presence of the God to whom we are all ultimately accountable. Indeed, Jesus warned that on the day of judgment we will even have to give an account for every “careless word” which we have spoken (Matt. 12:36)! This, at least for sinners like ourselves, is what we might call the bad news of God’s omnipresence.

But as I said previously, the reality is that God’s omnipresence is actually very good news. For it means that no matter what our circumstances, God is always present! When we’re anxious or scared, God is there. When we’re under pressure at work or having difficulties in a relationship, God is there. Yes; even if we’re sick or dying, God is present then, too. David wrote in the Psalms, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they

comfort me" (Psalm 23:4). For the one who's been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, the fact that God is always present is very "good news" indeed!

I hope you can see that the doctrine of God's omnipresence is not just an interesting issue for philosophers and theologians to ponder (although it is certainly that). It's also an extremely practical doctrine that is highly relevant to almost every aspect of our lives. For wherever we go, whatever joys we encounter or difficulties we face, God is there. And for the Christian, He is present as our Protector, Savior, Counselor, and Friend!

Notes

1. All Scriptural citations are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.
2. See, for example, Jesus' remarks in Luke 24:39: "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."
3. I got this insight from William Lane Craig, "Doctrine of God," Part 8 [Podcast] (accessed August 2010), available from <http://bit.ly/9ruR74>.
4. These quotations come from the discussion in J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 509-10.
5. Of course, some theologians (e.g., Process theologians) *do* believe that the universe is God's body. According to them, God is like the soul of the world (which is His body). This view is usually termed *panentheism*, which is not the same as pantheism.
6. This section is particularly indebted to the discussion of omnipresence in Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 509-11.
7. I put "before" in quotation marks since, if God is timeless without creation, there really isn't literally any temporal moment "before" God brings the universe into being. The

universe, along with time itself, simply has its beginning at the moment of creation. Nevertheless, for the purpose of communicating to our radio audience in the limited amount of time available, it is much easier to simply say “before” creation.

8. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 510.

9. Ibid., 510-11.

10. In this regard, please see John 1:1, 14-18; 3:16-21.

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Living With an Eternal Perspective

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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The Old Testament and Other Ancient Religious Literature

Do similarities in the Old Testament with other ancient Near Eastern literature prove that it is all the same kind of thing? Rick Wade shows why it’s not.

The Challenge

In the 1870s a scholar named George Smith revealed the discovery of both creation and flood stories in ancient Babylonian literature.^{1} Bible scholars were soon claiming that the writer of Genesis was merely borrowing from Babylonian mythology. Although competent scholars have since shown that the similarities between these accounts are largely superficial, the idea remains today in certain areas of academia and pop culture that the Bible is just another work of ancient mythology.



Although there are good reasons to see the Bible as

very different from other religious literature, the problem for conservative Christians is in how similar it is to other ancient literature; it's because there are significant affinities that scholars made that leap in the first place. On the one hand, liberal scholars and a lot of ordinary lay people take the similarities to indicate that the Old Testament isn't any more divine than other ancient literature. On the other hand, conservatives, fearful of seeing the Bible lose its status, tend to shy away from the similarities. Most of us wouldn't say it, but we don't like to think there's much overlap between the worldview of the ancient Israelites and that of their neighbors. Where we run into problems is when we assume that God revealed Himself in ways that are always satisfactory to modern people, especially with regard to scientific and historical accuracy. Neither the giving-away-the-store approach nor the approach of turning a blind eye to genuine similarities will do. We must let the Bible be what it is and determine for us how we should understand and use it.

For all the similarities, there are fundamental differences that set the Bible apart. In this article I will spend more time on the differences. Before turning to those, however, it would be good to mention a few similarities.

For one thing, there is similarity in the form that religious practice took. Temples, priests, prophets, and sacrifices were a part of the practices of other religions as they were of the Israelites'. Old Testament scholar John Oswalt notes, for example, that "the layout of the tabernacle and of the temple following it is essentially the same as the layout of contemporary Canaanite sanctuaries. Furthermore, the decoration of the temple seems to have been similar to that of Canaanite sanctuaries."[\[2\]](#)

There were similarities in law as well. For example, the "eye for an eye" injunctions in Exodus 21:23-25 are similar to some found in the Babylonian *Code of Hammurabi*. Both include punishments for striking a pregnant woman and causing her to

miscarry.{3}

Even here, though, there are differences, specifically in the purposes of these two. Old Testament scholar John Walton points out that the ancient codes, or treatises as he calls them, were not rules legislated by authorities. Rather, they were collections of principles, learned over time, assembled to show the worthiness and wisdom of the king in his role of maintaining order in society.{4} “This,” Walton writes, “was the most fundamental expectation of the gods.”{5}

By contrast, the Old Testament law was an important part of the covenant between God and His people; the laws were, as Walton says, the “stipulations of the covenant.”{6}

More could be said about similarities, but we’ll turn now to the differences between the Old Testament and other literature of the ancient Near East.

The One True God

Two fundamental differences between the Old Testament and ancient myths are the biblical claims that there is only one true God and that this God is not to be worshipped by means of idols.{7}

Israel’s neighbors were polytheists or henotheists, meaning they believed there were multiple gods but they worshipped only one, or one primarily. This is why the steward of Joseph’s house could speak to Joseph’s brothers of “your God and the God of your father” (Gen. 43:23) and why Pharaoh could say to Moses and Aaron, “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land” (Ex. 8:25). The Egyptians had their gods, the Hebrews had theirs. The cultural “atmosphere” of belief in many gods was as normal in that day as the modern secular mentality is in ours.

By contrast, Yahweh declared that there was only one God and

it was Him. "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no God," Yahweh said. "Who is like me? Let him proclaim it" (Isa. 44:6b-7a; see also 45:5,6).

Further, the true God was not to be worshipped through idols. That was a new idea. Idols were very important to the ancients. They were the actualized presence of deities. The idol received worship on behalf of the god. An example of that worship was providing food for the god by presenting it to the idol. John Walton says that through such expressions, "in this way the image mediated the worship from the people to the deity."[\[8\]](#)

This entire understanding was declared false by Yahweh. Through Isaiah and Jeremiah God declared that idols were wood or stone, silver or gold, and nothing more (Isa. 44; Jer. 10). "Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols," God said through Jeremiah, "for his images are false, and there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of delusion" (Jer. 10:14-15a). Through the Psalmist, God asked rhetorically, "Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?" (Ps. 50:12-13).

Transcendence vs. Continuity

One of the ways we distinguish the Old Testament from other literature of the ancient Near East is to note the difference between actual history and myth. The stories of the gods in other literature we call mythological. The word myth is often used today to mean false, but it has a much richer meaning than that.

In his book *The Bible Among the Myths*, John Oswalt gives several definitions of myth which have to do with such things as the definition of the word and sociological and theological factors and more.[\[9\]](#) A central feature of all of them is what Oswalt calls "continuity." By continuity he means an actual

metaphysical connection between all things. A simple illustration of this principle is the claim, "I am one with the tree, not merely symbolically or spiritually, but actually. The tree is me; I am the tree."[{10}](#) In the ancient world, this continuity included the gods. The differences between nature and the gods were more of degree than of kind.

This connection is more than a matter of mere resemblance. Because the pagan gods were understood to be continuous with nature, what happened in nature was thought to be a direct result of the activities of the gods. If the crops didn't grow or the animals didn't reproduce, it must have had something to do with the gods. Moving in the other direction, people hoped to manipulate the gods by engaging in some ritualistic act on the level of nature. So, by retelling and acting out the mythical stories of the divine, ideal world, a connection was made between humanity and the gods. It was hoped that the outcomes of the mythical accounts would apply to the natural world.[{11}](#) This direct continuity between earth and "heaven" sheds light on such things as temple prostitution and fertility rituals. Through re-enactments of the mythological origins of the world, which involved the sexual activities of the gods, people hoped they could inspire the gods to make their crops grow and their animals fertile.

By contrast, the God of the Old Testament is not continuous with the created world. Yahweh is transcendent, above and separated in His very nature from the created order. This distinction marks a fundamental difference between the teachings of the Old Testament and those of the ancient myths.

This has several very important implications. I'll run through a few.

Being transcendent meant God could not be manipulated through rituals the way pagan gods could. Fertility rituals, for example, were meaningless because they had no relation

whatsoever to how God created or governed the world. The Israelites engaged in certain ritualistic acts, but they were not for the purpose of making God do what they wanted. In fact, when they became substitutes for godly living, God told them to stop doing them. We read in Isaiah chapter 1 about how abhorrent the sacrifices and the rituals of the Israelites had become to God.

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood (Isa. 1:11-17).

The pagan gods demanded the appeasement of sacrifices. Yahweh looked for a change of heart and behavior.

Here's another difference. Because the various acts of the pagan deities recounted in myths were thought to be eternally recurring, time and space lost their significance. The acts of the gods were timeless. They couldn't be connected to particular moments in history.[\[12\]](#) Thus, the mythological view reduced the significance of the historical.

By contrast, in Scripture we see the transcendent God acting in history through specific events and persons. The people of Israel were called not to re-enact but to remember particular events in history, for it was in these things that the transcendent God of the Bible revealed Himself.

The transcendence/continuity distinction helps explain why idol worship was so strongly condemned in Scripture. It was more than just a matter of worshipping the wrong God. It showed a basic misunderstanding of the *nature* of God. To engage in idol worship was to give in to the idea of continuity between nature and the divine. This mentality was likely behind the creation of the golden calf by Aaron when Moses was on the mountain. The people had lived in a world where gods could be seen through physical idols. It was natural for them, when wondering where Moses and Yahweh were, to find reassurance in a physical representation of deity. But it was condemned by God.

A Few More Differences

Here are three more differences between the worldview and religion prescribed in the Old Testament and that seen in other ancient Near Eastern literature.

First, the biblical worldview regards humanity highly. In the Old Testament, we read that man and woman were created in God's image. They were the pinnacle of God's creative work. In the pagan myths, mankind was created merely to serve the needs of the lazy and conceited gods. Humans were only good for "food and adulation," as John Oswalt says.[\[13\]](#)

Second, Yahweh was concerned with people's moral lives. Among other ancient Near Eastern peoples, Oswalt writes, religion was "about sacrifice, ritual, ritual purity, prayer, offerings, and the like." Things like this were part of the covenant between Israel and Yahweh, but not the only things, and not even the most important, as we saw in the Isaiah 1 passage quoted earlier. Ethical obedience was and is an important part of our response to God. His people are to tell the truth, to respect other people and their possessions, to keep the marriage bed pure, etc. Similar laws can be found in some other religious codes, but for Israel they weren't just

the laws of the land; they were aspects of a *relationship* with God that were grounded in the *character* of God.[{14}](#)

Third, the people of Israel could know if they were pleasing or displeasing Yahweh and why. They knew what they were required to do and not do, and they got feedback, typically through the prophets.

By contrast, other gods didn't seem so concerned to communicate their thoughts or motives to people. When hardships came for no apparent reason, people thought they must have offended the gods, but they couldn't know for sure what they had done or not done. Walton writes that "the minds of the gods were not easily penetrated."[{15}](#) By contrast, he says, "nothing in the ancient Near East compares to the extent of revelation that Yahweh gives to his people and the depth of relationship that he desires with them."[{16}](#)

By countering the idea that the Bible is just another example of ancient literature, I have not proved that the Bible's message is true. The point is to clear away an objection that gets in the way of understanding. It provides a space for people to give more thought to the teachings of the Bible. The Bible is then able to speak for itself.

Notes

1. Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 46 (1974) 81-102; accessed online at www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1974-2_081.pdf.
2. John Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 91-92.
3. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Mich.: Baker Academic, 2005), 31-32.
4. John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew*

Bible (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 290-91.

5. Ibid., 295.

6. Ibid., 299.

7. Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 57-58.

8. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 114-115.

9. Oswalt, *The Bible Among the Myths*, chaps. 3 and 4.

10. Ibid., 43.

11. Ibid., 42.

12. Ibid., 43.

13. Ibid., 70.

14. Ibid., 77.

15. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 307.

16. Ibid., 298.

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

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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Make Your Faith Your Own

Kyle Skaggs encourages believers with practical suggestions for growing one's faith in Christ.

I was inspired to write this article when another believer told me they weren't sure whether they continue to be a believer because they believe for themselves, or because of their parents' faith. It is that uncertainty I want to address.

One of the first questions our students are asked at Mind Games is, "Why are you a Christian?" Most of them can't give a

good answer. There can be any number of reasons for this, but the one I am concerned with is a lack of spiritual maturity. Knowing and communicating why you are a Christian is one of the first steps to making your faith yours. Being able to definitively say that your faith in Christ is yours and not something inherited from family, friends, or culture gives you the confidence and the fortitude to be an effective witness to the world, which is critical these days.

The writer of Hebrews wrote, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil." (Hebrews 5:12-14)

To make your faith in Christ your own is to mature spiritually. Those who have grown up in the church, yet have not taken responsibility for their walk with Christ, are unable to discern good from evil because they are like children. At some point, you need to stop waiting to be spoon-fed by your parents or your pastor every Sunday and start being deliberate about your relationship with God. This means adopting a mindset that encourages spiritual growth.

To grow spiritually, we need to first desire to grow closer to God. If you lack that desire, then doing any activity to grow spiritually will become a chore. This requires prayer and introspection guided by the Holy Spirit. If you ask God for it, He will change your heart to give you that desire. Put yourself in God's shoes: don't you think it would please Him to be asked, "Lord, I want to WANT to grow closer to You. Please give me a heart that seeks You more"?

Next, expect Him to work in your life. Trust that God will change you. Furthermore, trust that God will not lead you

astray. Trust that He will speak to you through the scriptures, through other Christians, and through prayer. In our culture it is popular to be skeptical, and that is fine so long as that is used to discern God's word from man's; but we still need to be open to the fact that God can and will reveal His will to us. Trust that the Holy Spirit will guide your interpretation. You still need to learn to discern truth from falsehood. If what is said does not contradict scripture, then it may be true and helpful. Engage in activities that will form godly habits.

Spend more time with God. Just as you get to know someone better by spending more time with them, you will get to know God better as you spend more time with Him. Be deliberate about this, planning your day around that time you have set aside for Him. That looks like spending time in His word, meditating on what you have read, talking to Him in prayer by sharing your heart with Him and then listening for a response. It can look like cultivating mindfulness of God's presence with you and His gracious activity in your life through giving thanks for the ways in which He provides, protects, and shows His love for you.

It is frustrating to ask God to change you, only to continue to stumble over sinful habits. Stop relying on yourself to change your behavior. Don't simply ask God for help, yet change nothing about your life. The New Testament frequently uses the word translated "repent" to describe a U-turn in actions and direction. Repentance is something we need to do—with God's help, but it is still our responsibility. God does not do it for us. Start doing things that will help you grow spiritually. Studies have shown that when people engage with the scriptures at least four times a week, the odds that they will engage with sins like drunkenness, marital infidelity, gambling, and pornography decrease significantly. Meanwhile, those who experience what researchers call "the power of 4" more than double the odds of sharing their faith,

memorizing scripture, and discipling others.[{1}](#)

In the same way that you need to eat well in the weeks leading up to a race, you need to fill your head with godly things. For example, if all your music is about sex and violence, is it any surprise your thoughts drift to those subjects? Do whatever you can to increase the amount of godly things going into your head through your eyes (your screens) and ears (your playlist).

Trust that God will answer your prayers. If for example you sprain your ankle, and a friend lays their hands on you and prays for healing, trust that it was God who healed you. He is in control of all things, choosing to act directly, or through people, or through the natural processes He created. His actions do not need to be miraculous, so do not hesitate to give Him credit when your prayer is answered.

Remember the prayers God answers. It is in our nature to remember the bad things that happen to us more than the good. So it can be easy to allow every unanswered prayer to overshadow those that are answered. Keep track of what you are praying for, and as time goes on, see what prayers God has answered. Being able to see how God has been at work in your life will increase your faith, which in turn leads to spiritual maturity. Start praying and looking for opportunities to act in faith. To do this, you need to be listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, these opportunities will seem random. Whether witnessing to somebody, or helping the needy, taking the opportunity to glorify God will increase your faith in Him. Finally, always ask the Holy Spirit to reveal your heart to you. It is so easy to lie to yourself, and God cannot be pleased by the self-righteous.

To summarize, if you want to grow as a man or woman of God, you need to take responsibility for your faith. Decide that

you want to grow spiritually. Develop godly habits that encourage your faith to grow. Pray for opportunities to glorify God. Trust God to reveal His will to you. Remember the prayers He answers. As you develop these habits and learn to make Christ the Lord over your life, your faith will grow.

Notes

1. Cole, A., & Ovwigho, P. C. (December 2009). *Understanding the Bible Engagement Challenge: Scientific Evidence for the Power of 4*, Center for Bible Engagement. bttbfiles.com/web/docs/cbe/Scientific_Evidence_for_the_Power_of_4.pdf

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Prophecies of the Messiah

Dr. Michael Gleghorn argues that the Bible contains genuine prophecies about a coming Messiah that were accurately fulfilled in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Place of His Birth

Biblical prophecy is a fascinating subject. It not only includes predictions of events that are still in the future. It also includes predictions of events that were future at the time the prophecy was given, but which have now been fulfilled and are part of the past. This latter category includes all the prophecies about a coming Messiah that Christians believe were accurately fulfilled in the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. If the Bible really does contain such prophecies, then we would seem to have evidence that's at

least consistent with the divine inspiration of the Bible. One can see how an all-knowing God could accurately foretell the future, but it's not clear how a finite human being could do so. Thus, if there are accurately fulfilled prophecies in the Bible, then we have yet another reason to believe that the biblical worldview is true.



Let's begin with a prophecy about the Messiah's birthplace. "Messiah" is a Hebrew term that simply means "anointed one." When translated into Greek, the language of the New Testament, the term becomes "Christ." Christians believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Hebrew Scriptures (see Mark 14:61-62).

In Micah 5:2 we read, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." This prophecy was given in the eighth century B.C., more than seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus!

Notice, first, that it refers to a future ruler who will come from the town of Bethlehem. When King Herod, shortly after Jesus' birth, asked the Jewish religious leaders where the Christ (or Messiah) was to be born, they told him that he was to be born in Bethlehem and cited this verse from Micah as support (Matt. 2:1-6). Both Matthew and Luke confirm that Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1 and Luke 2:4-7). So He clearly meets this necessary qualification for being the promised Messiah.

But that's not all. Micah also says that the origins of this ruler are "from of old, from ancient times." How should we understand this? One commentator notes, "The terms 'old' . . .

and 'ancient times' . . . may denote 'great antiquity' as well as 'eternity' in the strictest sense." [\[1\]](#) Dr. Allen Ross states, "At the least this means that Messiah was pre-existent; at the most it means He is eternal." [\[2\]](#) Micah's prophecy thus suggests that the Messiah will be a supernatural, perhaps even divine, person. And this astonishing conclusion is precisely what Jesus claimed for Himself! [\[3\]](#)

The Time of His Appearing

Let's now consider a fascinating prophecy that, in the opinion of many scholars, tells us when the Messiah would make His appearance. It's found in Daniel 9.

Daniel was one of the Jewish captives who had been brought to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. The prophecy in Daniel 9 was given in the sixth century B.C. While much can be said about this passage, we must focus on a few important points.

To begin, verse 24 gives us the time parameters during which the prophecy will unfold. It reads, "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin," and so on. Although we can't go into all the details, the 'seventy 'sevens'" concern seventy distinct seven-year periods of time, or a total of 490 years.

Next, verse 25 tells us that from the issuing of a decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the coming of the Messiah, there will be a total of sixty-nine "sevens," or 483 years. There are two views we must consider. The first holds that this decree was issued by the Persian ruler Artaxerxes to Ezra the priest in 457 B.C. [\[4\]](#) Adding 483 years to this date brings us to A.D. 27, the year many scholars believe Jesus began His public ministry! The second view holds that the reference is to a later decree of Artaxerxes, issued on March 5, 444 B.C. [\[5\]](#)

Adding 483 years to this date takes us to A.D. 38. But according to this view, the years in question should be calculated according to a lunar calendar, consisting of twelve thirty-day months.[{6}](#) If each of the 483 years consists of only 360 days, then we arrive at March 30, 33 A.D. Dr. Allen Ross says “that is the Monday of the Passion week, the day of the Triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.”[{7}](#) The views thus differ on the date of Jesus’ death, but each can comfortably fit the evidence.[{8}](#)

Finally, verse 26 says that after the period of sixty-nine “sevens” the Messiah will be “cut off” and have nothing. According to one scholar, “The word translated ‘cut off’ is used of executing . . . a criminal.”[{9}](#) All of this fits quite well with the crucifixion of Jesus. Indeed, the accuracy of this prophecy, written over five hundred years before Jesus’ birth, bears eloquent testimony to the divine inspiration and truth of the Bible.

The Nature of His Ministry

In Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses told the Israelites, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” This verse promised a succession of prophets who would speak God’s words to the people. Ultimately, however, it refers to Jesus Christ. One commentator notes that the Messianic interpretation of this passage is mentioned not only in the New Testament, but also among the Essenes, Jews, Gnostics, and others.[{10}](#) Peter explicitly applied this passage to Jesus in one of his sermons (Acts 3:22-23).

But not only was the Messiah to be a great prophet, it was also foretold that he would be a priest and king as well. The prophet Zechariah was told to make a royal crown and symbolically set it on the head of Joshua, the high priest. The Lord then said, “Here is the man whose name is the Branch

. . . he will . . . sit and rule on his throne. And . . . be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two" (Zechariah 6:12-13). 'The title "Branch" is a messianic title.'[{11}](#) So the scene symbolizes the future Messiah, here referred to as "the Branch," uniting the offices of king and priest in one person.

But why is it important that the Messiah be a priest? As a prophet he speaks God's word to the people. As a king he rules from his throne. But why must he also be a priest? "Because priests dealt with sin," says Michael Brown, a Christian scholar who is ethnically Jewish. "Priests bore the iniquities of the people on their shoulders."[{12}](#) And this, of course, is precisely what Jesus did for us: "He . . . bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24).

Dr. Brown points to a tradition in the Talmud that says that on the Day of Atonement there were three signs that the animal sacrifices offered by the high priest had been accepted by God. According to this tradition, in the forty years prior to the temple's destruction in A.D. 70, all three signs turned up negative every single time.[{13}](#) Dr. Brown comments, "Jesus probably was crucified in A.D. 30, and the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70."[{14}](#) So during this forty-year period God signaled that he no longer accepted these sacrifices. Why? Because final atonement had been made by Jesus![{15}](#)

The Significance of His Death

Without any doubt, one of the most astonishing prophecies about the promised Messiah is found in Isaiah 52-53. The verses were written about seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus. They largely concern the death of the Lord's "Suffering Servant." According to many scholars, a careful comparison of this passage with the Gospels' portrayal of Jesus' suffering and death reveals too many similarities to be merely coincidental.

In some of the most-cited verses from this intriguing passage we read: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:5-6). Here we have a vivid depiction of substitutionary atonement. The Lord lays upon His servant "the iniquity of us all" and punishes him "for our transgressions." In other words, God's servant dies as a substitute in our place. This is precisely what Jesus claimed for himself, saying, "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

The parallels between Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" and Jesus are certainly impressive. But some scholars have suggested that Isaiah's "servant" is actually the nation of Israel and not the Messiah. Dr. Michael Brown dismisses this notion however, insisting that 'nowhere in the . . . foundational, authoritative Jewish writings do we find the interpretation that this passage refers to the nation of Israel. References to the servant as a people actually end with Isaiah 48:20.'[\[16\]](#) What's more, he says, "Many . . . Jewish interpreters . . . had no problem seeing this passage as referring to the Messiah . . . By the sixteenth century, Rabbi Moshe Alshech said, 'Our rabbis with one voice accept and affirm . . . that the prophet is speaking of the Messiah, and we shall . . . also adhere to the same view.'[\[17\]](#)

For his part, Dr. Brown is so convinced that this passage prophetically depicts the suffering and death of Jesus that he feels "as if God would have to apologize to the human race and to the Jewish people for putting this passage into the scriptures" if Jesus is not the one in view![\[18\]](#) Although this is a strong statement, it's not unjustified. For Isaiah 53 not only foretells the death of God's servant for the sins of the

people, it also implies his resurrection!

The Mystery of His Resurrection

In the opinion of many scholars, Isaiah 53 not only foretells the death of God's servant; it also implies his resurrection from the dead!

It's important to notice that Isaiah 53 makes it absolutely clear that the Messiah is put to death. It says that "he was cut off from the land of the living" (v. 8), and that "he poured out his life unto death" (v. 12). On the other hand, however, it also says that "he will see his offspring and prolong his days" (v. 10), and that after his suffering "he will see the light of life and be satisfied" (v. 11). So the text teaches both that the Messiah will die and that he will live again. And although the passage doesn't explicitly teach the Messiah's resurrection, it's certainly consistent with it. This is really staggering in light of the compelling historical evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus! [\[19\]](#)

Let's now pause to consider what we've learned in this brief article. Micah 5:2 teaches that the Messiah would come out of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus. Also, by teaching the preexistence, or even eternality, of the Messiah, the prophecy suggests that he'll be a supernatural, possibly even divine, figure. In Daniel 9:24-27 we saw that the Messiah would appear to Israel sometime around A.D. 27 – 33, precisely the time of Jesus' public ministry! Deuteronomy and Zechariah teach that the Messiah would minister as prophet, priest, and king. As a prophet, Jesus spoke God's word to the people. As a priest, he offered himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins. And while he didn't reign as king during his first advent, he was called "the king of the Jews" (Matt. 27:11, 37). And Christians believe that he's in some sense reigning now from heaven and that he'll one day reign on earth as well (Luke 1:32-33).

Finally, Isaiah 53 teaches that the Messiah would die for our sins—and then somehow live again. This is consistent with the New Testament's record of Jesus' substitutionary death and bodily resurrection.

Of course, we've not been able to consider all the prophecies. But hopefully enough has been said to conclude with Dr. Brown that if Jesus isn't the Messiah, "there will never be a Messiah. It's too late for anyone else. It's him or no one."^{20} Well, you've now heard the evidence; the verdict is up to you.

Notes

1. Thomas E. McComiskey, "Micah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 427.
2. Allen Ross, "Messianic Prophecies," at www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2764. Accessed on September 6, 2007.
3. See, for example, Matthew 11:27; John 8:58 and 10:30.
4. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., "Daniel," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 114. See also Ezra 7:11-26.
5. J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), 1362. See also Nehemiah 2:1-8.
6. See, for example, the discussion in Ross, "Messianic Prophecies," at www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=2764. Accessed on September 6, 2007.
7. Ibid.
8. The first holds that He was crucified in A.D. 30, the second in A.D. 33.
9. Pentecost, "Daniel," 1364.
10. Earl S. Kalland, "Deuteronomy," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 122.

11. F. Duane Lindsey, "Zechariah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), 1558. See also Zechariah 3:8.
12. Michael Brown, interviewed in Lee Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus* (Advance Reader Copy) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 199.
13. See Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 39a.
14. Brown, interviewed in Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 201.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 213.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 212.
19. For a defense of this important claim, please see some of the excellent articles by William Lane Craig at www.reasonablefaith.org. For more scriptural support, please compare Peter's sermon in Acts 2:22-36 with Psalm 16:8-11.
20. Brown, interviewed in Strobel, *The Case for the Real Jesus*, 203.

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Truth You Can Sing About – Part 3

Probe radio producer Steven Davis provides spiritual truth in five Christmas carols, backed by new music written and performed by his son Jon Clive Davis.

Coventry Carol

Songs about Jesus' birth have been close friends with Christmas for generations, but when's the last time you thought about the great truth found in these Christmas hymns and carols? In this article we're highlighting five Christmas songs, and first up is *Coventry Carol*.



**Herod the King in his raging charged he hath this day,
His men of might in his own sight all children young to slay...**

Following a star, Magi arrive in Jerusalem, and ask Herod where they can find this new born King of the Jews. Herod rouses his biblical scholars to research this, and they find in Micah (5:2):

But as for you, Bethlehem . . . too little to be among the
clans of Judah,
from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel.
His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of
eternity.

This King was a much bigger deal than Herod ever would be. Still, Herod chooses to inform the Magi, encouraging them to return and tell him where they found this King, so that he too could "Worship Him (Matthew 2:8)."

But God knowing his heart, warns the Magi to return home another way. When Herod found out he was furious, and instructed his soldiers to kill all the baby boys two years old and younger. A second prophecy is fulfilled from Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more." (31:15)

It was this event which stirred the writing of the hauntingly beautiful *Coventry Carol*. Even though this is a dark and tragic theme, we need to know and to feel the entire context

surrounding the birth of Christ.

One child born, and who knows how many dozens, if not hundreds, were slaughtered.

2000 years later, few would respond to Christ as Herod did; but to even do something as “harmless” as ignore Him, places you at eternal risk. So, how do you respond to the Christ?

In the Bleak Midwinter

**Enough for Him, whom Cherubim worship night and day,
a breastful of milk and a mangerful of hay;
Enough for Him, whom Angels fall down before,
the ox and ass and camel which adore.**

The third verse speaks to something we often forget, especially when it comes to applying it. The Christmas narratives from the Gospels, prophecies and subsequent teaching speak plainly and forcefully to the deity and humility of Christ. The Apostle Paul explains it well:

Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. (Philippians 2: 6-8 NLT)

Jesus Christ gives us the greatest example of a life of humility, first by laying aside His “divine privileges,” then humbled Himself further by dying for our sins on the cross. Going from the non-stop worship of the cherubim to mother's milk and a bed of hay was entirely within His character. As was the stark contrast between angels falling prostrate before Him to simple barnyard beasts adoring Him.

Perhaps God's greatest goal for your life and for mine is to make us like Jesus. Paul tells us in Romans: “For those whom

he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” (Romans 8:29) So do you think humility would be part of that process for us? Of course.

The author of the song Christina Rossetti wraps up her verses with an application:

Yet what I can I give Him, give my heart.

Humility is what brings us to Christ. Will you give your heart to Him this Christmas?

God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen

**God rest ye merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan’s power when we were gone astray.
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy, O tidings of
comfort and joy.**

Even though this is one of the oldest Christmas Carols still being sung today, it offers a unique blending of historic and contemporary perspectives.

The first and last verses are for us (the contemporary perspective), while the middle verses are about shepherds, angels, the Christ Child, and His mother Mary. Let’s look at the verses which apply to you and me.

The first line tells us how we are to rest merry and are not to dismay. How can we do that? Because Christ was born to save. The angel said: “Do not be afraid” (Luke 2:10). In other words, don’t be dismayed. And, “there has been born for you a Savior” (Luke 2:11), which allows us to rest merry. We learn more from Matthew 1:21, “He will save His people from their sins.” So not just saved—but saved from our sins.

The next line talks about how “we were gone astray.” Isaiah 53 shows us how far we’ve gone astray, listing the things Christ

has done for us: bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; chastised for our peace, and His wounds healed us. And after all Christ has done for us, it says: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way." Despite this, the Lord "Laid on him the iniquity of us all."

What typically is the last verse, with the contemporary perspective, says:

Now to the Lord sing praises, all you within this place.

That's what you do when the Son of God has come into the world, to save you from your sins.

While Shepherds Watched

While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground,

An angel of the Lord came down, and glory shone around.

"Fear not," said he for mighty dread had seized their troubled mind

"Glad tidings of great joy I bring to you and all mankind."

Well, there's no doubt from the title it's all about the shepherd's perspective of what happened the night Christ was born.

When you compare the lyrics of the carol with Luke 2, you discover that the shepherd's perspective in this song is extremely Biblical. Examine all the main points from the Gospel narrative, and you find them in the song: the cast, the location, angelic appearance, fear, angelic announcement, new location, signs, chorus, praise.

Now a word about the cast, and their perspective. *They were shepherds!* But wait, wasn't this the birth of the Son of God? King of kings and Lord of Lords? Why would God make such a stellar announcement to the working class? Two reasons:

The first reason is found in both Luke 2 and the first verse of the song. Here's Luke's account: "And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.'" This good news was for ALL the people.

The second reason the shepherds were the recipients of such good news was pride. Had the message been brought to the elite, the royal, the upper class, do you think they would have shared such a great message with those of us less fortunate? Probably not. We wouldn't have access to their social circles. Why would they seek us out to share this good news? Pride would have cut the Good News off from the rest of the world.

God did not want this message to miss anyone. Christ came humbly, and his announcement came humbly. After all, *God so loved the **world**.*

0 Holy Night

**0 holy night! The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth!
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.**

Long lay the world in sin and error pining. Although one rarely "pines" anymore, as I read this line, I feel the hopelessness and helplessness pressing in. In the seventh chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, he said: "And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't . . . I am a slave to sin." Yeah, that's hopeless.

Speaking of slavery, the third verse declares: **Chains shall He**

break for the slave is our brother; and in His name all oppression shall cease. In 1847, when the lyrics were written, slavery was rampant, especially in these United States. And a century and a half later, oppression still hasn't ceased. Why?

Well, Paul said it in the previous passage: "I am a slave to sin." We are *all* slaves to sin . . . until Christ breaks those chains.

The result of Christ breaking the chains of oppression is found in the choruses:

Fall on your knees;

and

Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend!

Christ humbled Himself to embrace our human weaknesses, and humbled Himself even further, unto death on the cross. And our response is to fall on our knees in humility and praise. I wonder if humility has a place in breaking the chain of oppression. Seems to work for Jesus.

This program's scripts were written by the producer of Probe Radio, Steven Davis. The music was composed and performed by his son and Mind Games Camp alumnus Jon Clive Davis. May your Christmas be filled with praise!

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Is Jesus the Only Way? – Part 2

Paul Rutherford explains how reason, Christ's resurrection, and the Bible all testify that Jesus is the only way to

heaven.



I can't drive around town seven days straight without passing at least one car with a bumper sticker that reads, "Coexist" on

the back. You know the one. It spells the word using symbols associated with the world's faiths, ancient and modern.



The popularly held mantra is that "all religions are equally valid ways to heaven." This is what's called pluralism. So is there room in this brave new world for the words of an ancient and historically respected faith?

Jesus once said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) That sounds offensive and inflammatory today. I will remind you that Jesus said it, not me.

Even more important is the truth question. It is perhaps even more offensive! Are Jesus' words true?

I fully acknowledge even the question itself may strike you as antiquated, out of date. Perhaps I sound to you like an eccentric, soured-up, fuddy-duddy. I may be. But if the words of Jesus are true, then far more than your offended sense of style is at stake here. Far, far more.

So listen up. And take note because this crazy sounding first-century Jewish rabbi made some crazy-big statements about the nature of man, the nature of reality, and how to live the good life, here, now, and forever. Does that at least sound appealing to you? If even just for the sake of a little controversy?

Explore with me the words of this rabbi. In this article we'll think through three reasons you should agree with him. And maybe you'll even find eternal life in the process. If you're a long-time listener to Probe radio, or a regular listener, this may sound familiar. I have [another](#) program exploring the position that Jesus is the only way to God. This one is part two. In this one I give you three reasons Jesus is in fact the only way to heaven. In the previous program, I defended Jesus' statement against three lines of criticism. So in the next sections I'll explain how reason, the resurrection, and the Word all testify that Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Jesus the Only Way Because of Reason

Western culture today is more pluralistic and secular than ever before. This means at least in one small part, that people believe multiple religions lead to heaven. Western culture has been moving this way for some decades. Now it has reached mainstream. Pop culture increasingly accepts this. It is therefore so much more important to consider this exclusive claim Jesus made. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." (John 14:6)

This is an increasingly unpopular teaching. Before I defend it, allow me to clarify. It was made by the Lord Jesus himself. I didn't make it up. I am merely defending it.

So today I want to talk about how it is reasonable to believe this statement—why it is that you should yourself believe Jesus is the only way to heaven.

Today's reason is logic itself. I will base this conclusion on two points: first, that the belief in one God is more logically defensible than believing in multiple creator gods; and second, that the belief in Jesus Christ as God is more reasonable than claims to deity made by others.

The first point is that believing in one creator God is more

reasonable than believing in multiple. The god Aristotle believed in (the unmoved mover) was eternally simple. That is, at the root of all things is ultimately one thing—one cause, one source, one origin to which all other things owe their existence.[\[1\]](#) This position beautifully avoids the difficulty of what philosophers call *reductio ad absurdum*—or the problem of infinite regression—or the problem of which came first, the chicken or the egg? The search for the first, original, or ultimate source, does not continue on and on forever. It cannot.

The second point is that Jesus is the most reasonable candidate for divinity. I respect the Buddha. But he never claimed to be God. Neither did Mohammad. Jesus was very clear. He claimed to be God.

Consider His teachings. They have not been surpassed in excellence in the two millennia that have passed since He walked the earth. Consider His actions. History's best biographies about the man Jesus, record Him loving His enemies, healing the sick, and showing compassion to outcasts. Jesus' life exemplified extraordinary moral rectitude.

I conclude, therefore, that it is more reasonable to believe Jesus is the only way to God given that it is more reasonable to believe in only one creator God, and given that Jesus has the best case for divinity among man's founders of faith.

Jesus the Only Way Because of the Resurrection

We have a saying in American culture that nothing is certain but death and taxes. So if the taxman doesn't come to call, the grim reaper will eventually. Death finds each of us, so we must face our own mortality.

By the best historical accounts Jesus also died and was buried, just like so many of His human brothers before Him.[\[2\]](#)

But Jesus, on the other hand, experienced something unique, declaring Him God above all others.

I speak, of course, of resurrection.[{3}](#) Jesus Christ is the only person ever to have raised up Himself from the dead of his own volition, and by His own power.

This one point may be the most compelling of the three I offer this week. It is perhaps the most intuitive case for Jesus being the only way to Heaven. If Jesus really died and raised Himself from the dead, then His power exceeds those of any other man before Him, or after, for that matter. Surely He must be God.

No other religious figure can make that claim. In a class by Himself, Jesus reigns over all the founders of world religions. Muhammad's burial site is a common tourist destination in Saudi Arabia for contemporary pilgrims. Buddha's cremation site is in northern India. No such site exists today in contemporary Israel for Jesus. His body has no confirmed remains.

The tomb is empty. That much is clear. Records indicate He definitely died and was buried. The empty tomb demands an explanation. Resurrection makes the most sense. Jesus is the only way because He is the only one who has died and raised himself up to new life.

We have several excellent articles at our website devoted to just this topic.[{4}](#) Go check them out for more detail. Jesus is who He said he is, "The way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6) So the question is, do you want some? Believe in Jesus today by faith.

Jesus the Only Way Because the Word Declares It

Western culture today increasingly accepts the belief that

multiple religions are equally valid and they are all ways to eternal life. I propose to you today another reason to believe something

diametrically opposed to this—namely that the Jesus Christ revealed in the Bible, is the only way to eternal life. As the gospel writer John quoted Him, He is, the way, the truth, and the life (14:6). No one comes to the Father except through Him.

This third and final line of reasoning that Jesus is the only way to eternal life, springs from the Bible—from the very word of God itself.

You may not accept the Bible as God's word. That's ok. Just hear me out. Let me explain how this line of reasoning at least makes sense. Then after you've heard it, you can judge for yourself if it's true or not.

So first, the Bible claims to be God's word (2 Timothy 3:16). If we therefore assume the very commonly held conception that God is good and perfect, then that includes the words He speaks as well. So if He speaks good words, then those words must be true. They must accurately describe reality.

The Bible also makes this claim. Jesus in a famous prayer to the Father asks him to sanctify His disciples with the truth before stating, "Your word is truth." (John 17:17) It's a profound statement.

So if God's word is true, and God says in His word that Jesus is, in fact, the only way to God—that none can come to Him except by Jesus, then that means it's true. See how simple that is?

But this statement is also made in another part of the Bible, Acts 4:12. Peter and John have been arrested and are being examined by the Jewish leaders. Peter declares Jesus to them and explains, "There is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved."

I fully admit this line of reasoning rests on you acknowledging the authority of the Bible—in which case you may not have needed to be convinced in the first place. But if you had not already been convinced of the truth of God's word, I am very sincerely relying on the power of the Spirit at work in you to believe this truth. (Isaiah 55:11)

Conclusion

In this article we considered the truth of a controversial claim. It might be one of the most hotly contested claims in religion today—that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven.

This is not popular these days in America, Europe, anywhere in the English speaking West, or the non-English speaking West. To hear responses to criticisms against the claim, check out [part one](#) of this two part series.

Jesus was Himself no stranger to controversy. He died a criminal's death at the hands of His enemies. He was killed and buried. The Jewish and Roman leaders were smugly satisfied they'd dispatched this unquiet voice.

But when Jesus' enemies attempt to end his earthly ministry, they unknowingly ushered in a spiritually unending ministry of atonement and reconciliation. By his death Jesus paid the price of sin—death—satisfying the just wrath of God. Jesus made peace with God on your behalf. Believe in Him by faith today and you can have peace with God. Would you like to have peace with him? Tell Him right now. Use your voice or pray silently. But tell Him. Go ahead.

The only thing required of you to receive eternal life is to believe Jesus is Lord. One of Jesus' most famous sayings is, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

Confess this belief with your mouth that Jesus Christ is God and believe in your heart that God has raised up his Son from the dead. And you can be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Jesus is the only way to God because there is no other way to get to God but by Jesus. Mankind is imperfect. You are dead in your transgressions and sins. The only way to satisfy God's holy wrath is to give Him what is due: death. Jesus died that death for you. He's the only one who could ever have paid your debt. And He did.

Human reason leads us to this beautiful conclusion that Jesus is the only way. God has declared it himself clearly in his divinely inspired book—the Bible. His resurrection seals it.

If you believed this for the first time today you are now heir to an eternal throne. Pick up a Bible and read Jesus' life story in the book of John. Tell a friend who's a Christian. Make plans to join them at their church Sunday. Keep praying and reading the Bible. You can discover the wonderful adventure of life in Jesus Christ, the only way to God.

Notes

1. Metaphysics, Lambda.
2. Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19
3. Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20
4. [Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Fiction? – A Clear Christian Perspective;](#)
[What Difference Does the Resurrection Make?;](#)
[The Resurrection: Fact or Fiction?](#)
[– A Real Historical Event;](#)
[The Answer Is the Resurrection](#)

Is Jesus the Only Way?

Paul Rutherford explains why Jesus is the only way to know God.



I was sitting in my car at a red light and I saw a bumper sticker on the car in front of me that said, “Coexist.” Only, the letters on the bumper sticker are religious symbols. A

crescent stands in place of the letter “c,” a peace symbol in place of the letter “o,” and some of the other symbols included a cross, a Star of David, and a yin-yang, all used to create the word “coexist.”

Perhaps you’ve seen an image just like this bumper sticker, but on a t-shirt or tattoo. It represents a common sentiment in our culture that everyone should get along, or coexist peacefully. And I love that sentiment. We *should* get along. In fact, I’m grateful to God I live in a country in which an unprecedented number of people from all different religions, backgrounds, and ethnicities do, in fact, coexist every day, and for the most part without violent protest. The life we enjoy in the United States is historically unprecedented.



But the coexistence advocated in *this* bumper sticker is something more subtle. It’s a way of getting along that is more than meets the eye. It frequently calls for a peaceable lifestyle free of conflict between faiths. People hope that we can all unite in a single brotherhood and celebrate our differences, particularly religious ones. They don’t understand why we bicker over who’s right and who’s

wrong.

The call to coexist is a reaction to the exclusive truth claims of religion, especially Christianity. In fact, its exclusivism is the most offensive aspect of Christianity today. “Repent. Believe. Come to Jesus. He’s the only way!” These are phrases easily associated with Christianity, especially street preaching. What should we do with Christianity’s exclusivism in a twenty-first century cosmopolitan society? Haven’t we progressed beyond such narrow-mindedness in these modern times? Isn’t claiming Jesus as the only way intolerant of other faiths? Don’t those Christians know all religions are equally valid paths to heaven? They shouldn’t force their beliefs on others!

Claiming Jesus is the only way to heaven *is* exclusive, I admit. It says there is no other way to God except by trust in Jesus Christ. Jesus most famously says this Himself in the Bible: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6).

Even though it’s offensive, I believe Jesus really is the only way to God. In this article we’re going to explore that question by discussing objections to it, and discover why He really *is* the only way.

Tolerance

As believers, when we claim Jesus is the only way, you often hear people give some variation of, “That’s so intolerant!” In doing so, they reject the claim. Often implied, but not said straight out, is the demand that the Christian “tolerate” others’ beliefs, or take back what he just said.

It’s worth pointing out that claiming Christianity to be intolerant is itself an intolerant claim. But the notion of [tolerance](#) is complex and has a long history. And rather than elaborate that contradiction, let’s begin by exploring the

complexity of tolerance.

What's usually meant by tolerance these days is including beliefs that include all others. This position generally rejects Jesus as the only way because diversity and equality are now celebrated as the highest values. "Tolerance" celebrates differences of religions and equality of opportunity to practice them. To claim Jesus is the only way squelches both equality and diversity by claiming only one religion is right. Since squelching diversity and equality are socially unacceptable, the exclusivity of Jesus isn't tolerated.

But this issue is complex. (That might be apparent already.) Truth and tolerance are actually linked. In fact, tolerance relies on truth. In the book *The Truth about Tolerance*, David Couchman says, "If there is no real truth, there is no reason for me to be tolerant. Without some kind of beliefs which cause me to value you as a person, even though I disagree with you, why should I be tolerant towards you?"[\[1\]](#) For tolerance to exist at all, it relies upon a framework of truth. That resonates with an idea mentioned earlier, how intolerance contradicts itself.

But the rabbit hole goes even deeper. Truth also relies upon tolerance. "[I]t is also the case that truth as a reflective goal for individuals and communities. . .needs a context of right-minded toleration to flourish in."[\[2\]](#) Without tolerance, truth likewise becomes the hammer of oppression. We find then that truth and tolerance go hand in hand.

Nevertheless, tolerance is the hammer of choice in culture today. Too often suppression of Christians sharing the truth that Jesus is the only way of salvation is justified in the name of tolerance. Don't be taken captive by this distortion. Genuine tolerance acknowledges all positions, even those that are exclusive. A biblical worldview holds only one truth, Jesus is the only path to heaven, while maintaining respect

and dignity for those who disagree. That's genuine tolerance.

Absolutes Don't Exist

Here is another objection you might hear: Christians can't claim Jesus is the only way because there are no [absolutes](#). What Christians claim is an absolute truth. And there simply are no absolute truths.

Their justification goes like this. We know from study, from reason, from the postmodern era, that society has moved beyond absolutes. There is no absolute truth. There is no overarching metanarrative (or idea of truth) which can transcend culture, nation, or time. Truth is a construct created by each man, each culture, and bound by the strictures of the time in which it was created.

This objection shares a similar weakness to the tolerance objection. Denying absolutes is also self-defeating. It contradicts itself. If we were to ask this objector if she really believed what she was saying was true, we could ask her, "You believe no absolute truth exists, right? Are you absolutely sure of that?" This objector would have to agree. That's what the position holds, thus contradicting her own claim.

This objection often comes out of the postmodern school of thought, which says there is no such thing as objective truth, such as $2 + 2$ always equals 4. Postmodern thought also denies the meaningfulness of history along with the ability to interpret literature in a unified and meaningful way. The unfortunate consequence is that we're left with a bleak reality stripped of purpose or meaning, which frankly, isn't very appealing. Without truth, meaning, history, or purpose, what's the point?

The great irony of it all is that postmodern thought arrives at its conclusions by way of reason, which it then concludes

isn't true, and then holds it in contempt. It calls into question reason itself and the whole Enlightenment project along with it. So there's a healthy dose of despair that frequently accompanies adherents to postmodern thought, including our friends who don't believe Jesus can be the only way to God because there are no absolutes. But that's the lie to which I don't want you to be taken captive. Jesus really is the only way. He's the only way to find peace in a wrecked world. He is meaning for a confused life. And He leads us home to heaven out of a world where we don't belong. The remedy to that despair is Jesus.

Despair at the failure of reason to improve mankind is the sad but ultimate end of every god which usurps the rightful place of the one true God: Jesus Christ. The truth is, all gods fail, disappoint, and leave us desperate. The only one who is faithful is Jesus. (cf. Deut. 7:9; 2 Thess. 3:3) But we won't find that satisfaction until we rest assured in the truth that Jesus really is the only way.

Pluralism

There is another category of objectors to Christ's claim to exclusivity. A difficult but less in-your-face objection is pluralism. [Pluralism](#) is the belief that any variety of beliefs and values are all equally true and valid.

When I claim Jesus is the only way, some calmly object. Pluralists tend to be more laid-back. Typically they affirm my right to follow Christ, even celebrate it. These folks calmly share their belief that all religions are right: they all lead to god. Often they cite the Eastern proverb that there are many paths to the top of the mountain.

First, I'd like to point out that pluralism is intellectually lazy. It doesn't take seriously the law of non-contradiction. (This law says that two opposite things cannot both be true at

the same time and in the same way.) When a Christian claims the path is exclusive, that Jesus is the only way, the pluralist might think, "That's nice, but actually, I know that all religions lead to heaven." He doesn't accept the Christian's position as true. He says he believes Christianity is true while at the same time denying its central tenet, which is that Jesus is the only way.

But this response is not unique to Christianity. A conservative Jew sincere about his faith won't say any path leads to heaven; neither will a Sunni Muslim. Pluralism attempts to make peace where there is none, and only succeeds in agreeing with no one.

Second, Christians who hold to exclusivism are sometimes falsely accused of pushing their beliefs on others. In condemning the exclusivist claims of Christianity, the pluralist imposes *her* beliefs on the Christian. It contradicts the very intended principle.

We all have beliefs or actions we want others to take seriously. There's nothing wrong with that. From my experience, pluralism is usually based on fear, which is completely understandable. The other person disagrees but fears conflict. They fear the relationship might be at stake if they express their true belief. As believers we still accept and honor people even if they don't agree with us. This is how we alleviate fear, demonstrating acceptance for those with whom we disagree. (And that's the true meaning of tolerance, by the way.)

When someone throws up this smokescreen in conversation, it can feel scary-alarming. Suddenly, the person you're talking to gets defensive. We can wonder, "Where did this come from?" In that moment it's probably not wise to press. Ask them why they believe that way, or affirm them. Certainly no one has a right to force compliance on another unwillingly. Communicate that we don't have to agree to be accepted. Further, don't

fall prey to this area where culture takes many believers captive. Jesus is the only way. Stand fast.

The Only Way

Is Jesus the only way? Yes. Multiple scriptures teach this truth. Let's consider a few.

Matthew 11:27 says, "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." Jesus is claiming that God his Father has handed everything over to Him. This is an indirect claim to be God Himself. But Jesus also makes it clear He is the only one, since no one knows the Father but the Son.

Let's also consider John's gospel. Before Jesus even began his ministry John the Baptist responds to Jesus' identity. "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) In Hebrew culture at the time, calling someone the Lamb of God was a claim to the Messiah who was prophesied (Isaiah 53:7). Further, only God has the power to take away sin. This was an unmistakable claim to divinity. It's interesting also that Jesus doesn't correct him, or deny Godhood. On the contrary, a short time later, Jesus picks up his first two disciples and encourages them, saying, "Come and you will see" (John 1:39).

It's one thing to claim divinity and yet another to claim to be the *only* divinity. So, where does the Bible say Jesus is the only way? As we mentioned earlier, by Jesus' own admission He is the only way to God in John 14:6—"I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." Peter also explains the meaning of Jesus' exclusivity in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Believers, take heart. Jesus Christ is the one and only way. Questioning Jesus' exclusivity is a recent historical phenomenon. That question is commonly asked in the 20th century West, a culture increasingly influenced by postmodern thinking and multiculturalism. Take courage. We who accept the exclusivity of Christ are in a historical majority. Repudiation for Christians as being intolerant, exclusive, or uneducated is a recent occurrence. These are the current trends of our culture. Don't be taken captive. Jesus is the only way.

Notes

1. David Couchman, quoted in *The Truth about Tolerance*, Brad Stetson and Joseph G. Conti, (InterVarsity Press, 2005), 75.
2. Brad Stetson and Joseph G. Conti, *The Truth about Tolerance*, (InterVarsity Press, 2005), 75.

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Spiritual Life and the Kingdom of God

Tom Davis explores how recovering the practice of classic spiritual disciplines can enhance believers' relationship with God and our impact on the world around us.

There is a loss of spiritual knowledge of the truth of Christianity and how we live in light of that truth. This loss of spiritual knowledge is the result of shifts in cultural attitudes toward faith, happiness, ethics, freedom, and tolerance. The answer to the loss of spiritual knowledge is a return to the practice of spiritual disciplines. After

examining the benefits of suffering and the disciplines of study, prayer, and fasting, I will show how these disciplines restore spiritual knowledge in society.

Loss of Spirituality

Today's society is in spiritual turmoil. Most people are not knowledgeable about spiritual things. The National Study of Youth and Religion indicates that the Church has become less influential in the lives of people. The effects of modernity and post modernity have created a popular culture that is suspicious of any claim to objective religious knowledge and any idea of an authoritative source of information concerning spiritual issues. Christian Smith writes, "In this culture religion lost, at least in theory, any remaining principled, authoritative standing to make truth claims that it has enjoyed in previous eras of history."[\[1\]](#)

Basically, this means that most people have adopted a mindset that says, "You can't know anything for sure about religion. And if you think you do, you're an arrogant bigot."

Five Steps to Spiritual Death

In his book, *Kingdom Triangle*, Biola professor and theologian J.P. Moreland claims that there are five cultural shifts that have contributed to today's state of spirituality in the culture. The first shift separates knowledge from faith.[\[2\]](#) All spiritual beliefs are considered valid because they are not real knowledge. Many people think that all religions lead to the same God. They say that we should not criticize other religions because they call God by a different name or hold different theological beliefs. These things are a matter of faith, not knowledge. This kind of attitude relegates all things spiritual to the subjective arena of faith. The things of the spirit are relegated to the "upper story" of faith. Real knowledge only exists in the "lower story" of the academic disciplines.[\[3\]](#) The result of this view of faith is that spirituality becomes something that is neither true nor

false. Separating faith and knowledge ultimately leads to a denial of spiritual truth.

The second shift is the definition of happiness.{4} In the Bible happiness is portrayed as part of a right relationship with God. To live the good life meant that a person had intellectual and moral virtue. God created people to live well according to what they were created to be. J.P. Moreland explains, "So understood, happiness involves suffering, endurance, and patience because these are important means to becoming a good person." {5} The pressure of modernism and postmodernism has changed this view. Happiness is now associated with pleasure. Television commercials promise to deliver happiness through the next fad diet that will increase your sex appeal. Male enhancement drugs promise to give men happiness by giving them back their youth and an increased sex drive. Happiness can be achieved by buying the newest car, toy, accessory, or a trip to an exotic place or amusement park. The good life now means having fun and collecting things so that you can feel good.

The third shift that Moreland notes is a shift from duty and virtue in morality to a minimalist view of ethics.{6} Previously, moral knowledge was viewed as an objective set of propositions about right or wrong, or good and evil. It used to be that everyone would agree it was always wrong to torture and kill small children. Now moral knowledge is viewed as subjective feelings or opinions. This change can be seen if we look at the language we use when making moral statements. People used to say things like, "I know," or "I think that this is the right thing to do." Now we say, "I felt that it was right for me to do this."

Duty to one's society used to be viewed as an essential part of a moral life. People were expected to help their neighbor. If an old lady was trying to cross the street, young men were expected to help her. Now, as long as they do not push the old lady into traffic, or rob her, the young men are considered to

be moral. This change is the result of culture. People are no longer expected to contribute to their society. As long as people are not hurting anyone else, they are now considered to be moral. This view of morality changes a person's view of life. Life is now about having the most fun without harming anyone. Life used to be about living for something bigger than the individual. People used to live for God and country. Now people live for themselves and their own pleasure.

The fourth shift is in how people view freedom.[{7}](#) Freedom used to mean that people could live the way they ought to live. People were free to do what was right without government interference. Now freedom means the right of people to do what they want, when they want. Popular culture says that as long as you do not hurt anyone you can do what you want.

The last shift that Moreland notes is a shift in the meaning of tolerance.[{8}](#) Classic tolerance is when people will allow others to be, do, or believe differently than they do, even though one person thinks that the view of another person is wrong. People were allowed to critique the views of other people, but respect for the other person was still maintained. Contemporary tolerance is the view that people are not allowed to critique another person's beliefs. People are no longer allowed to say that someone is wrong. This attitude ends all public discussion. Every idea must be tolerated, except ideas that claim that other ideas are wrong. Ironically, the new tolerance fails its own definition of tolerance because they do not tolerate intolerance.

Returning to Spiritual Health

The popular culture has raised five strongholds against the knowledge of God: separation of faith and knowledge, a self-centered view of happiness, a minimal view of ethics, a new view of freedom, and a new view of tolerance. How are Christians to respond to this? Paul writes, "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to

destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). Christians must recapture our spiritual disciplines.

Theology, the Intellect, and Spirituality

The first thing that needs to be addressed is that Christians need a renewed interest in theology. J. I. Packer, while discussing the influence of the Puritans in his life, writes, "All theology is also spirituality, in the sense that it has an influence, good or bad, positive or negative, on its recipient's relationship or lack of relationship to God."[\[9\]](#) Theology comes from two Greek words. *Theos* is the Greek word for God; *logos* is the Greek word for logic. Theology can be understood as the logic, or science of God.[\[10\]](#) Spirituality, in the Christian context, is a person's relationship with God. In order to claim to have a relationship with God a person has to have knowledge of who God is. It would be odd to have a man talk about having a relationship with a woman and then say he does not know her and has never met her. The concept of a relationship presupposes that each party in the relationship has knowledge of the other party.

The Bible and Books

An essential step to gaining spiritual knowledge is a disciplined approach to reading the Bible. Billy Graham addresses the importance of studying the Bible: "Your spiritual life needs food. What kind of food? Spiritual food. Where do you find this spiritual food? In the Bible, the Word of God."[\[11\]](#) Paul writes, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God gave the Bible to people so that people can learn about God. By studying the Bible a person will gain knowledge about God and strengthen that person's relationship

with God.

Christians should also read other books. The Bible contains essential information for salvation and knowing God. However, the Bible is not exhaustive in its knowledge. Christians can grow intellectually and spiritually by gaining knowledge about God's creation. David Naugle, head of the philosophy department at Dallas Baptist University, sums up the impact of books on his life: "I have sought and still seek to be a person of the Book and of books, that I might know God and more and more about his world in the context of faith."[\[12\]](#) The study of the disciplines of theology, philosophy, the humanities, and the sciences helps people develop a coherent worldview. A worldview gives people the ability to understand the world through the corrective lens of the knowledge of God.

The medieval priest Thomas à Kempis advises, "If you would profit from it, therefore, read with humility, simplicity, and faith, and never seek a reputation for being learned. Seek willingly and listen attentively to the words of the saints; do not be displeased with the saying of the ancients, for they were not made without purpose."[\[13\]](#) We grow intellectually and spiritually when we read the books of others. We gain insight to their wisdom. We should humbly read the books written by the ancient teachers. They left their wisdom in writing so that we can learn from them.

Suffering

Contemporary society thinks that suffering should be avoided at all costs. However, suffering can have a good outcome. Paul writes, "More than that, we rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Romans 5:3-4). When we suffer, we can learn to endure. Our endurance produces character—that is, we mature and learn to trust God. God is the only hope that will never fail. Matthew Henry writes, "He who, being thus tried, comes forth as gold, will thereby be

encouraged to hope.”{14} When soldiers train, they punish their body; they suffer. Their suffering in training makes them better soldiers in combat because their suffering has made them stronger and given them more endurance. As a Navy veteran, I know this is true personally.

Prayer

Prayer is the spiritual discipline of talking to God. God speaks to us in the Bible like the way people communicate through writing letters; the communication is one way. Praying is more like a discussion between two people. In prayer we get to talk with God.

Paul told the church at Thessalonica to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The best way to start a disciplined prayer life is to pray every day. This is easier if we begin each day with prayer. J. P. Moreland writes, “When you get up in the morning, start off with praise and thanksgiving to God for the things you honestly appreciate about him and his dealings with you. Then lift your burdens to him until you have a sense of rest before the Lord.”{15} By beginning each day with prayer we turn our minds and our hearts toward God and His will. Each day is a new opportunity to minister to someone in need. Our prayers will give us spiritual discernment so that we can recognize those in need. Our minds will also be turned towards God and the things of heaven, and we can continue to keep these things in our minds throughout the day.

John Calvin used four rules for prayer. First, we must “have our heart and mind framed as becomes those who are entering into converse with God.”{16} We must prepare ourselves to pray. Minds that are distracted do not make for good conversation. This is no ordinary conversation. People prepare themselves for meeting with important people. We should be prepared to open our hearts and minds to God when we pray. We should be aware that we are praying to our God, but that this

God loves us and wants to bring our concerns to Him. Paul writes, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God" (Philippians 4:6). We should not be anxious when praying because we know that God cares for us and can do all things. We should pray about all our concerns. Our prayers should be full of worship, thanking God for all that He has done.

One way to prepare to pray is to remember what David Naugle calls the "Three P's." These are "(1) my purpose, or what I would live my life for, (2) my profession, or what I would spend my life doing, and (3) my partner, or who I would spend my life with." [{17}](#) David Naugle's "Three P's" cover the most important decisions we will make in our lives. Our purpose fills our life with purpose. We should pray for purpose so that God will align what we want our purpose in life to be with what He wants our purpose in life to be. Our profession is where we fulfill our purpose. A car mechanic can glorify God in fulfilling his purpose to be God's representative in the auto shop. Our spouse is our ministry partner. Husbands and wives are not separated from each other. They share each other's joys and burdens. Praying for these things will focus our minds on what is important and orient our hearts toward living a life pleasing to God.

John Calvin's second rule is "That in asking we must always truly feel our wants, and seriously considering that we need all the things which we ask, accompany the prayer with a sincere, no, ardent desire of obtaining them." [{18}](#) Our requests should be things that we truly want or need. When we pray for the wants and needs of others, we should try to feel their desire for the request so that we can better minister to them through prayer. James tells us, "Is anyone suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise" (James 5:13). We should be honest and sincere in our requests and in our thanksgiving. A sincere prayer would be praying for a

loved one to get well when they are sick. An insincere prayer might look like praying for a job promotion when you know that you have not been putting your best effort into the job.

Third, “discard all self-confidence, humbly giving God the whole glory.”[\[19\]](#) When we pray, we should realize who we are, and who God is. Jesus said, “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand in the synagogues and at the street corners so that they may be seen by others” (Matthew 6:5). The hypocrites’ motivation to pray in the street corners was so that people would see them and think that these people were righteous. Jesus makes this point with more clarity in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector:

Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and one a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself prayed thus: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortionist, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I 9give tithes of all that I get.” But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” (Luke 18:10-13)

The Pharisee came to God in prayer thinking that he was righteous and better than other men. He even pointed out his fasting and tithing as if God should be impressed with these things. The tax collector was humbled in the presence of God. He would not look up to heaven because he understood that he was guilty before God. The tax collector prayed sincerely for mercy. Asking God for mercy gives God glory and humbles the person.

John Calvin’s fourth rule of prayer is, “We should be animated to p-ray with the sure hope of succeeding.”[\[20\]](#) God is all powerful, able to meet our every need. Jesus teaches this same principle, “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone

who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). By grace we have been made children of God. If we ask, God will give us what we need. When we humble ourselves before God, He will be merciful. God knows what we need and will give us what is good for us. Jesus said, "If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him" (Matthew 7:11).

Through our prayer life we should conform to the image of God revealed in Jesus. Andrew Murry taught:

And of all the traits of a life *like Christ* there is none higher and more glorious than conformity to Him in the work that now engages Him without ceasing in the Father's presence His all-prevailing intercession. The more we abide in Him, and grow unto his likeness, will His priestly life work in us mightily, and our life become what His is, a life that ever pleads and prevails for men.{21}

Our prayers should make us more Christlike. By praying, we conform to God's will. Christ makes intercessions to the Father for us. We have the privilege of making intercessions to Christ for others.

Fasting

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, "Strict exercise of self-control is an essential feature of the Christian's life." {22} One way to exercise self-control is by abstinence (saying no to ourselves by not doing something we want). Fasting is one of the most difficult abstaining disciplines. Calvin defines fasting as "when we retrench somewhat from our accustomed mode of living, either for one day or a certain period, and prescribe to ourselves a stricter and severer restraint in the use of that ordinary food." {23} In short, fasting is abstaining from food for a short period of time.

Jesus taught:

When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matthew 6:16-18).

Fasting is to be done in secret. Again, Jesus points to the hypocrite, who wants to gain a reputation from his spiritual discipline. Jesus taught that people would be rewarded by not making a spectacle out of their spirituality.

What is the goal of fasting? Augustine taught, "While we live in the temporal order, we must fast and abstain from the enjoyment of what is temporal, for the sake of the eternity in which we desire to live."[{24}](#) Fasting reminds Christians that they do not depend on temporal things. God wants Christians to rely on Him to supply our needs. In a world where tight schedules are kept and frivolous distractions are available everywhere, it can be easy to forget God. Fasting emphasizes the importance of a right relationship with the world by abstaining from the sustenance of food. John Calvin lists three goals for fasting: "We use it either to mortify and subdue the flesh, that it may not wanton, or to prepare the better for prayer and holy meditation; or to give evidence of humbling ourselves before God, when we would confess our guilt before him."[{25}](#) Many times the flesh (the part of us that operates independently from God, either in active rebellion or passive indifference) will want to rebel against the spirit. Fasting deprives the flesh of sustenance and weakens it. The spirit can then rule the flesh. There are times when a Christian will need to place special focus on prayer and meditation. Fasting is one way to prepare the spirit for these activities.

Reversing the Shifts

In our contemporary culture faith is viewed as being completely separate from knowledge. This faulty view originates within Christianity with the ideas of some Christian philosophers and theologians. Soren Kierkegaard saw faith as “the highest passion in a human being.”^{26} He applies this view to Jesus: “The proofs which Scripture presents for Christ’s divinity—His miracles, His resurrection from the dead, His ascension into heaven—are therefore only for faith, that is, they are not ‘proofs,’ they have no intention of proving that all of this agrees perfectly with reason: on the contrary they would prove that it conflicts with reason and therefore is an object of faith.”^{27} Kierkegaard believed that Jesus lived and died and rose from the dead. But he thought that Jesus was unknowable through knowledge and reason. One could only know Jesus through faith, and that meant that faith was opposed to knowledge and reason.

When writing to Theophilus, Luke says, “Just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, to write an orderly account for you” (Luke 1:2-3). John writes “That which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you” (1 John 1:3). The New Testament authors were writing about what they knew. These men walked, talked, and ate with Christ for three years. These men knew Christ face to face. Wayne Grudem addresses the harmony of faith and reason: “Rather, saving faith is consistent with knowledge and true understanding of facts.”^{28} Faith is not separate from knowledge, it is trust in knowledge.

Once the facts of the Bible are known, faith in those facts will affect how we experience happiness. Happiness defined as satisfaction of desires is an empty pointless feel-good emotion that lasts only for a moment. But the joy of God does not fade. Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John

15:11). Christians get joy through meditating on the things of God. Neal Anderson and Robert Saucy state that "Meditation on the Word should produce thoughts that reach our emotions."[\[29\]](#) A relationship with God produces happiness, a deep well-being of the soul, that lasts. The Psalmist writes, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight" (Psalm 19:14). What we study and put into our minds affects our relationship with God. When we have knowledge of God then we can meditate on God. It is impossible to meditate on an object that you have no knowledge of. Meditation on the things of God brings joy.

The cultural shift to a minimalist ethic, the idea of contemporary freedom, and the meaning of tolerance are the result of relativism's effect on the culture. Relativism is the idea that there are no objective moral values, and morality is either decided by each person or each community. There are many problems with this view. Relativism makes it impossible to criticize others. If moral truths are subjective then each person gets to decide for himself what is right or wrong. Relativism cannot place blame for wrong doings. What people do is neither right nor wrong. Right or wrong is up to each individual. Why should we expect each person to reach the same conclusion? Relativists cannot promote tolerance because any definition of tolerance is an objective definition that, if true, applies to everyone.[\[30\]](#) But if morality is objective (meaning that there are things that are right and wrong for all people at all times), then freedom cannot mean that people can do what they want when they want. People will have responsibilities. They will be free to do what is right, and they will be free to do what is wrong. Being free means that we make choices of our own volition.

Conclusion

The loss of spiritual knowledge has caused a fractured society and people who lead fractured lives. The cultural shifts are a result of people not taking spiritual knowledge seriously.

Spiritual knowledge must have absolutes to provide meaning for life. Francis Schaeffer observes, “we need absolutes if our existence is to have meaning—my existence, your existence, man’s existence.”^{31} Absolutes are learned by practicing the spiritual disciplines. A careful study of the Bible will bring knowledge ABOUT God; heart-surrender to Him, coupled with learning to abide in Him, will bring knowledge OF God. Prayer will keep people in touch with God. Fasting will break down the resistance of the flesh to living a spiritual life. The five shifts of contemporary culture mean death. The spiritual disciplines bring people spiritual life. True spirituality can only be found in Christ. Only meditation and learning about Christ can return wonder to life. I pray that through spiritual disciplines we may retain the wonder of a life given to us by God.

Notes

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