The Glory of Grace

Sue Bohlin explores God's marvelous grace as the unending flow of His power, presence and favor in our lives.

I bet you recognize "grace" as a theology word. Many of us are quick to say, "Oh yeah, I know what that is. We're saved by grace through faith." Or we know of churches with the word "grace" in their name. But many of us don't have a real handle on it. Often that's because we haven't seen it modeled in our families, our churches, or our communities. We're too focused on trying to prove ourselves good enough, too busy trying to keep God from getting mad at us.

But this misunderstood blessing of grace is *hugely* important. It's one of the big things that sets Christianity apart from all other religions! Any other world religion involves performance-based works. Biblical Christianity says, "We're messed-up



broken people before a holy God, and there's nothing we can do to earn His approval. But He loves us and delights in us despite the fact that we don't deserve it." With all other religions, the emphasis is on "do." Because of grace, in Christianity the emphasis is on "done." {1}

One of the most powerful elements of grace is simply acceptance. The book of Romans assures us that we are accepted by both the Father (Romans 14:3) and the Son (Romans 15:7). We can do nothing to earn Their acceptance; it's a gift. The Father says, "I accept you just the way you are, but I love you too much to leave you that way. Come to Me: My arms and My heart are open to you because of what My Son did in His incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. I have always loved you, My precious child. I chose you before the foundation of the world, to adopt you into My family." {2} I love to think of God stamping our foreheads with an invisible tattoo that says, "Accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6,

KJV).

Pastor Mark Driscoll has an especially great definition of grace. Instead of the one we've heard for years, "God's undeserved favor," Mark calls it "ill-deserved" favor.{3} But my all-time favorite definition comes from John Ortberg: "Grace is the offer of God's ceaseless presence and irrational love that cannot be stopped. It's the flow of God's power and presence and favor in your life from one moment to the next that enables you to do whatever it is God has for you to do."{4} I want to focus on God's power, presence, and favor, as well as giving some real-life examples of what grace looks like.

Power

A little boy was playing in his sandbox one Saturday morning when he discovered a large rock in the middle of it. The boy dug around the rock, managing to dislodge it from the dirt. With a little bit of struggle, he pushed and nudged the rock across the sandbox. But then he found that he couldn't roll it up and over the little wall. The boy shoved, pushed, and pried, but every time he thought he had made some progress, the rock tipped and then fell back into the sandbox.

All this time the boy's father watched from his window as the drama unfolded and his son burst into tears of frustration.

As the tears fell, a large shadow fell across the boy and the sandbox. It was the boy's father. He asked, "Son, why didn't you use all the strength that you had available?"

The boy sobbed, "But I did, Daddy, I did! I used all the strength that I had!"

The father corrected kindly, "No, son, you didn't use all the strength you had. You didn't ask me." With that, the father reached down, picked up the rock and removed it from the

sandbox.

Experiencing God grace means depending on Him to provide the power for our lives, whether it's dislodging a big ol' rock in our sandbox or simply making it through the day.

I like to think of the power of God's grace as electricity that is available twenty-four hours, seven days a week. God's grace is always available to us at every moment of our life, and because of His goodness and faithfulness, we never have to fear a power shortage of God's grace.

The key to experiencing the flow of God's power is what Jesus called *abiding*, choosing to remain in a state of trustful dependence on God. Jesus said in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for *apart from Me you can do nothing*."

I love to illustrate this by turning on a shop light that's plugged into an electrical outlet. When I press the switch, the light goes off, even though the power is still flowing and available. We can shut off the expression of grace, the flow of God's power, by quenching the Spirit—by actively disobeying God, or by passively ignoring Him. But His power can shine in our lives again as soon as we open ourselves up to Him, asking for His help, intentionally depending on His power and not our own. Grace is the flow of God's power in our lives.

Presence

One morning, as I swam laps in the health club pool, I was meditating on these three aspects of grace. I said, "Lord, what do You want me to know about Your presence?" At that very second, I "just happened" to see a large sign on the wall right in front of me: "WARNING: NO LIFEGUARD ON DUTY." I literally laughed out loud, realizing that this was code for "You're on your own, buddy." God's grace means we never have to fear that there's no lifeguard on duty, that we're on our

own, because He has promised to never leave us or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6, Hebrews 13:5). The Lord Jesus' last promise was, "I am with you always" (Matthew 28:20).

My favorite illustration of grace as God's presence is the building of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Dwight relates that during its initial construction, "Twenty-three workers fell to their deaths. Finally, halfway through the project, a large net was put in place beneath the bridge. From then on, only ten men actually fell—all caught by the net. Plus, the workers' productivity was raised by twenty-five percent. Assured that their safety was no longer in question, they pursued their work with far greater freedom and effectiveness than before. This is exactly what God has done for us. Stretched wide beneath us, extending from eternity past to eternity future, is God's perfect grace, assuring every believer that we can never fall from His favor. No matter how badly we falter or fail, we can never plunge past the grace of God." {5}

Think of grace as the hand of God ready to catch you when you fall. Because God is good and He is sovereign, that means nothing can happen that He cannot redeem. There is no such thing as an unrecoverable disaster. Even when we sin deliberately and stupidly, we cannot jump beyond the bounds of His grace. Now, His grace usually involves painful discipline, because God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6), but we cannot out-sin God's love and grace.

Recently, a friend of mine was anguishing, "Why did God allow me to wreck my marriage and family? I wouldn't let my children run out into the street and be hit by a car, why did He let me go that far?" As I turned to the Lord for an answer, He whispered, "I'm always protecting My children, but you don't see the disasters I avert." Part of God's grace is the safety of His protecting presence.

Favor

One important element of grace is favor. One dictionary defines favor as "an attitude of approval or liking."

Five-year-old Matt got up from his nap one day and said, "Guess what, mommy, I just had a dream about Jesus!" The mommy asked, "Well, what did Jesus say to you?" "Nothing." "Well, what was Jesus doing?" "Nothing." "Now Matthew, you just said you had a dream about Jesus, he MUST have said or done something!" Matt was quiet for a moment, and then with a wiggle and grin he looked up and said shyly, "He just stood there and liked me."

When somebody likes you, their eyes light up when they see you. Did you know God's whole face lights up when He looks at you? The Bible talks about His face shining on us. {6} God doesn't only love us, He likes us! Experiencing God's grace means He showers not only love but like on us, and His face reflects His heart of favor toward us.

Every child needs to receive the <u>"3 A's"</u> of favor from his daddy: attention, affection, and approval. The Father poured out the 3 A's on the Lord Jesus at His baptism when He said, "You are My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." {7} Those words are like gold, and we can receive them into our own hearts as well.

I love the way one daddy blogger expresses grace toward his daughter. He writes,

I love you. I love the way your hair rolls into ringlets and falls into your eyes. I love the way you read yourself books, even though you can't read. I love the way you dance and twirl around the kitchen. I love the way you wave at cars that pass on our walks. I love the way you scream "Dad" in the middle of the night. I love the way you say "do it again" when we do something fun. I even love the permanent

marker custom design you put on my new Mac. But as much as I love you, Jesus loves you more. I sacrifice a lot because I love you, but Jesus sacrificed everything because he loves you. So if somewhere along the way you fail a test or love a boy who does not love you back or have a mastectomy or develop Alzheimer's or gain some weight or lose a job, you will still hold infinite value because Jesus loves you. No matter what. You are loved exactly as you are. Always. {8}

Oh yeah. That's the beauty of grace.

What Grace Looks Like

I want to share some examples of what grace looks like, both the way God showers grace on us, and the way people share His grace with others.

God has poured grace on me in a huge way when traveling internationally. Because of a schedule change, I found myself flying back to Dallas from Germany just in time to speak at a weekend women's retreat. I arrived home from the airport with just enough time to repack my bags and pick up my speaking notes and props. I then drove two hours to the retreat facility, arriving while the women were still singing. I literally got out of the car with my notebook in hand, walked in the door and up to the stage to start speaking. With the time difference, my body felt like it was five o'clock in the morning and I'd been awake for twenty-two hours. But God not only kept me alert, He filled me with His energy, and the women couldn't tell any difference.

When we've received God's grace, we are able to turn around and give it to others.

Grace means responding with patience when someone forgets they already told you something, or that you told *them* something, and just going with the flow. Grace means lifting off the burden of needless "shoulds" that weigh people down. One

grace-filled speaker invited people to respond in song at the end of her message, saying, "If you'd like to sing, great! Join us! If you need a rest, feel free to just listen." She removed any pressure to perform. At our church, a couple of pastors managed to deliver a message on giving and stewardship without even a hint of shame, or condemnation, or pressure. That's what grace looks like.

When my friend's mother contracted Alzheimer's, she told her daughter early in the progression of the disease, "If I get to the point where I don't recognize you, don't take it personally." She was expressing grace in being more concerned about her daughter's hurt than her own loss of memory.

Another friend needed eye surgery to keep her from losing her sight. Her friend Angela, who has been blind for a number of years, told our friend, "Don't be concerned about talking about your vision to me—I am so over that!" That's what grace looks like.

One of my favorite stories happened one night to my dear friend who was starting to realize what monsters her abusive parents were. She had always patterned herself after her mother, and suddenly realized she had even chosen the same dishes as her mother's when they got married. Suddenly she couldn't abide the thought of keeping them in the house a moment longer. She grabbed a plate out of the cupboard and hurled it to the floor, smashing it to pieces. Her husband heard the noise and came to see what was going on. When she explained the connection between their dishes and her mother, her husband calmly said, "Have at it. Tomorrow morning I'll take you to get new dishes." Not only did he clean up the mess when she was done, but all those shards damaged their kitchen floor—and he never once mentioned it. That's grace.

Notes

1. See, for example, John 15:5; 19:30; Colossians 3:4;

Ephesians 2:8-9.

- 2. Ephesians 1:4-5
- 3. marshill.com/media/religionsaves/grace
- 4. This quote came from a sermon preached at Pastor Ortberg's church, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California, 2003. When I emailed him asking for a specific citation, his answer was, "I have no idea, Sue."
- 5. Dwight Edwards, Experiencing Christ Within Workbook: Passionately Embracing God's Provisions for Supernatural Living (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2002), p. 105.
- 6. Numbers 6:25
- 7. Matthew 3:17
- 8. jeffdlawrence.com/2011/12/23/some-thoughts-on-how-to-talk-to-little-girls/
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The Dangerous Ideology of Transgenderism

Transgenderism has been the topic in the news for more than a decade; therefore, Christians need to know what to think about the various claims being made. We also need to know how to respond to an aggressive push by trans activists to normalize this behavior and criticize anyone who does not accept it.

Transgenderism is the belief that people have a "gender identity" that is distinct from their biological sex. If they feel there is a conflict between their gender and their sex, gender identity should take precedence. Although a very small



fraction of the population may experience gender dysphoria (where a person experiences discomfort or distress from a

mismatch between their biological sex and the gender they want to be), the current percentage of Americans identifying as transgender or nonbinary (not identifying as either male or female, masculine or feminine) has exploded.

Sexuality, Gender, and Medical Studies

Dr. Paul McHugh has served as the Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Johns Hopkins Medical School. He has concluded that "gender reassignment surgery" doesn't work. He, along with Dr. Lawrence Mayer, surveyed over 200 peer-reviewed studies done in various disciplines. {1} Here are four of the most important conclusions from their paper:

First, the "belief that sexual orientation is an innate, biologically fixed human property" is not supported. In other words, people are not "born that way."

Second, the "belief that gender identity is an innate, fixed human property independent of biological sex—so that a person might be a man trapped in a woman's body or a woman trapped in a man's body—is not supported by scientific evidence."

Third, "only a minority of children who express genderatypical thoughts or behavior will continue to do so into adolescence or adulthood." It goes on to say that children should not be encouraged to become transgender. They also should not be subjected to hormone treatments or surgery.

Fourth, people who are homosexual or transgender "have higher rates of mental problems (anxiety, depression, suicide), as well as behavioral and social problems (substance abuse, intimate partner violence), than the general population."

While the paper only focuses on the scientific research, it obviously has implications for public policy. Incorrect scientific claims have been used to justify court rulings, government policies, and medical practices concerning sexual orientation and gender identity. They have not been based upon

American College of Pediatricians

Above, we talked about some of the scientific research into homosexuality and transgenderism. Dr. Paul McHugh and Dr. Lawrence Mayer surveyed over 200 peer-reviewed studies and came to conclusions that are contrary to much of the current statements being made by trans activists.

Dr. Paul McHugh was also one of the authors of a statement by the American College of Pediatricians. The title of their statement was: "Gender Ideology Harms Children." {2}Here is a summary sentence or two of the eight points they make in their statement.

- 1. "Human sexuality is an objective biological binary trait: XY and XX are genetic markers of health, not genetic markers of a disorder."
- 2. "No one is born with a gender: Everyone is born with a biological sex. Gender (an awareness and sense of oneself as male or female) is a sociological and psychological concept; not an objective biological one."
- 3. "A person's belief that he or she is something they are not is, at best, a sign of confused thinking."
- 4. "Puberty is not a disease and puberty-blocking hormones can be dangerous."
- 5. "According to the DSM-V [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition], as many as 98% of gender-confused boys and 88% of gender-confused girls eventually accept their biological sex after naturally passing through puberty."
- 6. "Pre-pubertal children diagnosed with gender dysphoria may be given puberty blockers as young as eleven, and will require

cross-sex hormones in later adolescence to continue impersonating the opposite sex. These children will never be able to conceive any genetically related children even via artificial reproductive technology. In addition, cross-sex hormones (testosterone and estrogen) are associated with dangerous health risks including but not limited to cardiac disease, high blood pressure, blood clots, stroke, diabetes, and cancer."

- 7. "Rates of suicide are nearly twenty times greater among adults who use cross-sex hormones and undergo sex reassignment surgery, even in Sweden which is among the most LGBTQ-affirming countries."
- 8. "Conditioning children into believing that a lifetime of chemical and surgical impersonation of the opposite sex is normal and healthful is child abuse."

Gender Dysphoria Research

Abigail Shrier wrote about the transgender craze in her book Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters.{3} In my radio interview with her, she explained that "gender dysphoria" was characterized by severe and persistent discomfort in one's biological sex. It typically begins in early childhood. In previous generations, it afflicted a sliver of the population (roughly .01 percent) and occurred mostly in boys.

Prior to 2012, there was no scientific literature on girls (11-21) ever having developed gender dysphoria at all. Then the Western world experienced a sudden surge of adolescents claiming to have gender dysphoria and self-identifying as "transgender."

In 2016, Lisa Littman (an ob-gyn, public health researcher) was scrolling through social media when she noticed a statistical peculiarity. Several adolescents (most of them

girls) from a small town in Rhode Island had come out as transgender. In fact, they were all from the same friend group.

She admitted that she knew very little about gender dysphoria, but this statistical anomaly was interesting to her. And she then noticed there had been a sudden spike in the Western World of girls experiencing gender dysphoria. She immersed herself in the scientific literature on gender dysphoria to try to understand what was happening. Perhaps it was due to increased social acceptance of LGBTQ people, but she suggested in a peer-reviewed paper that the girls might be rushing toward "transition" because of peer contagion. As you might imagine, her suggestion was roundly criticized. She was also accused of anti-trans bigotry.

In a subsequent research project, she collected data anonymously from 256 parents whose kids had not met the criteria of gender dysphoria in childhood, but suddenly identified as transgender in adolescence. She identified 16 traits in common. Here are a few.

- 1. The vast majority have zero indicators of childhood gender dysphoria.
- 2. Almost a third of them did not seem at all gender dysphoric.
- 3. A majority had one or more psychiatric diagnosis and almost half were engaged in self-harm prior to the onset of dysphoria.
- 4. Nearly 70 percent of the teenagers belonged to a peer group in which at least one friend had also come out as transgender.
- 5. Among parents who knew their children's social status, over 60 percent said the announcement brought a popularity boost.

6. Over 88 percent of the parents surveyed reported being supportive of transgender rights.

There is growing evidence that social contagion is a much better explanation for the notable increase in the number of young people (especial young women) who now claim to be transgender.

Promotion of Transgenderism

Transgenderism has been promoted through social media, through the schools, and even through the medical establishment. Abigail Shrier began to look at the influence of social media on this transgender craze. In her chapter on "The Influencers" she talks about trans promoters who have become a YouTube sensation. We are seeing similar promoters on TikTok and other social media platforms. Here are a few of the ideas she discovered.

- 1. If you think you might be trans, you are.
- 2. Testosterone is amazing. It may just solve all your problems.
- 3. If your parents love you, they will support your trans identity.
- 4. Deceiving parents and doctors is justified, if it helps transition.
- 5. You don't have to identify as the opposite sex to be trans.

She also found that transgenderism was being promoted through the schools. One program coordinator she talked to acknowledged that the "role of schools has changed." Now "schools have expanded to be the hub for a lot more social services and looking more holistically, emotionally, at what's going on with children." In other words, they have become a "source of social justice."

You might wonder how schools teach about transgenderism to young children. Teachers begin by talking about gender identity. A book intended for kindergarten teachers to read to their students reinforces the idea that gender is a social construct. It begins with a familiar origin story: "Babies can't talk, so grown-ups make a guess by looking at their bodies. This is the sex assigned to you at birth, male or female." It then provides a list of gender options: trans, genderqueer, non-binary, gender fluid, transgender, gender neutral, agender, bigender, etc.

Transgender charts and diagrams are being used in many schools. There is a "Genderbread Person" that is supposed to help children sort through how their gender identity and their gender expression relates to their biological sex. And there is a "Gender Unicorn" that is supposed to help them understand who they may be physically attracted to and emotionally attracted to.

The American Psychological Association has even put together guidelines for the Care of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC) patients. Doctors must provide "gender affirming care" which is defined as being "respectful, aware, and supportive of the identities and life experiences of TGNC people."

How to Respond to the Transgender Moment

Ryan Anderson is the author of the book, When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment. [4] When I interviewed him on his book, he explained how transgender ideology promotes the opportunity for children to change their gender with surgery and drugs. And parents "are told that puberty blockers and cross-sex hormones may be the only way to prevent their children from committing suicide."

Ryan Anderson countered that the best studies of gender dysphoria have found "that between 80 and 95 percent of children who express a discordant gender identity will come to identify with their bodily sex if natural development is allowed to proceed." He also documented that even children going through "transitioning" treatment still have an extraordinarily high rate of suicide attempts compared to the general population.

He reminded us that we should be tolerant and loving toward children (and adults) who struggle with their gender identity. But we should also be aware of the potential harm when transgender identity is normalized.

Unfortunately, we are living in a world where transgender activists want more than tolerance and kindness. They demand affirmation. We aren't allowed to question whether using medical treatments to aid in transgender transformation is positive for children. In his book, Ryan Anderson shows that the best biology, psychology, and philosophy support an understanding of sex as a bodily reality. As he puts it: "Biology isn't bigotry."

Abigail Shrier also offers several suggestions. First, don't get your kid a smartphone. She explains that nearly every problem teenagers face traces itself back to the introduction of the smartphone years ago.

Second, don't relinquish your authority as a parent. You don't have to go along with every idea your teenager has, nor do you have to go along with every educational or psychological fad being promoted in society.

Third, don't support gender ideology in your child's education. She provides an example of what happens when schools do a seminar on anorexia or suicide. Often the prevalence increases. A small number of students may have gender confusion or gender dysphoria. But talking about it

will spread confusion.

Finally, don't be afraid to admit, that it's wonderful to be a girl.

While she talks about the benefits and opportunities of being a girl, Christians can go even further. We believe God is responsible for who we are and what we are. Each one of us is created in God's image (Genesis 1:26). We can celebrate girls and boys and encourage them to use their gender and their gifts to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 1:31).

Notes

- 1. Dr. Lawrence S. Mayer and Dr. Paul R. McHugh, "Sexuality and Gender," *The New Atlantis*, Fall 2016, www.thenewatlantis.com/collections/sexuality-and-gender.
- 2. "Gender Ideology Harms Children," September 2017, https://acpeds.org/assets/imported/9.14.17- Gender-Ideology-Harms-Children updated-MC. pdf.
- 3. Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*, Regnery Publishing, 2021.
- 4. Ryan Anderson, When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment, Encounter Books, 2019.

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Wes Huff — Billy Carson Debate

A significant corner of the internet recently (October 28, 2024) blew up with a debate between Christian apologist Wes Huff and popular skeptic Billy Carson when their online debate went viral. Kyle Skaggs provides context and understanding.

In recent years, social media platforms that allow monetized live streaming services like Twitch and YouTube have gained significant importance. While live streaming first became popular for gaming content on Twitch, it quickly expanded its scope to more diverse mediums of engagement, the latest of which is the academic world.

The interactive format allows experts and enthusiasts to engage with diverse audiences in real-time, creating a more accessible form of dialogue. Live streaming services are slowly evolving into a hub for philosophical, religious, and ethical debates.

This year started with <u>a debate</u> over the reliability of the Scriptures, and the uniqueness and goodness of the Christian worldview went viral. So, why did it resonate with so many people, what happened during the debate, and what can it teach us about apologetics?

First, the popularity of streaming services on Twitch and YouTube among Millennials and Gen Z cannot be understated. For people my age and younger, these platforms are the most common way to learn different philosophies and worldviews rather than the classroom.

The Billy Carson-Wes Huff debate was initially to be between Carson, a popular Bible conspiracy theorist, and his friend Mark. Mark, believing he was not knowledgeable enough to do the subject matter justice, asked Director of Apologetics Canada, Wes Huff, if he would debate Carson while Mark moderated.

Huff thoroughly dismantled each of Carson's arguments with historical and literary evidence. Shortly afterwards, Carson demanded Mark not to post the debate, a request that was ignored. Carson is now trying to sue Huff. The debate was already popular due to Carson and Mark's substantial audiences, and it further went viral after Huff was invited to

speak about it on Joe Rogan's podcast.

Much of the debate's three-hour runtime is padded out by the host, who tends to lead the conversation on tangents, and his statements largely add little to the debate. This, paired with his habit of over-explaining and repeating his questions, causes the debate to drag in places. However, this is offset by the quality content produced between Carson and Huff.

The topics covered are the inspiration and reliability of the scriptures, and the Christian worldview. The first point of the debate was the crucifixion of Jesus. Carson explained that the Gospel of Barnabas, which predates the KJV, does not mention the crucifixion. Furthermore, the Gospel of Jesus's Wife, while controversial, is believed to be an accurate record that Jesus may have been married. This places the crucifixion in doubt.

Huff counters that the Gospel of Barnabas is a known forgery. We know it is a forgery because it is clear the author has no knowledge of the region, customs, and time of the first century. The author also paraphrased Dante's *Inferno*. Internal evidence heavily suggests a medieval date, not to mention the only two copies of it are in late medieval Spanish and Italian.

Carson claims parts of the Genesis story are copied verbatim from the Enuma Eilish (an ancient Babylonian creation myth), Sumerian cylinder scrolls, and other ancient texts. When Huff asks him to summarize the Enuma Eilish Carson does so, but frames the story in his own interpretation to the point where it is borderline unrecognizable. It would have fit perfectly on a late 2000's history channel at 3:00 am. Wes does not focus on this. Instead, he asks which part of Genesis 1 and 2 is copied.

Huff asks this because having read both the Bible and Enuma Eilish, he does not find any parallels beyond the surface

level. He points out that most Ancient Near East scholars see the Genesis account as an apologetic against documents like the Enuma Eilish.

Carson claims that there are certain words that let him know they were copied. As an example, the idea of separating the earth from the water, and the earth being void and formless tells us that somebody looked at the Enuma Eilish and copied them. Carson attempts to change the subject, saying there was so much more he wanted to cover.

Huff explains the purpose of the Enuma Eilish was to show that the deities come from the created order, which is a fluke. The common man does not matter. Only the kings were made in the image of the divine. On the other hand, the Bible says there is only one God who creates, what He created was good, and man is made in the image of God. Huff argues that rather than plagiarism, the Genesis account is a polemic against works like the Enuma Eilish.

Carson closed his argument by claiming the scriptures are clearly 100% man-made because there are statements in the text that encourage genocide, slavery, and all sorts of horrible things. Wes counters with the ethic found in Judaism and Christianity that is found nowhere else, that we are created in the image of God. People are always going to abuse scripture and religion. The earliest criticism of Christianity is that it's a religion of slaves and women. The Christian worldview gives agency to the marginalized.

Before going into the debate, Huff looked into the content Carson produces to get a feel for what kind of arguments he'd be facing. So he knew that all he needed to do was let Carson ramble. If Carson had not acted the way he did, and just took the loss, this would not have exploded in popularity.

Huff constantly asks Carson what is his methodology for determining what is an accurate source of information. Carson

says his methodology was gathering up as many texts as he could, alongside traveling to learn from their various cultures and the stories they tell. This gave Huff an idea of how much research Carson was doing, but did not answer his question.

Why is methodology so important for Wes? He explains in his interview with Joe Rogan, "What I was trying to get Billy to get to the bottom of was partly a question of methodology." Professionals in Wes's field of study make sure they can explain the criteria they use when looking at one source versus another source to develop a conclusion. They must rely on non-deductive reasoning, which deals in probability. This means we look at the data we have, and make inferences to the best possible conclusion. Historians rarely disagree with the data, but the conclusion can be vastly different.

Carson's claims disagree with the data. Everything that Billy cited against the crucifixion was either false in the case of the Sinai Bible, or verified forgeries. The evidence against the crucifixion in terms of documentary evidence presented by Billy is not convincing. When Huff points this out, Carson tries to move on to a new subject, showing his inexperience with this kind of conversation. It would have been better if he clarified his criteria for determining the value of a source, or admitted his methodology was flawed. This way, he could keep his credibility as a scholar. By deflecting and changing the subject in the face of defeat he comes across as amateur.

Throughout the debate, we see Huff exemplify what Jesus told His disciples before sending them out among the people of Israel: "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." (Matthew 10:16) We can see from the comment section that Huff's kind conduct resonated with people. Subscribers to Carson's channel switched to following Huff! One wrote that their worldview was shattered, and they were picking up the

Bible again! Huff later said he did not expect the debate to go viral in the way it did. It is amazing to see the Holy Spirit work through seemingly little things.

"...[I]n your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander." (1 Peter 3:15)

When we answer with gentleness and respect we show the other person we don't want to dominate them. If they don't become less combative, they at least become more willing to listen. From there, it's all the Holy Spirit's work. This is why I say we need more debates like this, because no matter how we argue, the people we speak to directly may never accept the Gospel, but what about those listening in?

Mind Games Camp (radio transcript)



There's one thing we do here at Probe that is my favorite part of ministry. Our Student Mind Games Camp is a week-long, total immersion, give-it-all-we've-got experience for high school and college students that changes minds and hearts forever.



Beautiful Camp Copass in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area is surrounded by a lake on three sides and it feels very secluded—even though it's not far from the Dallas-Ft. Worth airport, so students can easily fly in. We teach Christian students how to think biblically on a wide range of subjects: understanding how others think as they understand their worldviews, how they can know that Christianity is true,

creation and evolution, human nature, the differences between guys and girls, the problem of evil and the value of suffering, campus Christianity, and even how to watch a movie with their brain turned on. They learn about Islam, a compassionate but biblical view of homosexuality, different views of science and Earth-history, and genetic engineering.

Returning campers get to experience what is always a highlight for our students, a special alumni track with new lectures in an intimate, personal setting. The alumni always tell the first-timers what an amazing difference it makes to come back a second or even third time, because they get so much more out of the conference than they ever thought possible.

The Probe teachers don't just give the lectures, though; we continue conversations at meals where we eat and visit with the students instead of each other. We break up into discussion groups to help the students process what they're learning in the sessions. There is free time every afternoon and evening to hike, swim, play basketball or card games, read or nap. Or of course, just hang out with new friends.



The students are delighted to meet other thinking Christians from all over the country, students eager to think and grow in their faith as they learn to love God with their minds together. They enjoy getting to know us as the instructors, too. We're not only available the whole week; we look for opportunities to engage in conversations that will encourage and affirm what God is doing in the minds and hearts of these precious young

people.

We'll be talking about Mind Games in this article, but you can go to our website, Probe.org/mindgames, and check out our

videos, a typical week's schedule, and lots of other information. In the next sections you'll hear a little bit from several lecturers, and also from several of our Mind Games alumni.

Sneak Peek of Probe Lectures

Here are snippets from lectures of four of our Probe Mind Games instructors, speaking on the Biology of Human Uniqueness, LGBT, Islam, and Nietzsche for Beginners:

Dr. Ray Bohlin:

Fire is also necessary for creating tools, particularly metal tools. You have to be able to heat metals to a really high temperature: copper, silver, gold—all their melting temperatures are over a thousand degrees centigrade. So you have to get a really hot fire to do that, and to be able to make the tools liquid, to make them malleable. So you've got not only to be able to make a fire, you have to be intentional as to how you make a really hot fire.

Sue Bohlin:

What I really love is my title for this, which is "Grace and Truth About Homosexuality," because I think we need both. We need to be coming from a heart of compassion and sympathy and understanding for the sexual and relational brokenness that results in homosexuality, but we also need to be absolutely camped out on the truth of the Word of God.

Paul Rutherford:

The third of the five pillars of Islam is the giving of alms, what they call zakat. It's much similar to Christian charity, to giving to a church or giving to the poor; Muslims likewise have a heart for their community, have a heart for those who are down and out. This is the giving to "the least of these,"

as Christians might call it. The fourth pillar of Islam is Ramadan, and Ramadan is a fast. It is a month-long fast. This is a time when they train themselves in discipline, of practicing not eating during the day, and when they train themselves in increasing their desire for God, for Allah.

Todd Kappelman:

Adolph Hitler, when he was coming to power after 1939, he ordered just crates and crates and crates of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and would give to his captains and his commanders and everything, and we believe by this action in some of Hitler's own words that he saw himself to be the inheritor of much of Nietzsche's philosophy and especially the aspect of the overman, the great world historical figure that Nietzsche is going to advocate for solving some of the problems that he's going to look at.

Comments from Alumni, Part 1

In this article we're talking about our memorable, life-impacting, week-long summer Mind Games conference. But you don't have to take our word for it. Consider what some of our alumni have to say.

Here's three-time alumnus, Noah:

Mind Games is a fun place of fellowship, you get a lot of excitement, there's a ropes course that you go on so there's a lot of excitement there, you do a lot of team-building activities, it's a ton of fun, you get to learn a whole lot about life, about faith, about people, about relationships. You get to experience a whole new world of things that you've never experienced before in the faith. A lot of people, they just have a surface-level faith, but here at Mind Games we go a whole lot deeper into that faith, we lay it out and we explain philosophically how it works, reasonably how it works, how it works with science, how it works with other people, how

it works with suffering, how it works with everything, just how the world works with faith.

Here's Esther:

My faith before Mind Games was a little crazy . . . I had thoughts about suicide a few times, and then I started to doubt, "Is God even there?" Like, if He was there, then wouldn't I feel His presence? Then I came to Mind Games and I was like, there's no way He's not real. For someone who hasn't been here, Mind Games is a great experience. You not only gain friends and family, but you learn more about God and how to stay stronger in your faith.

Tyler had a major shift between his first and second time at Mind Games:

I'm Tyler Lord from Athens, Georgia. Last year when I came I was actually agnostic, so I didn't really know. But kinda having experiences throughout the year after Mind Games and coming back, I've become a Christian. It's lots of fun. You come and, you know, it's not really all about religion. There's a bunch of free time you get to play around. You come in, and you don't really know what to expect, When you get here and you think, oh, it's gonna be a bunch of lectures, but it's really not. You get a good bond with everybody's who's here, like the other campers. And even though there are lectures, they're really interesting. The apologetics ones are great for like if someone comes up to you and they're like, "Why are you a Christian?"

Comments From Alumni, Part 2

Here are a few more alumni comments, starting with Arty:

Mind Games is a wonderful time of fellowship, worship and just gaining a lot of knowledge into why Christianity is reasonable, how Christianity can work with science, how your faith and science can work together and not against each other. Mind Games is fun, it's very much about the relationships that you build, it's about the people who you interact with on a daily basis for the week.

This was Anya's second time through:

After this second round of Mind Games, I feel like I've grown much more as a person, not just due to time but also how much Mind Games has affected me personally, If I had to describe Mind Games to someone who's never been here before, I would say it's something that completely blows your mind away. Not in the sense that it's all weighing over your head, but just how much they describe, how much detail and information you have on how to defend your faith. First year it was amazing, and second year it got even better.

Ben also returned:

Well it's really that the first Mind Games for me was like planting the seed, this time it's nurturing the plant. It was really so I could re-establish what they had taught me last year, cause last year was such an eye-opener I wanted to see if either I could experience that or build upon it this year, which I have.

Amy set a record of coming to Mind Games!

My name is Amy Klaschus, I'm from Orlando Florida, and I've been to Mind Games five times now! What keeps me coming back to Mind Games is the people, because I love the teachers—they're very nice and they're always willing to help and answer questions. Every year there have been at least a few people among the students who are just so welcoming and so Christian in a way I can't really find back home as much. I know that in shaping my growth in faith, Mind Games has been just completely essential, because it's given me the perspective and the ability to think biblically about all the problems I face, all the problems I faced in high school and

now all the problems I've been facing this past year of college.

Why Go to Mind Games?

We now know that three out of four high school seniors who had been part of a church youth group drop out of church within a year. {1} One reason for this is that they don't own their faith; they don't know that Christianity is true, and they don't know why it's true. They tend to equate faith with a warm fuzzy feeling that doesn't stand up to the challenges of life. Many students are afraid to express their doubts so they never learn that there are good, solid answers to their questions. They are sensitive to the disconnect that happens when those who profess to be Christ-followers act no differently from unbelievers.

For over twenty years, Probe's Mind Games conferences have been preparing young people for the challenges to their faith. In that time, we have witnessed firsthand the incredible thirst for a reliable trustworthy faith. Again and again we hear that some had despaired of ever finding something like Mind Games. The conference consistently exceeds expectations, and students often tell us they wish they had brought their friends.

Alumni from these summer conferences have gone on to become leaders on their campuses, the government and the military. This week-long immersion truly changes lives, giving them a new confidence in their God, His Word, and in their role as His ambassadors. We know this because some of them come back as alumni a second or third year, and because they contact us years later and let us know how Mind Games continues to impact them.

Mornings start with an informal devotional by Probe staff and a time of prayer. They receive twenty-five hours of lecture using video clips, role play, Q and A, and other teaching techniques. They connect with each other and process what they're learning in small groups. We as staff get to know and truly love them.

The Student Mind Games Camp is for those who have finished their junior or senior years of high school, and for college freshmen and sophomores. [Note: especially motivated students younger than that are welcome, though!] Please go to our Web site, Probe.org/mindgames, and check out videos. You can look at a typical schedule, and find out all the details. And then register someone you love. It will make a difference in time and eternity.

Note

1. Steve Cable, Is This the Last Christian Generation?
probe.org/is-this-the-last-christian-generation/

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

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

be asked, he challenges them to spend time exploring the questions and developing biblical worldview-based answers.

The Professor

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

Probe Ministries has sponsored a <u>college prep conference</u> since 1991 that was designed to help young people gain some insights and even some knowledge on how to address the intellectual challenges that college will provide.

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

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

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

In 2007, LifeWay surveyed 23- to 30-year-olds and found that seventy percent had taken at least a one year break from church during their college years. {1} Now, almost two-thirds of these return to some level of church attendance, but mainly to please family or friends who encouraged them to return. That means that most of our churched youth are making many of

their life decisions, including marriage and career, apart from a church context. Even many who return carry numerous scars from bad choices during those years. {2}

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

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

A Simple Question

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I Asked Jesus into My Heart!"

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

The professor quickly fires back, "You asked Jesus into your heart?! That sounds pretty gross, really. What's he doing in there with all that blood? Yuck!" That always gets a surprised reaction and a little befuddlement. The student typically tries to recover by saying something like, "No, I mean it's like I trusted Jesus as my Savior."

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

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

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

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

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

"You're a Narrow-Minded, Self-Righteous Bigot!"

Here are three other directions our conversations have frequently taken.

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

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

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

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

Finally in talking about salvation I ask what happens to those who don't believe in Jesus. Most will hesitatingly say they go to hell. The professor predictably rants, "Just because I don't believe the same fairy tale as you, I'm going to hell?" When they predictably shake their head yes, I get down eye to eye and spit out, "You're a narrow minded, self-righteous bigot!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

So what about you? Why are you a Christian?

Notes

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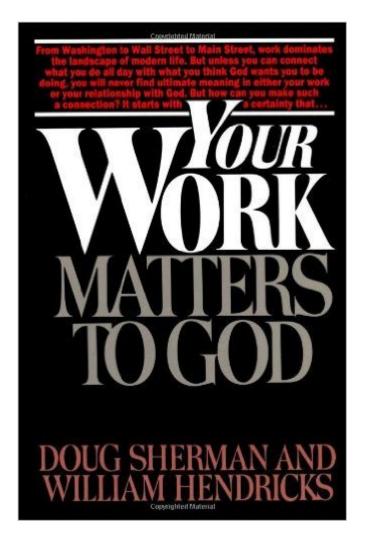
Your Work Matters to God

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

This article is also available in <u>Spanish</u>.

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





In their excellent book Your Work Matters to God, {1} Doug Sherman and William Hendricks expose the wrong ways of thinking about work, and explain how God invests work with intrinsic value honor. Rick Warren echoes this idea in his blockbuster The Purpose Driven Life when he writes, "Work becomes worship when you dedicate it to God perform it with and awareness of his presence."{2}

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

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

One problem with this secular view is that it sets us up for disappointment. If you leave God out of the picture, you'll have to get your sense of importance, fulfillment and reward from someplace else: work. Work is the answer to the question, "Who am I, and why am I important?" That is a very shaky foundation—because what happens if you lose your job? You're suddenly a "nobody," and you are not important because you are

not employed.

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

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

Inappropriate Hierarchies: Soul/Body, Temporal/Eternal

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

Another wrong way of thinking is to value the eternal over the temporal so much that we believe *only* eternal things matter. Some people believe that if you work for things that won't

last into eternity—jobs like roofing and party planning and advertising—you're wasting your time. This wrong thinking needs to be countered by the truth that God created two sides to reality, the temporal and the eternal. The natural universe God made is very real, just as real as the supernatural universe. Asking which one is real and important is like asking which is real, our nine months in our mother's womb or life after birth? They are both real; they are both necessary. We have to go through one to get to the other.

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

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

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

us up for false guilt and a sense of "missing it").

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

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

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

How God Wants Us to See Work

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

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

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

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

Listen to what Solomon wrote:

After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! 6}

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

Why Work is Good

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

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

1. Through work we serve people. Most work is part of a huge network of interconnected jobs, industries, goods and services that work together to meet people's physical needs. Other jobs meet people's aesthetic and spiritual needs as well.

- 2. Through work we meet our own needs. Work allows us to exercise the gifts and abilities God gives each person, whether paid or unpaid. God expects adults to provide for themselves and not mooch off others. Scripture says, "If one will not work, neither let him eat!" {7}
- 3. Through work we meet our family's needs. God expects the heads of households to provide for their families. He says, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." {8}
- 4. Through work we earn money to give to others. In both the Old and New Testaments, God tells us to be generous in meeting the needs of the poor and those who minister to us spiritually. {9}
- 5. Through work we love God. One of God's love languages is obedience. When we work, we are obeying His two great commandments to love Him and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.{10} We love God by obeying Him from the heart. We love our neighbor as we serve other people through our work.

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

Notes

- 1. Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, Your Work Matters to God. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1987.
- 2. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. p. 67.
- 3. Philippians 1:21
- 4. Romans 12:1, 2
- 5. Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14
- 6. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19, The Message.
- 7. 2 Thess. 3:10

- 8. 1 Tim. 5:8
- 9. Leviticus 19:10—Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your God. Ephesians 4:28—Let him who steals, steal no longer but rather let him labor performing with his own hands what is good in order that he may have something to share with him who has need. Gal 6:6—The one who is taught the word is to share all good things with the one who teaches him.
- 10. Matthew 22:37-39
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The Common Woodpecker: Chance or Design?

Dr. Ray Bohlin gave this presentation at the Discovery Institute's 2025 Dallas Conference on Science and Faith.

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

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 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.

The Answer Is the Resurrection

Steve Cable shows us that the resurrection is the key apologetic for those seeking to evangelize. As we share our faith, understanding the evidence for the resurrection helps prepare us to answer questions raised by a seeker after the truth.

Making a Defense for Your Living Hope

A key verse for our ministry at Probe is 1 Peter 3:15 where Peter writes, "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." {1}

I want to encourage you to make this verse a motivator for your own walk as an ambassador for Christ. You might say, "I am not equipped to make a defense. Surely, this verse is talking to pastors and people like the researchers at Probe." A deeper



look at Peter's letter shows us that this is not the case. Peter makes it clear that these instructions are for all Christians. {2} In addition, Peter wrote this verse in the imperative tense, meaning that it is a command, not a suggestion.

Okay. I want to be ready to give an account for the hope that

is in me, but I need be clear on what that hope is. Fortunately, Peter answers that for us in chapter 1 where he writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." {3}

So, our hope is a living hope for an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven. If I am to make a defense for this hope of eternal life, I need to be able to explain why I believe that the source of this hope has both the capability and the motivation to follow through on this offer.

How do we get this living hope? Our hope comes "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"! Jesus' resurrection is the basis for our hope. If Jesus is not resurrected from the dead, we are of all men most to be pitied. [4] So, any defense of the hope that is within us begins with explaining why someone should believe in the resurrection. The empty tomb is the cornerstone to answering most other objections raised up against the gospel.

In the remainder of this article, we will look at evidence for the resurrection and how a defense of the resurrection is the foundation for answering many of the objections raised against Christianity.

Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

Giving an account for our belief in Jesus' resurrection is the key to defending the hope within us. Several books have been written on this topic, and you can find a <u>list</u> of them in the transcript of this radio program on our Web site. The evidence for the resurrection as an historical event is so strong that even Dr. Antony Flew, until recently a noted proponent of

atheism, had to admit, "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events." {5}

One help to remembering the overwhelming evidence is to think of the ten A's attesting to Jesus' resurrection:

- 1. Accurate predictions. Both the Old and New Testaments contain predictions of Jesus' death and resurrection. Numerous times in the Gospels, Jesus told his disciples and the Jewish authorities that He would rise to life after three days in the earth. In John 2, at the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus told this to the Jewish leaders. It made such an impression on the disciples, that verse 22 tells us, "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken."
- 2. Attesting miracles. Jesus' resurrection was not a sudden miraculous cap to an otherwise unremarkable life. Jesus had consistently demonstrated His authority over the material universe from turning water into wine, to walking on the water, to healing the sick, to raising Lazarus from the dead. His resurrection is consistent with the power He demonstrated during His earthly ministry.
- 3. Agonizing death. Jesus had numerous opportunities to avoid a fatal confrontation with the Jewish leaders and Roman authorities. No one is going to go through a Roman scourging and crucifixion as a hoax. Jesus submitted to the cross because it was necessary to pay for our sins and He knew that He had the authority to conquer death.
- 4. Angry authorities. After word of Jesus' resurrection began to spread, the Jewish authorities wanted to put a stop to people believing in Him. Producing the body of Jesus would

have been the best way to do this. Even with support from the Roman authorities, they were never able to produce a body.

- 5. Absent body. The chief priests set a guard around Jesus' tomb to make sure the body was not stolen by his disciples. Those guards knew their lives could be at stake if they failed in their duty, but on the third day Jesus was gone. Once they regained their senses, the guards "reported to the chief priests all that had happened." [6] Why did they take this risk? Because they knew that there was no body to recover. No one has ever found any credible evidence that the body of Jesus was anywhere to be found on this earth.
- 6. Amazed disciples. After Jesus' arrest, most of His disciples fled. It is clear from their reaction that they despised the cross and were not anticipating the resurrection. Two of his disciples did not recognize the risen Jesus even as He was teaching them the Scriptures related to Himself. {7} Their skepticism and shock showed that they clearly were not part of some preplanned hoax.
- 7. Agreeing eyewitnesses. After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to over five hundred people. They testified to His resurrection. We do not have a record of anyone disputing their testimony, saying "I was there with them and it was a hoax."
- 8. Apostolic martyrs. People don't die for something they know to be a hoax. Yet, many of these eyewitnesses accepted death rather than deny the resurrection of Jesus.
- 9. Agnostic historians. Contemporary, non-Christian historians reported that Jesus was reputed to have risen from the dead and that his followers were willing to die rather than recant their belief in Jesus.
- 10. Attesting Spirit. Over the centuries, the Holy Spirit continues to convict unbelievers and assure believers that Jesus is the risen Son of God.

We don't have to believe in the resurrection in *spite* of the facts. Instead, we believe in the resurrection in *light* of the facts. If you can defend your belief in the resurrection, then you are already positioned to respond to other questions people may have about your faith. In fact, you can respond to objections by asking, "Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus?" If the answer is no, then you may want to focus on the evidence for the resurrection as a foundation for addressing their other concerns.

Tearing Down Objections Through the Resurrection

The evidence for Jesus' resurrection is the key to making a defense for our living hope. Let's consider some common objections to Christianity, and see how the resurrection can be the starting point for a reasoned response.

1. Is there a God still active in this universe?

Jesus' resurrection shows there is a power that transcends the physical universe. A transcendent God is the only power that can override decay and death. As the apostle Peter wrote, "[God] raised [Jesus] from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." {8}

Jesus' resurrection declares God's active involvement in this world. He planned it from the beginning and He performed it at the appointed time. {9}

2. What difference does God make to my life?

Jesus' resurrection shows that He lives into eternity and that we have the prospect of life beyond this world. {10} Knowing we have a soul that continues beyond this world impacts our perspective on life. As Paul points out, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." {11}

But if the dead are raised, then we need to live with eternity in mind. It becomes a top priority to know the one who controls eternity, God.

3. Is the Bible really God's revelation? Every religion has their holy books.

Jesus' resurrection confirms that Jesus is the source of truth. He knows which holy book is actually a revelation from God. Jesus affirmed the inspiration of the Old Testament. He promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles as they shared His teaching through the New Testament. The Gospel of John states, "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." {12}

If Jesus' resurrection caused His disciples to believe the Bible, it is certainly sufficient to cause me to believe.

4. I am too insignificant for God to love.

Jesus' resurrection shows the depth of God's love for you. Without the crucifixion there would be no resurrection. His crucifixion cries out "God loves you!" Romans tells us that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." {13}

Being singled out for God's love makes you very significant in His universe.

5. How can anyone know the truth about life and death?

Jesus' resurrection gives Him firsthand knowledge. He has been beyond death and returned. His knowledge transcends this physical universe. Jesus gives us an eyewitness for eternal life. He told Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world. . . . For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth." {14}

Jesus testifies to the truth regarding eternal life. We can

trust His testimony because of the resurrection.

6. Why should I believe that Jesus is God's divine Son?

Jesus' resurrection conquered the grave. No mortal can claim victory over decay and death.

He said that "I and the Father are one." His victory over death confirms His claim, crying out through the ages "He is God!" As Paul proclaims in Romans, "[Jesus] was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." {15}

7. Aren't there many ways to God? Can Jesus be the only way?

Jesus' resurrection puts Jesus in a class by Himself. His crucifixion and victory over death clearly show that He is a the only way to God. If there were multiple ways, Jesus would not have gone to the cross. He allowed himself to be subjected to death because it was necessary for our redemption. In addition, Jesus clearly stated that no one comes to the Father except through Him. {16}

8. How can I possibly be forgiven for my sins?

Jesus' resurrection validates His claim to have victory over sin and death. The ultimate result of sin is death, and Jesus conquered death. {17} In Romans chapter 10 we learn "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." {18}

Belief in Jesus' resurrection is a central part of saving faith.

9. Why should I believe God is involved in His creation? I don't see God making much difference in this world.

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates God's active involvement in this world. He predicted it, He planned it, He performed it. Peter writes, "[you are redeemed] with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you." {19}

10. How can a loving God allow all of the evil in this world?

Jesus' resurrection demonstrates a loving God redeeming a world degraded by evil. If there were no evil, Jesus would not have had to conquer death through the cross. If God was not loving, He would not have sent Jesus into the world to redeem us. {20} Looking at His death and resurrection, we know without a doubt that there is evil in this world, yet we are still loved by a God with power over death. Evil and love coexist because God valued us enough to create us in His image with a genuine capability to choose to turn our backs on Him. Making us unable to choose evil would have made us unable to love removing the greatest attribute of His image.

Once someone accepts the resurrection, many other barriers to accepting Christ are torn down. Whatever the question, the answer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

May what John said of the disciples be true of us as well: "So when He was raised from the dead, . . . they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken." {21}

Notes

- 1. Scripture references are taken from the NASB95.
- 2. 1 Peter 1:1-2, 3:8.
- 3. 1 Peter 1:3-4.
- 4. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19
- 5. Gary Habermas, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism: An Exclusive Interview with Former British Atheist Professor Antony Flew." Available from the Web site of Biola University at www.biola.edu/antonyflew/.
- 6. Matt 28:11.
- 7. Luke 24:13-32
- 8. 1 Peter 1:21.

- 9. 1 Peter 1:18-21.
- 10. 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
- 11. 1 Cor. 15:32.
- 12. John 2:22.
- 13. Rom 5:8-11.
- 14. John 18:37-38.
- 15. Rom 1:4-5.
- 16. John 14:7.
- 17. James 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:54-57.
- 18. Rom 10:9-10.
- 19. 1 Peter 1:18-20.
- 20. John 3:16.
- 21. John 2:22.

Resources on Evidence for Jesus' Resurrection

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Habermas, Gary, and Michael Licona. *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 2004.

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- -. The Case for Easter. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
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Historical Cycles

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of four world-changing cycles: a political/cultural cycle, a generational cycle, a technological cycle, and a financial cycle.

Are there cycles in history? Yes, even though there is a linear trajectory in history, there are generational cycles we can observe. No doubt you have heard the phrase: "Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, weak men create hard times." Or you may have heard: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." And you may have heard the phrase "the fourth turning" that predicts a crisis at the end of a four-fold cycle.

We are going to look at four of the most often quoted cycles: a political/cultural cycle, a generational cycle, a technological cycle, and a financial cycle. Today we take for granted



democracy, capitalism, and the industrial revolution. These political, economic, and technological realities were not always in our world but came about because of revolutions.

One of the most significant revolutions took place 250 years ago. Andrew Wilson talks about this in his book, *Remaking the World*. He describes 1776 as "a year that witnessed seven transformations taking place—globalization, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, the Great Enrichment, the American Revolution, the rise of post-Christianity, and the dawn of Romanticism."

Some of the events in 1776 we know. That was the year the Declaration of Independence was ratified. It was the year when Adam Smith published the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776. It was

also the year of James Watt's invention of the steam engine that spawned the industrial revolution. Both capitalism and the industrial revolution led to a significant increase in life expectancy and the rise of social development.

In this article as we discuss each of these four cycles, we should remember this interesting fact: all these cycles seem to be converging today. The last time these cycles converged in 1776, the world changed.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were "men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do."

What does the future hold? Only God knows. As the song goes, "He's got the whole world in His hands." We may not know the future, but we can trust in the One who knows the future.

I think we are likely headed for a massive change in the future. But it is difficult to predict what political event or economic spark might inflame our world. Therefore, we should all be in prayer for our leaders and prepare ourselves for possible turmoil ahead.

Political/Cultural Cycle

Let us look at what appears to be an eighty-year political/cultural cycle. (It actually seems to average out to about 84 years). Go back to 1848 and you have Karl Marx publishing the *Communist Manifesto* and other works. The political and social impact of his Marxist perspective swept through Europe, changed the political structure of many countries, and is still an influence today. This idea not only introduced a new way of viewing the world but was also responsible for removing the monarchy from most nation states.

Another important political change happened 84 years later in

the 1930s. In Europe, you have the rise of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. In this country, you had the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt who signed into law a significant number of New Deal programs that vastly expanded the scope of government and are influential in our lives today. It is worth remembering that the federal government wasn't as large as it is today. Roosevelt was responsible for the creation of so many of the alphabet soup of programs and federal agencies. The following decades were the era of big government.

If you add another 84 years, you come to 2016. In Europe, you have the political battle known as Brexit and the beginning of some populist uprisings. In this country, you also had the rise of populism and a reaction to the size and scope of big government. That was best illustrated by the election of Donald Trump.

It was also a time of turmoil. In Europe, we had the farmer protests in the Netherlands and the yellow jacket protests in France. In the U.S., we had BLM protests and Antifa protests.

There is also a longer cycle that describes the rise and fall of empires. General John Glubb notices that most empires last about 250 years. If you apply that to the U.S., you find that we are entering the end of that cycle. One key date is 1776. That not only marks the beginning of the nation (Declaration of Independence) but the promotion of capitalism (Adam Smith and the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*). By the way, if you go back about 250 years before that you come to the Protestant Reformation that began when Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the Wittenberg Door.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were "men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do."

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for

a massive change in the future.

Generational Cycle

We now turn to looking at a generational cycle.

More than a quarter century ago, William Strauss and Neil Howe wrote their bestselling book, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*. In it, they argued that history could be understood as coming in turnings, which have cycles of four. Each cycle spans a length longer than human life, roughly 80 to 100 years. That unit of time was what the ancients called the saeculum. These four turnings of the saeculum comprise the historical rhythm of growth, maturation, entropy, and destruction.

The first turning is a High — an upbeat era of strengthening institutions and weakening individualism. That is when a new civic order develops and the old values decay. The second turning is an Awakening — which is a passionate era of spiritual upheaval. This is when the civic order comes under attack from new values. The third turning is an Unraveling — which is a downcast era of strengthening individualism and weakening institutions. This is when the old civil order decays and new values develop. The fourth turning is a Crisis — which is a decisive era of secular upheaval. The values regime propels the replacement of the old civil order with a new one.

The authors predicted that political, economic, and social upheavals would rattle the United States in and around the 2020s. The 2008 economic crisis and the changes just described from 2016 seemed to support the predictions made in the book.

Last year, Neil Howe wrote *The Fourth Turning Is Here*. The title tells it all. We are in crisis as illustrated by a government that does not seem to function, low public trust in just about any institution, political polarization, moral and

legal chaos, and a collapse of families. He reminds us of the Abraham Lincoln quote that "a house divided against itself cannot stand" and that the government "will become all one thing, or all the other." He also reminds us of other fourth turning crises in America: World War II, the Civil War, and the American Revolution.

We are fortunate to live in such a time as this (Esther 4:14). We should be like the sons of Issachar (1 Chronicles 12:32) who were "men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do."

What does the future hold? It appears we are likely headed for a massive change in the future.

Technological Cycle

Let's look at a technological cycle.

There appears to be about a fifty-year technological cycle, in which we see important technological revolutions. In the late 18th century, we saw the beginnings of what today we refer to as the industrial revolution. Most people lived on farms. This revolution brought people out of the farms into the cities and factories.

Fifty years later was the age of steam and railways that changed the world significantly. Up until that time, we had manpower and horsepower. Trains that run on steam and steam ships changed the world in significant ways. Now people could move faster and carry heavier loads over a longer distance.

Fifty years after that we had steel and electricity. Steel was important in buildings. Brick buildings could only be a few stories high. Steel allowed designers to create skyscrapers and to build bridges over larger sections of water. Electricity literally lit up the dark night and provided numerous conveniences that we take for granted today.

Fifty years after that we had oil, automobiles, and a revolution in mass production. Automobiles provided people with the ability to go wherever they wanted without having to walk, ride a horse, or catch a train. Advances in mass production enhanced the industrial revolution and made possible the vast array of products available to us today.

By the 1970s, we came into the age of information and telecommunications. This came about with the development of the transistor and then the microchip. Our digital world developed because of these inventions.

Today, we find ourselves in a world of fast computers, artificial intelligence, and genetic engineering. We have social media, but we also have social media censorship. We have creative graphics, but we also have deep fakes and growing questions about what is real and what is fake. We can genetically treat and cure diseases, but we can also genetically engineer humans. How much of this will be driven by politics or economics? It is worth noting this latest technological cycle raises significant questions and also coincides with the political cycles and the generational cycle.

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Financial Cycle

In this article we have looked at four important historical cycles. Now we conclude by covering a financial cycle. You will notice that some of the financial cycles parallel the technological revolutions.

America moved from an agricultural society to an industrial economy to an information society.

If you look at the wealth cycles of nations, you notice something interesting about which currency was dominant. The financial superpower changes over time, on average about 100 years. Perhaps you have seen a chart that shows these changes:

Portugal — Portuguese Real (15th century)

Spain — Spanish Real (16th century)

Netherlands — Dutch Guilder (17th century)

France — Franc (18th century)

Britain — Pound sterling (19th century)

U.S. — U.S. dollar (20th century)

Where are we today? The U.S. and other countries around the world are experiencing a debt crisis. One significant reason for this is the fact that the dollar is no longer "good as gold." For 5,000 years, money was gold. But protecting it and transporting it was difficult. Banks and nations held the gold and created paper certificates that represented the value. Sometimes, the amount of paper currency was not always backed by gold.

The greatest problem came in the 20th century. In 1944, the Bretton Woods conference fixed gold at \$35 per ounce. But by 1971, President Nixon closed the gold window and we have seen over the last fifty-plus years that the value of the dollar has continually declined. Also, the possibility of the U.S. dollar remaining the reserve currency in the world is questionable.

At the same time, this country and other countries are facing a significant debt crisis. It is easy to spend more when all you need to do is print more money. That leads to inflation and a devaluation of your currency.

When faced with a debt crisis, you only have a few options. You can default on the debt, which some nations have done. You

can tax the citizens, but there isn't enough wealth in any nation to cover the size of those national debts. You could cut spending, but few politicians would ever consider that option. Instead, most countries (including the U.S.) print more money. Unfortunately, that can only last for so long. Just look at Weimar Germany or Zimbabwe or Venezuela.

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