

# **“You Are Too Harsh on Women Who Are Gender-Sensitive”**

Dear Sue Bohlin,

In your article [“Probe Answers Our E-Mail: What’s Your Position on Gender Neutral Bibles?”](#) you write,

*“I am also bothered by the unspoken assumption that women are too self-centered and hyper-sensitive not to be able to figure out that when the Bible—the very words of God Himself—uses the word “man” or “mankind” to refer to all humans, we can’t figure that out without getting upset. Just about every language on the face of the planet uses the generic male pronoun to represent all people, but apparently our sensibilities are too finely-tuned to allow for readers of these newer translations to make the mental jump. . .! “*

**I think it sounds a bit harsh. As a Christian woman, I have struggled for years to see that women have as much value to God as men because it seems to me that the Bible is mostly for men and about men. Women were created for men, must submit to men, and to be the help mate to men. I know that most people claim that women are not inferior to men but when I read the Scriptures, I see the inferiority very clearly. However – I find it helpful to read a Bible that uses pronouns and nouns that clearly show which verses refer to males only and which refer to all mankind. I don’t appreciate the comment about not being able to make the mental jump to understand the idea that male pronouns are often inclusive. I don’t think I am being self-centered, since I truly believe that women are inferior to men in God’s eyes, but I am learning to accept that God has a right to make us for what ever purpose He chooses, even if this hurts very deeply and doesn’t make sense to me. Was there really a need for you to be so hard on those of us who**

## **struggle with these issues?**

Dear friend,

I regret that my article caused you pain. I'm not sure that it was me being harsh as much as your unfortunate (albeit understandable) tenderness and sensitivity at having been lied to about the inferiority of women. I think the high value of women starts in the very beginning of the Bible when God deliberately makes Adam incomplete without Eve, and says it is not good for man to be alone. . . and then Paul fine-tunes that truth in 1 Cor. 11:7 when he says that man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. If woman is the glory of the image and glory of God, then we are the best and most beautiful aspect of His creation! I love what John Eldredge writes in *Wild at Heart*: "Eve is the crown of creation, remember? She embodies the exquisite beauty and the exotic mystery of God in a way that nothing else in all creation even comes close to." Please also note the poignancy of his next sentence: "And so she is the special target of the Evil One; he turns his most vicious malice against her." I would respectfully suggest that your sensitivity may have been triggered by the arrows of the Evil One's "vicious malice" against you.

There is a strength and glory to men that is different from the strength and glory of women. When we look at the way the Lord Jesus treated women with such tenderness and respect and dignity, attributes totally unknown in the world at that time, we see what God REALLY thinks of women. He likes us; He loves us; He delights in us! He does not think we are, nor did He make us, inferior to men. We are different from men. He put the most beautiful and tender parts of Himself in US, to reflect His image in a way men cannot—just as there are wonderful parts of the Fatherhood of God that men reflect in ways we cannot. That is not a difference of value, but of function.

I truly ache that you struggle with the issue of women's value in the sight of God. My guess is that the way you've been treated by misogynistic men who do not protect and cherish women as God tells them to, has given you the wrong impression of what God thinks of us. I pray He shows you how very much He esteems you as a wonderful creation of His hand and heart.

I would like to invite you to listen to a powerful, encouraging and comforting recording of the Lord Jesus speaking to His Bride, based on what He has said in His word and produced by a good friend of ours, Bob Singleton, [here](#). This has been very touching to the people who have heard it, and I pray it will minister to your heart as well.

Warm blessings,

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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# **The Doctrine of Revelation: How God Reveals His Nature and His Will**

*Rick Wade considers how God reveals his nature and his will to mankind. He finds that God clearly speaks to us through His creation and through His thoughts communicated in special revelation (includes His spoken word, His written word, and His Son).*

## **Revelation and the God Who Speaks**

Some years ago the pastor of the church I attended was on a nationally syndicated radio program with another pastor of a

more liberal bent. They were discussing differences of understanding about Christianity, one of which was the nature of the Bible. My pastor asserted that Scripture is the inspired, revealed Word of God. The other pastor disagreed, saying that the Bible is a collection of the religious reflections of a particular group of people. Since it was a call-in program, I phoned at that point and asked the question, "If the Bible is just the religious ideas of a group of people and isn't from God, how can we know whether what we think is true Christianity is what *God* thinks it is?" The pastor said something about how we have other ways of knowing truth, and the program ended. Not a very satisfying answer.

The issue being dealt with was the nature of Scripture. Is it the religious reflection of sincere people expressing truth about God the best they can? Or is it the revealed word of God?

In [another article](#) I dealt with the matter of the inspiration of Scripture. In this article I want to look at the doctrine of revelation. Not the *book*, Revelation, at the end of the New Testament, but the *doctrine* of revelation.

## **Revelation: What makes the Bible more than just religious writings**

What *is* revelation? New Testament scholar Leon Morris quotes *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. Revelation, it says, is "'The disclosure of knowledge to man by a divine or supernatural agency', and secondly, 'Something disclosed or made known by divine or supernatural means.'" Says Morris:

*Theologians might hesitate over this concentration on knowledge, for some of them would certainly prefer to define revelation in terms of the disclosure of a person. But the point on which we fasten our attention is the word 'disclosure'. Revelation is not concerned with knowledge we*

*once had but have forgotten for the time being. Nor does it refer to the kind of knowledge that we might attain by diligent research. It is knowledge that comes to us from outside ourselves and beyond our own ability to discover.*[\[1\]](#)

Thus, revelation is knowledge we can have no other way than by being told.

Here one might ask the question, Does it make sense to think God might reveal Himself? What we see in Scripture is a God Who speaks. God walked and talked with Adam in the “cool of the day” (Gen. 2:8ff). Later, He spoke to Abraham and then to the prophets of Israel. In the Incarnation of Christ He spoke directly, as man to man, face to face. Along the way He inspired His prophets and apostles to write His words to man.

This makes perfect sense. First, we know things in keeping with their nature. So, for example, we know the color of something by looking at it. We know distances by measuring. We know love by the good it produces. Along the same lines, we know persons by what they reveal about themselves. God is a Person, and there are things we can only know about Him if He tells us Himself. Second, God is transcendent, high above us. We cannot know Him unless He condescends to speak to us. Third, since God created rational, communicative beings, the idea that He would communicate with them in a rational way is not unreasonable.

Today, people look here and there for answers to the big questions of life—some consciously looking for God, some just looking for any truth on which they can depend. The doctrine of revelation teaches us that rather than wait for us to find God, God has found us. And He has revealed Himself to us in words we can understand.

# General Revelation

Revelation comes to us in two basic forms: general or natural revelation, and special revelation. Let's look at the first of these.

## Through what has been made

General revelation is God's Word given through the created order. Everyone is exposed to general revelation just by virtue of living in and being part of creation. In Psalm 19 we read, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (vv. 1–4). This idea is reiterated in Romans 1 where Paul writes, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature— have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (v. 20). Says Leon Morris, "A reverent contemplation of the physical universe with its order and design and beauty tells us not only that God is but also that God is a certain kind of God." [\[2\]](#)

If God can be known through creation in general, then it's reasonable to think He can be known through man himself in particular as part of the created order. God has left His imprint on those made in His image. Theologian Bruce Demarest follows John Calvin in his belief that we all have an immediate knowledge of God based on our being made in His image and on common grace. [\[3\]](#) Our own characteristics of personality, rationality and morality say something about God.

## What can be known through general revelation

What do we know about God through general revelation? Demarest says that through nature we know that God is uncreated (Acts

17:24), the Creator (Acts 14:15), the Sustainer (Acts 14:16; 17:25), the universal Lord (Acts 17:24), self-sufficient (Acts 17:25), transcendent (Acts 17:24), immanent (Acts 17:26–27), eternal (Ps. 93:2), great (Ps. 8:3–4), majestic (Ps. 29:4), powerful (Ps. 29:4; Rom. 1:20), wise (Ps. 104:24), good (Acts 14:17), and righteous (Rom. 1:32); He has a sovereign will (Acts 17:26), has standards of right and wrong (Rom. 2:15), and should be worshiped (Acts 14:15;17:23).[{4}](#) Furthermore, we all have some knowledge of God’s morality through nature (Rom. 2:15).

## **Other religions**

It is because of general revelation that other religions often contain some truth about God. Remember that Paul said everyone knows God exists through what He has made, but that this knowledge is suppressed by our unrighteousness. They “exchanged the truth of God for a lie,” he said, “and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1: 25). Nonetheless, snippets of truth can be detected in non-Christian religions. “For example,” writes Bruce Demarest, “the Yoruba people of Nigeria have a name for God, ‘Osanobwa,’ that means ‘he who blesses and sustains the world.’ The Taro people, also of Nigeria, after a time of barrenness often call a baby girl ‘Nyambien,’ meaning ‘God is good.’ The Ibo people of Nigeria denote God as ‘Eze-elu,’ or ‘the King above.’ And the Mende people of Liberia designate God as the Chief, the King of all Kings.[{5}](#) The Gogo people of West Africa believe that Mulungu governs ‘the destiny of man sending rain and storm, well-being and famine, health or disease, peace or war. He is the Healer.’[{6}](#) The Yoruba people say that in the afterlife the person-soul, the Oli, will give account of itself before Olodumare the supreme God. Since, as anthropologists testify, these convictions appear to have been arrived at apart from Christian or Muslim teaching, they must derive from God’s universal general revelation in nature, providence, and the implanted moral law.”[{7}](#)

## **What can't be known**

If all this *can* be known through nature, is there anything that *can't*? Yes there is. Although through nature we can know some things *about* God, we cannot know how to get to *know* God personally, how to find redemption and reconciliation. This is why there had to be *special* revelation.

## **Special Revelation**

As I have noted, God has revealed Himself through nature, but through nature we cannot know how to be reconciled to God. God had to speak in a special way to tell us how we may be redeemed. "Special revelation is redemptive revelation," says Carl Henry. "It publishes the good tidings that the holy and merciful God promises salvation as a divine gift to man who cannot save himself (OT) and that he has now fulfilled that promise in the gift of his Son in whom all men are called to believe (NT). The gospel is news that the incarnate Logos has borne the sins of doomed men, has died in their stead, and has risen for their justification. This is the fixed center of special redemptive revelation." [\[8\]](#)

## **Personal**

What is the nature of special revelation? First we should note that it is the communication of one Person to other persons. It isn't simply a series of propositions setting forth a theological system. This is why special revelation finds its culmination in Jesus, for in Him we are confronted with the Person of God. We'll talk more about this later.

## **Verbal and Propositional**

It has been the understanding of the church historically that God has spoken verbally to His creatures. Words have been exchanged; rational ideas have been put forward in understandable sentences. Not *all* revelation is easy to understand, of course. Meaning is sometimes shrouded in

mystery. But important truths are made clear.

That God would reveal Himself through verbal revelation isn't surprising. First, He is a *Person*, and persons communicate with other persons with a desire to extend and receive information. Second, His clear desire is to make friends with us. He wants to restore us to a proper relationship with Him. It's hard to imagine a friendship between two people who don't communicate clearly with one another.

Implicit in this understanding of revelation is the belief that it contains propositional truths; that is, statements that are informative and have truth value.

This isn't to say the Bible is only propositions. Douglas Groothuis notes that it also contains questions, imperatives, requests, and exclamations. However, in the words of Carl Henry: "Regardless of the parables, allegories, emotive phrases and rhetorical questions used by these [biblical] writers, their literary devices have a logical point which can be propositionally formulated and is objectively true or false."[{9}](#) So when Jeremiah says that God "has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm!" (32:17), we know that the image of God's "arm" speaks of His power active in His creation. The truth "God acts with power in His creation" is behind the imagery.

### **Modern ideas**

In recent centuries, however, as confidence in man's reason overshadowed confidence in God's ability to communicate, the understanding of revelation has undergone change. Some hold that revelation is to be understood in terms of *personal encounter*, of God encountering people so as to leave them with a "liberating assurance. . . .This assurance – 'openness to the future', Bultmann called it – was equated with faith."[{10}](#) Such an encounter can come as a result of reading Scripture, but Scripture itself isn't the verbal revelation of God. Even

in evangelical churches where the Bible is preached as God's Word written, people sometimes put more faith in their "relationship" with God than in what God has said. "Don't worry me with doctrine," is the attitude. "I just want to have a relationship with Jesus." It's fine to have a relationship with Jesus. But try to imagine a relationship between two people here on earth in which no information is exchanged.

Those who hold this view draw a line between the personal and the propositional as if they cannot mix. In his evaluation, J.I. Packer says that this is an absurd idea.

*"Revelation is certainly more than the giving of theological information, but it is not and cannot be less. Personal friendship between God and man grows just as human friendships do – namely, through talking; and talking means making informative statements, and informative statements are propositions. . . . To say that revelation is non-propositional is actually to depersonalize it. . . . To maintain that we may know God without God actually speaking to us in words is really to deny that God is personal, or at any rate that knowing Him is a truly personal relationship."*[{11}](#)

Another idea about the Bible in particular which has become commonplace in liberal theology is that the Bible is the product of the inspired ideas of men (a "quickenning of conscience"[{12}](#)) rather than truths inspired by God. If this were the case, however, one might expect the Bible to give hints that it is just the religious reflections of men. But the witness of Scripture throughout is that it is the message of God *from* God. Here we don't see men simply reflecting on life and the world and drawing conclusions about God. Rather, we're confronted by a God who steps into people's lives, speaking words of instruction or promise or condemnation.

# Modes of Special Revelation

Special revelation has taken different forms: the spoken Word, the written Word, and the Word made flesh.

## Spoken Word

In the Garden of Eden, God spoke to Adam directly. (Gen. 3:8ff) He spoke to Abraham (e.g. Gen. 12:1–3), to Moses (Ex. 3:4ff), and to many prophets of the nation of Israel following that. Amos said that God did nothing “without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. . . . The Lord has spoken,” he said. “Who can but prophesy?” (3:7–8) Prophets were primarily forth-tellers, relaying God’s Word to those for whom it was intended. [{13}](#)

## Written word

God also had His prophets write down what He said. The writings of Moses were kept in the Tabernacle (Dt. 31:24–26), read in the hearing of the Israelites (Dt. 31:11), and kept as references by future kings of Israel (Dt. 17:18ff). They are quoted throughout the OT (Josh. 1:7; 1 Kings 2:3; Mal.4:4). Joshua put his teachings of God’s ordinances with “the book of the law of God” (Josh. 24:26), and Samuel did the same (1 Sam. 10:25). The writer of Chronicles spoke of those earlier writings (1 Chron. 29:29), and later, Daniel referred to these books (Dan. 9:2,6,11). Solomon’s proverbs and songs are mentioned in 1 Kings 4:32. The writing of the New Testament took a much shorter time than the Old Testament, so we don’t see generations down the line referring back to the writings of their fathers. But we do see Peter speaking of the writings of Paul (2 Pe. 3:15–16), and Paul referring (it appears) to Luke’s writings in 1 Tim. 5:18.

## Word made flesh

So God has spoken, and His words have been written down. The third mode is the Word made flesh. The writer of Hebrews says

that, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son . . . ." (1:1-2a) All God's will wasn't given at once; it came in portions at various times. J.I. Packer says, "Then, in New Testament times, just as all roads were said to lead to Rome, so all the diverse and seemingly divergent strands of Old Testament revelation were found to lead to Jesus Christ."[{14}](#)

Jesus has been the mediator of revelation since the beginning. "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matt. 11:27) Peter says it was the Spirit of Christ who spoke through the Old Testament prophets. (1 Pe. 1:11) But these were God's words given through men. In the Incarnation we received the fullest expression of His word directly. Jesus was and is the Word made flesh. (John 1:1,14)

Jesus is the supreme revelation because He is one with the Father: He is God speaking. He spoke the words the Father taught Him. (John 12:49; 14:10), and He summed up his ministry with the phrase "I have given them your word." (John 17:14) Abraham Kuyper summed it up beautifully: "Christ does not argue, he *declares*; he does not demonstrate, he *shows* and *illustrates*; he does not analyze, but with enrapturing symbolism *unveils* the truth."[{15}](#)

But Jesus doesn't reveal God just in His words but also in His person – in His character and the way He lived. Says the late Bernard Ramm: "The attitudes, action, and dispositions of Christ so mirrored the divine nature that to have seen such in Christ is to have seen the reflection of the divine nature." He continues:

*Christ's attitudes mirror the Father's attitudes; Christ's affections mirror the Father's affections; Christ's love mirrors the Father's love. Christ's impatience with unbelief is the divine impatience with unbelief. Christ's wrath upon*

*hypocrisy is the divine wrath upon hypocrisy. Christ's tears over Jerusalem is the divine compassion over Jerusalem. Christ's judgment upon Jerusalem or upon the Pharisees is the divine judgment upon such hardness of heart and spiritual wickedness.* {16}

As the Son spoke the Word of the Father so clearly because He knows perfectly the mind of the Father, so He also reflected the character of the Father being of the same nature.

In Christ, also, we see revelation as *event*. He carried out the will of the Father, thus revealing things about the Father. The cross not only accomplished our redemption; it also demonstrated the love of God. Jesus revealed God's glory in changing the water to wine in Cana (John 2:11) and in His resurrection (Rom. 6:4).

The total redeeming work of Christ, therefore, revealed the Father in word, in character, and in deed.

## **Modern Hurdles**

There are a couple of ways modern thought has served to undermine our confidence in the Bible as the written revelation of God. One way has to do with the knowability of historical events; another with the final authority for truth.

First, the matter of history and knowledge. In the Enlightenment era, philosophers such as Ren Descartes taught that only those ideas that could be held without doubt could count as knowledge. This created a problem for Scripture, for its major doctrines were revealed through *historical events*, and the knowledge of history is open to doubt logically speaking. History is constantly changing. Because of such change, the different contexts of those living long ago and of the historian negatively affects the historian's ability to truly comprehend the past. At best, historical knowledge can only be probable. Religious ideas, on the other hand, seemed

to be eternal; they are fixed and unchanging. It was believed that they could be known through reason better than through historical accounts. The classic statement of this position was made by the eighteenth century German, Gotthold Lessing, when he said, “The accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.”[{17}](#) (“Accidental” means just the opposite of necessary; such things didn’t logically have to happen as they did.)

Thus, biblical teachings were put on the side of probability, of opinion, rather than on the side of *knowledge*. Since it was thought that religious truths *ought* to be on the side of logical *certainty* and *knowledge*, people began to wonder whether the Bible could truly be the revelation of God.

The fact is, however, that we *can* know truth through historical texts; we find it there all the time. I *know* I was born in December of 1955 and that George Washington was our first president – even though these truths aren’t what we call logically *necessary*, such as with mathematical equations. Although historical knowledge as such doesn’t give the rational certainty our Enlightenment forebears might have wanted, it doesn’t have to in order to be counted as knowledge.[{18}](#) Knowledge doesn’t *have* to be logically *necessary* in order to be *trustworthy*.[{19}](#) There is no reason God cannot make Himself known through the lives of people and nations, or that the historical records of that revelation cannot convey objective truth to subsequent generations.

Nonetheless, confidence in Scripture was weakened. Wherein shall our confidence lie, then, with respect to religious matters? If we can’t know truth through historical accounts, but must rely on our own reason, our reason becomes supreme over Scripture. The authority for truth lies within us, not in the Bible.

This subjectivity is the second outgrowth of the Enlightenment that affects our understanding of revelation and the Bible.

Now it is *I* who have final authority for what is true. For some people it is our *reason* that is supreme. The philosopher, Immanuel Kant, taught that God speaks through our reason, and our worship of Him consists in our proper moral behavior. For others it is our *feelings* that are supreme. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for example, put the emphasis on our feelings of dependence and of oneness with God. For him, to make Scripture authoritative was to elevate reason above faith, and that was unacceptable. Thus, one camp elevated *reason* and said that historical accounts (such as those in Scripture) cannot provide the certainty we require, while the other camp elevated *feeling* and rejected final confidence in Scripture as too much in keeping with reason. Both ways the Bible lost out.

The turn inward was accentuated by the philosophy of existentialism. This philosophy had an influence on Christian theology. Theologian Rudolph Bultmann was "the outstanding exponent of the amalgamation of theology and existentialism," according to Philip Edgecumbe Hughes. The Bible was stripped of the supernatural, leaving little at all to go by with respect to the person of Jesus. But this didn't matter since Bultmann's existentialism turned the focus inward on our individual experience of the encounter with God.

The influence of this shift is still felt today. For too many of us, our confidence rests in our *own* understanding of things with little regard for establishing a theological foundation by which to measure our experience. On the one hand we get confused by disagreements over doctrines, and on the other our society is telling us to find truth within ourselves. How often do we find Christians making their bottom line in any disagreement over Christian teaching or activity, "I just feel this is true (or right)"? Now, it's true we can focus so much on the propositional, doctrinal content of Christianity that it becomes lifeless. It does indeed engage us on the level of personal experience. But as one scholar notes, "What is at stake is the actual *truth* of the biblical witness; not in the

first place its truth *for me* . . . but its truth as coming *from God*. . . . The objective character of Scripture as truth given by God comes before and validates my subjective experience of its truth.”[\[20\]](#) If we make our individual selves and our experiences normative for our faith, Christianity will have as many different faces as there are Christians! Our personal predilections and interests will become the substance of our faith. Any unity among us will be unity of *experience* rather than unity of the *faith*.

In response to the subjective turn of thinking, we hold that *reason* is insufficient as the source of knowledge of God. We could not know of such doctrines as the Incarnation and the Trinity unless God told us. Likewise, making *feelings* the final authority is death for theology, for there is no way to judge between personal experiences unless there is an objective authority. We have the needed authority in the revealed Word of God. Because we *can* know objective truth about God, we needn't look within ourselves to discover truth.

One final point. God has revealed Himself for a reason, that we might know Him and His desires and ways. We can have confidence that the Holy Spirit, Who inspired the writing of Scripture, has also been able to preserve it through the centuries so as to provide us with the same truth He provided those in ancient times.

God has spoken, through general revelation and special. We can know Him and His truth.

## **Notes**

1. Leon Morris, *I Believe in Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 10-11.
2. Morris, 33.
3. Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 51.
4. Demarest, 242-243.

5. Warren Lewis, ed., *Global Congress of World Religions* (Barrytown, N.Y.: Unification Theological Seminary, 1978), 126.
6. Bolaji Idowe, *African Traditional Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1975), 151. Quoted in Demarest, 243.
7. Demarest, 243.
8. Walter, A. Elwell, ed. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), s.v. "Revelation, Special," by Carl F. H. Henry.
9. Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 113.
10. J.I. Packer, *God Has Spoken: Revelation and the Bible*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 87.
11. Packer, 52-53.
12. Packer, 86.
13. Other modes of special revelation which can be categorized as the word spoken were dreams, visions, and theophanies. Cf. Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 44-48.
14. Packer, 81.
15. Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 287. Quoted in Bernard Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 111.
16. Ramm, 113.
17. Philip E. Hughes, "The Truth of Scripture and the Problem of Historical Relativity," in D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 178.
18. See my article ["Confident Belief: What Does It Mean To Know Truth?"](#), Probe Ministries, 2001. Available on the Web at [www.probe.org/confident-belief/](http://www.probe.org/confident-belief/).
19. See the above article.
20. Hughes, 183.

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# Reiki: A Christian Perspective

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn offers an overview and critical Christian worldview evaluation of Reiki energy medicine, an alternative health therapy that has grown in popularity in recent years.*



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

## What is Reiki?

In the past twenty-five years there has been a huge increase in both the general acceptance and public availability of various types of alternative health therapies. Although some of these therapies may be beneficial, others do little good, and some are downright harmful. Under the broad umbrella of alternative medicine there are a variety of therapies that might loosely be referred to as “energy medicine”:

Energy medicine is a broad field covering a variety of therapies from many parts of the world. While each is based on the existence of a nonphysical energy pervading the universe, the nature of the energy, the form of therapies, and how healing is believed to take place varies from culture to culture.[\[1\]](#)

This energy is variously referred to as *prana* in India, *chi* in China, and *ki* in Japan. One form of energy medicine that has been growing in popularity is called *Reiki*. According to some, *rei* means “universal,” and *ki* means “life force energy.” But the International Center for Reiki Training goes further, declaring that “Rei” is more accurately understood to mean “supernatural knowledge or spiritual consciousness . . . the wisdom that comes from God or the Higher Self.” Thus,

according to the Center, “it is the God-consciousness called Rei that guides the life force called Ki in the practice we call Reiki.”[{2}](#)

Reiki was discovered, or perhaps rediscovered, by Dr. Mikao Usui during a mystical experience at a mountain retreat in early twentieth century Japan. Some claim it is the same method of healing used by both the Buddha and Jesus, although the records of this have been lost.[{3}](#)

So how does Reiki work? To put it generally, and somewhat simply, Reiki claims to work by removing obstructions to the free flow of life force energy throughout the body. Such obstructions, which arise through negative thoughts, actions, and feelings, are believed to be the fundamental cause of illness and disease. But “Reiki clears, straightens and heals the energy pathways, thus allowing the life force to flow in a healthy and natural way.”[{4}](#) In this way, Reiki is believed to enhance physical, mental and emotional health.

In order to tap into this power and learn to channel Reiki one must first receive four attunements from a Reiki Master during a First Degree Reiki training session. These attunements are alleged to open “subtle mental and physical energy systems” that prepare the recipient “to channel Universal Life Force Energy.”[{5}](#) Supposedly, this creates a permanent connection with Reiki, thus allowing the recipient to channel this energy for life.

At this point, some may be wondering if there is any scientific evidence that corroborates the existence of this energy. Let’s look at the evidence.

## **Is there Scientific Support for Reiki?**

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some proponents of life force energy claimed it was a form of electromagnetic radiation (of which light and heat are familiar examples).[{6}](#)

Of course, electromagnetic radiation is a real, physical phenomenon of the world in which we live. But should it be identified with life force energy? The answer is no, and today most of those who believe in such energy would say the same. After all, such energy is generally believed to be non-physical. But electromagnetic radiation is a form of physical energy.

Still, many Reiki practitioners believe that good evidence supports the existence of life force energy. For example, the aura is said to be “a field of subtle life-force energy that surrounds the body of every living being.”[\[7\]](#) Those properly attuned to this energy often claim that they can feel a person’s aura. A few even claim to see auras.

But it’s one thing to make such a claim, quite another to demonstrate it under properly supervised conditions. In one study, ten people who claimed to see auras were tested against a control group of ten people who made no such claim. “Four identical screens were placed in a room with volunteers who took turns standing behind one or another of them.”[\[8\]](#) Those who claimed to see auras believed that they could detect which screen the volunteer was standing behind. But out of 720 attempts, they only gave 185 correct answers – an accuracy rate consistent with guessing. The control group, however, gave 196 correct answers – eleven more than those who claimed to see auras! Apparently, not everyone who claims to see auras can actually demonstrate this claim.

But haven’t auras been photographed? One author claims, “Kirlian photography . . . enables us to . . . photograph auras.”[\[9\]](#) However, when such photographs are investigated by independent scientists, the images are seen to have a completely physical explanation. Also, Kirlian auras have been recorded for some things not usually believed to have a field of life force energy, like pennies and paper clips. Such evidence casts doubt on the claim that auras have been photographed.

Thus, if there is such a thing as life force energy, it has so far eluded the detection of scientists. Such energy may still exist, and science may one day verify as much. But for now, scientific support is lacking. Still, some argue that “the proof of whether a therapeutic procedure is effective rests not on the gathering of data alone but on the client’s actual experience.”[{10}](#) In other words, if Reiki works, such life force energy must exist!

## What About Reiki’s Success?

For many people, the most powerful evidence of Reiki’s effectiveness as an alternative health therapy are the testimonials of those who claim to have been personally helped by it. Consider what happened to Alex. He was in chronic pain due to a motorcycle accident that resulted in three crushed vertebrae. He attended a Reiki class, and after his first initiation was free of persistent pain![{11}](#)

How does one explain such a story? Does it prove that Reiki really works? While it cannot be denied that there is abundant anecdotal evidence of Reiki’s healing power, we must be very careful before we credit Reiki with relieving Alex’s pain. “With the exception of unsubstantiated opinion, anecdotal evidence is the least useful...evidence available to judge medical therapies.”[{12}](#)

This isn’t just the opinion of conventional Western medicine. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine acknowledges that there is a “hierarchy in the different types of evidence for therapies, with anecdotal at the bottom.”[{13}](#) Thus, anecdotal evidence counts for something, but it hardly *proves* that Reiki is an effective method of healing.

So how might we explain Alex’s pain relief? Although there are various possibilities, for the sake of time we will only mention two. First, we must honestly acknowledge that maybe Reiki *was* responsible for the elimination of Alex’s pain.

After all, it was immediately after receiving Reiki that Alex felt relief. However, it's crucial to recognize that there is another very sensible and well-documented explanation. Quite simply, Alex's pain relief may have been due to the "placebo effect."

"The placebo effect is the combination of factors that give therapies beneficial effects, but which are not caused by any direct physiological action."[\[14\]](#) A classic example is the sugar pill. In itself it can neither cure illness nor relieve pain. However, when given to a patient by a trusted, confident physician, who says it's just what the patient needs to recover from his or her ailments, it can be incredibly effective in relieving a wide variety of psychosomatic disorders. Since such disorders have a psychological or emotional (rather than physiological) cause, they can be relieved without directly treating the patient's body.

Many studies indicate that the placebo effect can account for a full third (or more) "of the improvements found with any therapy."[\[15\]](#) But can it explain Alex's sudden relief from pain? Indeed it can. Pain can be treated very effectively with placebos.

Of course, some may argue that the really important thing is not so much *why* Alex was healed, but simply *that* he was healed! To some degree, I can sympathize with this argument. But it does have problems.

## **Should Christians Be Concerned About Reiki?**

Most people, myself included, consider physical health to be good and valuable. All things being equal, it's better to be healthy than sick. But if this is so, then does it really matter *how*, or *why*, the sick are healed? Isn't the only important thing simply *that* they're healed? And how can anyone object to Reiki if it helps accomplish this?

These are important questions and they deserve a sympathetic response. But first, let's consider an important question: Is physical health *always* preferable to sickness? After all, most people consider such qualities as compassion, patience, courage, and love to be great and noble virtues. But what if there were people who could only acquire such virtues through the pain and suffering brought on by physical illness? So long as they're healthy, they will lack these virtues. But if they're sick, they will acquire them. Let me suggest that if you truly value these virtues, you might decide that it's better to be morally and spiritually healthy (though physically sick), than physically healthy alone.

Let's now return to our initial question. Does it really matter *if, how, and why* Reiki works? I think it does. Suppose there is no genuine power in Reiki. Suppose it "works" merely as a placebo. In that case, would you want to send a loved one to a Reiki practitioner to be treated for strep throat? Without proper treatment this would likely result in rheumatic fever, permanent heart disease, and maybe even death. Real antibiotics are needed; a placebo cannot cure this kind of infection.[{16}](#) Under circumstances such as these, I suspect that no one would want their loved ones treated by Reiki alone.

But now suppose that there *is* genuine power in Reiki. Is it not important to know *where* this power comes from and *what* it is? What if Reiki offers physical health only at the expense of spiritual health? Should Christians be concerned about this?

The International Center for Reiki Training describes Reiki as "spiritually guided life force energy."[{17}](#) After receiving the necessary attunements, a Reiki practitioner can channel this energy for life. The Center describes the attunement process as "a powerful spiritual experience" that "is guided by the Rei or God-consciousness." What's more, this experience "is also attended by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings

who help implement the process.”[{18}](#)

What are Christians to make of this? Should we be concerned about the nature of this attunement process? Exactly who, or what, are these Reiki spirit guides? Should we be cautious about becoming involved with these spirits? Or should we simply trust that they’re doing God’s work? After all, doesn’t *all* healing come from God?

## **Does All Healing Come From God?**

Does all healing come from God? The International Center for Reiki Training declares that “Reiki comes from God.”[{19}](#) But if we read the material on their Web site, we see that the Center advocates an Eastern or New Age view of “God.” This view is radically different from that of the Bible. For example, the Center equates “God” with man’s Higher Self, thus blurring the distinction between God and humanity that is taught in the Bible. Practically speaking, this difference between the God of the Bible and the “God” of Eastern or New Age philosophy means that adherents of these two systems are asserting something very different when they claim to have been healed by God.

The God of the Bible is a personal being, capable of miraculously healing people according to His will (Exodus 15:26). Nevertheless, the Bible does not teach that *all* signs and wonders come from God. On the contrary, Jesus warned His disciples that in the last days there would be false Christs and false prophets who would show great signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul linked such events to the power of Satan (2 Thess. 2:9).

But does Satan have the power to perform marvelous healings? Indeed, it appears that he might. In Revelation 13 we learn that after receiving power from Satan, the beast is healed of

a near-fatal head wound (vv. 2-3). The context seems to imply that this amazing healing is the work of Satan. From a biblical perspective, this raises an important question about the healing power of Reiki. Exactly where does this healing energy come from?

We've already seen that there is not convincing evidence to regard this energy as a physical phenomenon. Biblically, this seems to leave only two main options. Either the energy comes from God, or it does not. Although the International Center for Reiki Training declares that "Reiki comes from God," we've already seen that this cannot be the God of the Bible. Is it possible, then, that the source of this energy is demonic?

As I mentioned previously, the ability to channel life force energy involves first going through an attunement process. The Center claims that these attunements are attended "by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings who help implement the process."<sup>{20}</sup> Is it possible that by involving themselves with spirit guides, Reiki practitioners may unwittingly be opening themselves, as well as their patients, to demonic influences? Although it may not be possible to categorically affirm that the source of Reiki energy medicine is demonic, the Bible, in condemning all forms of spiritism, does seem to at least allow for this possibility (see Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:9-14; Acts 16:16-18). Therefore, it seems to me that Christians should take the wiser, safer, and probably even healthier course of action, and carefully avoid all involvement with Reiki energy medicine.

## Notes

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  8. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 197.
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  12. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 115. I have relied heavily on chapter 10, "How Science Tests Therapies and Remedies," in this section.
  13. *Ibid.*, 116.
  14. *Ibid.*, 118.
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  17. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).
  18. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html).
  19. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).
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# Martial Arts – A Christian View

*Dr. Zukeran looks at the popular activity of marital arts from a biblical worldview perspective. He determines that Christians may safely participate in martial arts as long as they distance themselves from the Eastern philosophical ideas associated with most forms of martial arts.*

## The Origins and Popularity of the Martial Arts

Gliding across the Pacific, the Asian martial arts have become part of the mainstream of American culture. Today there are an estimated two to three million practitioners in the United States, 40 percent of which are children between the ages of 7 and 14.<sup>{1}</sup> The martial arts industry generates annual revenue topping the \$1 billion mark.

Why this rise in popularity? For one thing, people today are interested in and more willing to accept Eastern ideas. What was once considered “foreign” is now embraced as old, and thus “tried and true.” Advocates extol the physical benefits and self-discipline that result from its practices. Movies further popularize martial arts with films such as *Enter the Dragon*, *Rush Hour*, and the Oscar winning *Crouching Tiger-Hidden Dragon*. The rise in crime also has people seeking to learn ways to protect themselves and their loved ones.

There are few written records regarding the origin of martial arts. These are interwoven with myths or verbal traditions that make it difficult to accurately trace the record. Archaeological evidence indicates that the martial arts may

have begun as early as 2000 BC in the Fertile Crescent.[{2}](#) From there it traveled eastward to India and China.

The father of the Asian martial arts according to the most popular tradition is an Indian Buddhist Monk named Bodhidharma who arrived in China in the late fifth century A.D. Settling in a monastery in the Songshan Mountains located in the Kingdom of Wei, he developed a series of mind-body exercises designed to improve the health of the monks and assist them in meditation. Based on the movements of different real and mythological animals and incorporating concepts from Taoism and Zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma taught a style of combat known as Shao-lin gung fu. Gradually, Shao-lin gung fu migrated from the temples to the Chinese populace. It was adapted and refined as it spread across the country and eventually, to the world.

Martial arts have been very popular among Christians. Scot Conway, founder of the Christian Martial Arts Foundation, estimates between 50 and 70 percent of American martial artists – and roughly 20 percent of all instructors – consider themselves Christians.[{3}](#) But other Christians argue that the philosophy of Asian martial arts is wholly incompatible with biblical teaching. They point to the origin of Eastern mysticism as reason for Christians to avoid any level of participation. Still others say Jesus' exhortation to "turn the other cheek" shows that using force is wrong.

How should a discerning Christian respond? Can we participate in the martial arts and be consistent with our biblical convictions?

## **Differences in the Martial Arts**

Should Christians participate in the martial arts? In order to make an informed decision, it is helpful to recognize that there are two basic categories for martial arts. It is important to note that the division is not rigid; in some

cases, values from one type may be blended or subtly integrated into the other. But for simplicity and clarity, we will use the two main groups.

One type, called “internal” or “soft” martial art, focuses on inner spiritual development, balance, form, and mental awareness. This soft art emphasizes two principles – that the mind dictates action and that the opponent’s own force is used to defeat him or her.[\[4\]](#) Students are taught Taoist and Buddhist philosophical principles such as the “chi” force and the “yin and yang” concept. Through breath control, soft art practitioners seek to “collect, cultivate, and store” this chi force which is located in the body. Some believe they can use the chi force to strike down opponents from a distance. Examples of internal or soft martial arts include the Chinese Tai-chi Chuan and the Japanese Aikido.

The second category of martial arts is called the “external” or “hard” art. This type teaches that physical reactions precede mental reaction. It also promotes the idea that an opponent’s force should be met with an equal but opposite force. While the hard martial art system also uses breath control like the soft arts, the emphasis is on developing strength and quickness through the use of straight and linear body motions.[\[5\]](#) The hard arts include certain forms of Chinese kung fu, and Shao Lin boxing. The Japanese arts were adapted from Chinese kung fu. The hard arts include Ju-jitsu, Judo, Karate, Ninjitsu, and Kendo. The Korean martial arts include Tae Kwon Do and Tang Soo Do.

While there are religious concepts in the martial arts, few schools would qualify as religious movements, and few seek to meet the religious needs of the student. However, a little exposure to Eastern mysticism may lead to greater involvement in the future. So as a general rule, Christians should avoid the internal or soft martial arts because of the concentration on the teachings of Eastern religions and philosophies. Several schools even utilize the occult techniques of

meditation and altering consciousness. External or hard martial arts, on the other hand, concentrate primarily on physical training. These physical lessons usually do not conflict with our biblical convictions.

Before joining a dojo or martial arts gym, one needs to know the worldview of the instructor. Even some hard martial arts teachers incorporate Eastern ideas and occult practices into their styles. Look for instructors who teach the physical movements but exclude the Eastern ideas.

## **Eastern Concepts in the Martial Arts**

Since martial arts are traditionally based on the Eastern philosophies of Taoism and Zen Buddhism, several key concepts can be prominent in the classes. Let's look at three of them.

The concept of "chi" or "ki" is central in some martial arts. Chi is believed to be the impersonal life energy that flows throughout the universe and pulses through the human body. By harnessing the chi in individuals, martial artists believe they can perform at higher levels of ability or can release chi power resulting in devastating effects. Chi is controlled through specialized breathing techniques, gymnastics, and meditation.

Another common martial arts teaching is the Taoist (pronounced "dow-ist") concept of yin and yang, that nature consists of conflicting elements which function in perfect balance to one another. As mankind should live in harmony with the Tao, so the martial artist must strike hard with firmness at times, but at other times accept the energy of the opponent, then reroute the energy, causing the opponent to defeat himself. This redirection allows a relatively gentle resolution, and brings one into harmony with the opponent and the flow of nature.

A Christian must also avoid the practice of Eastern

meditation. The goal of this type of meditation is to empty one's mind, alter one's consciousness, or unite with the impersonal divine. Scott Shaw writes, "Meditation is a sacred process. It is the method used by the spiritual warrior to calm the mind and to connect the body and mind with the infinite." [\[6\]](#) This greater awareness supposedly enables the martial artist to increase his or her performance. In many schools, the combined use of Eastern meditation and the chi are essential to mastering the art. (Not all martial arts use meditation for this purpose. Some use it to focus on the lesson or task at hand such as picturing the action in your mind before physically carrying it out.)

But the mysticism of Taoism and Buddhism is not compatible with Christianity; neither is Eastern meditation the same as biblical meditation. The Bible does not teach altering our consciousness or emptying our minds. Instead, the goal of Scriptural meditation is to *fill* our minds with God's Word. (Psalm 1:2) Another danger of Eastern meditation is that it can open our minds to the occult, a practice the Bible prohibits. The Bible does not teach the Eastern idea of chi, that there is an impersonal life energy of the universe within us. Rather, the Bible says that each individual has an eternal soul that will either go to heaven or to hell based on whether or not they have a relationship with Christ.

## **Self Defense or Turn the Other Cheek?**

Besides concerns about the role of Eastern religion in the martial arts, some people think martial arts encourages violence. Martial arts teach fighting, and so are contrary to the Bible's instructions about pacifism. Is there ever a time when Christians can use force?

Christian pacifists believe it is always wrong to injure another person. Many interpret Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:38-48, where he states, "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other

also . . .”, to mean never use violence. This is exemplified in the life of Christ who suffered silently and did not retaliate while enduring torture even unto death.

Despite these arguments, the proper interpretation of the Matthew 5 passage does not teach pacifism. In Jewish culture, to be struck or slapped on the cheek was an insult (2 Corinthians 11:20). Jesus was teaching that when a disciple is insulted for being a follower of Christ, the disciple should not retaliate with force. However, being insulted is a very different situation from being attacked by a mugger or your wife being attacked by a rapist.

In the Gospels, Christ did not resist violent attacks because of His unique mission to be the sacrifice for our sins. However, in the Old Testament, the preincarnate Christ judged wicked nations with the sword. (Judges 6:11-16). Not only did He smite His enemies, He aided Israel in being an instrument of judgment as well. Revelation predicts the glorified Christ coming to judge the nations with a sword. Also in the New Testament, Jesus and His disciples did not teach military leaders to withdraw from the military (e.g., Matthew 8:8-13, Luke 3:14). In Romans 13, Paul writes that the government has the right to “bear the sword.” In other words, a righteous government can use capital punishment when an offender is worthy of death.

Therefore, complete pacifism is not the spirit of Christian teaching. In fact, the most loving thing to do when a friend or family member is attacked by a harmful foe is to risk one’s life and use force to restrain the enemy. If a man is attacking a child, or a woman is being raped, it would be morally wrong not to sacrifice your life and restrain the assailant even with deadly force if necessary.

The Bible allows a Christian to use self-defense and force when confronted with a criminal act. Force may not be used for revenge or out of unjust anger. Christians who engage in the

martial arts should have a clear understanding of this. The use of martial arts must be for self-defense and protecting loved ones from acts of evil. One should never use their fighting system to instigate combat or seek revenge.

## **Should Christians Participate in the Martial Arts?**

To summarize what I have covered so far, I believe that the physical aspect of martial arts can be separated from the Eastern religious and philosophical teachings. Also, I believe the Bible teaches us that there is a time when we are called to use force, even deadly force to halt acts of evil.

Here are some practical guidelines if one is deciding to participate in the martial arts or if one is selecting a school. First, a person should check his or her motives. One should not engage in martial arts if one's motives include becoming a tough guy, showing off, or gaining revenge. Parents should make it clear to their children that the martial arts are never to be used for affectation or for instigating conflicts. Unworthy motives are detrimental to one's walk with the Lord and witness to others. Positive reasons include physical conditioning, discipline, and self-defense. Develop parameters for limiting the use of force. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. Force is used in defensive purposes only.

Generally speaking, Christians should avoid the soft or internal form of martial arts because they tend to emphasize Eastern philosophical and religious ideas. External or hard martial arts emphasize the physical training. However, it would be wise to be on guard because many instructors of external martial arts may incorporate Eastern mysticism in to their system. Also, one should be careful to avoid the possibility of being enticed to learn about Eastern spirituality as they advance.

Find out the worldview of the instructor. The role of religion in the martial arts depends mostly on the instructor, so choosing a proper instructor is the most important factor. Some instructors claim to teach the physical aspect only. However, as students advance, instructors begin to incorporate Eastern religious ideas to help students attain a higher level of performance. Observe advanced classes to see if they incorporate Eastern practices. There is also helpful information through Christian organizations such as Karate for Christ and the Christian Martial Arts Foundation.

The Christian life involves caring for the nurture and growth of our mind, spirit, and our body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. I have benefited greatly from my time in the martial arts. It has provided me great exercise, discipline, and opportunities to witness for Christ. There were times in my life when I had to use force to restrain hostile persons or protect loved ones. I believe that the martial arts can be beneficial to Christians who are informed and mature.

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**See Also:**

["Martial Arts and Just War Theory"](#)

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# Slavery in America – How Did the Founders and Early Christians Regard It?

*Kerby Anderson presents a thoughtful review of the attitude towards slavery held by many of our founders and early Christian leaders. Although a tragic chapter in our history, he encourages us to understand that many opposed slavery from the beginning believing that all men are in fact created equal.*

## Introduction

Slavery has been found throughout the history of the world. Most of the major empires in the world enslaved millions. They made slaves not only of their citizens but of people in the countries they conquered.

Slavery is also a sad and tragic chapter in American history that we must confront honestly. Unfortunately, that is often not how it is done. History classes frequently teach that the founders and framers were evil men and hypocrites. Therefore, we no longer need to study them, nor do we need to study the principles they established in founding this country and framing the Constitution.

In fact, I have met many students in high school and college who have no interest in learning about the founders of this country and the framers of the Constitution merely because some were slaveholders. But I have also found that they do not

know the whole story of the struggle over slavery in this country.

In reaction to this secular revisionist teaching in the public schools and universities, a Christian perspective has been offered that does not square with history. Some Christians, wanting to emphasize the biblical principles of the founding of this country, seem to have turned a blind eye to the evil of slavery. Slavery was wrong and represented an incomplete founding of liberty in this country.

In this article we will look at slavery in America and attempt to tell the story fairly and honestly. At the same time, we will bring forth facts and stories that have been lost from the current revisionist teaching on slavery.

First, let's put slavery in America in historical perspective. Historians estimate that approximately 11 million Africans were transported to the New World. Of these 4 million went to Brazil, 2.5 million to Spanish colonies, 2 million to the British West Indies, and 500,000 to the United States.

Although it is sometimes taught that the founders did not believe that blacks were human or deserved the same rights as whites, this is not true. Actually, the founders believed that blacks had the same inalienable rights as other persons in America. James Otis of Massachusetts said in 1764 that "The colonists are by the law of nature freeborn, as indeed all men are, white or black."[{1}](#)

Alexander Hamilton also talked about the equality of blacks with whites. He said, "their natural faculties are probably as good as ours. . . . The contempt we have been taught to entertain for the blacks, makes us fancy many things that are founded neither in reason nor experience."[{2}](#)

As we will see, many worked tirelessly for the abolition of slavery and wanted a society that truly practiced the belief that "all men are created equal."

# The Founders' View of Slavery

Let's see what the founders and framers really thought about slavery and what they did to bring about its end. Here are a few of their comments.

Slavery was often condemned from the pulpits of America as revolutionary preachers frequently spoke out against it. One patriot preacher said, "The Deity hath bestowed upon them and us the same natural rights as men."[3](#)

Benjamin Franklin said that slavery "is an atrocious debasement of human nature."[4](#) He and Benjamin Rush went on to found the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery.

Benjamin Rush's desire to abolish slavery was based on biblical principles. He stated: "Domestic slavery is repugnant to the principles of Christianity." He went on to say, "It is rebellion again the authority of a common Father. It is a practical denial of the extent and efficacy of the death of a common Savior. It is an usurpation of the prerogative of the great Sovereign of the universe who has solemnly claimed an exclusive property in the souls of men."[5](#)

John Adams said, "Every measure of prudence, therefore, ought to be assumed for the eventual total extirpation of slavery from the United States . . . . I have, through my whole life, held the practice of slavery in . . . abhorrence."[6](#)

James Madison in his speech before the Constitutional Convention said, "We have seen the mere distinction of colour made in the most enlightened period of time, a ground of the most oppressive dominion ever exercised by man over man."[7](#)

During the American Revolution, many slaves won their freedom. Alexander Hamilton served on George Washington's staff and supported the plan to enlist slaves in the army. He wrote to John Jay that "An essential part of the plan is to give them

their freedom with their muskets . . . for the dictates of humanity and true policy equally interest me in favor of this unfortunate class of men.”{8} Blacks from every part of the country (except South Carolina and Georgia) won their freedom through military service.{9}

After the Revolution, many Americans who were enjoying new freedom from England were struck by the contradiction that many blacks were still enslaved. John Jay said “That men should pray and fight for their own freedom and yet keep others in slavery is certainly acting a very inconsistent as well as unjust and perhaps impious part.”{10}

In *Federalist* #54, James Madison stated that Southern laws (not nature) have “degraded [the slaves] from the human rank” depriving them of “rights” including the right to vote, that they would otherwise possess equally with other human beings. Madison argued that it was a “barbarous policy” to view blacks “in the unnatural light of property” rather than persons entitled to the same rights as other men.

## **Slavery and the Founders**

When America was founded, there were about half a million slaves. Approximately one third of the founders had slaves (George Washington and Thomas Jefferson being the most notable). Most of the slaves lived in the five southern colonies.

Benjamin Rush and Benjamin Franklin (both signers of the Declaration of Independence) founded the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery in 1774. Rush went on to head a national abolition movement.

John Jay was the president of a similar society in New York. He said: “To contend for our own liberty, and to deny that blessing to others, involves an inconsistency not to be excused.” John Adams opposed slavery because it was a “foul

contagion in the human character” and “an evil of colossal magnitude.” His son, John Quincy Adams, so crusaded against slavery that he was known as “the hell-hound of abolition.”

It’s important to note that when these anti-slavery societies were founded, they were clearly an act of civil disobedience. In 1774, for example, Pennsylvania passed a law to end slavery. But King George vetoed that law and other laws passed by the colonies. The King was pro-slavery, and Great Britain (at that time) practiced slavery. As long as the colonies were part of the British Empire, they would also be required to permit slavery.

When Thomas Jefferson finished his first draft of the Declaration of Independence, it included a paragraph condemning the King for introducing slavery into the colonies and continuing the slave trade. It said: “He [King George] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither.” Unfortunately, this paragraph was dropped from the final draft because it was offensive to the delegates from Georgia and South Carolina.

After America separated from Great Britain, several states passed laws abolishing slavery. For example, Vermont’s 1777 constitution abolished slavery outright. Pennsylvania passed a law in 1779 for gradual emancipation. Slavery was abolished in Massachusetts and New Hampshire through a series of court decisions in the 1780s that ruled that “all men are born free and equal.” Other states passed gradual abolition laws during this period as well. By the time of the U.S. Constitution, every state (except Georgia) had at least prohibited slavery or suspended the importation of slaves.

Most of the founders (including many who at the time owned

slaves) wanted to abolish the slave trade, but could not do so at the founding of this country. So, what about the compromises concerning slavery in the Constitution? We will look at that topic next.

## Slavery and the Framers

We have noted that some of the founders were slaveholders. Yet even so, many of them wanted to abolish slavery. One example was George Washington.

In 1786, Washington wrote to Robert Morris that “there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of [slavery].”[\[11\]](#) Later in his life he freed several of his household slaves and decreed in his will that his slaves would become free upon the death of his wife. Washington’s estate even paid for their care until 1833.

What about the compromises in the U.S. Constitution? When the delegates came to Philadelphia, there were strong regional differences between northern and southern states concerning slavery.[\[12\]](#)

The first compromise concerned enumeration. Apportionment of representatives would be determined by the number of free persons and three-fifths of all other persons. Many see this as saying that blacks were not considered whole persons. Actually, it was just the opposite. The anti-slavery delegates wanted to count slaves as less in order to penalize slaveholders and reduce their influence in Congress. Free blacks were considered free persons and counted accordingly.

The second compromise dealt with the slave trade. Congress was prohibited until 1808 from blocking the migration and importation of slaves. It did not prevent states from restricting or outlawing the slave trade. As I pointed out previously, many had already done so. It did establish a

temporary exemption to the federal government until President Jefferson signed a national prohibition into law effective January 1, 1808.

A final compromise involved fugitive slaves that guaranteed return of slaves held to service or labor "under the laws thereof." The wording did not imply that the Constitution recognized slavery as legitimate but only acknowledged that states had laws governing slavery.

It is notable that the words "slave" and "slavery" cannot be found in the U.S. Constitution. James Madison recorded in his notes on the constitutional convention that the delegates "thought it wrong to admit in the Constitution the idea that there could be property in men."

Slavery was wrong, and it is incorrect to say that the U.S. Constitution supported it. Frederick Douglas believed that our form of government "was never, in its essence, anything but an anti-slavery government." He argued, "Abolish slavery tomorrow, and not a sentence or a syllable of the Constitution need be altered."

Nevertheless, the seeds of a future conflict were sown in these compromises. The nation was founded on the ideal that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights." John Quincy Adams later admitted that: "The inconsistency of the institution of slavery with the principles of the Declaration of Independence was seen and lamented." The conflict eventually broke out into a great civil war.

## **The Bible and Slavery**

How does the Bible relate to slavery in America? While it is true that so many of the leaders in the abolition movement were Christians, there were others who attempted to use their particular interpretation of the Bible to justify slavery.

That should not be surprising since today we see people trying to manipulate the Bible to justify their beliefs about issues like abortion and homosexuality.

The Bible teaches that slavery, as well as other forms of domination of one person over another, is wrong. For example, Joseph was sold into slavery (Genesis 37), and the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites (Exodus 1). Neither these nor other descriptions of slavery in the Bible are presented in a favorable light.

The Old Testament law code made it a capital crime to kidnap a person and sell him into slavery (Ex. 21:16). It also commanded Israel to welcome a slave who escaped from his master and not be returned (Deut. 23:15-16).

Nevertheless, some pointed to other passages in the Old Testament to try to justify slavery. For example, those who needed financial assistance or needed protection could become indentured servants (Ex. 21:2-6; Deut. 15:12-18). But this was a voluntary act very different from the way slavery was practiced in America. Also, a thief that could not or would not make restitution could be sold as a slave (Ex. 22:1-3), but the servitude would cease when restitution had been made.

In the New Testament, we see that Paul wrote how slaves (and masters) were to act toward one another (Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22-25, 4:1; 1 Tim. 6:1-2). Since nearly half of the population of Rome were slaves, it is understandable that he would address their attitudes and actions. Paul was hardly endorsing the Roman system of slavery.

Paul's letter to Philemon encouraged him to welcome back his slave Onesimus (who had now become a Christian). Christian tradition says that the slave owner did welcome him back as a Christian brother and gave him his freedom. Onesimus later became the bishop of Berea.

It is also true that many of the leaders of the abolition

movement were Christians who worked to abolish slavery from America. Lyman Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, William Lloyd Garrison, and Charles Finney are just a few of the 19th century leaders of the abolition movement. Finney, for example, not only preached salvation but called for the elimination of slavery. He said, "I had made up my mind on the question of slavery, and was exceedingly anxious to arouse public attention to the subject. In my prayers and preaching, I so often alluded to slavery, and denounced it." [\[13\]](#)

Slavery is a sad and tragic chapter in American history, and we must confront it honestly. But the way the subject of slavery is taught in America's classrooms today often leaves out many important facts. I encourage you to study more about this nation's history. Our founders have much to teach us about history, government, and morality.

## Notes

1. *Rights of the Colonies* in Bernard Bailyn, ed. *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 439.
2. Alexander Hamilton writing to John Jay, March 14, 1779 in Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds. *The Founders' Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), I:527.
3. Samuel Stillman, *The Duty of Magistrates* (1779) in Frank Moore, ed., *Patriot Preachers of the American Revolution* (New York: Charles T. Evans, 1892), 285.
4. "An Address to the Public from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition Slavery" in J.A. Leo Lemay, ed., *Benjamin Franklin, Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1987), 1154.
5. Benjamin Rush, *Minutes of the Proceedings of a Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies*

*Established in Different Parts of the United States Assembled at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, 1794), 24.

6. John Adams to Robert J. Evans, June 8, 1819, in Adrienne Koch and William Peden, eds., *Selected Writings of John and John Quincy Adams* (New York: Knopf, 1946), 209.
7. Speech at Constitutional Convention, June 6, 1787 in Max Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven: Yale University, 1937), 1:135.
8. Hamilton, in Kurland and Lerner, eds., *The Founders' Constitution*, I:527.
9. Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961).
10. John Jay writing to Richard Price, September 27, 1785 in *The Founders' Constitution*, 538.
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12. Matthew Spalding, *The Founders' Almanac* (Washington, DC: Heritage, 2002), 285-6.
13. Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1876), 324.

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## **Christianity and Racism – Was Jesus a Racist?**

*Rusty Wright takes a hard look at this question: does Christianity promote racism? He looks at the lives and*

*teachings of Jesus and Paul to see if they taught equality of all races or promoted racism. He finds that it is not the teachings of Christianity that promote racism. A biblical worldview will create a love for all people and a desire to help them develop personal faith.*

## **Does Christianity Promote Racism?**

Thirty years after the heyday of the Civil Rights movement, racial issues in the US remain sensitive. Racial quotas in the workplace and academia continue to be controversial. Prominent corporations are accused of racist practices. Certain supremacy groups promote the Bible, God and the white race. Race and politics interact in ways that carry both national and international significance.

A few years back, the Southern Baptist Convention made headlines for renouncing racism, condemning slavery and apologizing for the church's intolerant past. That laudable contrition raised a deeper question: Why would Christianity ever be associated with racial oppression in the first place? How did the faith whose founder told people to "love one another" ever become linked with human bondage and social apartheid?

African-American theologian James Cone notes that "In the old slavery days, the Church preached that slavery was a divine decree, and it used the Bible as the basis of its authority."[1](#)

"Not only did Christianity fail to offer the ... [Black] hope of freedom in the world, but the manner in which Christianity was communicated to him tended to degrade him. The ... [Black] was taught that his enslavement was due to the fact that he had been cursed by God. ... Parts of the Bible were carefully selected to prove that God had intended that the...[Black] should be the servant of the white man..."[2](#)

As a white baby boomer growing up in the South, I experienced segregated schools, restrooms, drinking fountains and beaches. My parents taught and modeled equality, so the injustice I saw saddened me deeply. I was appalled that the Ku Klux Klan used the Bible and the cross in its rituals.

During college, a friend brought an African-American student to a church I attended in North Carolina. The next Sunday, the pastor announced that because of "last week's racial incident" (the attendance of a Black), church leaders had voted to maintain their longstanding policy of racial segregation. Thereafter, any Blacks attending would be handed a note explaining the policy and asking that they not return. I was outraged and left the church. (Postscript: A few years ago I learned that that white church had folded and that an African-American church came to use the same facility. Maybe God has a sense of humor.)

Does Christianity promote racism? Is it mainly a faith for whites? This article will examine these two burning questions.

## Was Jesus Racist?

Does the Christian faith promote racism? Is it mainly for whites? Certain extremists think so. Some slavery-era ministers wrote books justifying slavery. George D. Armstrong wrote in *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery*, "It may be... that Christian slavery is God's solution of the problem [relation of labor and capital] about which the wisest statesmen of Europe confess themselves at fault." [\[3\]](#)

Consider another book, *Slavery Ordained of God*. In it, Fred A. Ross wrote, "Slavery is ordained of God, ... to continue for the good of the slave, the good of the master, the good of the whole American family, until another and better destiny may be unfolded." [\[4\]](#)

Those words seem quite different from the biblical injunction

to “love your neighbor as yourself,” a statement with equally poignant historical roots.

In first-century Palestine, the Jews and Samaritans were locked in a blood feud. Divided by geography, religion and race, the two groups spewed venom. Each had its own turf. Jews considered the Samaritans to be racial “half-breeds.” The two groups disputed which followed the Bible better and on whose land proper worship should occur.

The Samaritans were often inhospitable to{5} and hostile toward the Jews. Many Jewish pilgrims deliberately lengthened their journeys to bypass Samaria. Jews publicly cursed Samaritans in their synagogues, would not allow Samaritan testimony in Jewish courts, and generally considered Samaritans excluded from eternal life.{6}

Once a Jewish lawyer asked Jesus of Nazareth, “Who is my neighbor?”{7} Jesus, who as Jew surprised people by mixing freely with Samaritans, told him a now famous story. Robbers attacked a Jewish traveler, beating him and leaving him half-dead. Two Jewish religious leaders ignored the injured man as they passed by. But a Samaritan felt compassion for the Jewish victim – his cultural enemy – and bandaged his wounds, transported him to an inn and provided for his care. Jesus’ point? This “Good Samaritan” was an example of how we should relate to those with whom we differ.

The founder of the Christian faith was no racist. He told people to get along. What about a chief expositor of the Christian faith? And why is eleven o'clock Sunday morning often the most segregated hour of the week? Let’s turn now to these important questions.

## **Was A Chief Expositor of the Faith A Racist?**

Does Christianity promote racism? As we have seen, Jesus of

Nazareth was no racist. Living in a culturally and racially diverse society that was in many ways analogous to ours, He promoted harmony by His example and His words. What about Paul, one of the chief expositors of faith in Christ?

Paul often had to counsel members of the communities he advised about diversity issues. Some in the groups with which he consulted were Jews, some were non-Jews or "Gentiles." Some were slaves and some were free. Some were men and some were women. The mix was potentially explosive.

From prison, Paul wrote to a friend whose slave had run away, had met Paul, and had come to faith. Paul appealed to his friend on the basis of their relationship to welcome the slave back not as a slave but as a brother. He offered to repay any loss from his own pocket. The letter survives in the New Testament as the book of "Philemon" and is a touching example of a dedicated believer seeking to internally motivate a slaveholder to change his attitudes and behavior.[{8}](#)

Paul felt that the faith he had once persecuted could unify people. He wrote to one group of believers that because of their common spiritual commitment, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one..."[{9}](#) Paul, a Jew by birth, wrote to some non-Jewish believers that "Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us."[{10}](#)

Paul exhorted another group of believers to live in harmony. He wrote, "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony."[{11}](#)

Paul promoted harmony, not discord. If the founder of the faith and its chief expositor were not racists, why is eleven o'clock Sunday morning often the most segregated hour of the week?

## **True Followers?**

Why is Christianity often associated with racism? The short answer is that some that claim to be followers of Jesus are not really following Him. They may have the label "Christian," but perhaps they never have established a personal friendship with Christ. They may be like I was for many years: a church member, seemingly devoted, but who had never accepted Christ's pardon based on His death and resurrection for me. Or they may have genuine faith, but haven't allowed God into the driver's seat of their life. I've been there, too.

I shall always remember Norton and Bo. Norton was a leader of the Georgia Black Student Movement in the 1970s. Bo was a racially prejudiced white Christian. Once during an Atlanta civil rights demonstration, Bo and some of his cronies beat Norton up. The animosity ran deep.

Norton later discovered that Christianity was not a religion of oppressive rules, but a relationship with God. As his faith sprouted and grew, his anger mellowed while his desire for social justice deepened. Meanwhile, Bo rejected his hypocrisy and began to follow his faith with God in control. Three years after the beating, the two unexpectedly met again at a Christian conference. Initial tension melted into friendship as they forgave each other, reconciled and treated each other like brothers.

Of course not all disobedient Christians are racists. Nor is everyone not aligned with Jesus a racist. But faith in Christ can give enemies motivation to reconcile, to replace hatred with love.

Historical examples abound of true faith opposing racism. John Newton, an 18th-century British slave trader, came to faith, renounced his old ways, became a pastor, and wrote the famous hymn, "Amazing Grace." Newton encouraged his Christian friend, William Wilberforce, who faced scorn and ridicule in leading a long but successful battle in Parliament to abolish the slave trade.

Does Christianity promote racism? No, true Christianity seeks to eliminate racism by changing people's hearts.

After I had spoken on this theme in a sociology class at North Carolina State University, a young African-American woman told me, "All my life I've been taught that white Christians were responsible for the oppression of my people. Now I realize those oppressors were not really following Christ."

Is Christianity just for whites? Norton, the Black activist, certainly did not think so. Let's look further at the faith that crosses racial divides.

## **The Heart of the Matter**

Is Christianity just for whites? Jesus and Paul said anyone who believed would be plugged into God forever. Africa has millions who follow Jesus. Koreans send missionaries to the US. And don't we need them!

In Cape Town, South Africa, Saint James Church has been a beacon of diversity and social concern with its white, Black, Asian and biracial members. One Sunday evening, radical Black terrorists sprayed the multiracial congregation with automatic gunfire and grenades. Eleven died and 53 were wounded, some horribly maimed. The world press was astounded by the members' reaction.

Lorenzo Smith, who is biracial, saw his wife, Myrtle, die from shrapnel that pierced her heart as he tried to shield her. Yet he forgave the killers. "I prayed for those that committed the

crime," he told me, "so they, too, can come to meet [the Lord]."

The president of the West African nation of Benin came to the US a few years back with a message for African American leaders: His compatriots were sorry for their ancestors' complicity in the slave trade. An often-overlooked component of slavery's historical stain is that Black Africans sold other Black Africans into slavery. When rival tribes made war, the victors took prisoners and made them indentured servants, often selling them to white slave merchants.

Benin's President Kerekou, who in recent years had made his own commitment to Christ, invited political and church leaders to his nation so his tribal leaders could seek reconciliation with African Americans.

Brian Johnson, an African-American organizer, said the realization that Blacks sold other Blacks into slavery has been difficult for many African Americans to handle. "This made it difficult to hold the White man responsible," he explained as we spoke. "This creates some problems in our own psyche. We have to deal with another angle to this.... It's not merely a Black-White thing."

The problem is in human hearts, Johnson believes. "All have sinned," he claims, quoting the New Testament.<sup>{12}</sup> "All of us need to confess our wrong and appeal to [God] for forgiveness."

Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy lamented that "Everybody thinks of changing humanity, but nobody thinks of changing himself."<sup>{13}</sup> True Christianity is not just for whites, and it does not promote racism but seeks to eliminate it. Changing corrupt institutions is very important. An ultimate solution to racism involves changing individual hearts.

## Notes

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3. Quoted in Frazier, *loc. cit.*; quoted in Cone *loc. cit.* Neither emphasis nor bracketed words are mine. Emphasis is likely Frazier's or Armstrong's. Bracketed words could be either Frazier's or Cone's.
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5. Luke 9:52-53.
6. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957, 1961, 1966), pp. 958-960. See also John 4:1-45.
7. Luke 10:29 ff.
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10. Ephesians 2:14 NLT.
11. Colossians 3: 12-14 NLT.
12. Romans 3:23 NIV.
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# Feminism: A Christian Perspective

*Sue Bohlin provides a Christian view on feminism. How does this prevalent view of women measure up from a biblical perspective?*

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

The worldview of feminism has permeated just about every aspect of American life, education and culture. We see it in the way men are portrayed as lovable but stupid buffoons on TV sitcoms. We see it in the way boys are punished and marginalized in school for not being enough like girls. We see it in politically correct speech that attempts to change the way people think by harassing them for their choice of words.

The anger and frustration that drove feminism's history is legitimate; women have been devalued and dishonored ever since the fall of man. Very real, harmful inequities needed to be addressed, and it's important to honor some of the success of feminist activists. But at the same time, we need to examine and expose the worldview that fuels much of feminist thought.

Modern-day feminism got its major start when Betty Friedan wrote her landmark book *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she coined the phrase "The Housewife Blahs" to describe millions of unfulfilled women. There are many reasons that women can feel unfulfilled and dishonored, but from a Christian perspective I would suggest that this is what life feels like when we are disconnected from God and disconnected from living out *His* purpose for our lives. As Augustine said, "We are restless, O God, until we find our rest in Thee."

Betty Friedan looked at unhappy, unfulfilled women and diagnosed the problem as *patriarchy*, which means a male-dominated society. If women are unhappy, the reason is that

men are in charge.

The early feminists decided that women are oppressed because bearing and raising children is a severe limitation and liability. What makes women *different* from men equals *weakness*. The next step, then, was to overcome that difference so that women could be just like men. The invention of the birth control pill helped fuel that illusion.

Out of the consciousness-raising groups in the '70s came a shift in the view of women's differences. Instead of seeing those differences as weakness, they now saw those differences as a source of pride and confidence. It was now a good thing to be a woman.

The next step in feminist thought was that women were not just *equal* to men, they were *better* than men. This spawned famous quotes like Gloria Steinem's comment that "A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle."[{1}](#) Male-bashing became the sport of the '90s.

Feminism says, "The problem is patriarchy—male dominated society." The problem is actually the sin of people within a God-ordained hierarchy. In a fallen world, there are going to be problems between men and women, and especially abuses of power. We must not confuse the abuses of the structure with the structure itself.[{2}](#)

## **Feminism and the Church**

Feminism has so permeated our culture that we should not be surprised that it has impacted the church as well. Religious feminists uncovered the "Church Women Blahs." People became aware that for the most part, women were relegated to service positions like making coffee and rocking babies. If a woman had gifts in teaching, shepherding, administration or evangelism, she was out of luck.

The *Magna Carta* for Christian feminists is Galatians 3:28: "In

Christ there is no male or female.” However, the context of this verse is not about equal rights, but that all believers have the same position of humility at the foot of the Cross. The issue is not capability, but God-ordained positions within a God-ordained authority structure of male leadership. Other biblical passages that go into detail about gender-dependent roles show that Galatians 3:28 cannot mean the obliteration of those roles.

There are two main areas where religious feminists seek to change gender roles: the role of women in the church, and the role of women in marriage. The discussion has produced two camps: egalitarians and complementarians.

Egalitarians are the feminist camp, with an emphasis on equality of *roles*, not just *value*. They believe that hierarchy produces inequality, and that different means unequal. The solution, therefore, is to get rid of the differences between men’s and women’s roles. Women should be ordained, allowed to occupy the office of pastor and elder, and exercise authority over others in the church. Instead of differences in the roles of husband and wife, both spouses are called to mutual submission.

Egalitarians are reacting against a very real problem in the church. But the problem of authoritarian men, and women relegated to minor serving positions, is due to an abuse and distortion of the hierarchy God designed. Egalitarians reject the male authority structure along with the abuse of that structure.

Complementarians believe that God has ordained a hierarchy of authority in the church and within the family that reflects the hierarchy of authority within the Trinity. And just as there is equality in the Trinity, there is equality in the church and in marriage because we are all made in the image of God. Women are just as gifted as men, but there are biblical restrictions on the exercise of some of those gifts, such as

not teaching men from a position of authority, and not occupying the office of pastor or elder. In marriage, wives are called to submit to their husbands. Mutual submission in marriage is no more appropriate than submission of parents to children.

Christian feminists did not evaluate whether the structures or hierarchies of leadership were there because God designed them that way. They just demanded wholesale change. But some things are worth keeping!

## **Feminism on Campus**

As with the family and the church, feminism has had an impact on our college campuses. Abraham Lincoln once warned, "The philosophy of the school room in one generation will become the philosophy of government in the next." What happens on college campuses eventually affects the rest of the culture, and nowhere is feminism's pervasiveness more evident than in our colleges.

A new discipline of Women's Studies has arisen in many universities. These courses usually stress women's literature, treating with contempt anything written by "dead white European males." They often incorporate women's religions in the curricula, especially the Goddess worship of Wicca on campus. The main tenet of this pagan religion is that the worshipper is in harmony with Mother Earth and with all life. They worship the Goddess, which is described as "the immanent life force, . . . Mother Nature, the Earth, the Cosmos, the interconnectedness of all life."[{3}](#) Many witches (followers of Wicca, not Satanists) and pagans are involved in women's studies programs because, as one Wiccan Web site put it, "Many feminists have turned to Wicca and the role of priestess for healing and strength after the patriarchal oppression and lack of voice for women in the major world religions."[{4}](#)

Christianity is often portrayed on college campuses, and

especially within Women's Studies, as an abusive religion. There are several reasons. First, because Christianity is hierarchical, teaching differentiation of roles and that some are to submit to and follow others. Second, their skewed view of the Bible is that Christianity teaches that women are inferior to men. Third, Christ was male, so he is insufficient as a role model for women and can't possibly understand what it means to be a woman. And fourth, since the language of the Bible is male-oriented and patriarchal (both of which are evil), it must be dismissed or changed.

Feminism impacts dating relationships on campus. Heterosexual dating is often colored by an attempt to persuade women that all men are potential rapists and cannot be trusted. Even a remark meant to compliment a woman is taken as sexist and unacceptable. One woman, wearing a short skirt on campus, heard someone whistle appreciatively. She strode into the women's study center complaining, "I've just been raped!"

Angry feminists convey a hatred and fear of men as part of the feminist ideology. When it comes to dating, for a number of feminists, lesbianism is considered the only appropriate option. If men are brutes and idiots, why would anyone want to have an intimate relationship with one? In fact, there's a new acronym on campus, GUG: "Gay until graduation." But the fact is, most women really like men; that's always been a problem for feminists. Let's consider more problems that result from feminism.

## **The Problematic Legacy of Feminism**

Feminists started from a reasonable point in recognizing a most unhappy aspect of life in a fallen world: women tend to be dishonored, disrespected, and devalued by many men. This is as true in religious systems as it is in society and political systems. Feminists started out trying to rectify this problem first by trying to prove that women were as good as men. Then they decided that women were better than men. They ended up

trying to erase the lines of distinction between men and women altogether. This has resulted in tremendous confusion about what it means to be a woman, as well as what it means to be a man. And naturally, it has produced a lot of confusion in relationships as well. This confusion ranges from men who are afraid to open doors for women for fear of receiving a rude tongue-lashing, to women who are baffled in the workplace because the men they compete against at work won't ask them out on a date.

Radical feminist thought despised much of what it means to be a woman—to be receptive and responsive and relational, to treasure marriage and family. Only masculine traits and behaviors and jobs were deemed valuable. Nonetheless, many young women are confused by the messages they are getting from the culture: that an education and a job are the only worthwhile pursuits, and the social capital of marriage and family is no longer valued. However, these same women feel guilty and confused for finding themselves still longing for marriage and family when they're supposed to be content without them. One college student said, "I've taken all the women's studies courses—I know that marriage and motherhood are traps—but I still want to do both."[\[5\]](#)

The legacy of feminism is the refusal of the God-given role of men to be initiator, protector and provider. And the God-given role of women to be responder, nurturer and helper is equally disdained. The consequence of this rebellion is relational confusion, especially in the home. Dads aren't communicating to their sons why it's a blessing to be male, because frankly, they're not sure that it is. The message of feminism is that being male is a joke or a curse. Moms aren't teaching their daughters the basic skill sets that homemakers need because they're too busy at their jobs and besides, haven't we been taught that being a homemaker is demeaning? As a mentoring Mom to mothers of preschoolers, I see how many young women are totally clueless about how to be a wife and mother because

those essential skills just weren't considered important by their mothers. Radical feminism hates family and families, and we all suffer as a result.

Feminism says, "The problem is patriarchy—male dominated society." The problem is actually the sin of people within a God-ordained hierarchy. The heart of feminism is a rebellion against the abuses of this God-ordained hierarchy, but it's also a rebellion against God's plan itself. This is a perfect example of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Feminists believe they have the right to reinvent reality and to change the rules to suit them. This rebellious belief system has had some disastrous effects on our culture and society.

For example, one of feminism's biggest achievements was the legalization of abortion. *Keeping* it legal is one of feminism's biggest goals: see, if women are to be truly free, then they must be free to decide whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term. A woman's ability to conceive, give birth, and nurture babies is seen as weakness and vulnerability, because women can be forced to be impregnated and to bear unwanted babies. Removing the consequence of sexual activity, and getting rid of unwanted pregnancy to cancel out a woman's so-called "weakness," is important to many feminists. So, since 1973, there have been over 40 million abortions in the U.S. {6}. But that only tells part of the story; "while some women report relatively little trauma following abortion, for many, the experience is devastating, causing severe and long-lasting emotional, psychological and spiritual trauma." {7} I have the privilege of helping post-abortual women grieve the loss of their babies and receive God's forgiveness for their sin. They know that feminism's insistence that abortion is every woman's right is a lie.

Another impact of feminism is seen in the feminization of American schools. Feminism's disrespect for men and boys has shaped schools and educational policy around values and methods that favor girls over boys. Competition, a natural

state of being for many boys, is considered harmful and evil, to be replaced with girl-friendly cooperative, relational activities. "Schools are denying the very behavior that makes little boys boys. In Southern California, a mother was stunned to find out that her son was disciplined for running and jumping over a bench at recess."[\[8\]](#) My colleague Don Closson wrote, "Gender crusaders believe that if they can influence little boys early enough, they can make them more like little girls."[\[9\]](#)

To despise the glory of masculinity is to reject the very image of God. To despise the treasure of femininity is to reject what the Bible calls the glory of man.[\[10\]](#) That's the problem with feminism: it is a rejection of what God has called good. It has gone too far in addressing the inequities of living in a fallen world. It's a rebellion against God's right to be God and our responsibility to submit joyfully to Him.

## Notes

1. Actually, I have discovered, it wasn't original with Ms. Steinem. She had this to say in a letter she wrote to *Time* magazine in autumn 2000: "In your note on my new and happy marital partnership with David Bale, you credit me with the witticism 'A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.' In fact, Irina Dunn, a distinguished Australian educator, journalist and politician, coined the phrase back in 1970 when she was a student at the University of Sydney." Irina Dunn has confirmed this story, in an e-mail of January 28, 2002: "Yes, indeed, I am the one Gloria referred to. I was paraphrasing from a phrase I read in a philosophical text I was reading for my Honours year in English Literature and Language in 1970. It was "A man needs God like a fish needs a bicycle." My inspiration arose from being involved in the nascent women's movement at the time, and from being a bit of a smart-arse. I scribbled the phrase on the backs of two toilet doors, would

you believe, one at Sydney University where I was a student, and the other at Soren's Wine Bar at Woolloomooloo, a seedy suburb in south Sydney. The doors, I have to add, were already favoured graffiti sites."

[www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/414150.html](http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/414150.html)

2. I am indebted to the wisdom and insight of Mary Kassian as expressed in her excellent book *The Feminist Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992).

3. [www.cog.org/wicca/about.html](http://www.cog.org/wicca/about.html)

4. Ibid.

5. Quoted by Barbara DeFoe Whitehead, *Mars Hill Audio Journal* No. 61, Mar./Apr. 2003.

6. [www.nrlc.org/abortion/aboramt.html](http://www.nrlc.org/abortion/aboramt.html)

7. [www.hopeafterabortion.com/aftermath/](http://www.hopeafterabortion.com/aftermath/)

8. William Pollack, *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998),

94. The entire quote is from Don Closson, "[The Feminization of American Schools](#)".

9. Ibid.

10. 1 Cor. 11:7

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## Are We Alone in the Universe? A Biblical View of Aliens

*Dr. Ray Bohlin provides a Christian view on the probability and meaning of life on other planets. From a biblical perspective, what would it mean to find evidence of life beyond this earth?*



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

# Life on Mars?

There was great excitement in the media when a group of scientists from NASA announced they had found evidence of life on Mars. Their evidence, an alleged Martian meteorite, was vaulted to center stage, and everyone from CNN to *Nightline* ran special programs with interviews and video footage of the scientists and their prized specimen. President Clinton was so excited by the announcement that he praised the U.S. space program and took the opportunity to establish a bipartisan space summit headed up by Vice President Al Gore to study the future of U.S. space research. Aren't we already doing that?

Anyway, clearly this announcement took the country by storm. Some of the scientists were embarrassingly gushing about how significant these findings were. The media frenzy was prompted by the early release of an article from the journal *Science*, the premier scientific journal in the U.S. The article was due out the following week, but *Science* decided to release it early because it had leaked out.

Here's what the excitement was about. A group of scientists had studied a meteorite that had been found in the ice of Antarctica. Previously, it had been determined that this meteorite had originated on Mars by studying the gaseous content of glass-like components of the meteor. The gas composition matched very well the atmosphere of Mars. This conclusion seems reasonable.

So, they presumed they had a meteor from Mars. Next they looked for evidence of life on and in the crevices of the meteor. They found two types of molecules that can form as a result of life processes, carbonates and complex molecules called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons or PAHs. They also found shapes in the rock that resembled those of known microfossils on Earth. Microfossils are fossils of one-celled organisms which are rather tricky to interpret.

Well, what does this mean? Obviously, the NASA scientists felt the things just mentioned provided ample evidence to conclude that life once existed on Mars. However, the chemical signs could all be due to processes that have nothing to do with life, and the supposed microfossils are 100 times smaller than any such fossil found on Earth. Other groups that studied this same meteorite concluded that either the temperature of formation of the chemicals was far too high to allow life (over 700 degrees C) or that other chemical signals for life were absent. John Kerridge, a planetary scientist from the University of California at San Diego, said, "The conclusion is at best premature and more probably wrong." But listen to the concluding statement in the paper in *Science*:

*Although there are alternative explanations for each of these phenomena taken individually, when they are considered collectively, particularly in view of their spatial association, we conclude that they are evidence for primitive life on Mars.*[{1}](#)

In plain English, there are reasonable non-life explanations for each of the evidences presented, but we just think that they mean there is life on Mars. The evidence *is* very equivocal and was challenged by many other scientists, but the media did not report that as fully. But maybe they are right! In fact, there is one simple explanation that is consistently ignored by media and scientists alike. If there really is, or has been, life on Mars, what could that possibly mean for evolution, and more importantly, does it somehow refute creation? We'll look at that next.

## **What Would Life on Mars Mean?**

Because of the recent announcement of signs of life on Mars, many people were encouraged in their belief that we are not alone in the universe. These signs are far from certain and probably wrong, but if it's true, what would these results

mean to evolutionists? Moreover, is there any reason for Christians to fear confirmation of life on Mars?

Let us assume, then, for the moment that the evidence from this Martian meteorite is legitimate evidence for life on Mars—life that at some point in the past actually existed on Mars. What would it mean?

For evolutionists the evidence is perceived as confirmation that life actually arises from non-life by purely chemical processes. In addition, evolutionists draw the conclusion that life must be able to evolve very easily since it did so on two adjacent planets in the same solar system. Therefore, even though origin of life research is actually at a standstill, such a discovery seemingly confirms the notion that *some* chemical evolution scenario *must work*. I will address this assumption later.

On the other hand, some have stated that if there is life on Mars, creationism has been dealt a death blow. They rationalize that since (1) we now know that life can evolve just about anywhere, and (2) the Bible never speaks of life anywhere but on Earth, the Bible is, therefore, unreliable. Besides, they reason, why would God create life on a planet with no humans? However, since the Bible is absolutely silent on the subject of extra-terrestrial life, we can make no predictions about its possibility. God is certainly free to create life on planets other than Earth if He chooses.

Getting back to the evolutionists' glee at the possibility of life evolving on other planets, the real question is whether this is the proper conclusion if life is indeed found on Mars? The simple answer, inexplicably avoided by the media, is NO! The simplest answer to the possible discovery of life on Mars is that the so-called "Martian life" actually came from Earth!

Think about it this way. The meteorite that was found is supposed to have existed on Mars previously. How did it get to

Earth? Well, it is hypothesized that a large meteorite crashed into Mars throwing up lots of debris into space, some of which finds its way to Earth and at least a few of which are found by Earthlings. If you are thinking with me, you now realize that the same scenario could have been played out on Earth.

Evolutionists suggest that the Earth was under heavy meteor bombardment until at least 3.8 billion years ago—about the time they say life appeared on Earth. Christian astronomer Hugh Ross states it this way:

*Meteorites large enough to make a crater greater than 60 miles across will cause Earth rocks to escape Earth's gravity. Out of 1,000 such rocks ejected, 291 strike Venus, 20 go to Mercury, 17 hit Mars, 14 make it to Jupiter, and 1 goes all the way to Saturn. Traveling the distance with these rocks will be many varieties of Earth life.* [\[2\]](#)

Ross also documents that many forms of microscopic life are quite capable of surviving such a journey. All this is quite well known in the scientific community, but I have not seen it mentioned once in any public discussion. I believe the reason is that the possibility of life having evolved on Mars is too juicy to pass up.

## **The Improbability of Life Elsewhere in the Universe**

I would like to address the amazing optimism of so many that the universe is teeming with life. No doubt this is fueled by the tremendous success of such science fiction works as *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* which eloquently present the reasonableness of a universe pregnant with intelligent life forms.

Inherent within this optimism is the evolutionary assumption that if life evolved here, certainly we should not arrogantly suppose that life could not have evolved elsewhere in the

universe. And if life in general exists in the universe, then, of course, there must be intelligent life out there as well.

This is the basic assumption of the SETI program, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence. This is the program, now privately funded instead of federally funded, that searches space for radio waves emanating from another planet that would indicate the presence of intelligent life. But is such a hope realistic? Is there a justifiable reason for suspecting that planets suitable to life exist elsewhere in the universe?

Over the last two decades scientists have begun tabulating many characteristics of our universe, galaxy, solar system, and planet that appear to have been finely-tuned for life to exist. Christian astronomer and apologist, Dr. Hugh Ross documents all these characteristics in his book *Creator and the Cosmos*, [\[3\]](#) and is constantly updating them. In the book's third edition (2001), Ross documents 35 characteristics of the universe and 66 characteristics of our galaxy, solar system, and planet that are finely-tuned for life to exist.

Some examples include the size, temperature, and brightness of our sun, the size, chemical composition, and stable orbit of Earth. The fact that we have one moon and not none or two or three. The distance of the Earth from the sun, the tilt of the earth's axis, the speed of the earth's rotation, the time it takes Earth to orbit the sun. If any of these factors were different by even a few percent, the ability of Earth to sustain life would be severely compromised. Recently it has been noted that even the presence of Jupiter and Saturn serve to stabilize the orbit of Earth. Without these two large planets present exactly where they are, the Earth would be knocked out of its present near circular orbit into an elliptical one causing higher temperature differences between seasons and subjecting Earth to greater meteor interference. Neither condition is hospitable to the continuing presence of life.

Ross has further calculated the probabilities of all these factors coming together by natural processes alone to be  $1 \times 10^{-166}$ ; that's a decimal point followed by 165 zeroes and then a one. A very liberal estimate of how many planets there may be, though we have only documented less than 100, is  $10^{22}$  or 10 billion trillion planets, one for every star in the universe. Combining these two probabilities tells us that there are  $10^{-144}$  planets in the entire universe that could support life. Obviously this is far less than one; therefore, by natural processes alone, we shouldn't even be here—let alone some kind of alien life form.

So unless God created life elsewhere, we are alone, and for the materialistic evolutionist, this is a frightening thought.

## **Problems with Chemical Evolution on Earth**

The statistics given above mean that we are really alone in the universe and that there is no hope of finding intelligent civilizations as in the television program *Star Trek*. While it means there is no one out there to threaten our survival, there is also no one out there to save us from our own mistakes.

This observation highlights why I believe the scientific community and the media became so excited about the possibilities of life on Mars. Efforts to determine how life could have evolved from non-living matter have been so fraught with problems that it makes the possibility of life elsewhere extremely remote. But if it could be proved that life evolved elsewhere, then it would demonstrate that life springs up rather easily, and we just haven't found the right trick here on Earth to prove it. But this just leapfrogs the problem.

But is the evolution of life from non-living chemicals really that impossible? The difficulties fall into three categories, the Chemical Problem, the Thermodynamic Problem, and the

Informational Problem. These issues are presented comprehensively in a book by Thaxton, Bradley, and Olsen titled *The Mystery of Life's Origin*<sup>{4}</sup> and in a chapter in the edited volume by J. P. Moreland, *The Creation Hypothesis*.<sup>{5}</sup>

*Chemical Problems* are illustrated by the difficulty in synthesizing even the simplest building block molecules necessary for life from inorganic precursors. Amino acids, sugars, and the bases for the important nucleotide molecules that make up DNA and RNA were all thought to be easily synthesized in an early Earth atmosphere of ammonia, methane, water vapor, and hydrogen. But further experiments showed this scenario to be unrealistic. Ammonia and methane would have been short-lived in this atmosphere; the multiple energy sources available would have destroyed the necessary molecules and water would have broken apart into hydrogen and oxygen. The oxygen was scrupulously avoided in all prebiotic scenarios because it would have poisoned all the necessary reactions.

*Thermodynamic Problems* arise from the difficulty in assembling all these complex molecules that would have been floating around in some prebiotic soup into a highly organized and complex cell. To accomplish the task of achieving specified complexity in life's molecules such as DNA and proteins, the availability of raw energy for millions of years is not enough. All systems where specified complexity is produced from simple components requires an energy conversion mechanism to channel the energy in the right direction to accomplish the necessary work. Without photosynthesis, there is no such mechanism in the prebiotic Earth.

*The Informational Problem* shows that there is no way to account for the origin of the genetic code, which is a language, without intelligent input. Informational codes require intelligent preprogramming. No evolutionary mechanism can accomplish this. Life requires intelligence.

So you can see why evolutionists would get excited about the

possibility of finding evolved life elsewhere. It's because life is seemingly impossible to evolve here. So, if it did happen elsewhere, maybe our experiments are just missing something.

## ***Independence Day, The Movie***

In the movie *Independence Day*, an alien battle force swoops down on Earth with the intention of destroying the human race, sucking the planet dry of all available resources and then moving on to some other unlucky civilization in the galaxy. But, those indomitable humans aided by good old American ingenuity outsmart those dull-witted aliens and Earth is saved. The story has been told many times, but perhaps never as well or never with such great special effects. The movie was a huge success.

But why are we continually fascinated by the possibility of alien cultures? The movie gave the clear impression that there must be great numbers of intelligent civilizations out there in the universe. This notion has become widely accepted in our culture.

Few recognize that the supposed existence of alien civilizations is based on evolutionary assumptions. The science fiction of *Star Trek* and the *Star Wars* begins with evolution. As I've stated earlier, evolutionists simply rationalize that since life evolved here with no outside interference, the universe must be pregnant with life. Astronomer Carl Sagan put it this way after he had reviewed the so-called success of early Earth chemical evolution experiments:

*Nothing in such experiments is unique to the earth. The initial gases, and the energy sources, are common throughout the Cosmos. Chemical reactions like those in our laboratory vessels may be responsible for the organic matter in interstellar space and the amino acids found in meteorites.*

*Some similar chemistry must have occurred on a billion other worlds in the Milky Way Galaxy. The molecules of life fill the Cosmos.* {6}

Sagan strongly suggests that the probabilities and chemistry of the universe dictate that life is ubiquitous in the galaxy. But as I stated earlier, the odds overwhelmingly dictate that our planet is the only one suitable for life in the universe. And the chemistry on Earth also indicates that life is extremely hard to come by. The probability of life simply based on chance occurrences is admitted by many evolutionists to be remote indeed. Many are now suggesting that life is inevitable because there are yet undiscovered laws of nature that automatically lead to complex life forms. In other words, the deck of cards is fixed. Listen to Nobel Laureate and biochemist, Christian de Duve:

*We are being dealt thirteen spades not once but thousands of times in succession! This is utterly impossible, unless the deck is doctored. What this doctoring implies with respect to the assembly of the first cell is that most of the steps involved must have had a very high likelihood of taking place under the prevailing conditions. Make them even moderately improbable and the process must abort, however many times it is initiated, because of the very number of successive steps involved. In other words, contrary to Monod's affirmation, the universe was—and presumably still is—pregnant with life.* {7}

The only problem with de Duve's suggestion is that we know of no natural processes that will lead automatically to the complexity of life. Everything we know of life leads to the opposite conclusion. Life is not a product of chance or necessity. Life is a product of intelligence.

Without Divine interference we are alone in the universe and without Christ we are—and should be—terrified. The gospel is

as relevant as ever.

#### Notes

1. *Science*, 16 August 1996, 273:924-30.
2. *Creator and the Cosmos*, NavPress, 2001, p. 210.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 145-199.
4. Lewis and Stanley, 1984.
5. InterVarsity Press, 1994, pp. 173-210.
6. *Cosmos*, Random House, 1980, p. 40.
7. *Vital Dust*, Basic Books, 1995, p. 9.

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# Myths Christians Believe – False Beliefs Exposed

*Sue Bohlin identifies and examines some common false beliefs held by many Christians. These beliefs, which are countered by biblical scripture, range from considerations of angels to heaven to salvation to “God helps those who help themselves.”*

## Angels, Good and Bad

In this article we examine some of the myths Christians believe.

There are lots of misconceptions about angels and devils that come from non-biblical sources ranging from great literature to films to the comic strips in our newspaper.

One myth about angels is that when a loved one dies, he or she becomes our guardian angel. While that can be a comforting thought, that's not what Scripture says. God created angels

before He created the physical universe; because we know they sang together in worship and shouted for joy at the creation (Job 38:7). When believing loved ones die, they stay human, but they become better than they ever were on earth, and better than the angels. No angel was ever indwelt by God Himself, as Christians are!

An even greater myth that many people believe is the image of Satan as an ugly red creature with pitchfork, horns, and a tail who gladly reigns in hell. For this misconception we have several authors to thank, mainly the 13th century work of Dante's *Inferno* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, written in the 1700s. The biblical image of Satan is of an angel who has fallen to irredeemable evil and depravity but yet can transform himself into a beautiful angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14) He can make himself appear winsome, which is why people can be attracted to the occult. But Satan is not the king of hell. Jesus disarmed him at the Cross, made a public spectacle of him and the rest of the demons, and made him into a defeated foe destined for an eternity of torment in the lake of fire. (Col. 2:15, Rev. 20:10)

Another misconception about Satan that many people believe is that he is the evil counterpart to God. In C.S. Lewis' preface to the *Screwtape Letters*, he answers the question of whether he believes in "the Devil":

*Now, if by 'the Devil' you mean a power opposite to God and, like God, self-existent from all eternity, the answer is certainly No. There is no uncreated being except God. God has no opposite. No being could attain a "perfect badness" opposite to the perfect goodness of God; for when you have taken away every kind of good thing (intelligence, will, memory, energy, and existence itself) there would be none of him left.*

# **If I Do Everything Right, Life Will Work Smoothly.**

A very common myth that many Christians believe is, “If I do everything right, life will work smoothly.” We seem to be immersed in an attitude of entitlement, believing that God owes us an easy and comfortable life if we serve Him. We expect to be able to avoid all pain, and we look for formulas to make life work. Frankly, many of us are addicted to our own comfort zones, and when anything disturbs our comfort zone, we feel betrayed and abandoned by God.

So when life doesn't go so smoothly, we often jump to one of two conclusions. Either we must be sinning, or God is out to get us. The book of Job draws back the curtain on the unseen drama in the heavenlies and shows us that when problems come, it doesn't have to be one of these two options. Sometimes things are going on behind the scenes in the heavenly realm that have nothing to do with our sin. And since God is totally good, it's a lie from the pit of hell that when bad things happen, God is out to get us in some kind of cosmic sadistic power play.

Even when we do everything right—although NOBODY does everything right, not even the holiest, most disciplined people—things can go wrong. The Bible gives us insight into why it might be happening. First, we live in a fallen world, where bad stuff happens because that's the consequence of sin. This includes natural disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes and floods, and includes moral disasters like divorce and abuse and murder.

Secondly, we live in a spiritual battle zone. Unseen demonic enemies attack us with spiritual warfare. God has provided spiritual armor, described in Ephesians 6, but if we don't put it on, His armor can't protect us.

Third, we have an inaccurate view of suffering. We think that

if we're suffering, something is wrong and needs to be fixed. But 1 Peter 4:19 says that some people suffer according to the will of God. That doesn't sound very nice, but that's because we often think the most important thing in life is avoiding pain. But God isn't committed to keeping us comfortable, He's creating a Bride for His Son who needs to shine with character and perseverance and maturity.

The Lord Jesus promised that we would have tribulation in this world. (John 16:33) The word for tribulation means pressure; it means we get squeezed in by trouble. Jesus said that in the world we would have pressure, but in Him we have peace. Life won't always work smoothly, no matter how well we live, but we always have the presence and power of God Himself to take us through it.

## **God Won't Give Me More Than I Can Handle.**

People get baffled and angry when bad things happen, and it just gets worse when God doesn't make the difficult situation go away. We start wondering if God has gone on vacation because we're nearing our breaking point and God isn't stepping in to make things better.

The problem with this myth is that God is in the business of breaking His people so that we will get to the point of complete dependence on Him.<sup>{1}</sup> Brokenness is a virtue, not something to be protected from. When the apostle Paul pleaded with God to remove his thorn in the flesh, God said no. Instead, He responded with an amazing promise: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul realized that his weakness was the very key to experiencing God's strength and not his own.

One of my friends ministered as a chaplain at Ground Zero in New York after the Sept. 11 attacks. She got so tired and exhausted that she knew it was more than she could bear. That's when she discovered that her exhaustion took her out of

God's way and He could shine through her, ministering with His strength through her profound weakness.

I love this definition of brokenness: "Brokenness is that place where we realize that all the things we counted on to make life work, don't." [{2}](#) God makes life work. Formulas don't. Our own efforts don't. Trustful dependence on Him plugs us into the power source for life. And that often happens when we've crossed over the line of what we can handle on our own.

## **God Helps Those Who Help Themselves.**

This myth has been repeated so many times that many people think its in Scripture. It's not. In fact, the truth is exactly the opposite. A heart full of self-dependence and self-reliance says to God, "I don't need You, I can do it myself. I can handle life without You." God honors our choices and the exercise of our will; He doesn't push His help on us. He waits for us to ask for it. He can't help those who help themselves because we're too busy *doing* to receive His strength and His help. It's like the way you can't fill a cup with coffee when it's already full of tea. Jesus said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing." (John 15:5) But that doesn't stop lots of us from trying! The truth is, God doesn't help those who help themselves; God helps the helpless.

## **Two Myths About Heaven**

The first myth is perpetuated by the many jokes and comics about St. Peter at the pearly gates. Many people believe that if our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds, St. Peter will let us into heaven. It doesn't work that way.

God has one standard for getting into heaven: absolute perfection and holiness. The person who has sinned the smallest sin is still guilty and cannot be perfect and holy. It's like a balloon: once it's popped, there's nothing anyone can do to make it whole again. Only one Person has ever

qualified for heaven by being perfect and holy—the Lord Jesus. When we trust Christ as our Savior, He does two things for us: He pays the penalty for our sin, which keeps us out of hell, and He exchanges our sin for His righteousness, which allows us into heaven.

Another myth is that heaven is like a big socialist state where everybody gets a standard issue harp and halo and we all sit around on clouds all day praising God in a never-ending church service. Doesn't sound all that great, does it?

Fortunately, heaven's a whole lot better than that. For one thing, the reason we think worshiping God for all eternity is boring is because we don't know God as He really is. We're like the six-year-old boy who declared that "girls are stupid, and kissin' 'em is even stupider." Kids don't have a clue how great love can be, and we don't have a clue how wonderful God is.

Heaven is no socialist state. There will be varying degrees of reward and responsibility in heaven, depending on the way we lived our life on earth. All believers will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, when God will test our works by passing them through the fire of motive. If we did things in His strength and for His glory, they will pass through the refining fire and emerge as gold, silver and costly stones. If we did things in our own flesh and for our glory or for the earthly payoff, we will have gotten all our strokes on earth, and our works will be burned up, not making it through the testing "fire."

There are different types of rewards in heaven: a prophet's reward, a righteous man's reward, and a disciple's reward. Some will receive the crown of life, or a martyr's crown, and there's also the crown of righteousness. Our lives in heaven will be determined by the choices, sacrifices, and actions of earth. Some will be very wealthy, and others will be "barely there." You can check our Web site for the scriptures about

this.[{3}](#)

## **Myths About the Bible and Salvation**

Many non-Christians believe a myth that is accepted by a lot of Christians as well—that the Bible has been changed and corrupted since it was written. The historical evidence actually makes a rather astounding case for the supernatural protection and preservation of both Old and New Testaments.

As soon as the New Testament documents were written, people immediately started making copies and passing them around. There are so many copies in existence that the New Testament is the best-documented piece of ancient literature in the world. And because there are so many copies, we can compare them to today's Bible and be assured that what we have is what was written.

The Old Testament scribes were so meticulous in copying their manuscripts that they were obsessive about accuracy. They would count the middle letter of the entire original text and compare it to the middle letter of the new copy. If it didn't match, they'd make a new copy. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947, they demonstrated that this collection of Old Testament scriptures has been faithfully preserved for two thousand years.

Many people believe that certain parts of the Bible have been corrupted or deleted, such as supposed teaching on reincarnation. However, this is just hearsay from people who do not understand how the canon of scripture was decided on. From the beginning of the church, Christians recognized the 27 books that make up the New Testament as God's inspired word, and the writings that weren't inspired were eventually dropped. We have some great articles on our Web site that explain about the reliability of the Bible.[{4}](#)

Many Christians believe another myth: "I believe in Jesus, but

surely God will let people of other faiths into heaven too.” Many seem to think that being a “good Muslim” or a “sincere Buddhist” should count for something.

This does make sense from a human perspective, but God didn't leave us in the dark trying to figure out truth on our own. He has revealed truth to us, both through Jesus and through the Bible. So regardless of what makes sense from our limited human perspective, we need to trust what God has said.

And Jesus, who ought to know because He is God in the flesh, said, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by Me.” (John 14:6) No other religion deals with the problem of sin and God's requirement of perfection and holiness on God's terms. There may be many ways to Jesus, but there's only way to the Father. It's God's heaven, and He makes the rules: it's Jesus or nothing.

## Notes

1. I am indebted to Dr. Al Meredith, the pastor of Wedgwood Baptist Church in Ft. Worth, Texas, for this perspective. Wedgwood Baptist was the site of the massacre the night of the “See You At the Pole” celebration when seven youth and staff members were killed and seven others wounded by a crazed gunman.

2. Jeff Kinkade, pastor of Reinhardt Bible Church in Garland, Texas.

3. [“Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Help Me Understand Rewards in Heaven.”](#)

4. [“Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?”](#). Also, [“The Authority of the Bible”](#) and [“The Christian Canon”](#).

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# “The Author of the Pentateuch was Moses, Not Ezra, Right?”

First I want to thank you for your article [Did Moses Write the Pentateuch?](#). Would you please elaborate on, or provide scriptural references or other reference sources that would identify the “basis” upon which Baruch Spinoza suggests that Ezra may have been the author. I know who Ezra was and I have read this in several commentaries but it has not been made clear as to how this conclusion is reached.

Spinoza was ejected from synagogue teaching because of his pantheistic world view and naturalistic approach to Biblical criticism. His scientific criticism of the Bible made him an early leader in the modern movement of higher criticism.

In his 1670 work *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* he argued that since the Pentateuch refers to Moses in the third person and includes an account of his death it could not have been written by Moses. By appointing Ezra as the author (which is later accepted in the documentary hypothesis promoted by Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen in the 19th century) it helps to push the composition date of the Old Testament into a later time frame. This has been a goal of many liberal theologians who have sought to debunk prophetic revelation by proving the authorship to be after the fact of events being predicted.

Gleason Archer, in his survey of the Old Testament, notes that ancient authors commonly referred to themselves in the third person. Xenophon and Julius Caesar both wrote in this manner and conservative scholars have long acknowledged that Joshua probably wrote the account Moses death.

I hope that this is helpful.

For Him,

Don Closson

Probe Ministries