

Christian Apologetics

Rick Wade's introduction to Christian apologetics, rather than delving into specific arguments for the faith, examines the need to think well and develop logic skills. It is important to be able to answer the charge of elitism that is often leveled at Christianity today, and this essay concludes with some cogent statements making a case for Christianity.

Introduction

Throughout the history of the church, Christians have been called upon to explain why we believe what we believe. The apostle Paul spoke of his ministry as “the defense and confirmation of the gospel.” Peter said we need to “be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you.”

This activity of the church came to be known as apologetics which means “defense.” But, if it is important that we defend the faith, how do we do it?

In this essay I will not provide a lot of evidences and arguments. I will rather look at some basic principles that will guide us in defending the faith. We will talk about our starting point and about the important matter of thinking logically. We'll look at the specific charge of elitism which is prevalent on college campuses today. Finally, we'll deal with the question of presenting a case for Christianity.

So, what is apologetics, anyway, and what is it supposed to do? Apologetics has been defined as “the science and art of defending the faith.” It is chiefly concerned with the question of the truth of Jesus Christ. In the days of the Greeks, when someone was summoned to court to face a charge, he would present an “apology” or a defense. For Christians, this might mean answering the question, “Why do you believe that Jesus is God?” or a question more often heard today, “Why

do you think Christians have the truth?"

So, apologetics is first of all defense. It has come to include more than just defense, however. Not only is the truth of our beliefs an issue, but also the beliefs others hold. A second task of apologetics is to challenge other people to defend their beliefs.

A third task of apologetics is to present a case for the truth of the biblical message. One might call this task "proving" Christianity (although the matter of proof must be qualified). If this seems to be too ambitious a goal, we might speak simply of persuading people of the truth of the biblical message.

In all of this our goal is to let the light of God's truth shine in all its brilliance. It is our ambition also to bring unbelievers to a recognition of the truth of Jesus Christ and to persuade them to put their faith in Him.

Apologetics is typically a response to a specific question or challenge, either stated outright or just implied. Paul reasoned with the Jews for whom the cross was a stumbling block, "explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead." In the second century, apologists defended not only Christian beliefs but also Christians themselves against such charges as atheism and cannibalism and being threats to the state. In the Medieval era, more attention was given to the challenges of Judaism and Islam. In the era of the Enlightenment, apologists had to defend Christianity against the narrow confines of scientific rationalism. Today the challenge has shifted again, this time from attacks on specific doctrines to the question of whether Christianity has any claim to final truth at all.

Like our forebears, we must answer the challenges of our day. We must respond to our contemporaries' questions as difficult and uncomfortable as that might be.

Thinking Well

One of my frustrations in studying apologetics has been trying to master the overwhelming number of questions and challenges, on the one hand, and supporting evidences and reasons, on the other. Although it behooves us all to master some of these, it seems to me that it is just as important to learn how to think well.

Learning to think well, or logically, is important for Christians for several reasons. It helps us put together the various pieces of our faith to form a cohesive whole. It helps us make decisions in everyday life when the Bible doesn't speak directly to a particular issue. We must learn to deduce true beliefs or proper courses of action from what we do know from Scripture.

Good, logical thinking is especially important for an apologist. On the one hand, it can help prevent us from putting together shoddy arguments for what we believe. On the other hand, it helps us evaluate the beliefs of those who challenge Christianity. Too often we stumble at criticisms which sound good, but which really stand on logically shaky legs. Let's consider a few examples.

Here's a basic one. How do you respond to someone who says, "There's no such thing as absolute truth"? If the individual really thinks there is no absolute truth that is, truth that stands for all people at all times, that person at best can only say "In my opinion, there's no such thing as absolute truth." To say "There's no such thing as absolute truth" is to state an absolute; the statement refutes itself.

Here's another one. You've heard people say, "All religions really teach the same thing." Oh, really? Ours teaches that Jesus is God in flesh; other religions say that He isn't. A logical principle called the law of non-contradiction says that Jesus can't both be God and not be God.

Let's try one more. Some people say, "I can't believe in Christ. Look at all the terrible things Christians have done through the centuries." How would you answer this objection? While it is true that what Christians do influences non-Christians' responses to the gospel, such actions have nothing to do with whether Christianity itself is true. If part of the gospel message was that once a person becomes a Christian that person absolutely will never sin again, the objector would have grounds for questioning the truth of the faith. But the Bible doesn't say that. We can agree that Christians shouldn't do terrible things to other people, but what people did in fourteenth-century Europe or do in twentieth-century America in the name of Jesus can't change the reality of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ. The person making this argument may not like what Christians have done, but this complaint has no logical force against the truth of Christ. When people present arguments against the faith, we need to discern whether what they say is both factually true and logically sound. Often the objections we hear are neither. Learning how to think logically ourselves will enable us to spot fallacies in others' thinking. Perhaps pointing these out (in a gentle way, if possible) will cause the person to rethink his or her position. At least it will defuse the attack on our faith.

Answering The Charge of Elitism

I've been talking about the importance of logical thinking in doing apologetics. Now I'd like to apply that in considering a charge currently being made against Christians, especially on college campuses.

In a video I recently saw, a young woman said the notion that Christians have the only truth is "elitist." She was saying that since there are so many different beliefs in the world, how can any one group of people claim to have the only truth? She, and many others like her, consider such thinking

arrogant.

How can we respond to this charge? First, notice the name-calling. We are charged with "elitism." The real issue is passed over in favor of a put-down. This is just another example of how ideas and issues are dealt with in our society these days. It is important, however, not to react in kind. Too often in our society the battles over issues and ideas are fought with name-calling and sloganeering. This is unbecoming to Christians and unprofitable in apologetics and evangelism. We need to deal with the ideas themselves.

Second, Christians can acknowledge that non-Christians can know truth and that other religions can include some truth. If they didn't, they would find very few adherents. They fail, though, on such fundamental issues as the identity of Jesus and the way to be reconciled to God.

Third, notice the faulty logic in the argument. What does the reality of many points of view have to do with the truth-value of any of them? This is like saying: "Some men think they should treat their wives with the same respect they desire; some ignore their wives; others think it's okay to beat them. Who's to say only one way can be right?" The structure of the argument is the same, but it is obvious that the conclusion is wrong. A critic might understandably question our assurance that what we believe is the final truth given that there are so many people who disagree. But it is faulty logic to conclude that no beliefs can claim final truth simply because there are so many of them. Fourth, since the criticism rests upon the idea that two or more conflicting beliefs can be true, we must challenge this assumption. It can be shown to be incorrect by looking to everyday experience. If my wife says it is raining outside but my son says it isn't, do I take my umbrella or not? It can't be both raining and not raining at the same time. Likewise, if one person says Jesus is the only way to salvation and another says He isn't, no more than one of them can be correct.

Some people, of course, will challenge the notion that our knowledge of God is like knowing whether it is raining outside. God is not a part of nature; He is “wholly other.” This issue is much too involved to develop here. But I believe that this thinking is fundamentally a prejudice against authoritative revelation. God has spoken, and He has given us evidence in this world to confirm what He has said.

This challenge to Christianity and many others like it are not easy to deal with. But if defending the faith means responding to the challenges of our day, we must prepare ourselves, as difficult as it may be. Otherwise, we can’t expect to be heard.

The Case for Christianity Part 1

Earlier I wrote that one of the tasks of apologetics is to present a case for the truth of the biblical message. Now I’d like to present a few foundational considerations, and after that we’ll look at how we might construct a case.

When Christians are called upon to present a case for the faith, they are, in effect, being asked to offer proof that Christianity is true. What evidences or arguments can be marshaled to establish the truth of what we believe?

What we would like to do is make a case which no person of reasonable intelligence can fail to accept. But the Bible acknowledges the reality that many people will not believe no matter how compelling the evidence. Remember the story in Luke 16 about the rich man who died and suffered torment? He begged Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers about what they also faced. Listen to the response. Abraham said, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.” A determined will can ignore the best of evidence.

Unless we are talking about proof in the mathematical sense,

we need to note that proof is person-relative; what will convince one person might not convince another. This doesn't mean, however, that Christianity only becomes true when someone is convinced. It's true whether anyone believes it or not.

In making a case for the faith we seek to present a sound argument which will be persuasive for a particular listener. On the one hand, this consideration frees us from the responsibility of having an argument which will convince everyone; on the other hand, it means that we must not depend upon "one-size-fits-all" arguments.

Even if we're able to deal adequately with the challenges of a given individual, we need to also note what the real basis of our belief is. A true knowledge of God is based upon divine testimony which is accepted by faith, but which is also confirmed for us by evidences of various types. The testimony of Scripture about such matters as the work of Christ on the cross and justification by faith are things which can't be proved; they are accepted by faith.

We must also remember the nature of our message. Christianity is not just a system of beliefs, but rather the message of the One who is truth. This is an especially pertinent point today, given the mentality of the younger generations. Today we've lost the confidence in our ability to reason through the major issues of life in a disinterested, scientific manner and come to firm conclusions. Conceptual schemes that don't touch us where we really live hold little interest anymore. We need to draw people to Jesus who is the answer to the major questions of life. Christianity is living truth, and it should be preached and defended as such.

We might only be able to convince the non-believer that Christianity is plausible or believable. But that's a good start; often it takes many steps for a person to come to faith. Our job is to provide a solid intellectual foundation

to make those steps sure.

The Case for Christianity Part 2

Now we'll finish our discussion by outlining a way of presenting a case for Christianity. Note that this is just an outline; it'll be up to you to fill in the details.

Since God created the universe and is active in His creation, there is no lack of evidence for the truth of Christianity. When I use the word "evidence," I'm using it in a broad way to include not only factual evidence, but logical arguments and human experience as well. Evidence is anything that can be brought to bear on the truth-claims of Scripture.

As we present evidence, we must be aware that the false presuppositions unbelievers hold about God, man, and the world might skew their evaluation of the evidences. In fact, the idea of encouraging people to evaluate Christianity makes some people uneasy. Are we allowing sinful people to bring God to the bar of judgment? No, we aren't. We are simply recognizing that, although the Bible never hints that anyone is justified in rejecting its message, it does present witnesses to the truth, typically through historical reminders and miracles. Further, because unbelievers are made in God's image and live in God's world, they have some understanding of the truth, and we can appeal to that understanding.

We can divide the kinds of evidence at our disposal into three categories: fact (or empirical evidence); reason (or logical thinking); and experience (or human nature and the experience of life).

These three kinds of evidence can be used two ways: evaluation and explanation.

First, we can look for evidence in a given area which confirms Scripture. This is the evaluation aspect of apologetics. So, for example, we can ask, Are there observable facts which

affirm what Scripture teaches? Consider history and archeology. Are the teachings of Scripture coherent and logically consistent? Yes, they are. Typically, people who say there are contradictions in the Bible have a hard time remembering one. Is what the Bible says about human nature and human experience true to what we know? Yes it is; we can identify with biblical characters.

The second way we use evidences is to see if Christianity can explain them. The following questions might clarify what I mean. We can ask, Does the Christian worldview explain the facts of nature? Yes, it does, for it says that Jesus created and sustains the universe. Does Christianity provide an explanation for the reliability of human reason itself? Sure; we are created in the image of God with intelligence. Does the Bible explain human nature and experience? Yes, for it relates that, while the image of God and common grace enable us to do good to a certain extent, we are given to sin because of the Fall.

In this essay I've tried to provide some foundational principles for defending the faith. As we prepare to give an answer to our society, it's important that we learn to think logically, that we respond to the questions of our day, that we become familiar with the broad range of evidence at our disposal, and that we consider the person or persons we are addressing as we present our case. With this in mind, we exhibit the truth of Jesus Christ in all its splendor, and, as always, leave the results to God.

©1997 Probe Ministries.

Culture and the Bible

This is not a Christian culture. We are living in an environment that challenges us to continually evaluate what it means to live the Christian life. So how do we respond? The answer begins with the Bible. Our view of culture must include biblical insights. In this essay we will strive to investigate selected passages of Scripture pertaining to culture.



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

The Golden Calf and the Tabernacle: Judging Culture

Chapters 31-39 of Exodus provide a unique perspective of culture and God's involvement with it. On one hand the work of man was blessed through the artistry of Bezalel, Oholiab, and other skilled artisans as they cooperated to build the tabernacle (35-39). On the other hand, the work of man in the form of the golden calf was rejected by God (31-34). This contrast serves to suggest a guideline with which we can begin to judge culture.

Chapter 31:1-11 contains God's initial instructions to Moses concerning the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Two important artisans, Bezalel and Oholiab, are recognized by God as being especially gifted for this work. These men were skilled, (1) creative people who were able to contribute significantly to the religious/cultural life of the nation of Israel. But at this point in the narrative the scene changes dramatically.

While Moses was on the mountain with God, the people became impatient and decided to make a god, an idol. This prompted an enraged response from both God and Moses. The end result was tragic: three thousand were slain as a result of their idolatry.

Then the attention of the people was directed toward the building of the tabernacle. Chapters 35-39 contain detailed accounts from God pertaining to the tabernacle, and the subsequent work of the skilled artisans, including Bezalel and Oholiab. The finished product was blessed (39:42-43).

In this brief survey of a portion of Israel's history we have seen two responses to the work of man's hands: one negative, the other positive. The people fashioned a piece of art, an idol; the response was negative on the part of God and Moses. The people fashioned another piece of art, the tabernacle; the response was positive and worthy of the blessing of both God and Moses. Why the difference in judgment? The answer is deceptively simple: the intent of the art was evaluated. And it was not a matter of one being "secular" and the other "sacred." Art, the cultural product, was not the problem. "Just as art can be used in the name of the true God, as shown in the gifts of Bezalel, so it can be used in an idolatrous way, supplanting the place of God and thereby distorting its own nature." (2)

Art is certainly a vital element of culture. As a result, we should take the lessons of Exodus 31-39 to heart. Our evaluation of culture should include an awareness of intent without being overly sensitive to form. If not, we begin to assign evil incorrectly. As Carl F.H. Henry says, "The world is evil only as a fallen world. It is not evil intrinsically." (3)

These insights have focused on certain observers of cultural objects as seen in art: God, Moses, and the people of Israel. In the first case God and Moses saw the golden calf from one perspective, the people of Israel from another. In the second case all were in agreement as they observed the tabernacle. The people's perception changed; they agreed with God's intent and aesthetic judgement. The lesson is that our cultural life is subject to God.

Entering the Fray

How do you react when you're out of your comfort zone: your surroundings, friends, and family? Do you cringe and disengage yourself? Or do you boldly make the best of the new locality?

The first chapter of Daniel tells of four young men who were transported to a culture other than their own by a conquering nation, Babylonia. Their response to this condition provides us with insights concerning how we should relate to the culture that surrounds us. Daniel, of course, proves to be the central figure among the four. He is the focus of our attention.

Several facets of this chapter should be noted. First, Daniel and his friends were chosen by the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, to serve in his court. They were chosen because of their "intelligence in every branch of wisdom ... understanding ... discerning knowledge ... and ability for serving in the king's court" (v. 4). Second, they were taught "the literature and language of the Chaldeans" (v. 4). Third, Daniel "made up his mind" that he would not partake of the Babylonian food and drink (v. 8). Fourth, "God granted Daniel favor and compassion" with his superiors even though he and his friends would not partake of the food (v. 9-16). Fifth, "God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom" (v. 17). Sixth, the king found Daniel and his friends to be "ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm" (v. 20).

This synopsis provides us with several important observations. First, evidently there was no attempt on the part of Daniel and his friends to totally separate themselves from the culture, in particular the educational system of that culture. This was a typical response among the ancient Jews. These young men were capable of interacting with an ungodly culture without being contaminated by it. Evangelicals are often paranoid as they live within what is deemed an unchristian

culture. Perhaps a lesson can be learned from Daniel concerning a proper response. Of course such a response should be based on wisdom and discernment. That leads us to our second observation.

Second, even though Daniel and his companions learned from the culture, they did so by practicing discernment. They obviously compared what they learned of Babylonian thought with what they already understood from God's point of view. The Law of God was something with which they were well acquainted. Edward Young's comments on v. 17 clarify this: "The knowledge and intelligence which God gave to them ... was of a discerning kind, that they might know and possess the ability to accept what was true and to reject what was false in their instruction." (4) Such perception is greatly needed among evangelicals. A separatist, isolationist mentality creates moral and spiritual vacuums throughout our culture. We should replace those vacuums with ideas that are spawned in the minds of Godly thinkers and doers.

Third, God approved of their condition within the culture and even gave them what was needed to influence it (v. 17).

Evangelicals may be directed by God to enter a foreign culture that may not share their worldview. Or, they may be directed to enter the culture that surrounds them, which, as with contemporary western culture, can be devoid of the overt influence of a Christian worldview. If so, they should do so with an understanding that the Lord will protect and provide. And He will demonstrate His power through them as the surrounding culture responds.

The World in the New Testament

In and *of*: two simple words that can stimulate a lot of thought when it comes to what the Bible says about culture, or the world. After all, we are to be in the world but not of it. Let's see what the New Testament has to say.

The terms *kosmos* and *aion*, both of which are generally translated "world," are employed numerous times in the New Testament. A survey of *kosmos* will provide important insights. George Eldon Ladd presents usages of the word:(5)

First, the world can refer to "both the entire created order (Jn. 17:5, 24) and the earth in particular (Jn. 11:9; 16:21; 21:25)."(6) This means "there is no trace of the idea that there is anything evil about the world."(7) Second, "kosmos can designate not only the world but also those who inhabit the world: mankind (12:19; 18:20; 7:4; 14:22)."(8) Third, "the most interesting use of kosmos ... is found in the sayings where the world – mankind – is the object of God's love and salvation."(9)

But men, in addition to being the objects of God's love, are seen "as sinful, rebellious, and alienated from God, as fallen humanity. The kosmos is characterized by wickedness (7:7), and does not know God (17:25) nor his emissary, Christ (1:10)."(10) "Again and again ... the world is presented as something hostile to God."(11) But Ladd reminds us that "what makes the kosmos evil is not something intrinsic to it, but the fact that it has turned away from its creator and has become enslaved to evil powers."(12)

So what is the Christian's responsibility in this evil, rebellious world? "The disciples' reaction is not to be one of withdrawal from the world, but of living in the world, motivated by the love of God rather than the love of the world."(13) "So his followers are not to find their security and satisfaction on the human level as does the world, but in devotion to the redemptive purpose of God" (17:17, 19).(14)

The apostle Paul related that "worldliness" consists of worshipping the creature rather than the creator (Rom. 1:25), of finding one's pride and glory on the human and created level rather than in God. The world is sinful only insofar as it exalts itself above God and refuses to humble itself and

acknowledge its creative Lord.”(15) The world is seen as it should be seen when we first worship its creator.

This summary of *kosmos* contributes several points that can be applied to our survey. First, the world is hostile toward God; this includes the rebellion of mankind. Second, this hostility was not part of the original created order; the world was created good. Third, this world is also the object of God’s redemptive love and Christ’s sacrifice. Fourth, the world is not to be seen as an end in itself. We are always to view culture in the light of eternity. Fifth, we are to be about the business of transforming the world. “We are not to follow the world’s lead but to cut across it and rise above it to a higher calling and style.”(16) Or, as Ronald Allen says: “Ours is a world of lechery and war. It is also a world of the good, the beautiful, and the lovely. Eschew lechery; embrace the lovely— and live for the praise of God in the only world we have!”(17)

We are in need of a balance that does not reject beauty, but at the same time recognizes the ugly. Our theology should entail both. The world needs to see this.

Corinthians and Culture

“You’re a Corinthian!” If you had heard that exclamation in New Testament times you would know that the person who said it was very upset. To call someone a Corinthian was insulting. Even non- Christians recognized that Corinth was one of the most immoral cities in the known world.

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians contains many indications of this. The believers in Corinth were faced with a culture which resembled ours in several ways. It was diverse ethnically, religiously, and philosophically. It was a center of wealth, literature, and the arts. And it was infamous for its blatant sexual immorality. How would Paul advise believers to respond to life in such a city?

That question can be answered by concentrating on several principles that can be discovered in Paul's letter. We will highlight only a few of these by focusing on certain terms.

Liberty is a foundational term for Christians entering the culture, but it can be misunderstood easily. This is because some act as if it implies total freedom. But "The believer's life is one of Christian liberty in grace." (18) Paul wrote, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything" (6:12, 10:23). It must be remembered, though, that this liberty is given to glorify God. A liberty that condones sin is another form of slavery. Thus, "Whether ... you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (10:31). In addition, we must be aware of how our liberty is observed by non-believers. Again Paul wrote, "Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God" (10:32).

Conscience is another term that figures prominently in how we enter the culture. We must be very sensitive to what it means to defile the conscience. There must be a sensitivity to what tempts us. "The believer who cannot visit the world without making it his home has no right to visit at his weak points."¹⁹ As a result, we need to cultivate the discipline that is needed to respond to the ways the Spirit speaks through our conscience.

Yet another term is brother. In particular, we should be aware of becoming a "stumbling block" to the person Paul calls a "weaker brother." This does not mean that we disregard what has been said about liberty. "A Christian need not allow his liberty to be curtailed by somebody else. But he is obliged to take care that that other person does not fall into sin and if he would hurt that other person's conscience he has not fulfilled that obligation." (20) This requires a special sensitivity to others, which is a hallmark of the Christian life.

On many occasions the Probe staff has experienced the challenge of applying these principles. For example, some of us speak frequently in a club in an area of Dallas, Texas called "Deep Ellum." The particular club in which we teach includes a bar, concert stage, and other things normally associated with such a place. Some refer to the clientele as "Generation Xers" who are often nonconformists. We can use our liberty to minister in the club, but we must do so with a keen awareness of the principles we have discussed. When we enter that culture, which is so different from what we normally experience, we must do so by applying the wisdom found in God's Word to the Corinthians.

Encountering the World

How do you get a hearing when you have something to say? In particular, how do you share the truth of God in ungodly surroundings?

Paul's encounter with Athenian culture (Acts 17:16-34) is illustrative of the manner in which we can dialogue with contemporary culture. His interaction exhibits an ability to communicate with a diversity of the population, from those in the marketplace to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. And he exhibits an understanding of the culture, including its literature and art. Paul was relating a model for how we can relate our faith effectively. That is, we must communicate with language and examples that can be understood by our audience.

Verse 16 says that Paul's "spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols." We should note that the verb translated "provoked" here is the Greek word from which we derive the term paroxysm. Paul was highly irritated. In addition, we should note that the verb is imperfect passive, implying that his agitation was a logical result of his Christian conscience and that it was continuous. The idolatry which permeated Athenian culture stimulated this

dramatic response. Application: the idolatry of contemporary culture should bring no less a response from us. Materialism, Individualism, Relativism, and Secularism are examples of ideologies that have become idols in our culture.

Verses 17 and 18 refer to several societal groups: Jews, God-fearing Gentiles, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, as well as the general population, namely “those who happened to be present.” Evidently Paul was able to converse with any segment of the population. Application: as alert, thinking, sensitive, concerned, discerning Christians we are challenged to confront our culture in all of its variety and pluralism. It is easier to converse with those who are like-minded, but that is not our only responsibility.

In verse 18 some of the philosophers call Paul an “idle babbler” (i.e., one who makes his living by picking up scraps). Application: we should realize that the Christian worldview, in particular the basic tenets of the gospel, will often elicit scorn from a culture that is too often foreign to Christian truth. This should not hinder us from sharing the truth.

The narrative of verses 19-31 indicates that Paul knew enough about Athenian culture to converse with it on the highest intellectual level. He was acutely aware of the “points of understanding” between him and his audience. He was also acutely aware of the “points of disagreement” and did not hesitate to stress them. He had enough knowledge of their literary expressions to quote their spokesmen (i.e., their poets), even though this does not necessarily mean Paul had a thorough knowledge of them. And he called them to repentance. Application: we need to “stretch” ourselves more intellectually so that we can duplicate Paul’s experience more frequently. The most influential seats in our culture are too often left to those who are devoid of Christian thought. Such a condition is in urgent need of change.

Paul experienced three reactions in Athens (vv. 32-34). First, "some began to sneer" (v. 32). They expressed contempt. Second, some said "We shall hear you again concerning this" (v. 32). Third, "some men joined him and believed" (v. 34). We should not be surprised when God's message is rejected; we should be prepared when people want to hear more; and we can rejoice when the message falls on fertile soil and bears the fruit of a changed life.

Conclusion

We have seen that Scripture is not silent regarding culture. It contains much by way of example and precept, and we have only begun the investigation. There is more to be done. With this expectation in mind, what have we discovered from the Bible at this stage?

First, in some measure God "is responsible for the presence of culture, for he created human beings in such a way that they are culture-producing beings." (21) Second, God holds us responsible for cultural stewardship. Third, we should not fear the surrounding culture; instead, we should strive to contribute to it through God-given creativity, and transform it through dialogue and proclamation. Fourth, we should practice discernment while living within culture. Fifth, the products of culture should be judged on the basis of intent, not form. Or, to simply further:

We advance the theory that God's basic attitude toward culture is that which the apostle Paul articulates in I Corinthians 9:19-22. That is, he views human culture primarily as a vehicle to be used by him and his people for Christian purposes, rather than as an enemy to be combatted or shunned. (22)

Let us use the vehicle for the glory of God!

1. The word "skill," which is frequently employed to describe artisans in these chapters (NASB), is from the Hebrew word *hakam*, meaning "wise." One of its main synonyms is *bin*, basically meaning "discernment". Thus, the skillful person is one who, in the minds of the Israelites, was also "wise" and "discerning" in his artistry.
2. Gene Edward Veith, *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 31.
3. Carl F.H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 420.
4. Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 48-49.
5. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974). In particular, see chapters 17 and 29.
6. Ibid., 225.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 226.
10. Ibid.
11. Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Carl F.H. Henry, eds. *Baker's Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), s.v. "World, Worldliness," by Everett F. Harrison.
12. Ladd, 226.
13. Ibid., 227.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 400.
16. R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1985), 209.
17. Ronald B. Allen, *The Majesty of Man: The Dignity of Being Human* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1984), 191.
18. Henry, 420.
19. Ibid., 428.
20. F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 243.

Unity School of Christianity

History

The Unity School of Christianity began as a quest for physical healing by its co-founder, Mary Caroline Page, known as Myrtle, the wife of Charles Fillmore. Even before their marriage in March of 1881 Myrtle had already developed an eclectic theology. Charles had a background in Hinduism, Buddhism, Rosicrucianism, and Theosophy.

They became students of metaphysics and after taking some forty or more courses Myrtle developed what was to become known as Practical Christianity. Myrtle became a practitioner of “mental healing.”

A spiritual breakthrough came for Myrtle in 1886 when she attended a meeting lead by Dr. E.B. Weeks, a noted metaphysician. Dr. Weeks made a statement that would change Myrtle’s understanding of herself and set her on a new course of spiritual development. Myrtle was in a state of mental and physical illness and had come to a point where she was not helped by either medicine or physicians. Dr. Weeks’s statement that day brought her the healing she sought. She cherished each word of the phrase “I am a child of God and therefore I do not inherit sickness.”

Myrtle believed that she had discovered a great “spiritual truth” regarding healing, i.e., by repeating this phrase as a positive affirmation she would be healed. She began to offer her services to others and soon developed a following of those seeking divine healing.

The Fillmores were students of Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, a

mental healer and metaphysician. Myrtle was also a follower of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, who was likewise influenced by Quimby. Unity, therefore, was birthed by the Fillmores, but its roots go back to directly to Mary Baker Eddy and both directly and indirectly to Phineas Quimby.

According to Charles Fillmore the name Unity was adopted in 1895, denoting that Unity was devoted to the spiritualization of all humanity and took the best from all religions. He said the following regarding the eclectic belief system of Unity:

We have studied many isms, many cults. People of every religion under the sun claim that we either belong to them or have borrowed the best part of our teaching from them. We have borrowed the best from all religions, that is the reason we are called Unity. . . . Unity is not a sect, not a separation of people into an exclusive group of know-it-alls. Unity is the Truth that is taught in all religions, simplified. . . so that anyone can understand and apply it. Students of Unity do not find it necessary to sever their church affiliations.

Thus many Christians adopt Unity's teachings and bring those back into their churches, not identifying their "new" teachings as Unity's and thereby compromising the doctrinal integrity of the church.

Unity Doctrine and Theology

God

God is not a personality but a spiritual energy "force" or principle of love. Charles Fillmore in his book, *Jesus Christ Heals*, says that "God is not loving. God is love . . . from which is drawn forth all feeling, sympathy, emotion, and all that goes to make up the joys of existence."

Fillmore goes on to say, "God does not love anybody or

anything. God is the love in everybody and everything. God exercises none of His attributes except through the inner consciousness of the universe and man." In other words, God is not a personal being but an energy or force that expresses itself as a pantheistic love that permeates all things.

H. Emilie Cady attempts to reconcile the seemingly incongruous possibility that God can be both personal and impersonal by her statement:

To the individual consciousness God takes on personality, but as the creative underlying cause of all things, He is principle, impersonal; as expressed in each individual, He becomes personal to that one personal, loving, all-forgiving Father-Mother.

It's obvious that Unity's understanding of who God is has fallen victim to its own syncretism. Unity, while attempting to identify itself as being biblical, has offered too much on the "altar of tolerance" and, thereby, has prostituted itself on the bed of other gods.

Donald Curtis, former minister at Unity Church of Dallas and author of several Unity books, has this to say about God: "Every one of us has planted within him a God-seed, and the business of life is to see that this seed grows, unfolds, and expresses in our world."

Curtis goes on to say, "As this seed unfolds through the development of the Christ consciousness, we fulfill our highest objective in this world."

The ultimate goal of those who follow Unity teaching is to recognize their "oneness" with the "Force," thereby realizing their true self, the God-Self. The god of Unity is an adaptation of Hindu belief regarding the divine. God is a part of His creation. God is in all things.

Jesus the Christ

Unity also holds an unbiblical view of Jesus. Donald Curtis agrees with Unity theology in that he believes that Jesus the man is fundamentally different from Jesus the Christ. Curtis says, "Christ is the universal principle of love and wisdom. Christ is the only Son of God, but this only Son of God lives in each one of us."

Curtis makes a primary deviation from biblical understanding in that he holds the position that Jesus is man and that Christ is divine consciousness. He states, "Let us prepare ourself so that the Christ may be born in our own consciousness!" In other words, our spirituality is based on the discovery that the Christ is inherently within each one of us regardless of our personal beliefs or affiliations.

Curtis continues: "When we say 'Jesus the Christ,' we must realize that Jesus represents man and Christ represents God in man." Unity distorts Christ as the Messiah and renders Him as a "universal principle of love" that resides in all of humanity simply waiting to be discovered through self-consciousness.

Unity, along with other New Age belief systems, espouses a mental and spiritual 'transformation' that will raise our consciousness. According to Curtis "there are levels of development through which we grow toward full Christ-consciousness when we are truly transformed, fully reborn."

The pantheistic nature of Unity is expressed in Curtis' declaration that "we let our self be ruled by the Christ within. We let the Christ teaching unfold in and through us in this great new age. We know that this Christ principle indwells every individual, no matter what his religious beliefs may be. . . . We give thanks for the realization of the mystical Christ, for the Christ consciousness alive in our life."

Unified Man

According to Donald Curtis, man's primary purpose is to recognize that he is divine. He states: "There is another teaching, however a higher teaching. It is that man has always existed as part of God, and that this God-self, which is the living Essence of everything, individualizes itself in man."

Curtis goes on to say that "within each of us there is a great, wise, and beautiful Being. This is what we really are—the living Essence of everything. We are evolving constantly. We have self-consciousness; now we must develop God-consciousness, a sense of universal unity. And we must endeavor to manifest this God-consciousness in our world to solve our apparent differences through love and understanding."

Unity teaches evolution, both physical and mental or spiritual. It teaches that mankind evolves toward Godhood and that this collective God-consciousness will be man's solution to all his problems. This teaching elevates mankind to divinity, a position that is far from biblical teaching.

In his book *The Way of the Christ*, Curtis says that "man is human, but he is first of all divine." He adds that "as we recognize and identify with the Christ within, we become one with the universal Self-God."

This is nothing more than Hindu philosophy dressed in Western garb: everything is a part of God and God encompasses all that is, whether it be animate or inanimate. This idea, pantheism, is widely held in the East and is being imported to the United States via every means available to man.

Salvation

H. Emilie Cady in her book, *Lessons in Truth*, says that "man originally lived consciously in the spiritual part of himself. He fell by descending in his consciousness to the external or

more material part of himself." In other words, the fall of man was from the spiritual realm to the physical and this fall has caused him to suffer spiritual amnesia. Therefore man's dilemma is to reclaim his place in the spiritual realm through right thinking.

Unity teaches that as man discovers his innate divinity he continues to raise his consciousness until he becomes fully God-realized. Once man has achieved this state of understanding he recognizes that he is in perfect oneness with God and is not in need of redemption but that he is indeed the divine.

The unbiblical position regarding salvation held by Unity is clearly seen in the Unity publication, *The Way to Salvation*. This pamphlet states that "Jesus Christ was not meant to be slain as a substitute for man; that is, to atone vicariously for him. Each person must achieve at-one-ment with God, by letting the Christ Spirit within him resurrect his soul into Christ perfection."

Curtis says that "more than ever, we need to become quiet and focus upon the inner. We need to be still and to know that the presence within is God." When one becomes fully aware of this divine presence salvation is realized because the individual no longer has a sense of lostness.

Reincarnation

Unity teaches that the individual lives a number of lifetimes within one existence. Dr. Donald Curtis of the Unity Church of Dallas writes that "it isn't so important that we make it in this particular lifetime, as it is to realize that we do make it, because there is only one lifetime and it goes on forever."

Article 22 of the Unity Statement of Faith states, "we believe that the dissolution of spirit, soul and body, caused by death, is annulled by rebirth of the same spirit and soul in

another body here on earth. We believe the repeated incarnations of man to be a merciful provision of our loving Father to the end that all may have opportunity to attain immortality through regeneration, as did Jesus."

Charles Fillmore rejected the standard understanding of reincarnation as described by the Hindu or the Buddhist. He could not accept their respective teachings regarding the Law of Karma or the Transmigration of the soul. For him reincarnation was a much more simple way for God to offer man a second chance at perfection.

This teaching of reincarnation is perhaps the most destructive of all the false teachings of Unity. The belief in reincarnation undercuts the primary tenets of the gospel. One would have to deny the deity of our Lord, His physical resurrection, and His Second Coming to accept the error of Charles and Myrtle Fillmore.

Reincarnation undercuts Christian doctrine in three ways. First, it assumes that God is impersonal and is therefore unknowable. Second, reincarnation denigrates the Atonement of Christ, and third, it denies the fact that Jesus physically resurrected from the dead. We need to look at each of these more closely.

The Bible does not offer any evidence to support these assumptions. On the contrary, the Bible clearly teaches that God is a personal Being and that He is knowable. Isaiah 43:25 and Jeremiah 31:20 tell us that God remembers; Exodus 3:12 and Matthew 3:17 say that God speaks; Genesis 1:1 and 6:5 along with Exodus 2:24 say that God sees, hears and creates. Elsewhere the Bible tells us that God is a personal Spirit (John 4:24 and Hebrews 1:3). Since God is a personal Being, He has a will (Matthew 6:10, Hebrews 10:7-9 and 1 John 2:17). Because God has an expressed will, He will also judge His creation (Ezekiel 18:30 and 34:20, and also 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Unity attempts to denigrate the Atonement of Christ in order to build a better case for reincarnation; however, the Atonement delivers man from the cyclical concept of rebirth. Reincarnation does not offer us either peace or hope. The Atonement offers us peace because we do not have to rely on our own righteousness, and it offers us hope because of what Jesus did on the cross. Jesus has dealt with our sin on the cross and our response is to simply accept His work on our behalf.

Likewise, Unity cannot accept a physical resurrection for our Lord. Unity holds that the disciples expected Jesus to be reincarnated, not resurrected. The biblical claims that Jesus rose physically, appeared to and was recognized by many, was physically touched by some, and ate fish with others are troublesome and must be explained away or spiritualized into meaninglessness if Unity is to seem plausible. (See Luke 24:16 and 31.)

Conclusion

The Unity School of Christianity is recognized as a cult because it exhibits several cultic characteristics. One such characteristic is syncretism. Syncretism is the attempt to combine or reconcile differing beliefs, usually by taking the most attractive features from several sources and combining them into a something new. Unity has taken what some would call "the best qualities" of various religious view points and combined them into a new and more acceptable faith.

Another characteristic of cults that is true of Unity is the denial of the biblical doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ's person and His finished work on the cross. In Unity, salvation comes by recognizing our inherent divinity and our oneness with God.

Unity is, in my opinion, the most deceptive of the cultic groups that use the word Christian in their name. Unity's

distinction is that the follower of its teaching is encouraged to remain in his respective church home whether it be Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, or whatever. The followers of Unity considers their denominational affiliation as a mission field where they can subtly disseminate their ideas.

I recall that when I first became a believer and was attending a Methodist church, there was a particular woman in the church who often greeted me with the phrase, "Greetings to your higher self." It was a peculiar way to greet someone, yet I never asked her what she meant by it. It was several years later when I became a student of the cults that I understood the significance of her greeting. She was a follower of Unity's teachings, that each of us has the divine residing within us and that the higher self is God.

According to Charles Fillmore, Unity is the blending of various religions and belief systems into one unified system of thought. The Fillmores introduced beliefs into their system that had been commonplace in Eastern religions and occult practices.

The Fillmores introduced a pantheistic view of God to their followers and saw God as being both male and female. God is seen as an energy or force that resides in all things both animate and inanimate. Likewise God is seen as being impersonal and a part of His creation.

Jesus is a principle of "love" that brings oneness to all things. This Christ principle is present within each one of us and ultimately unifies us in a salvation experience.

Unity teaches that man's primary problem is that he has spiritual amnesia and needs to reconnect with his destiny. He needs to regain the realization that he is evolving toward divinity.

Salvation, according to Unity, comes by recognizing one's divine nature. Unity does not recognize the Atonement of

Christ but rather seeks what Eastern mystics refer to as at-one-ment or realizing oneness with the divine on a spiritual level.

Since Unity does not recognize the work of Christ on the cross (the Atonement), but rather accepts evolution as a positive ingredient in man's spirituality, it is only logical that they embrace reincarnation as a valid system for spiritual enlightenment. As you can see, then Unity is not based on biblical teaching. To the contrary, it is heavily influenced by Eastern thought and belief. Unity is a classic New Age cult and is not Christian in any aspect of its doctrine or teaching.

©1995 Probe Ministries.

The Angel Quiz

Origin and Background of the Angels and Demons

The subject of this essay is angels. The material is presented in a quiz format because we have learned that many people enjoy testing their biblical knowledge in this way. Before going to the quiz, however, a few introductory observations about angels are in order.

Angels are referred to in 34 of the 66 books of the Bible.

They are mentioned 108 times in the Old Testament and 165 times in the New Testament.[{1}](#)

The presence of good angels, and evil ones (demons), are recognized in most of the world's religions. Angels are important figures in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, many Christian cults, and in the occult. "The history of various religions from the earliest times shows belief in Satan and demons to be universal...The great ethnic faiths of India, China, and Japan major in demonism, as well as the animistic religions of Africa, South America, and some islands...To an amazing degree, the history of religion is an account of demon-controlled religion, particularly in its clash with the Hebrew faith and later with Christianity."[{2}](#)

Currently interest in [angels](#) is very high in the United States, and many books and seminars are being offered on the subject in an attempt to meet this heightened curiosity about angels.

Unfortunately most of these books and seminars are naive, at best, and more often than not, occultic in orientation. Now let's turn to the quiz.

1. What does the word angel mean?

The basic meaning of the word angel is "messenger." This is significant because a messenger is given a message by a higher person. Much of the contemporary romance with angels sees them as somewhat independent, if not totally autonomous, but a messenger is on a mission from someone higher, in this case from God...or Satan.

2. What are some of the other names used of angels?

Other terms used to describe angels are: ministers, hosts (the armies of God), chariots, watchers, sons of the mighty, sons of God, elohim (or sons of Elohim), holy ones, and stars.[{3}](#)

3. Are angels created or have they always been with God?

They were created by Christ (Col. 1:15-17; John 1:3).

4. When were they created?

They were created some time prior to the creation of the earth because Job 38:4-7 says that the sons of God (angels) sang with joy when the earth was created.

5. What about their appearance? How do angels look?

When angels appear on earth, they usually have the appearance of adult human males and are often described in the same passage both as men and as angels (Genesis 18:1-2). In Mark 16:5 an angel is described as a young man.

6. What do angels wear?

They are often reported to wear white (Acts 1:10), white robes (Mark 16:15), garments white as snow (Matt. 28:3), dazzling apparel (Luke 24:4), and shining garments (Acts 10:30).

7. Is it possible to encounter angels and not recognize them as angels?

Yes, in Hebrews 13:2 we are warned to show hospitality to strangers because "some have entertained angels without knowing it."

8. Do angels really have wings?

Some angels don't have wings, or, at least, they don't manifest wings. Some clearly do. Cherubim are pictured as having four wings in Ezek. 1:5-12; 10:15; 11:22) and seraphim, as having six wings in Isaiah 6:2.

9. How do people react upon encountering angels?

The reaction varies. Sometimes the people are calm, but usually they experience fear, anxiety, emotional upheaval,

terror, or the desire to worship the angels. Mary was greatly troubled at first (Luke 1:28-29); armed soldiers at the tomb shook with fear and became like dead men (Matt. 28:4); John, the author of Revelation, fell at the feet of the angel to worship (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9).

Angels in the Old Testament

10. What caused the fall of the angels?

Satan, the leader of the fallen angels, was before his fall the highest of all created beings, but he was consumed with pride and rebelled against God (Ezek. 28:12-19; Isa. 14:12-14). He seduced a third of the angels to follow him in his rebellion (Rev. 12:4). These treacheries brought about his condemnation by God (1 Tim. 3:6) and the condemnation of the other rebelling angels.

11. When did they fall?

They fell some time after their own creation and before the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3).

12. Does Satan make his first appearance in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3?

No, a close reading of the account of man's fall in Genesis 3 reveals that Satan doesn't appear in the Garden of Eden though his influence is felt. Though his name isn't mentioned in the passage, he clearly inspired the actions of the serpent. Later, when God curses the serpent in verse 15, the last part of the curse is directed at Satan.

13. What do the opening verses of Genesis 6 have to do with angels?

There the sons of God took wives from among the daughters of men. One interpretation of the passage takes the sons of God to mean "angels" as the term is normally used. If this is so,

then these angels are the evil angels who, in a very unique occurrence, cohabited with human females and produced unusual offspring. For this heinous sin these angels are kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day (Jude 6). See also 2 Peter 2:4-12.

14. How would evil angels profit by these actions?

Aside from sensual pleasure, the purpose seems to be that they intended to pollute and pervert the human line. Since Christ needed to be born into the human family and be fully human as well as fully God, a degenerate hybrid-humanity would have prevented Him from being our authentic representative on the cross. This is the reason, some hold, for God's sending the world-wide flood: to wipe out the polluted line and start over with Noah's family.

15. Do angels marry?

No, this is clearly stated in Mark 12:25. It is commonly believed that angels do not procreate and are not a race.[{4}](#) (See also Matt. 22:30.) Generally they are portrayed as sexless apart from the difficulties mentioned in question 13.

They are probably sexless in their basic nature but possibly able to assume a variety of forms, just as they are normally invisible but able to manifest themselves when they desire. (See also 2 Cor. 11:14-15.)

Angels are referred to in the Scriptures by masculine word forms though neuter forms were available. They appear on earth as human males, but there is the possibility of a female angel in Zechariah 5:9.

16. What news did the Lord and two angels give Abraham?

The Lord and two angels (also described as three men and the Lord and two men) announced that Sarah would have a son and that Sodom would be destroyed.

17. What happened when the two angels left and went to Sodom?

The men of that city, not knowing that they were angels, asked Lot to send them outside so they could have sexual relations with them. The angels blinded the men and warned Lot and his family to leave the city because Sodom was about to be destroyed (Gen. 19:1-29).

18. What famous incident involved Jacob and many angels?

In Genesis 28 Jacob had a dream of a ladder stretching from earth into heaven, and he saw angels ascending and descending on the ladder. In the dream God gave the land around Jacob to him and to his descendants and proclaimed "in you and in your descendants shall all the earth be blessed" (Gen. 28:10-22).

19. What is the meaning of this dream and promise?

It was a reconfirmation of the Abrahamic covenant and indicated that the covenant would go through Jacob's line (not Esau's), that his descendants would be innumerable, and that wherever Jacob went God would be with him. It also looked forward to the coming of Christ through Jacob (Matt. 1:2).

20. What famous event involved Jacob and one angel? What happened?

Jacob, while fleeing from his brother Esau, wrestled all one night with an angel and persisted until the angel blessed him. The angel blessed him by changing his name from Jacob, meaning "trickster," to Israel, which means "he who persists with God." The angel also crippled one of Jacob's legs as evidence that the struggle had really occurred and was not merely a dream. The wrestling figure is described as a man and as God in Genesis 32:24-30 and as an angel in Hosea 12:4. So, the angel was probably the preincarnate Christ.

21. What Old Testament character was greeted by the angel of the Lord by this statement, "The Lord is with you, O valiant

warrior”?

Gideon (Judges 6:11-12).

Angels in the Earthly Life of Christ

22. Angels were involved in Jesus birth in several ways. Can you identify all these events?

The angel Gabriel (Luke 1:19) announced the coming birth of John the Baptist who would prepare the way for Jesus (Luke 1:5-25). Gabriel also announced to Mary, who was a virgin, the miraculous coming birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him not to put Mary away but to marry her because the child she was carrying was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was also told to name the child Jesus. When he woke up he did as the angel commanded him (Matt. 1:18-25). On the night of Jesus' birth, an angel announced the good news to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks. Then “suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God” (Luke 1:8-15).

23. Name the ways angels were involved in Jesus' life and teachings?

After the coming of the magi, an angel warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt to avoid Herod's search for the child. After Herod's death an angel again appeared to Joseph. He told Joseph to return to Israel (Matt. 2:19-20). When Christ was in the wilderness for 40 days, Satan was tempting Him and the angels were ministering to Him (Luke 4:1-2; Mark 1:13). Jesus taught about angels (Luke 16:22) and about Satan and his demons (Luke 10:17-20). He cast out demons, and He gave the disciples power over demons (Luke 9:1, 37-42). Christ was strengthened by an angel in Gethsemane the night He was taken prisoner (Luke 22:43).

24. Immediately after He stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Christ was met at the shore by a man who claimed to

be demon possessed. What evidence was there that the man was demon- possessed?

He had been bound, but had superhuman strength and had broken away from all human restraints, even chains; he was naked and lived among the tombs, constantly gashing himself with stones while screaming and crying (Mark 5).

25. How many demons did he have? What happened to the demons?

He said he had a legion, meaning literally several thousand. This was probably a figure of speech, but he doubtless had many demons. The demons begged not to be sent out of the country; Christ then sent them into some pigs grazing on a nearby mountainside, and the pigs ran over the cliff into the sea. This is one more evidence of Christ's total control over the demonic world (Mark 5).

26. How were angels involved after Christ's death?

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to visit the grave. Before they got there, "a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord had descended from heaven and rolled away the stone and sat upon it" (Matt. 28:2). Angels at the tomb announced that Christ was risen (Luke 24:4). Immediately after He ascended, two angels appeared and told the disciples that Jesus would return in the same manner that He had departed (Acts 1:10).

Angels in the Rest of the New Testament

27. What person was described as having the face of an angel?

Stephen, a young man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, was taken before the Sanhedrin and charged with blasphemy. He began to preach. Then "fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). His sermon, however, so angered the Council that they stoned him (Acts 7:1-60).

28. Who was taken by an angel on a missionary journey? What happened?

Philip was preaching in the villages of Samaria on his way to Jerusalem when an angel spoke to him and told him to go south on a road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. When he arrived the angel told him to approach an Ethiopian eunuch sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah. Philip explained the passage to the eunuch and baptized him upon hearing his statement of faith in Christ. After they come out of the water, the angel snatched Philip away and set him down in another city where he continued preaching the gospel (Acts 8:25-40).

29. What is the attitude of the heavenly angels toward God's plan of salvation?

There is great joy in heaven among the angels of God when a sinner repents and accepts Christ as Savior (Luke 15:10). They are clearly intrigued by what God is doing and long to know more (1 Pet. 1:10-12). They observe with great interest the behavior of the church. In fact in a passage about orderliness in the worship (Christ submitting to God, men submitting to Christ, and wives submitting to their husbands), Paul concludes by writing that women in church should have a symbol of authority on their heads because of the angels (1 Cor. 11:1-10). There are different theories about what all this means, but it seems clear that our behavior is to be respectful to the angels present and perhaps even instructive to them. Remember that the sin of the fallen angels began with Satan's pride, his unwillingness to submit and his desire for prominence.

30. What individual was freed from prison by an angel?

Simon Peter (Acts 12:3-10).

31. What did the angel do to free Peter?

He appeared in the cell, struck Peter's side to wake him, caused his chains to fall off his hands, then told him to get up and get dressed, and to follow him. They passed several guards without being seen, then they came to the gate of the city, and it opened by itself. Then the angel vanished.

32. Is it possible for an angel to say or teach things contrary to the Scriptures or to God's will?

Yes, in Galatians 1:8 Paul writes "Even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed."

33. Can angels be deceptive in other ways as well?

Yes, 1 Timothy 4:1 states: "in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons (fallen angels)."

34. What Gentile man was told by an angel to send for Simon Peter?

Cornelius, a righteous, god-fearing Centurion who gave alms to the Jews (Acts 10).

35. Why did the angel direct Cornelius to send for Simon Peter come to Cornelius?

So Peter could tell Cornelius and his relatives and friends about salvation through Christ. And, so Simon Peter could see further evidence of how God was beginning a great wave of conversions among the Gentiles (Acts 9:32-11:30).

36. What happened?

The Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and all those listening to Simon Peter's sermon. They began speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter had them all baptized.

Future State of the Angels and Demons

37. What future roles will the good angels have?

They are sometimes involved in punishing unbelievers (Acts 12:23). They will act as reapers toward the end of the age (Matt. 13:39), be involved in the judgments of the Tribulation (Rev. 8, 9, 16), and live forever with the believers of all ages in the New Jerusalem. [\[5\]](#)

38. Will the good angels judge the actions of their former comrades, the fallen angels?

No, believers in their glorified state will judge the fallen angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3). Christ will rule and the believers will rule under Him. Hebrews 2:5 states, "For He did not subject to angels the world to come."

39. What happens to the evil angels and Satan?

The evil angels and Satan will finally be judged by God who will cast them into the lake of fire that burns forever (Luke 20:36; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

Notes

1. C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), p. 13.
2. Merrill F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1971), p. 10.
3. Dickason, pp. 58-61.
4. Ibid., p. 34.
5. Ibid., p. 108.

Apologetics and Evangelism

Probe's founder Jimmy Williams, a master in classical apologetics, explores the use of apologetics in sharing the gospel.

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

Today as never before, Christians are being called upon to give reasons for the hope that is within them. Often in the evangelistic context seekers raise questions about the validity of the gospel message. Removing intellectual objections will not make one a Christian; a change of heart wrought by the Spirit is also necessary. But though intellectual activity is insufficient to bring another to Christ, it does not follow that it is also unnecessary. In this essay we will examine the place and purpose of apologetics in the sharing of our faith with others.

The word “apologetics” never actually appears in the Bible. But there is a verse which contains its meaning:

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give *an answer* to every man who asketh you the reason for the hope that is within you with meekness and fear (1 Peter 3:15).

The Greek word *apologia* means “answer,” or “reasonable defense.” It does not mean to apologize, nor does it mean just to engage in intellectual dialogue. It means to provide reasonable answers to honest questions and to do it with humility, respect, and reverence.

The verse thus suggests that the *manner* in which one does apologetics is as important as the words expressed. And Peter tells us in this passage that Christians are to be ready *always* with answers for those who inquire of us concerning our faith. Most Christians have a great deal of study ahead of

them before this verse will be a practical reality in their evangelistic efforts.

Another question that often comes up in a discussion about the merits and place of apologetics is, "What is the relationship of the mind to evangelism?" "Does the mind play any part in the process?" "What about the effects of the fall?" "Isn't man dead in trespasses and sins?" "Doesn't the Bible say we are to know nothing among men except Jesus Christ and Him crucified?" "Why do we have to get involved at all in apologetics if the Spirit is the One Who actually brings about the New Birth?"

I think you will agree that today there are many Christians who are firmly convinced that answering the intellectual questions of unbelievers is an ineffectual waste of time. They feel that any involvement of the mind in the gospel interchange smacks too much of human effort and really just dilutes the Spirit's work.

But Christianity thrives on intelligence, not ignorance. If a real Reformation is to accompany the revival for which many of us pray, it must be something of the mind as well as the heart. It was Jesus who said, "Come and see." He invites our scrutiny and investigation both before and after conversion.

We are to love God with the *mind* as well as the heart and the soul. In fact, the early church was powerful and successful because it out-thought and out-loved the ancient world. We are not doing either very well today.

Reasoning and Persuading

Most Christians today seem to prefer experiencing Christianity to thinking about or explaining it. But consider these verses:

Matthew 13:23: "But he who received the seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and *understands* it, who indeed bears fruit." They all heard it, but only the "good soil" *comprehended* it.

Acts 8:30: "When the Spirit prompted Philip to join himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch (who was reading Isaiah 53), he asked, 'Do you *understand* what you are reading?' The eunuch replied, 'How can I except some man should *guide* me?'"

Acts 18:4: Paul at Corinth was "reasoning in the synagogue every sabbath and trying to *persuade* the Jews and Greeks."

Acts 19:8: Paul at Ephesus "entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, *reasoning* and *persuading* them about the kingdom of God."

Romans 10:17: "So then faith comes by *hearing* and *hearing* by the word of God." Again the emphasis is on hearing with perception.

2 Corinthians 5:11: "We *persuade* men," says Paul. Vine's *Expository Dictionary* describes this Greek word like this: "to apply persuasion, to prevail upon or win over, bringing about a change of mind by the influence of reason or moral considerations."

All of these words—persuasion, dialogue, discourse, dispute, argue, present evidence, reason with—are vehicles of communication and are at the heart of Paul's classical evangelistic model. Can there be saving faith without understanding? Can there be understanding without reasoning? The Bible would appear to say no. Paul urges believers in 2 Timothy 2:15 to study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed.

J. Gresham Machen, a great Christian scholar, said the following words in 1912 to a group of young men at Princeton Seminary:

It would be a great mistake to suppose that all men are equally well-prepared to receive the gospel. It is true that the decisive thing is the regenerative power in connection with certain prior conditions for the reception of the

Gospel. . . . I do not mean that the removal of intellectual objections will make a man a Christian. No conversion was ever wrought by argument. A change of heart is also necessary . . . but because the intellectual labor is insufficient, it does not follow that it is unnecessary. God may, it is true, overcome all intellectual obstacles by an immediate exercise of His regenerative power. Sometimes He does. But He does so very seldom. Usually He exerts His power in connections with certain conditions of the human mind. Usually He does not bring into the kingdom, entirely without preparation, those whose mind and fancy are completely contaminated by ideas which make the acceptance of the Gospel logically impossible.

If these words were true in 1912, how much more are they needed today?

Individual Responses

People respond to the gospel for various reasons—some out of pain or a crisis, others out of some emotional need such as loneliness, guilt, insecurity, etc. Some do so out of a fear of divine judgment. And coming to know Christ brings a process of healing and hope to the human experience. To know Christ is to find comfort for pain, acceptance for insecurity and low self-esteem, forgiveness for sin and guilt.

And others seem to have *intellectual* questions which block their openness to accept the credibility of the Christian message. These finally find in Christ the answers to their intellectual doubts and questions.

Those today who are actively involved in evangelism readily recognize the need for this kind of information to witness to certain people, and there are many more doubters and skeptics out there today than there were even twenty years ago.

We can see more clearly where we are as a culture by taking a

good look at Paul's world in the first century. Christianity's early beginnings flourished in a Graeco-Roman culture more X-rated and brutal than our own. And we find Paul *adapting* his approach from group to group.

For instance, he expected certain things to be in place when he approached the Jewish communities and synagogues from town to town. He knew he would find a group which already had certain beliefs which were not in contradiction to the gospel he preached. They were monotheists. They believed in one God. They also believed this God had spoken to them in their Scriptures and had given them absolute moral guidelines for behavior (the Ten Commandments).

But when Paul went to the Gentile community, he had no such expectations. There he knew he would be faced with a culture that was polytheistic (many gods), biblically ignorant, and living all kinds of perverted, wicked lifestyles. And on Mars Hill in Athens when he preached the gospel, he did somewhat modify his approach.

He spoke of God more in terms of His presence and power, and he even quoted truth from a Greek poet in order to connect with these "pagans" and get his point across: "We are God's offspring" (Acts 17:28).

One hundred years ago, the vast majority of Americans pretty much reflected the Jewish mentality, believing in God, having a basic respect for the Bible, and strong convictions about what was right and what was wrong.

That kind of American can still be found today in the 90s, but George Gallup says they aren't having much of an impact on the pagan, or Gentile community, which today holds few beliefs compatible with historic Christianity.

To evangelize such people, we have our work cut out for us. And we will have to use both our minds and our hearts to "become all things to all men in order to save some."

A Variety of Approaches

As we're considering how we as Christians can have an impact on our increasingly fragmented society, we need to keep in mind that many do not share our Christian view of the world, and some are openly hostile to it.

In fact, a college professor recently commented that he felt the greatest impediment to social progress right now was what he called the bigoted, dogmatic Christian community. That's you and me, folks.

If we could just "loosen up a little," and compromise on some issues, America would be a happier place. What is meant by this is not just a demand for tolerance . . . but wholesale acceptance of *any* person's lifestyle and personal choices!

But the Bible calls us to be "salt and light" in our world. How can we be that effectively? I don't have a total answer, but I'll tell you after 30+ years of active ministry what isn't working. And by my observation, far too many Christians are trying to address the horrendous issues of our day with one of three very ineffective approaches.

Defensive Approach – Many Christians out there are mainly asking the question, "How strong are our defenses?" "How high are our walls?" This barricade mentality has produced much of the Christian subculture. We have our own language, literature, heroes, music, customs, and educational systems. Of course, we need places of support and fellowship. But when Paul describes spiritual warfare in 2 Corinthians 10, he actually *reverses* the picture. It is the *enemy* who is behind walls, inside strongholds of error and evil. And Paul depicts the Christians as those who should be mounting offensives at these walls to tear down the high things which have exalted themselves above the knowledge of God. We are to be *taking* ground, not just holding it.

Defeatist Approach – Other Christians have already given up. Things are so bad, they say, that my puny efforts won't change anything. "After all, we are living in the last days, and Jesus said that things would just get worse and worse." This may be true, but it may not be. Jesus said no man knows the day or the hour of His coming. Martin Luther had the right idea when he said, "If Jesus were to come tomorrow, I'd plant a tree today and pay my debts." The Lord may well be near, He could also tarry awhile. Since we don't know for sure, we should be seeking to prepare ourselves and our children to live for Him in the microchip world of the 21st century.

Devotional Approach – Other Christians are trying to say something about their faith, but sadly, they can only share their personal religious experience. It is true that Paul speaks of us as "epistles known and read" by all men. Our life/experience with Christ is a valid witness. But there are others out there in the culture with "changed" lives . . . and Jesus didn't do the changing! Evangelism today must be something more than "swapping" experiences. We must learn how to ground our faith in the facts of history and the claims of Christ. We must have others grapple with Jesus Christ, not just our experience.

Apologetics and Evangelism

I want to conclude this essay with some very important principles to keep in mind if we want to be effective in seeing others come to know Christ through our individual witness.

1. Go to people. The heart of evangelism is Christians taking the initiative to actually go out and "fish for men." Acts 17:17 describes for us how Paul was effective in his day and time: "Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the gentile worshippers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there."

2. Communicate with people. Engage them. Sharing the Gospel involves communication. People must be focused upon and then understand the Gospel to respond to it. It is our responsibility as Christians to make it as clear as possible for all who will listen. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11).

3. Relate to people. Effective witness involves not only the transmission of biblical information; it also includes establishing a relationship with the other person. Hearts, as well as heads, must meet. "So, affectionately longing for you," said Paul to the Thessalonians, "we were well pleased to import to you not only the good news of God, but also our own lives, because you have become dear to us" (1 Thess. 2:8).

4. Remove barriers. Part of our responsibility involves having the skills to eliminate obstacles, real or imagined, which keep an individual from taking the Christian message seriously. When God sent the prophet Jeremiah forth, He said, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth . . . and I have ordained you to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." Sometimes our task as well is one of "spiritual demolition," of removing the false so the seeds of truth can take root. Apologetics sometimes serves in that capacity, of preparing a highway for God in someone's life.

5. Explain the gospel to others. We need an *army* of Christians today who can consistently and clearly present the message to as many people as possible. Luke says of Lydia, "The Lord opened her heart so that she heeded the things which were spoken by Paul" (Acts 16:14). Four essential elements in sharing the gospel:

- someone talking (Paul)
- things spoken (gospel)
- someone listening (Lydia)
- the Lord opening the heart.

6. Invite others to receive Christ. We can be clear of presentation, but ineffective because we fail to give someone the opportunity and encouragement to take that first major step of faith. "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we beg you in Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

7. Make every effort by every means to establish them in the faith. Stay with them, ground them in the Scripture, help them gain assurance of their salvation, and get them active in a vital fellowship/church.

©1994 Probe Ministries

What is Islam? – And a Christian Response

The history, current status, basic beliefs and practices of Islam are surveyed; as well, a Christian response to Islam is offered.



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

It's not every day that religion appears as a front page story in today's newspapers, particularly on a regular basis. But over the past 20 years one religion has made the front page perhaps more than any other . . . the religion of Islam. Islam claims up to one billion followers worldwide. It is not only the fastest growing religion in the world, but its influence touches virtually every area of life—not only the spiritual, but the political and economic as well. What is more, its influence is being felt closer and closer to home. There are now up to 5 million Muslims in the U.S., and over 1,100

mosques or Islamic centers.

What does Islam teach? How are the teachings of Islam similar to those of Christianity? How are they different? What should our attitude be toward Islam, and toward those who follow this powerful religion? These are some of the questions we want to address in this essay.

The History of Islam

First, we want to take a look back at the history of Islam. Islam was founded in the early seventh century by Muhammed. When he was 40 years of age, in A.D. 610, Muhammed claimed to be receiving messages from God. These messages were later compiled and recorded in the Koran—Islam's holy book.

About this same time, Muhammed began preaching against the greed, economic oppression, and idolatry that plagued the Arab peoples. He called on the many factions of the Arab peoples to unite under the worship of Allah, the chief god of the Arab pantheon of deities. Though his message was initially rejected, by the year 630 he had succeeded in gaining control of Mecca, the economic and religious center of the Arabian peninsula.

Though Muhammed died two years later, the religious/political movement he founded rapidly spread throughout the Arab world, and far beyond. By A.D. 750, the Muslim empire spanned from Spain in the west to India in the east. In the centuries that followed, Islam penetrated deeper into Africa and Asia, extending as far as the Philippines. During its "golden era" Islam claimed some of the world's finest philosophers and mathematicians. It was during this time also that Islam and Christianity clashed as a result of the Crusades to reclaim the Holy Land from the Muslims.

Beginning around 1500, and accelerating after the industrial revolution of the 1700-1800s, Islam felt the increasing

influence of the European powers. Eventually, large portions of the Muslim world were colonized by European countries. This political and economic domination by Europe continued until the end of WWII, after which Muslim countries began to attain political independence. With the discovery and development of the vast oil reserves in many Muslim lands, economic independence suddenly came within reach also. At last, Islam had in its grasp both the opportunity and the resources to reassert itself as a powerful force in the world. After being on the defensive for many centuries, Islam was now on the offensive!

The Current Status of Islam

At this point we should discuss the current status of Islam. In doing so, it's important to realize that Islam is not a monolithic system. Though all Muslims draw their inspiration from Muhammed and the Koran, there are many identifiable groups and movements within Islam.

The most obvious division is that between Sunni and Shia Islam. The Sunnis (who compose about 90% of all Muslims) draw their name from the fact that they look both to the Koran and to the "sunna" in establishing proper Muslim conduct. The "sunna" is the behavior or example of Muhammed and of the early Muslim community. Of course, there are many subdivisions among the Sunnis, but they all identify themselves as Sunni.

The other major group of Muslims are the Shi'ites (who compose about 10% of all Muslims and reside mainly in Iraq and Iran). The word Shi'ite means "partisan," and refers to the fact that Shi'ites are "partisans of Ali." Ali was the son-in-law and cousin of Muhammed and one of the early Caliphs or successors to Muhammed as leader of the Muslim people. Shi'ites believe that the leader of Islam should be among the descendants of Ali, whom they believe possess a special divine anointing for this task. The last of these divinely appointed leaders, or

“imams” most Shi’ites believe to be in “hiding” in another realm of existence. The Ayatollah Khomeini was believed to have been a spokesman for this “hidden imam.”

A third group that should be mentioned are the Sufis—those Muslims (among both Sunni and Shia) who seek a mystical experience of God, rather than a merely intellectual knowledge of Him, and who also are given to a number of superstitious practices.

In addition to these divisions within Islam, mention must also be made of attitudes among Muslims toward their contact with the Western world in modern times. Though the situation is much more complex than we are capable of dealing with in this pamphlet, two broad trends have been evident within Islam.

One trend is toward some degree of accommodation and adjustment to the West and to modern ways of life. This has manifested itself most obviously in countries like Turkey, which have instituted largely secular forms of government and Western ways of life, while maintaining Islamic religious practices.

The opposite trend is toward a return to a more traditional approach to Islamic life and a rejection of Western and modern ways. The most extreme expression of this trend is manifest in the various forms of Islamic fundamentalism, which insist on the implementation of Muslim law (called the Sharia) in every area of life. Fundamentalists have been most successful in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and Sudan; but they are active in virtually every Muslim country, at times resorting to violence and terrorism in attempting to implement their agenda.

In understanding this potent religious and political movement, it is important to understand the various divisions and attitudes within Islam and the basic beliefs at Islam’s core.

The Basic Beliefs of Islam

Though the beliefs of Muslims worldwide are about as diverse as those among Christians, there are six basic articles of faith common to nearly all Muslims.

The first of these is that there is no God but Allah. The pre-Islamic Arabs were polytheists. But Muhammed succeeded in leading them to devote themselves solely to the chief God of the pantheon whom they called Allah (which simply means God). To worship or attribute deity to any other being is considered *shirk* or blasphemy. The Koran mentions numerous names of Allah, and these names are found frequently on the lips of devout Muslims who believe them to have a nearly magical power.

The second article of faith is belief in angels and jinn. Jinn are spirit beings capable of both good and evil actions and of possessing human beings. Above the jinn in rank are the angels of God. Two of them are believed to accompany every Muslim, one on the right to record his good deeds, and one on the left to record his evil deeds.

The third article is belief in God's holy books, 104 of which are referred to in the Koran. Chief among these are the Law given to Moses, the Psalms given to David, the Gospel (or Injil) given to Jesus, and the Koran given to Muhammed. Each of these is conceived to have communicated the same basic message of God's will to man. Obvious discrepancies between the Jewish and Christian Scriptures and the Koran (particularly with reference to Jesus and Muhammed) were accounted for by Muhammed in his suggestion that the Bible had been tampered with by Jews and Christians.

The fourth article of faith is belief in God's prophets, through whom Allah appealed to man to follow His will as revealed in His holy books. There is no agreement as to how many prophets there have been—some say hundreds of thousands.

Among them were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. But all agree that Muhammed was God's final and supreme prophet—the “seal” of the prophets. Though Muhammed himself said that he was a sinner, nonetheless there are many Muslims throughout the world who appear to come close to worshiping him.

The fifth article of faith is belief in the absolute predestinating will of Allah. Though some Muslims have modified this doctrine somewhat, the Koran seems to support the idea that all things (both good and evil) are the direct result of God's will. Those who conclude that Islam is a fatalistic religion have good reason for doing so.

The sixth and final article of faith is belief in the resurrection and final judgment. At the end of history, God will judge the works of all men. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds will enter into paradise (pictured in rather sensual terms). The rest will be consigned to hell. The paramount feature of Islamic belief, aside from its strong monotheism, is that it is a religion of human works. One's position with regard to Allah is determined by his success in keeping His laws.

The Basic Practices of Islam

Now we want to focus on the most important of those works. These are summarized in what are usually called the “Five Pillars of Islam.”

The first pillar is recitation of the creed: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammed is his prophet.” It is commonly held that to recite this creed in the presence of two witnesses is to constitute oneself a Muslim—one in submission to God. Of course, the word Islam simply means “submission.”

The second pillar is the regular practice of prayers. Sunni Muslims are required to recite specific prayers accompanied by prescribed motions five times daily. (Shi'ites do so only

three times a day.) All male Muslims are also enjoined to meet for community prayer (and sermon) each Friday at noon.

The third pillar is almsgiving. Born an orphan himself, Muhammed was deeply concerned for the needy. The Koran requires that 2.5% of one's income be given to the poor or to the spread of Islam.

The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast during the month of Ramadan (the ninth lunar month of the Muslim calendar, during which Muhammed is said to have received the first of his revelations from God, and during which he and his followers made their historic trek from Mecca to Medina). During this month, Muslims in good health are required to forego all food and liquid during daylight hours. This fast promotes the Muslim's self-discipline, dependence on Allah, and compassion for the needy.

The fifth pillar is the Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca. If possible, every Muslim is to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once during his life. It can be made properly only on a few days during the last month of the Muslim year. The Hajj promotes the ideas of worldwide unity and equality among Muslims. But it also contains many elements of prescribed activity that are of pagan origin.

A sixth pillar, that of jihad, is often added. (The term means "exertion" or "struggle" in behalf of God.) Jihad is the means by which those who are outside the household of Islam are brought into its fold. Jihad may be by persuasion, or it may be by force or "holy war." The fact that any Muslim who dies in a holy war is assured his place in paradise provides strong incentive for participation!

Muslims around the world look to these pillars for guidance in shaping their religious practice. But in addition to these pillars, there are numerous laws and traditions contained in the Hadith—literature that was compiled after the completion

of the Koran, that reportedly contains the example and statements of Muhammed on many topics. Because the laws of the Hadith and Koran cover virtually every area of life, Islam has well been referred to as an all-encompassing way of life, as well as a religion.

A Christian Perspective on Islam

At this point it is appropriate to offer a brief evaluation of Islam from a Christian perspective.

At the outset, it must be stated that there is much in Islam that the Christian can affirm. Among the most significant Islamic doctrines that can be genuinely affirmed by the Christian are its belief in one God, its recognition of Jesus as the virgin born, sinless prophet and messiah of God, and its expectation of a future resurrection and judgment.

There are, however, some very significant areas of difference. We will mention just a few. First, the Muslim perception of God is by no means the same as that revealed in the Bible. Islam portrays God as ultimately unknowable. In fact, in the Koran, Allah reveals His will, but He never reveals Himself. Neither is He ever portrayed as a Father to His people, as He is in the Bible.

Second, though Jesus is presented as a miracle working prophet and messiah, and even without sin, Islam denies that He is the Son of God or Savior of the world. Indeed, it is denied that Jesus ever died at all, least of all for the sins of the world.

Third, though mankind is depicted as weak and prone to error, Islam denies that man is a sinner by nature and in need of a Savior, as the Bible so clearly teaches. People are capable of submitting to God's laws and meriting his ultimate approval. According to Islam, man's spiritual need is not for a savior but for guidance.

This leads to the fact that since in Islam, acceptance by God is something we must earn by our works, it cannot possibly provide the sense of security that can be found in the grace of God as taught in the Bible.

Many of us will find opportunities to befriend Muslim neighbors, co-workers, or friends. As we do, we should be aware of some of the barriers that exist between Muslims and Christians, due to past and current animosities.

The attitude of many Muslims toward Christianity and toward the West is colored by the history of conflict that has found expression in the Crusades of Medieval times, European domination and colonialism, as well as Western support for Zionism in most recent times. We must allow the love of God to overcome our own fear and defensiveness and to penetrate these barriers.

In the past several years many Muslims have been deeply impressed by the compassion shown by Westerners (and particularly the United States) toward Muslim countries that have endured severe hardship. This kind of compassion can be shown on an individual level as well. As we do, we can then invite our Muslim friends to join us in a study of the New Testament, which reveals the only source of acceptance before God in His love and grace, expressed through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ and His gift of the Holy Spirit.

©1994 Probe Ministries

Why Wait Till Marriage? – A

Christian Perspective

Jimmy Williams and Jerry Solomon take a biblical worldview look at the question of premarital sex or fornication. They clearly show that regardless of the dominant teaching of the culture, the Bible describes the role of sex as far deeper in meaning and impact than simple physical intercourse.

Crucial moral battles are being fought in our culture. Nowhere is this seen more vividly than in the present sexual attitudes and behaviors of Americans. The average young person experiences many pressures in the formation of personal sexual standards and behavior.

The fact that some standard must be chosen cannot be ignored. Sex is here to stay, and it remains a very basic force in our lives. We cannot ignore its presence any more than we can ignore other ordinary human drives.

This essay explores contemporary sexual perspectives within a biblical framework. Each of us needs to think through the implications of sexual alternatives and choose a personal sexual ethic based on intellectual and Christian factors, not merely biological, emotional, or social ones.

Sex and Love

Before we begin our survey of various perspectives, we need to face squarely the relationship of the physical act of sexual intercourse to the more intangible aspects of a meaningful relationship between two human beings.

Is having sex really making love? Modern case studies, psychological insights, church teachings, and biblical premises all seem to suggest not. As psychoanalyst Erich Fromm puts it, "To love a person productively implies to care and to feel responsible for his life, not only for his physical powers but for the growth and development of all his human

powers.”[\[1\]](#)

If sex is merely a physical thing, then masturbation or other forms of autoeroticism should provide true and complete sexual satisfaction. Such is not the case. Alternatives to normal sexual intercourse may satisfy physically, but not emotionally. Meaningful sexual activity involves the physical union of a man and a woman in a relationship of mutual caring and intimacy.

Every normal person has the physical desire for sexual activity accompanied with a desire to know and be known, to love and be loved. Both desires make up the real quest for intimacy in a relationship; sexual intercourse represents only one ingredient that allows us to experience true intimacy.

A maximum sexual relationship exists where mutual communication, understanding, affection, and trust have formed, and two people have lastingly committed themselves to each other in a permanent relationship. The more of these qualities that are present, the deeper the intimacy and the more meaningful the relationship. It becomes more valuable as time passes because it is one of a kind—unique. To spread the intimacy around through a variety of sexual liaisons destroys the accumulated value of the previous relationship(s) and dilutes and scatters (in little doses to a number of people) what one has to give.

A real challenge faces young people today. Given the choice between hamburger at five o'clock or filet mignon at seven-thirty, are there any good reasons to forego the hamburger and wait for the filet? Why not both? Why not take the hamburger now **and** the filet later?

The latter attitude is precisely the rationale of those who encourage sexual activity outside of marriage. But it is not possible to have both without encountering problems later. Too many hamburgers ruin one's taste and appreciation for filet

and tend to turn filet into hamburger as well!

Contemporary Arguments for Premarital Sex

Now we will begin to consider the arguments that are presented to justify sexual activity before and outside of marriage. We will analyze the arguments briefly and explore the general implications of each rationale so that **you can decide** which will provide the best path for your future.

Biological Argument

Perhaps the most common reason used to justify premarital sexual activity is that the sex drive is a basic biological one. The argument is as old as the Bible, where Paul states in 1 Corinthians 6:13, "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food." The Corinthians were using the biological argument to justify their immorality, but Paul explained that the analogy to the sex appetite was (and is) fallacious. Humans cannot live without food, air, or water. But we can live without sex.

Nature says several things on this point. First, God has built into the natural world a mechanism for sexual release: nocturnal emissions, or orgasmic release during dreams. Second, nature rejects human promiscuity, as the growing problem of sexually-transmitted diseases makes abundantly clear.

Couples who confine sex to their marriage partners face no such danger from disease. Further, we can safely conclude that abstinence does not impair one's health. Sociologist Robert Bell quips, "There appear to be no records of males hospitalized because girls refused to provide sexual outlets."

[\[2\]](#)

While recognizing that human beings share many common characteristics with animals, we do not find comparable sexual behavioral patterns in the animal world. Human sexuality is

unique in that it *includes*, but *transcends*, physical reproductive elements. It reaches an intimacy unknown among animals. Humans are different from animals.

Statistical Argument

A second popular argument reasons that everyone is doing it. First, we must categorically emphasize that this is not a true statement. A recent study (1991) of college freshmen shows that "about two-thirds of men (66.3 percent) and slightly more than one-third of the women (37.9 percent) support the idea of sex between people who have known each other only for a short time." [\[3\]](#) As sobering as such statistics may be, they obviously indicate that not everyone is sexually active.

Further, **statistics** do not establish moral values. Is something right because it happens frequently or because many people believe it? A primitive tribe may have a 100 percent majority consensus that cannibalism is right! Does that make it right? A majority can be wrong. If a **society** sets the standards, those standards are subject to change with the whim and will of the majority. In one generation slavery may be right and abortion wrong, as in early nineteenth-century America; but in another generation, abortion is in and slavery is out, as today.

There are enough young people in any school or community who prefer to wait until marriage that the young person who wants to wait has plenty of company. Each person must decide where he or she wants to be in a given statistical analysis of current sexual mores and behavior.

Proof of Love

A third argument suggests that sexual activity tests or provides proof of love. Supposedly, it symbolizes how much the other cares. One therefore exerts pressure on the more reluctant partner to demonstrate a certain level of care. Reluctant partners succumbing to this pressure often do so

with an underlying hope that it will somehow cement the relationship and discourage the other partner from searching elsewhere for a less hesitant friend.

Any person who insists on making sex the ultimate proof of a genuine relationship isn't saying "I love you," but rather "I love it." True love concerns itself with the well-being of the other person and would not interpret sexual hesitation in such a selfish way. Furthermore, the person adopting this practice develops a pattern of demonstrating love by purely sexual responsiveness. Ultimately he or she enters marriage with something of a distortion as to what real intimacy means, to say nothing of having to deal with the memories of previous loves. Some behaviors are irreversible, and this process is like trying to unscramble an egg. Once it's done, it's done.

The broader perspective sees sex as an integral and important part of a meaningful relationship but not the totality of it. Remembering this will help any individual to make the right decision to refrain from sexual involvement if a potential partner puts on the pressure to make sex the test of a meaningful relationship.

Psychological Argument

The psychological argument is also a popular one and is closely tied to the biological argument previously discussed. Here's the question: Is sexual restraint bad for you?

Sublimating one's sex drive is not unhealthy. In sublimation the processes of sexual and aggressive energy are displaced by nonsexual and nondestructive goals.

But guilt, unlike sublimation, can produce devastating results in human behavior. It is anger turned inward, producing depression, a lowered self-esteem, and fatigue. Further, chastity and virginity contribute very little to sexual problems. Unsatisfying relationships, guilt, hostility toward the opposite sex, and low self-esteem do. In short, there are

no scars where there have been no wounds.

In this hedonistic society, some persons need no further justification for sexual activity beyond the fact that it's fun. "If it feels good, do it!" says the bumper sticker. But the fun syndrome forces us to sacrifice the permanent on the altar of the immediate.

The sex act itself is no guarantee of fun. Initial sex experiences outside of marriage are often disappointing because of high anxiety and guilt levels. Fear of discovery, haste, and lack of commitment and communication all combine to spoil some of the fun. Further, there is no way to avoid the exploitation of someone in the relationship if it's just for fun. Sometimes one person's pleasure is another's pain. No one likes to be or feel used.

Marilyn Monroe was a sex symbol for millions. She said, "People took a lot for granted; not only could they be friendly, but they could suddenly get overly friendly and expect an awful lot for a very little."[\[4\]](#) She felt used. She died naked and alone, with an empty bottle of sleeping pills beside a silent telephone. Was the fame and fun worth it? Evidently she thought not.

Experiential Argument

This perspective emphasizes a desire on the part of an individual not to appear like a sexual novice on the wedding night. One answer to this is to have enough sexual experience prior to marriage so that one brings practice, not theory to the initial sexual encounter in marriage. But the body was designed to perform sexually and will do so given the opportunity.

This is not to say that sexual skill cannot be gained through experience. It is to say that every skill acquired by humans must have a beginning point. If the idea of two virgins on their wedding night brings amusement to our minds instead of

admiration, it is actually a sad commentary on how far we have slipped as individuals and as a culture.

It must be emphasized again that healthy sexual adjustment depends much more on communication than technique. World-famous sex therapists Masters and Johnson found

Nothing good is going to happen in bed between a husband and wife unless good things have been happening between them before they go into bed. There is no way for a good sexual technique to remedy a poor emotional relationship.[\[5\]](#)

In other words, a deeply-committed couple with **no** sexual experience is far ahead of a sexually-experienced couple with shallow and tentative commitment, as far as the marriage's future sexual success is concerned.

Compatibility Argument

A corollary to the experiential argument is the one of compatibility. The idea is, How will I know if the shoe fits unless first I try it on? A foot stays about the same size, but the human sex organs are wonderfully stretchable and adaptable. A woman's vagina can enlarge to accommodate the birth of a baby or to fit a male organ of any size. Physical compatibility is 99 percent guaranteed, and the other 1 percent can become so with medical consultation and assistance.

Of greater importance is to test person-to-person compatibility. Sexual dysfunction in young people is usually psychologically based. Building bridges of love and mutual care in the non-physical facets of the relationship are the sure roads to a honeymoon that can last a lifetime.

Contraceptive Argument

The contraceptive argument supposedly takes the fear of pregnancy out of sexual activity and gives moderns a virtual green light. Actually, the light is at most pale green and

perhaps only yellow. The simple fact is that pregnancy (along with sexually-transmitted diseases) remains a possibility.

Beyond the question of contraceptive use is the entire area of unwanted children. There are no good alternatives for children born out of wedlock. Do we have the right to deprive children of life or a secure family setting and loving parents to supply their basic needs? Ironically, even severely battered children choose to be with their parents over other alternatives. Parental love and security are highly prized.

Sexual intimacy between a man and a woman is not exclusively their private affair. Sexual intercourse must take place with a view toward facing the consequences. The time of moral decision in sexual matters comes before one decides to have sex with someone, not later when unforeseen circumstances take things the wrong way.

Marital Argument

Perhaps the most prominent argument for premarital sex among Christians is the marital argument, which says, "We are in love and plan to marry soon. Why should we wait?"

Dr. Howard Hendricks, an authority on the family, comments that the best way to mortgage your marriage is to play around at the door of marriage.^[6] Loss of respect and intensity of feelings may occur, as well as guilt and dissatisfaction. Restraint for a time adds excitement to the relationship and makes the honeymoon something very special, not a continuation of already-established patterns. Some couples also see little value in a public declaration of marital intent. Or they may think the formality of a wedding is the equivalent of dogma. Those who prefer no public declaration but rather seek anonymity may be saying something about the depth (or lack thereof) of their commitment to one another. Do they have their fingers crossed?

Contemporary studies indicate that the marital argument is not

sound. Of 100 couples who cohabit, 40 break up before they marry. Of the 60 who marry, 45 divorce—leaving only 15 of 100 with a lasting marriage. Thus, cohabitation has two negative effects: it sharply reduces the number who marry, and dramatically increases the divorce rate of those who do.[\[7\]](#)

Engaged couples, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:36-37, should either control their sexual drives or marry. Intercourse, then, is not proper for engaged couples. They should either keep their emotions in check or marry.

Conclusion

We have examined some of the major arguments used to justify premarital sex. If these are the strongest defenses of sex outside of marriage, the case is weak. Our brief trek through the wilderness of contemporary sexual ideas has led to some virtual dead ends.

There are good reasons to make a commitment to limit our sexual experience to a time when the sex act can be reinforced in a context of permanent love and care. From this perspective, virginity is not viewed as something that must be eliminated as soon as possible, but as a gift to treasure and save for a special and unique person.

The biblical standard that puts sex within the fidelity and security of marriage is the most responsible code that has ever been developed. You are justified in following it without apology as the best standard for protecting human, moral, and Christian values that has been devised.

Some reading this may have already had sexual experience outside of marriage. The data we have discussed is not intended to condemn or produce guilt.

The good news is that Jesus Christ came for the expressed purpose of forgiving our sins, sexual and all other. Jesus, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever, will forgive

us. The real question now is, What shall we do with the future? Christ can cleanse the past, but He expects us to respond to the light He gives us. Hopefully this discussion will help you strengthen your convictions with regard to sexual decisions and behavior in the days ahead. As the adage says, today is the first day of the rest of your life.

Notes

1. Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1956).
2. Robert R. Bell, *Premarital Sex in a Changing Society*. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966) p. 150.
3. [Editor's note] We believe this data is from the American Freshman annual study, but unfortunately neither of the authors is able to verify the source.
4. Evelyn M. Duvall, *Why Wait Till Marriage?* (New York: Association Press, 1965, p. 38.
5. William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *The Pleasure Bond* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), pp. 113-14).
6. Howard Hendricks, lecture at Dallas Theological Seminary. "Christian Home Course," 1978.
7. See Kerby Anderson's article "Cohabitation" at Probe.org/cohabitation.

© 1994 Probe Ministries

An Easter Quiz

Written by Dale Taliaferro

1. What emotional state were the disciples in when they left the upper room to go to the garden?
Anxious, fearful, troubled (John 14:1, 27).

2. What is John 13-17 called?

The Upper Room Discourse.

3. Why were the disciples so troubled?

- a. They had probably been excommunicated by this time for professing Jesus as Christ (John 9:22).
- b. The religious leaders had determined to kill Jesus and His followers (John 11:16).
- c. One of the inner core was going to betray Him (John 13:20-30).
- d. Peter was going to deny Him three times (John 13:38).
- e. Jesus was going to leave them in the lurch (John 13:33).

4. For what did Jesus pray before they arrived at the garden?

Eternal security and temporal protection of the disciples (John 17:1-26).

5. What is the name of the garden?

Gethsemane.

6. Where is it located?

At the base of the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Luke 22:39).

7. What was the subject matter of Jesus' great discourse upon this mountain?

Prophecy (Matt. 24-25).

8. What ravine did they have to cross to get to the garden?

The Kidron Valley (John 18:1).

9. What did they do just before going out to the Mount of Olives?

Sang a hymn (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26).

10. Who accompanied Jesus the furthest into the garden?

Peter, James, and John (Matt. 26:37; Mark 14:33).

11. What command did Jesus give His disciples at this time?

"Remain here and keep watch with me" (Matt. 26:38).

12. How far did Jesus remove Himself to pray?

A stone's throw (Luke 22:41).

13. What posture was Jesus in when He prayed?

On His knees, face down on the ground (Matt. 26:39; Mark 14:35).

14. What was Jesus' emotional state at this time?

Deeply grieved to the point of death (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:34).

15. How did Jesus address His prayer?

To the Father (Matt. 26:39).

16. What petition did Jesus make?

"Let this cup pass from Me" (Matt. 26:39).

17. With what concession did Jesus close His prayer?

"Yet not as I but as Thou will" (Matt. 26:39).

18. How long did Jesus pray this time?

One hour (Matt. 26:40).

19. Upon finding the disciples sleeping, what warning did He give them?

Once again, "Watch and pray" (Matt. 26:41).

20. What rationale does Jesus use to strengthen His warning?

"For the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

21. What did Jesus pray the second time?

The same words (Mark 14:39).

22. When Jesus found the disciples asleep the second time, what excuse did they offer?

None (Mark 14:40).

23. What did Jesus pray the third time?

The same thing (Matt. 26:44).

24. How many people did Judas bring with him to arrest Jesus?

A multitude (Mark 14:33).

25. From whom was the crowd sent?

From the religious leaders (Matt. 26:47).

26. What happened to this multitude when Jesus identified Himself?

They fell backward upon the ground (John 18:4-6).

27. What did this signify?

As He had prophesied, none would take His life; He would give it up voluntarily (John 10:16-18).

28. What sign did Judas use to designate whom the crowd should arrest?

A kiss (Matt. 26:48).

29. How did Jesus convict Judas of his sin?

Confronted him *before* the kiss, stating, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48).

30. Which disciple drew his sword to protect Jesus?

Simon Peter (John 18:10).

31. What part of the body did Peter slice off when he attacked the servant of the high priest?

The ear (John 18:10).

32. What was the servant's name?

Malchus (John 18:10).

33. What did Jesus say to Peter in rebuke?

a. "Live by the sword, die by the sword."

b. "My Father could send 12 legions of angels."

34. How did Jesus heal the servant's ear?

By touching it (Luke 22:51).

35. Name two evidences that Jesus was in control during His

arrest and that His arrest was moving along as it had been divinely appointed.

- a. It was prophesied (Matt. 26:54; Mark 14:49; John 18:8-9).
- b. Jesus' comment, "The cup the Father gave me, I must fulfill," reflects His earlier prayer to the Father.

36. What three things did Jesus say to rebuke the multitudes, including chief priests, captains of the temple, and elders?

- a. "Have you come out to arrest Me as you would a robber with swords and sticks?"
- b. "You did not try to arrest Me when I *daily* sat teaching in the temple."
- c. "This is your hour and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53).

37. Who was the young man who fled Gethsemane naked?

Tradition identifies him as John Mark (Mark 14:51-52).

38. To whom was Jesus presented first?

Annas the high priest (John 18:24).

39. To whom did Annas send Jesus?

Caiaphas (Matt. 26:57).

40. Which two disciples followed?

Peter and John (Matt. 26:58; John 18:15).

41. Where did Jesus meet with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin?

Caiaphas's house (Luke 22:54).

42. How did they attempt to convict Jesus?

By bringing in false witnesses (Matt. 26:59-60; Mark 14:55-56).

43. Of what did two false witnesses accuse Jesus?

The claim to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days (Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:57-59).

44. How did Jesus respond to all of the charges?

He remained silent (Matt. 26:63; Mark 14:61).

45. What question did Caiaphas then ask Jesus?

Was He the Christ, the Son of God? (Matt. 26:63; Mark 14:61).

46. How did Jesus answer the question?

He said "*Egoeimi*," "I am" (Mark 14:62).

47. What did those who heard Him take His response to mean?

That He was the Messiah and also the Son of God, making Himself equal in person with God the Father (Matt. 26:65-66; Mark 14:63-64; John 5:18).

48. Had Jesus ever clearly claimed His deity before?

Yes (Mark 2:1-12; John 5:18; 8:58; 10:30; 14:9).

49. How did those with the priest respond to Jesus after Caiaphas sentenced Him to death?

- a. They spit in His face.
- b. They blindfolded Him and beat Him.
- c. They asked Him to prophesy who hit Him.
- d. Many other things that Scripture does not specify (Matt. 26:67-68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-65).

50. What dilemma do Peter's denials present to the reader?

The need to harmonize them. One can apparently list ten different denials by Peter.

51. How many denials did Jesus clearly prophesy that Peter would give?

Three.

52. What was the purpose of the regathering of the Sanhedrin at dawn?

Jesus was formally condemned by the Sanhedrin at that time. This action by the council was an effort to make the proceedings and the passing of judgment upon Jesus legal. But, as Greek expert A. T. Robertson writes, "No ratification of a wrong can make it right" (*A Harmony of the Gospels*, 215).

53. What did Judas feel when he realized he had helped condemn

Jesus to death?

Remorse (Matt. 27:3).

54. How much did the chief priests and elders give Judas to betray Jesus?

Thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 27:3; 26:15).

55. How much would that be worth today?

The exact amount is unknown; it was the redemption price for a slave (Exod. 21:32).

56. What did Judas do with the money after he realized what he had done?

He tried to give it back. When they wouldn't accept it, he threw it into the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies (Matt. 27:3-5).

57. What did Judas do next?

Hanged himself (Matt. 27:6).

58. What did the religious leaders do with the returned money?

Bought a field in which to bury foreigners— Potters Field or Field of Blood (Matt. 27:6-7; Acts 1:18-19).

59. What is significant about this action?

It fulfilled prophecy of both the price and the consequence (Matt. 27:7-10).

60. To whom did the council now take Jesus?

To Pilate (Matt. 27:2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1; John 18:28-29).

61. What principle can we learn from the Jews' legalism or "works" mentality at this point?

Legalism—actually any system of works—blinds one to his own sinfulness (John 18:28). They didn't want to defile themselves by going into the palace, but they were willing to kill an innocent man.

62. What accusations did the religious leaders bring against Jesus?

- a. He perverted the nation (Luke 23:2).
- b. He prohibited the giving of tribute to Caesar (Luke 23:2).
- c. He said He is Christ, a king (Luke 23:2).
- d. He stirred up the people (Luke 23:5).

63. What conclusion did Pilate come to after questioning Jesus?

- a. "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23:4).
- b. "I find no crime in Him" (John 18:38).

64. To whom did Pilate send Jesus?

Herod Antipas the Tetrarch (Luke 23:7).

65. What was the stated reason Pilate sent Jesus to Herod Antipas?

Jesus was a Galilean and under Herod's jurisdiction (Luke 23:6-7).

66. How did Herod Antipas receive Jesus?

Gladly (Luke 23:8).

67. Why did he receive Jesus this way?

He wanted to see a miracle (Luke 23:8).

68. How did Jesus respond to Herod's interrogation?

With silence (Luke 23:9).

69. How did Herod respond to this silent treatment?

He mocked Jesus (Luke 23:11).

70. What custom did Pilate attempt to use to keep from condemning Jesus?

The custom of freeing a prisoner during the feast (Matt. 27:15, 17; Luke 15:6, 9; John 18:39).

71. After Jesus' interrogation by both Herod and Pilate, what was the governor's verdict?

Neither he nor Herod had found Jesus worthy of death (Luke 23:15). In fact, Luke 23:14b says, "[I] have found no basis for your charges against Him."

72. What was the name of the other man Pilate offered to release?

Barabbas (Matt. 27:16; Mark 15:7; Luke 23:18; John 18:40).

73. What motive did Pilate detect which propelled the chief priests to demand Jesus death?

Envy (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10).

74. Why was Barabbas imprisoned?

Insurrection and murder (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19).

75. From whom did Pilate receive a warning to have nothing to do with Jesus?

His wife (Matt. 27:19).

76. What motivated her to warn Pilate?

She had suffered many things that day in a dream because of Jesus (Matt. 27:19).

77. How did Pilate respond to Jesus before he again told the crowd he could "find no crime in Him?"

a. Pilate scourged Him (John 19:1).

b. He allowed the soldiers to (1) plait a crown of thorns and place it on His head; (2) array Him in a purple garment; (3) while mockingly hailing Him as the King of the Jews, beat Him with their fists (John 19:2-3).

78. How many times did Pilate confess he could find no cause for putting Jesus to death?

Three (Luke 23:22).

79. At this point, what accusations do the Jews make to claims that Jesus is worthy of death?

"He made Himself [out to be] the Son of God" (John 19:7).

80. After Pilate again tried to release Jesus, what threat did the Jews use to obtain Jesus' condemnation?

"If you release Him, you are no friend of Caesar's. Everyone who makes a king speaks against Caesar" (John 19:12).

81. What symbolic gesture did Pilate make to declare himself innocent of condemning a righteous man?

He washed his hands before the multitude and said, "I am innocent of the blood of the righteous man (Matt. 27:24).

82. When, exactly, did this happen?

This is the subject of a huge debate, but it was probably just before dawn on Friday.

83. What did Pilate do to Jesus before he handed Him over to be crucified?

a. He had Jesus scourged a second time! (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15).

b. He delivered Jesus over to his guards, who first mocked and beat Him, then crucified Him (Matt. 27:27-30; Mark 15:16-19).

84. Who was enlisted to carry Jesus' cross for Him?

Simon of Cyrene (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26).

85. What is the name of the way that Jesus walked to His crucifixion?

The Via Dolorosa, "Way of Suffering."

86. Who accompanied Jesus along the path?

The two thieves (Luke 23:32).

87. What is the name of the place where Jesus was crucified?

In Hebrew, Golgotha (Matt. 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17).

88. What is this place called in Greek?

The cranium, the skull (Luke 23:33).

89. What is this place called in Latin?

Calvary.

90. Of what significance were the inscriptions on the crosses at crucifixions?

They identified the crime for which the person was being executed.

91. What were Jesus's first words from the cross?

"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

92. What is the first fulfillment of prophecy by those who crucified Jesus after He was nailed to the cross?

They cast lots over Jesus' garments (John 19:24).

93. What inscription did Pilate place on Jesus' cross?

"Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (John 19:19).

94. In what languages was it written?

Aramaic, Latin, and Greek (John 19:20).

95. Who are the three women named in scripture who stood by the cross (John 19:25)?

- a. Mary, mother of Jesus
- b. Mary's sister—the wife of Cleopas
- c. Mary Magdalene

96. What was the second thing Jesus said from the cross and to whom was it addressed (John 19:27)?

To Mary: "Woman, behold, your son"; to John, "Behold your mother!"

97. At what hour was Jesus actually crucified?

The third hour—nine a.m. (Mark 15:25).

98. At what hour did darkness enshroud the earth?

The sixth hour (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44).

99. How long did the darkness last?

Three hours (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44).

100. Around the ninth hour, what did Jesus cry out?

"My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken me?" (Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani).

101. What was Jesus' next-to-last utterance from the cross and to what did it refer?

"It is finished." It referred to the penalty He paid on the cross (John 19:30).

102. At the death of Jesus, what physical phenomena occurred?

- a. The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 21:45).
- b. There was an earthquake (Matt. 27:51).
- c. Rocks were split apart (Matt. 27:51).
- d. Tombs were opened (Matt. 27:52).
- e. There were many resuscitations of the dead. They entered into the city, appeared to many, and stayed alive until after Jesus' resurrection (Matt. 27:52-53).

103. The fear occasioned by these awesome phenomena moved the centurion at the foot of the cross to make what profession?

That Jesus was a righteous man and truly the Son of God (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47).

104. How did the multitudes respond to these awesome displays?

They returned to the city beating their breasts (Luke 23:48).

105. What reason did the Jews give to have Pilate break the legs of those crucified?

So as not to defile the sabbath-day Passover (John 19:31).

106. Instead of breaking Jesus' legs, they did something else to Him, since He was already dead. What?

They pierced His side (John 19:33-34).

107. What resulted from the piercing, signifying that death had occurred?

Blood and water flowed out (John 19:34).

108. What two prophecies relate to Jesus' legs not being broken?

- a. No bone shall be broken (Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12; Ps. 34:20).
- b. They will look on me, the one they have pierced (Zach. 12:10).

109. Who asked Pilate for the body of Jesus for burial?

Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50; John 19:38).

110. How did Pilate confirm that Jesus had in fact died?

He called in the centurion in charge of the crucifixion (Mark 15:44-45).

111. Who helped Joseph prepare the body for burial?

Nicodemus (John 19:39).

112. What two spices were used in the burial preparation?

Myrrh and aloes (John 19:39).

113. How much was used?

One hundred pounds (John 19:39).

114. Who were the two women who watched where Joseph and Nicodemus buried Jesus?

Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:47).

115. What reason did the chief priests and Pharisees give for sealing and guarding the sepulchre?

They secured the tomb for three days because they feared Jesus' disciples would steal the body and tell the people He had risen (Matt. 27:62-66).

116. What supernatural event accompanied the great earthquake early on Sunday morning?

An angel of the Lord rolled back the tombstone and sat on it (Matt. 28:2-4).

117. What is curious about the angel and this appearance?

The angel came and went. Some saw the angel and some didn't (John 28:2-10).

118. Who was the first person at the tomb early on Sunday morning?

Mary Magdalene (John 20:1).

119. Basically, what message did the angel give the women at the tomb?

“He is not here; He has risen just as He had said He would” (Matt. 28:5-7; Mark 16:26-7; Luke 24:5-7).

120. Who were the first two apostles to go to the empty tomb?

John and Peter (John 20:2).

121. What was curious about the burial wrappings?

They were in the tomb, neatly folded (John 20:5-7).

122. What excuse did the soldiers (who were paid by the chief priests and the elders) give for the disappearance of Jesus' body?

“His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we slept” (Matt. 28:11-13).

123. What is so ludicrous about this excuse?

The guards who fell asleep, plus all of those in the unit, would have been executed.

124. Name some of the people to whom Jesus appeared after He arose.

Mary Magdalene, Cleopas and a friend, the eleven disciples, Thomas (Mark 16:9, 14; Luke 24:17; John 20:26).

125. How long did He appear to the disciples before He finally ascended?

Forty days (Acts 1:1-2).

Jesus' Claims to be God – Yes, Jesus Said He is God

Sue Bohlin answers the question about Jesus claims to be God by reviewing the major scripture passages where Jesus did so. This study clearly shows that Jesus was God and openly claimed to be so. Bottom line: Jesus clearly communicated that He and the Father are one and are God.

[Note: The following essay was written in response to a friend's request: "Can you tell me where in the Bible Jesus claimed to be God?"]

This article is not an exhaustive list of Christ's claims to be God, but it does cover the major ones. I suggest you read this with a Bible open, as I have not posted all the scriptures listed.

1. Mark 2:1-12—Jesus heals a paralytic. He had authority to forgive sins, which is something only God Himself can do. Then, to authenticate His claim, He demonstrated His power by healing the paralytic.

2. The miracles Jesus performed are a very strong indication of His divinity (because no mere human can work actual miracles by his own power). Jesus referred to the miracles in John 10:24-39 as proof that he was telling the truth. This passage is Christ's own response to the unbelieving Jews' charge of blasphemy (dishonoring God by claiming to be God). Incidentally, this section also includes a beautiful promise that once you are saved/born again/become a Christian, you can never lose your salvation. Verses 28-29 say we will "never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (Here is another strong statement that He is God.) We can have the

assurance of eternal security because we didn't earn salvation in the first place; it is a free gift (Ephesians 2:8,9).

3. During Christ's trial, the chief priests asked Him point blank, "Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." And He said,

- "I am." (Mark 14:60-62)
- "Yes, it is as you say." (Matthew 26: 63-65)
- "You are right in saying I am." (Luke 22:67-70)

These are all ways of saying the same thing, written by different authors.

In John's gospel, he recounts Jesus' interview with Pontius Pilate (John 18:33-37). Pilate wanted to know if He were the King of the Jews. Jesus then talked about how His kingdom was not of this world. Pilate said, "You *are* a king, then!" Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king..." The truth is, he is King of the whole universe.

4. Jesus says in John 10:11-18 that he is the Good Shepherd. When you read this passage along with Ezekiel 34:1-16, you can see that Jesus was identifying Himself with God, who pronounced Himself Shepherd over Israel. The Jewish people, being an agrarian and shepherding society, knew and dearly loved this section of the Old Testament because God was using a metaphor they *lived* every day. So when Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd," and that whole John passage so clearly parallels the Ezekiel passage, there was no doubt that He was claiming to be God.

5. John 4:25-26. This is where the Samaritan woman, whom Jesus went to meet at the well, gets into a discussion of "living water" with Jesus. He pinpoints her sinful lifestyle (knowledge He would not have had as a mere human passerby), then He admits that He is the long-awaited Messiah: "I who speak to you am He."

6. John 5:1-18. Jesus heals a lame man on the Sabbath, which the unbelieving Jews gave Him a hard time about. His answer was, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I too am working." It was a well-known Jewish line of thought that, although God rested on the seventh day after Creation week, He continued to "work" in being loving, compassionate, and just, as well as keeping the earth producing, keeping the sun moving, etc. In other words, although the creating had stopped, the maintenance went on—even on the Sabbath, and that was the only "work" allowed on that day. So Jesus is putting Himself on the same level as his Father in working on the Sabbath. And by calling God "My Father" (instead of "Our Father"), He was claiming an intimate relationship with God that far exceeded anyone else's. So in these two ways, He was making Himself equal with God.

7. John 16:28. "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." What Christ is saying here is that He existed along with the Father before being born. He "entered the world" by wrapping Himself in human flesh and being born as a baby. He grew up, fulfilled His mission/ministry, was crucified and raised from the dead (all part of the "mission") and then left the world to go back to the Father in heaven, where He is now seated at the right hand of God (the place of honor). He is the only person who **ever** existed before conception. That Christ was in a "pre-incarnate state" means that He is God.

8. (This is many people's favorite argument for the deity of Christ, including mine.)

First, turn to Exodus 3, where Moses encounters God in the burning bush. God tells Moses that he is the one He has chosen to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses says to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me 'What is His name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God replies to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I

AM has sent me to you.'" God has said that His own name, His personal name, is "I AM."

Now...

a) Turn to John 8:56-58. Jesus is talking to the unbelieving Jews. "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing My day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet 50 years old," they said to Him, "and *you* have seen Abraham?" "I tell you the truth," Jesus announced, "before Abraham was, I AM!" Jesus was the great I AM from before the beginning of time; He existed before Abraham ever was. He is claiming here to be the I AM of the Old Testament. Verse 59 says the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but the Lord Jesus slipped away. The reason they wanted to stone Him was because stoning was the death penalty for blasphemy. He was claiming to be Yahweh—Jehovah—Almighty God—I AM. (Of course, it wasn't blasphemy when Christ claimed to be who He truly was!)

b) John 8:24. "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I AM, you will indeed die in your sins." In your Bible, it may read "if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be..." The extra words are supplied by the editors; they're not in the original text. If you're familiar with Exodus 3 you don't need the extra words for it to make grammatical sense. The Lord Jesus is again claiming to be God.

c) John 18:4. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas and some priests and soldiers are about to take Jesus prisoner. "Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to Him, went out and asked them, 'Who is it that you want?' 'Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'I AM,' Jesus said. When He said, 'I AM,' they drew back and fell to the ground." (Again, in your Bible the editors may have supplied "I am [he]" to make it grammatically correct. The Greek just says, "I AM.")

The force of Jesus' claim to be Yahweh (I AM) was so powerful

that it literally knocked the arresting officers and the Jewish priests off their feet!

The above points are by no means exhaustive, and are given to contribute to the reader's understanding that Jesus Christ is Lord because He is God. In this vein, I would like to close with one of the most powerful quotes ever written on the subject, by noted author C.S. Lewis in his classic, *Mere Christianity*:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God." That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come away with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

©1992 Probe Ministries.