

“My Beseating Sin Makes Me Doubt My Salvation”

written by Sue Bohlin

I am almost 70 years old and undoubtedly nearing “the end of the road.” I came to faith in Jesus Christ over thirty years ago but have consistently been plagued by a “betting sin” that I seem not to be able to have consistant victory over. I fall, confess, repent, and have “victory” for awhile, and then fall again. This continual struggle has led me to sometimes doubt my salvation, and I am troubled that perhaps the Lord has grown weary of my shallow commitment and has given up on me. What can I do?? I have recently been diagnosed with prostate cancer and I am in terror of dying and finding myself in hell. Please help!

I am so glad you wrote! You are not alone. I think this secret fear plagues millions of Christ-followers. And I also think that the core of this fear is not knowing how huge is His love for us, and His deep understanding of our broken humanity (Ps. 103:14—“For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”).

Our flesh, the part of us that operates independently from God and in our own strength, is hopelessly corrupted and unredeemable. But even though we can operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, in dependence on Christ, the same way that we can fly in an airplane that is dependent on the laws of aerodynamics to get and stay off the ground, eventually we return to our default position of fleshliness.

God knows this, and He understands it! And He loves us anyway. Consider the strong encouragement from Romans 8. The chapter opens with the astonishing statement that is a sure shame-killer: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” NO condemnation! The Lord has not “grown weary of your shallow commitment,” brother. He understands your weakness and

looks forward to the time when you are no longer fettered by the flesh that pulls you down like spiritual gravity.

But then consider the end of the chapter:

33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

The Lord Jesus died for you and, far from condemning you, intercedes for you this very day!

35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Nothing can separate us from Jesus' love. Nothing has the power to keep Him from loving us, and nothing has the power to keep us from being loved!

36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

God has pronounced you a conquerer through Christ, and is working to transform you into who He says you are. Even on the days when it doesn't much feel like it. He is still at work!

38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Nothing, nothing, nothing! Including our sin. Including our brokenness. Including our weak humanity.

And including besetting sins, which He allows us to struggle with so that we will turn to Him in dependence and trust. Recently I was blessed to attend a banquet for a ministry that helps people deal with unwanted same-sex attraction. The star of the evening was Jesus, who showed up in testimony after testimony of changed lives. Every person who spoke, uncoached except by the Holy Spirit, said in one way or another that they are now at the point where they can see that their struggle is a blessing because it forces them to depend on Christ with a desperation they never would have known otherwise. And that dependence on Christ has taken them to a place of intimacy with the Living Lord they didn't know was possible.

God is honored in our struggles, even when we slip and fall but continue to repent and get up again. It's all about teaching us to enter more deeply into relationship with Him, a relationship of love and friendship and affection and appreciation. I hope I have begun to reframe your struggle in a way that enables you to go to Him for help rather than hiding from the only One who has the power to help you stand against your flesh.

The Lord bless you and keep you today!

Sue Bohlin

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“It’s Unfair for God to Put Children in Muslim Families”

written by Sue Bohlin

If salvation is free for anyone who receives Jesus Christ as his personal saviour, then how about a child who is born into a Muslim family. He or she will not have a chance to receive salvation because of the traditional faith from their parents. So it is not fair for God to put this child in the Muslim family.

The timing of your question is one of those “God things” that make me smile. I was ready to reply with what I know to be true, that God is bigger than and not limited by the circumstances of someone’s birth, when I had the pleasure of sitting down to talk with a man who grew up in Iran, the son of devout Muslim parents, but who became a Christian. Let me tell you his story.

Ibrahim (not his real name) was very depressed, assaulted by what he calls “evil thoughts” pushing suicide as his solution. One night he lay in his bed, looking at the ceiling and said to God, “What have I done to You? I’ve lost my wife, my children, my business, my fortune. I’ve lost everything. What did I ever do to You to deserve this mistreatment?”

Immediately, he heard God’s voice inside his head: “Don’t you see? I rescued you from that woman. She was trying to take your life.” (And indeed, he found out later that this same woman, before taking him to the cleaners, had poisoned her first husband.)

Ibrahim knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he had heard from God, and he sat bolt upright in bed, swinging his legs onto the floor. At that moment, a single drop of sweat trickled from the back of his neck down his spine, and as it traveled down his back he felt all the energy and power drain out of him. He was a limp

dish rag, unable to stand, much less walk or do anything else. He was suddenly aware that he was physically as powerless and needy as he was spiritually.

He prayed, "I need help! Send me angels!"

Within days, as an answer to his prayer, he met a Christian woman who befriended him and shared her faith with him. She basically tutored him in Christianity, explaining that Jesus is the Son of God who died on the cross for Ibrahim's sins and was raised from the dead three days later.

One night, he had a dream. He was standing in a room with several other people when Jesus walked in and stood about 12 feet away from him, radiating strength and love and acceptance. Ibrahim was so excited! He said, "Jesus! What are You doing here?" and Jesus said, "I came to talk to you." All Ibrahim could think about—in his dream—was that he wanted Jesus to hug him. So he asked Jesus if he could hold Him and hug Him, but Jesus disappeared. . . and Ibrahim woke up.

The moment he awakened, he knew he was washed. He opened his heart to Jesus and became a Christian. He told all his friends of his experience, and they laughed derisively at him. But the reality that he had met Jesus and had become a new man—"a new, *joyful* man," he told me—was so much stronger than his friends' ridicule that it truly didn't matter to him.

Ibrahim delighted to tell me the differences between Christianity and Islam, how Islam is a "religion of the sword," full of force and fear, but Christianity is a religion of relationship, of receiving and returning God's love and delight. He loves the freedom that we have as Christians, freedom to make choices that are absent in Islam. He loves how Jesus has changed his heart, enabling him to forgive the people who hurt him deeply and love the people God brings across his path.

This is an illustration of how and why a child who grows up in a Muslim home is not hopeless. God tells us in Ecclesiastes 3:11 that He has planted eternity in our

hearts, and in Romans 1:19-20 He tells us that men are without excuse because He has given us clear evidence of Himself, both within ourselves (per Ecclesiastes) and in His creation.

So people are aware that there is a God to whom we are all accountable, and that God reveals Himself to people directly, through His children, and through His word.

In the Muslim world, we're hearing more and more stories of people coming to faith in Jesus through dreams and visions. Praise God!

Sue Bohlin

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“Your Perception of Hinduism is Inaccurate”

written by Rick Rood

Rick Rood's learned and well organized article on [Hinduism](#) is an excellent attempt at giving an idea of the basic features of the religion to non-Hindus.

I am a nominal Hindu with a great deal of Christian influence. I find a few inaccuracies when he talks of the religion under, “A Christian Response”. I appreciate that Hinduism is too vast a religion to be grasped accurately in all its aspects by any one man. However the perception that the Hindus' concept of God's grace could be a Christian influence and related

comments are inaccurate. Most of the rituals, Pujas that the Hindus perform are to seek God's grace and deliverance, apart from asking for material favors! Further the concept of performing "Prayaschitta" or atonement for your wrong-doing and asking for forgiveness is very much a part of Hinduism that came from ancient times. Of course, there is also the concept of the one who is wronged giving a "shaapa" (curse) to the wrong doer.

While there are a lot of differences between the two religions, the final destination individually and as a society appears to be the same.

And, by the way the Christians can relax. Though Hinduism is gaining popularity in the West there is no provision in Hinduism to "convert" non-Hindus! The Indian Christians are considered part of the Hindu culture and you find many Hindus like myself believing in Christ, though not in the same manner as the practicing Christians.

Thank you very much for your message regarding the article on Hinduism, and for taking the time to read the article. It is certainly not an exhaustive description of the Hindu religion and its comparison to the Christian faith. But I tried to give a brief summary.

I noted your comments with regard to the contrasts between Christianity and Hinduism mentioned in the article. I thought I would just briefly respond to your comment on "grace," and also on "forgiveness."

I appreciate what you said about Hindus seeking grace through religious activities. By this I take it that you mean that Hindus believe that they can obtain the help of a deity in relieving themselves of negative karma and moving toward enlightenment. I suppose that this kind of divine help or assistance could be described as "grace" in a certain broad sense (though I think you will see some important distinctions below). I appreciate also your comment about a Hindu worshiper asking for forgiveness (which I would take to be a remission of bad

karma).

I wonder if you could help me, however, in understanding the way in which you are using the word “grace.” As I understand the Hindu religion, spiritual progress always requires the effort or striving of the worshiper, whether it is through action or ritual, knowledge or meditation, or devotion to a deity. In the Christian faith, spiritual discipline and works of love and service are also very important. But these spiritual activities are never considered the means of one’s attaining salvation. They really are the fruit or result of attaining salvation. Actually, this salvation is not attained, but obtained as a gift through faith in Jesus. I’m sure you are familiar with the statement in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul, “For by grace you are saved, through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as the result of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). This statement puts grace and works in totally different categories. In fact, it states that salvation is a gift, not to be achieved, but to be received through faith in Jesus. I’m interested to know if you perceive the same contrast between the Hindu way of striving (working) to make spiritual progress toward enlightenment, and the Christian way of receiving the free gift of salvation through faith in Christ. One of the most beloved statements of Jesus that highlights this contrast is as follows: “Come unto me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28)!

The reason that this free gift of salvation is tied to faith in Christ comes into clearer focus when we consider the second issue you noted in your message . . . the issue of forgiveness. In the Christian faith, when God forgives someone their sins, it means that He freely releases the person from the judgment and penalty that his sins have brought against him. This judgment or penalty for sin is defined in the Bible as “death.” “For the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). The death referred to here is not merely physical death, but spiritual death which is eternal separation from God: “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2). This judgment on sin is necessary, because the Bible says that God is a “holy” God:

“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrong” (Habakkuk 1:13). Furthermore, the Bible says that it is impossible for us to be released from God’s judgment on sin by working our way out of it, or striving to overcome it: “No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law” (Romans 3:20).

How, then, does Jesus come into play here? By giving his life as a sacrifice for sin, taking on himself the judgment we deserve and paying the penalty that we owe to God: “For even the Son of Man (Jesus) came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (payment) for many” (Mark 10:45). This is why God is free to offer his forgiving grace to anyone who acknowledges his sin and need for forgiveness, and receives this gift by trusting in Jesus and what he has done for us: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). The “eternal life” referred to here includes God’s forgiving grace, but also so much more . . . a life in fellowship with God both now and forever. But apart from what Jesus has done for us, this “eternal life” could never be made available to us.

By the way, here is one additional contrast worth noting between Hinduism and Christianity. As I understand the Hindu religion, the goal of spiritual progress is ultimate union with God, a melting of all distinctions between self and ultimate reality. The essence of salvation or eternal life in the Christian scriptures is not union with ultimate reality, but communion with God . . . person to Person!

Thank you, _____, for taking time to interact with me on some very important issues. I commend you for taking seriously the spiritual journey we all are on in life. May I also commend to you a word from your own M. K. Gandhi: “I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus.”

Respectfully,

Rick Rood

“Did Jesus Preach Immortality?”

written by Dr. Michael Gleghorn

Dear Probe, I have studied the Gospels. My question is: Did Jesus Christ preach Immortality? If so for certain ones or for all?

Thanks for your letter. Jesus taught that salvation (including eternal life) was freely available to all men through faith in Him alone (see John 3:16; 14:6). Technically, Jesus did not preach the Greek doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Rather, he taught that all men would be raised bodily from the dead, some to glory and everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting death in the lake of fire (See John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:11-15). Of course, there is an intermediate state between death and resurrection in which the physically dead experience personal, conscious existence (presumably in a disembodied state), but this is not man’s final state of existence. The final state is the resurrection of the body.

I personally believe that Christ died for all men and that all men are offered eternal life through faith in Him (See 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 2 Pet. 3:9). Unfortunately, not all men will avail themselves of this gift. Therefore, some will be condemned to eternal separation from God in the lake of fire (the second death).

I hope this is helpful.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“Will I Go To Hell For My Doubts?”

written by Sue Bohlin

I have been a Christian my whole life. I have been struggling with faith lately. I am mostly intellectually convinced in Christianity, however I have a lingering doubt based on a few intellectual things. One is the battle between old earth and [young] earth [creation] and the other is the age of the book of Daniel—which online resources I have read seem to prove that it was written after the fact. (I have seen the Christian responses and they do not deal with all of the facts.) Anyway, none of these doubts would bother me except that Hebrews 11:1 and James 1:8 imply that any doubt might be cause for exclusion of me from heaven. I can’t even sleep at night because I am so afraid of going to hell. Is there any hope for me?

I would suggest that Hebrews 11:1 and James 1:8 do not imply that at all. In fact, doubt isn’t even mentioned. Hebrews is about the nature of faith, and James simply says that the double-minded person—one who continually wavers back and forth between trusting and not trusting—is inherently unstable in his thinking.

See, the Lord understands that we see through a glass darkly, as Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians. He understands that we are trying to make sense of a fallen world through a fallen intellect, and we don’t have all the puzzle pieces. He gives much more grace than you know, I think. The issue is not about having doubts, which usually just means we haven’t figured things out. God’s indictment is on those who refuse to trust. They are not the same thing. The Lord Jesus said to love God with our minds, and wrestling through the hard, meaty issues of apparent contradictions and complications is one way we do that. The very act of pursuing truth to attack our doubts and questions is a kind of worship!

Let me encourage you that there are answers, even if you haven't found them. For instance, Probe's position on the age of the earth question has brought great peace to my husband, Dr. Ray Bohlin's spirit; he's been diligently studying this issue for 30+ years. He has looked at the evidence for a young earth and universe, and an old earth and universe, and found compelling evidence for both. They clearly cannot both be true. So says he is an agnostic on the age issue. He doesn't know. And can live with that, especially since: 1) the issue is not WHEN but WHO created, and 2) the Bible doesn't tell us, which means it doesn't matter enough to get caught up in it. How long ago God created the heavens and the earth has nothing to do with whether Christianity is true or not.

I just read my answer to him to get his approval, and he added that he would be VERY careful about trusting online resources on the book of Daniel. Why should you believe them? The nature of the web is that anyone can publish anything, whether they have any expertise or not. Are they qualified? Biased? Especially sources like Wikipedia, which are going to reflect the anti-Christian bias of the culture, since the entries come from people whose thinking is pickled in the brine of secularism. I invite you to read another [answer to email at Probe.org about the book of Daniel](#).

I would also spend some time shoring up your understanding of your security in Christ if you have placed your trust in Him. If you became a Christian years ago, you became a new creature, a forever child of God. You cannot lose your relationship with your heavenly Father, no matter how many doubts plague you, any more than you can become unborn from your mother. Our founder, Jimmy Williams, wrote an article "How Can I Know I'm Going to Heaven?" here: www.probe.org/how-can-i-know-im-going-to-heaven/

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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“What About Household Salvation?”

written by Dr. Michael Gleghorn

What is your view on Household Salvation? (I am thinking of two scriptures: Acts 11:14-“...and he will speak words to you by which you will be saved, you and all your household” and Acts 16:31-“They said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”)

Thanks for your letter. My view on Household Salvation is that each member of the household, upon hearing the Gospel message, can be saved on the one condition of personal faith in Christ. Acts 11:14 MAY be predictive (i.e. predicting that everyone in the household would respond positively to the Gospel with personal faith in Christ). Acts 16:31 makes it clear that personal faith is the necessary condition for salvation. I think this verse is just a shorthand way of saying that whoever believes can likewise be saved. To hold that an entire household could be saved on the basis of one member’s faith in Christ would flatly contradict all the New Testament passages that speak of the necessity of personal faith in Christ for salvation.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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“Does Jesus’ Vine/Branches discourse in John 15 Mean You Can Lose Your Salvation?”

written by Dr. Michael Gleghorn

Does John 15:1-7 have anything to do with losing your salvation? I would like your input. Personally I believe it does not.

Thanks for your letter. John 15:1-7 definitely presents the interpreter with some difficulties. Nevertheless, I personally tend to agree with you and do not think that this passage teaches that a genuine believer (and this, of course, is important) can lose his/her salvation. Since my own studies are informed by the expertise of others, and since I share the viewpoint presented in the NET BIBLE, I have pasted their comments on this passage below:

The Greek verb *airo* (airo) can mean lift up as well as take away, and it is sometimes argued that here it is a reference to the gardener lifting up (i.e., propping up) a weak branch so that it bears fruit again. In Johannine usage the word occurs in the sense of lift up in 8:59 and 5:8-12, but in the sense of remove it is found in 11:39, 11:48, 16:22, and 17:15. In context (theological presuppositions aside for the moment) the meaning remove does seem more natural and less forced (particularly in light of v. 6, where worthless branches are described as being thrown out an image that seems incompatible with restoration). One option, therefore, would be to understand the branches which are taken away (v. 2) and thrown out (v. 6) as believers who forfeit their salvation because of unfruitfulness. However, many see this interpretation as encountering problems with the Johannine teaching on the security of the

believer, especially John 10:28-29. This leaves two basic ways of understanding Jesus statements about removal of branches in 15:2 and 15:6:

(1) These statements may refer to an unfaithful (disobedient) Christian, who is judged at the judgment seat of Christ through fire (cf. 1 Cor 3:11-15). In this case the removal of 15:2 may refer (in an extreme case) to the physical death of a disobedient Christian.

(2) These statements may refer to someone who was never a genuine believer in the first place (e.g., Judas and the Jews who withdrew after Jesus difficult teaching in 6:66), in which case 15:6 refers to eternal judgment. In either instance it is clear that 15:6 refers to the fires of judgment (cf. OT imagery in Ps. 80:16 and Ezek 15:1-8). But view (1) requires us to understand this in terms of the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ. This concept does not appear in the Fourth Gospel because from the perspective of the author the believer does not come under judgment; note especially 3:18, 5:24, 5:29. The first reference is especially important because it occurs in the context of 3:16-21, the section which is key to the framework of the entire Fourth Gospel and which is repeatedly alluded to throughout. A similar image to this one is used by John the Baptist in Matt 3:10, And the ax is already laid at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Since this is addressed to the Pharisees and Sadducees who were coming to John for baptism, it almost certainly represents a call to initial repentance. More importantly, however, the imagery of being cast into the fire constitutes a reference to eternal judgment, a use of imagery which is much nearer to the Johannine imagery in 15:6 than the Pauline concept of the judgment seat of Christ (a judgment for believers) mentioned above. The use of the Greek verb *meno* (meno) in 15:6 also supports view (2). When used of the relationship between Jesus and the disciple and/or Jesus and the Father, it emphasizes the permanence of the relationship (John 6:56, 8:31, 8:35, 14:10). The prototypical branch who has not remained is Judas, who departed in 13:30. He did not bear fruit, and is

now in the realm of darkness, a mere tool of Satan. His eternal destiny, being cast into the fire of eternal judgment, is still to come. It seems most likely, therefore, that the branches who do not bear fruit and are taken away and burned are false believers, those who profess to belong to Jesus but who in reality do not belong to him. In the Gospel of John, the primary example of this category is Judas. In 1 John 2:18-19 the antichrists fall into the same category; they too may be thought of as branches that did not bear fruit. They departed from the ranks of the Christians because they never did really belong, and their departure shows that they did not belong.”

The NET Bible is a really great site. If you’re interested in exploring the topic of salvation, they have a number of articles at www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=13. Articles specifically on the topic of “Assurance” can be found at www.bible.org/topic.asp?topic_id=31.

Hope these resources prove helpful.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

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“Did Christ HAVE to be Deity?”

written by Dr. Michael Gleghorn

Greetings Don,

I came across [your website article](#) concerning the deity of Christ and thought I would respond. if you have the time and interest, please entertain some of my thoughts and get back with me if time allows. My questions surround the topic of the necessity of Christ being deity. I accept that He is, but wonder if He **MUST** be for both the atonement and eternal salvation. What I would like to do is copy the text from my interaction with a good friend yesterday. That way I won't have to rewrite our dialogue. When you have time, please interject if you would. WB is my good friend, a pastor. I am DB.

WB: Your questions about Christ's deity in regards to salvation do sound like the JW's. "God can do it anyway he so pleases" (even Calvin suggests this as well). If God wanted, he could have made a world without the possibility for sin as well. He can do it any way he pleases, but he has reasons for doing it the way he does.

DB: Yes, he does. But as God, he could do it any number of ways. If you hold to the middle/knowledge position, you would have to agree to this idea, and the idea that he chose the best possible way to redeem mankind. That, in-and-of-itself, doesn't demand that Christ be deity.

WB: The early church fathers reasoned (there, I used the dirty word "reason") that Christ had to be God for our salvation to be effectual. You have heard it before, even from me. Be patient as I explain it again. If I sin against you, how long does the sin remain? Answer: until you forgive me or until you die. Even if I die first, the sin remains as an offense against you.

DB: No problems here at all. I agree wholeheartedly.

WB: If I sin against God, how long does the sin remain? Until he forgives me or until he dies. Since he does not die, and is an infinite being, then the sin is eternal: actually, my sin against him becomes an infinite

offense. Now: how can an infinite transgression be forgiven? (I hope we don't have to revisit justification in all of this). Only an infinite being can pay for an infinite sin — only an infinite being can absorb an infinite curse and satisfy the infinite penalty of an infinite crime. Only an infinite being can bear an infinite wrath. If Jesus was a man, his death would have no efficacy.

DB: Here's where questions arise on my part. I agree that my sin is an infinite offense against God. Actually, God is eternal and infinite and we are neither (in the absolute definitions of those terms-i.e. "immeasurable or without beginning or end"). Hence, maybe there is some reservation on my part to claim I, a finite being, can commit an infinite act. I suppose since we live forever (in glory or judgment), our sins remain always or are cleansed and forgiven always; hence, they are infinite or erased. All that being said (I'm typing out my thoughts), I don't feel it requires that Christ must be deity to be a sufficient sacrifice for my sins. What is required is a perfect sacrifice. If Christ was a created being, one who was higher than angels and who took on the form of man, lived a perfect, sinless life with free will (like Satan but succeeding), his sacrifice would be sufficient. I don't understand how, using reason, it would not. Like us, he would have had a beginning. Like us, free will. Unlike Adam, he did not sin (even if he could have-if he was not deity, this would give even more credence to the example that even though he was a man, he did not sin vs. our position as Trinitarians). As he was sinless, created or not, his perfect example and sacrifice would be sufficient. It seems that if there coexisted TWO forms of deity at the same time, and it was possible for them to sin against each other as does man, then a mediator, who would then have to be deity, would be required. To require deity to be sacrificed for the sins of finite man seems overkill and doesn't pan out in my mind as reasonable. It's certainly plausible, but I don't see how it has to be. Please correct me here. If God requires a perfect sacrifice, Jesus would have been a

sufficient sacrifice if God said he was having lived a perfect life (as a perfect man or perfect Adam).

WB: The applicability of Christ's atoning work to us as human beings depends upon the reality of his humanity.

DB: Absolutely.

WB: The efficacy depends upon the genuineness and completeness of his deity. **DB:** Not if God only requires a perfect, sinless sacrifice vs. the sacrifice of a deity. I still fail to understand why reason disallows this. It seems to me we are predisposed to this position to embrace our view of the trinity vs. the other way around. Reason, in my mind, doesn't exclude this argument.

WB: The JW's reject this saying that God can do anything he pleases. Okay, why didn't he just let a muskrat die for our sins then? The beauty of the cross is not that we have been redeemed, but that the eternal Holy God was willing to undergo the kenosis (humiliation from glory to earth to servant to criminal to death to tomb).

DB: I agree-that is the beauty of the cross. But if God created for himself a son with free will (much like Satan-and NO, I don't think they were brothers!!!) to be a sacrifice for a lower mankind who despises them both and who hates them, then his suffering and sacrifice on our part for the love of his father, who he could disobey at will, is a lovely story as well. That's just as moving in my mind. If he was deity and couldn't sin (if he was impeccable), we can only glory in his suffering, not his resistance to sin. Again, reason warrants that conclusion.

WB: This reveals God. And it is this that is the centerpiece of the Christian faith (our salvation was the result, and the reason, but the emphasis is on the grand mystery of God himself. (How boring it would be

to send someone else to do his dirty work).

DB: I addressed this above.

Hello _____,

Thanks for your e-mail. Don is overwhelmed with other duties and asked me to respond in his place. I hope you understand.

Since you claim to accept the doctrine of Christ's deity, I will simply assume this is a belief we share. Thus, rather than offering any arguments for this important doctrine, I will simply assume it is true for the purpose of this response.

Let me make just a few points by way of introduction. First, I think you raise an important issue that needs to be carefully considered and discussed. Second, I will have to reply in a somewhat abbreviated fashion, merely outlining what I consider to be some important points. Third, at the time of this writing, I freely admit that I CANNOT offer a conclusive argument that it was necessary for Christ to be God in order to provide an acceptable atonement for the sins of man. However, I want to offer a cumulative case for this position which I think is nonetheless compelling. This will involve both a response to some of your statements, as well as a brief, positive presentation of some evidence which I think makes it at least highly probable that Christ would indeed have to be God to provide an acceptable atonement for our sins. Finally, I offer these thoughts for your consideration since you wrote to Probe requesting a response. Although I have to reply rather quickly because of many other pressing duties, I am also offering a tolerably thoughtful response that I ask you to read carefully.

Please allow me to focus on your statements beginning with the remark, "Here's where questions arise on my part." You state:

"I don't feel it requires that Christ must be deity to be a sufficient sacrifice for my sins. What is required is a perfect sacrifice. If Christ was a created being,

one who was higher than angels and who took on the form of man, lived a perfect, sinless life with free will (like Satan but succeeding), his sacrifice would be sufficient. I don't understand how, using reason, it would not."

I wonder HOW you actually KNOW this to be true? Granted, you MAY be right. But HOW do you really KNOW? I note that you appeal to "reason" - a faculty for which I too have great respect - but it's important to remember that reason, like ALL of man's faculties, is fallen. This remark is not intended to denigrate reason. But it's common knowledge that man often makes errors in reasoning about all sorts of things. Not only that, we often begin our reasoning from false presuppositions, which often results in correctly reasoning to false conclusions. Finally, we almost never have all the essential information which we would need to reason to the right answer - even if we didn't continually commit errors in our reasoning.

I would argue that the question of whether or not it was necessary for Christ to be God in order to provide an acceptable atonement for the sins of man is the sort of question about which it would be quite easy to reason incorrectly. I would also argue that YOU BEAR THE BURDEN OF PROOF here. This is so for the simple reason that Christ was in fact God (as you admit), and the Father did in fact send His Son to be "the propitiation for our sins" (1 JN. 2:2). Since God is a rational moral agent, it seems fair to assume that He had some good reason for actually doing things as He did. Not only this, I think it's fair to ask whether God would have sent His only Son as the sacrifice for our sins if He could have achieved this end in some other way. It is at least odd that God would have sent His only Son to do what a morally perfect creature could just as easily have accomplished. Since God did in fact send His Son, however, you clearly bear the burden of proof in demonstrating that this was, in fact, not necessary. I don't think you can do so. Hence, I think your argument is ultimately unsuccessful.

Let me briefly illustrate this last point from a section of the dialogue between you

and your friend:

WB: The applicability of Christ's atoning work to us as human beings depends upon the reality of his humanity. DB: Absolutely. WB: The efficacy depends upon the genuineness and completeness of his deity. DB: Not if God only requires a perfect, sinless sacrifice vs. the sacrifice of a deity. I still fail to understand why reason disallows this. It seems to me we are predisposed to this position to embrace our view of the trinity vs. the other way around. Reason, in my mind, doesn't exclude this argument."

Concerning your final comments, I would agree that reason, in itself, doesn't necessarily exclude the possibility that God only requires a perfect, sinless sacrifice rather than a Divine one. But remember my comments on "reason" again. Just because human reason cannot exclude the possibility that you mention does not in any way prove that a Divine sacrifice was not necessary! And since you bear the burden of proof here, I must ask you HOW, specifically, you KNOW that God does NOT REQUIRE A DIVINE SACRIFICE? Since this is what God actually did, I would argue that it is more reasonable to believe it was necessary than that it was not. Admittedly, this does not PROVE my argument is true, but I do think it's more reasonable. And I am not obligated to assume the burden of proof here anyway.

I think you make an interesting, and potentially revealing, comment when you write:

"It seems that if there coexisted TWO forms of diety at the same time, and it was possible for them to sin against each other as does man, then a mediator, who would then have to be diety, would be required."

Again, I wonder HOW you KNOW this? Why, specifically, would a Divine mediator be required? Certainly reason does not demand this! Why would any mediator "be

required” at all? It’s quite possible that the gods could mediate their own dispute, just as two men might do. It’s also possible that a man, or a talking raccoon, could serve as a mediator. But here’s what’s interesting. If your logic is valid, and a god must mediate between gods, why would it not also follow that a God-Man must mediate between God and man?

But here’s another point. The example of reconciling two gods likely involves the reconciliation of equals. But this is not the case when we consider the reconciliation of man to God. Here, the parties are NOT equal. God is the Creator, man is His creation. It seems at least reasonable to believe (and is in fact true, I think) that the Creator may have a particular character which requires that reconciliation be achieved ONLY through a means which is perfectly consistent with all His attributes. And this, of course, may radically limit the means by which such reconciliation can actually be achieved. Again, I personally think it would be odd for the Father to send His only Son to accomplish on behalf of man what a morally perfect creature was capable of. Indeed, you yourself confess:

“To require deity to be sacrificed for the sins of finite man seems overkill and doesn’t pan out in my mind as reasonable. It’s certainly plausible, but I don’t see how it has to be.”

But since this is what God actually did, you bear the burden of proof in demonstrating that such a sacrifice was, in fact, overkill! Since God is a rational moral agent, it is at least reasonable to think that a Divine sacrifice may indeed have been NECESSARY. And if it was necessary it cannot, by definition, be overkill.

Let me conclude with two more observations. First, we both agree that Jesus was, in fact, the God-Man. I could easily demonstrate from the Scriptures both that Jesus believed this of Himself and that His disciples believed it as well. But here’s the point. Every time that Jesus, or one of His disciples, makes the claim that He is the ONLY way to God there is, at least potentially, an implicit argument that

only a God-Man can reconcile man to God! I could quote many verses, but let me offer just a few. When Jesus says to Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so **MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP**; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life” (JN. 3:14-15, emphasis mine), He is speaking as the God-Man. I admit that it is not necessary to interpret such a statement as requiring a Divine sacrifice, but it certainly has this potential - and that’s something to think about. In other words, since Jesus is the God-Man, He could be implicitly understood as saying that **ONLY** such a One as He is capable of reconciling man to God. It’s the same with many such statements of Jesus (e.g. JN. 14:6, etc.). And Jesus’ disciples, who also believed in His deity, repeatedly claim that there is no other way for man to be reconciled to God. For example, in Acts 4:12 Peter declares, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.” Again, this does not **PROVE** that a Divine sacrifice was necessary (the burden is yours to show it was not), but it may certainly be read as implying its necessity.

Second, consider this. In Paul’s famous verse on substitution, 2 Cor. 5:21, we read: “He (the Father) made Him (the Son) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Luther referred to this as the “Great Exchange.” Christ takes our sin on Himself and gives us His righteousness in its place! Now an argument could be made that, in order to be acceptable to God, man must be clothed in His righteousness. If this is so, then it would seem to follow that a Divine substitute was not superfluous, but **ESSENTIAL**. For how could we become “the righteousness of God” in Christ, unless Christ was actually God? It’s reasonable to believe He could only give us God’s righteousness if He was, in fact, God. And if such righteousness is essential for our reconciliation to God, then it follows that a Divine substitute would be necessary to achieve this goal. Again, I fully admit that this argument is **NOT CONCLUSIVE**—it is merely suggestive. But as I’ve said repeatedly (I’m sure you’re sick of it!), you bear the burden of proof - not me. Thus, I think I’ve offered

some good reasons to believe that a Divine sacrifice was indeed necessary and not overkill. I also think I've demonstrated that you're far from proving your own position (if in fact it's actually your position; I'm not saying it necessarily is).

Wishing you God's richest blessings,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

What's the Meaning of Life?

written by Jerry Solomon

Former Probe staffer Jerry Solomon explains how Christianity answers the biggest question of them all: What is the meaning of life?

Cathy has been married to her husband Dan for twenty years and is the mother of two teenagers. She is very involved in family, church, and community activities. Many consider her to be the model of one that "has it together," so to speak. Unknown to her family and her many friends, lately she has been thinking a lot about her lifestyle. As a result, she has even questioned whether there is any ultimate meaning or purpose underlying her busyness. At lunch one day she finds herself in an intimate conversation with a good friend named Sarah. Even though they have never talked about such things, Cathy decides to see how Sarah will respond to her questioning. Lets eavesdrop on their conversation.

Cathy: Sarah, I've been doing some serious thinking lately.

Sarah: Is something wrong?

Cathy: I don't know that I would say something is wrong. I just don't know what to make of these thoughts I've been having.

Sarah: What thoughts?

Cathy: This may sound like I'm going off the deep end or something, but I promise you I'm not. I've just started asking some really heavy questions. And I haven't told another soul about it.

Sarah: Well, tell me! You know you can trust me.

Cathy: Okay. But you promise not to laugh or blow it off?

Sarah: Stop being so defensive. Just say it!

Cathy: Sarah, why are you here? I mean, what is your purpose in life?

Sarah: (She pauses before responding flippantly.) You're right, you *have* gone off the deep end.

Cathy: Sarah, I need you to be serious with me here!

Sarah: Okay! I'm sorry! I'm just drawing a blank. Actually, I try *not* to think about that question.

Cathy: Yeah, well, denying it doesn't work anymore. It just keeps rolling around in my head.

Sarah: Can't you talk to Dan about it?

Cathy: I've thought about it, but I don't want him to think there's something wrong between *us*.

Sarah: Well, what about talking to your pastor? I bet he'd have some answers.

Cathy: Yeah, I've thought about that too. Maybe I will.

Is Cathy really “weird,” or is she an example of people that rub shoulders with us each day? And what about Sarah? Was her nervous response typical of how most of us would respond if we were asked questions about meaning and purpose?

James Dobson relates an intriguing story about a remarkable seventeen-year-old girl who achieved a perfect score on both sections of the “Scholastic Achievement Test, and a perfect on the tough University of California acceptance index. Never in history has anyone accomplished this intellectual feat, which is almost staggering to contemplate.”^{1} Interestingly, though, when a reporter “asked her, What is the meaning of life? she replied, I have no idea. I would like to know myself.”^{2}

This intellectually brilliant young lady has something in common with Cathy and Sarah, doesn’t she? She is able to understand complicated subject matter, but she has no idea if life has any meaning.

Our goal in this essay is to see if there is an answer for them, as well as all of us.

The Questions Around Us

As I was driving to my office one day I heard a dramatic radio advertisement for a book. It began something like this: “Would you like to find meaning in life?” As I listened to the remainder of the ad I realized that the books author was focusing on New Age concepts of purpose and meaning. But the striking thing about what was said was that the advertisers obviously believed that they could get the attention of the radio audience by asking about meaning in life. Some may think it is advertising suicide to open an ad with such a question. Or perhaps the author and her publicists are on to something that “strikes a chord” with many people in our culture.

Questions of meaning and purpose are a part of the mental landscape as we enter a new millennium. Some contend this has not always been the case, but that such questions are an unprecedented legacy of the upheavals of the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries.[{3}](#) Others assert that such questions are a result of mans rejection of God.[{4}](#)

Even though most of us don't make such issues a part of our normal conversations, the questions tend to lurk around us. They can be heard in songs, movies, books, magazines, and many other media that permeate our lives. For example, Jackson Browne, an exceptionally reflective songwriter of the 60s and 70s, wrote these haunting lyrics in a song entitled *For a Dancer*:

Into a dancer you have grown
From a seed somebody else has thrown
Go ahead and throw
Some seeds of your own
And somewhere between the time you arrive
And the time you go
May lie a reason you were alive....[{5}](#)

Russell Banks, the author of *Affliction* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, both of which became Oscar-nominated films, has this to say about his work: "I'm not a morbid man. In my writing, I'm just trying to describe the world as straightforwardly as I can. I think most lives are desperate and painful, despite surface appearances. If you consider anyone's life for long, you find its without meaning."[{6}](#)

Woody Allen, the film writer, director, and actor, has consistently populated his scripts with characters who exchange dialogue concerning meaning and purpose. In *Hannah and Her Sisters* a character named Mickey says, "Do you realize what a thread were all hanging by? Can you understand how meaningless everything is? Everything. I gotta get some answers."[{7}](#)

Even television ads have focused on meaning, although in a flippant manner. A few years ago you could watch Michael Jordan running across hills and valleys in order to find a guru. When Jordan finds him he asks, "What is the meaning of life?" The guru answers with a maxim that leads to the product that is the real

focus of Jordan's quest.

Even though such illustrations can be ridiculous, maybe they serve to lead us beyond the surface of our subject. We often get nervous when we are encouraged to delve into subject matter that might stretch us. When we get involved in conversations that go beyond the more mundane things of everyday life we may tend to get tense and defensive. Actually, this can be a good thing. The Christian shouldn't fear such conversations. Indeed, I'm confident that if we go beyond the surface, we can find peace and hope.

Beyond the Surface

Listen to the sober words of a famous writer of the twentieth century:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.... I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions. [\[8\]](#)

These phrases indicate that Albert Camus, author of *The Plague*, *The Stranger*, and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, was not afraid to go beyond the surface. Camus was bold in exposing the thoughts many were having during his lifetime. In fact, his world view made it obligatory. He was struggling with questions of meaning in light of what some called the "death of God." That is, if there is no God, can we find meaning? Many have concluded that the answer is a resounding "No!" If true, this means that one who believes there is no God is not living consistently with that belief.

William Lane Craig, one of the great Christian thinkers of our time, states that:

Man cannot live consistently and happily as though life were ultimately without meaning, value or purpose. If we try to live consistently within the atheistic worldview, we shall find ourselves profoundly unhappy. If instead we manage to live happily, it is only by giving the lie to our worldview.[{9}](#)

Francis Schaeffer agrees with ' analysis, but makes even bolder assertions. He also maintains that the Christian can close the hopeless gap that is created in a persons godless worldview. Listen to what he wrote:

It is impossible for any non-Christian individual or group to be consistent to their system in logic or in practice. Thus, when you face twentieth-century man, whether he is brilliant or an ordinary man of the street, a man of the university or the docks, you are facing a man in tension; and it is this tension which works on your behalf as you speak to him.[{10}](#)

What happens when we go “beyond the surface” in order to find meaning? Can a Christian worldview stand up to the challenge? I believe it can, but we must stop and think of whether we are willing to accept the challenge. David Henderson, a pastor and writer, gives us reason to pause and consider our response. He writes:

Our lives, like our Daytimers, are busy, busy, busy, full of things to do and places to go and people to see. Many of us, convinced that the opposite of an empty life is a full schedule, remain content to press on and ignore the deeper questions. Perhaps it is out of fear that we stuff our lives to the walls—fear that, were we to stop and ask the big questions, we would discover there are no satisfying answers after all.[{11}](#)

Let's jettison any fear and continue our investigation. There are satisfying answers. It is not necessary to “stuff our lives to the walls” in order to escape questions of meaning and purpose. God has spoken to us. Let us begin to pursue His answers.

Eternity in Our Hearts

The book of Ecclesiastes contains numerous phrases that have entered our discourse. One of those phrases states that God “has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart. . .” (3:11). What a fascinating statement! Actually, the first part of the verse can be just as accurately translated “beautiful in its time.” Thus “a harmony of purpose and a beneficial supremacy of control pervade all issues of life to such an extent that they rightly challenge our admiration.” [{12}](#) The second part of the verse indicates that “man has a deep-seated sense of eternity, of purposes and destinies.” [{13}](#) But man can’t fathom the vastness of eternal things, even when he believes in the God of eternity. As a result, all people live with what some call a “God-shaped hole.” Stephen Evans believes this hole can be understood through “the desire for eternal life, the desire for eternal meaning, and the desire for eternal love:” [{14}](#)

The desire for *eternal life* is the most evident manifestation of the need for God. Deep in our hearts we feel death should not be, was not meant to be. The second dimension of our craving for eternity is the desire for *eternal meaning*. We want lives that are eternally meaningful. We crave eternity, and earthly loves resemble eternity enough to kindle our deepest love. Yet earthly loves are not eternal. Our sense that love is the clue to what it’s all about is right on target, but earthly love itself merely points us in the right direction. What we want is an *eternal love*, a love that loves us unconditionally, accepts us as we are, while helping us to become all we can become. In short, we want *God*, the God of Christian faith. [{15}](#)

We must trust God for what we cannot see and understand. Or, to put it another way, we continue to live knowing there is meaning, but we struggle to know exactly what it is at all times. We are striving for what the Bible refers to as our future glorification (Rom. 8:30). “There is something self-defeating about human desire, in that what is desired, when achieved, seems to leave the desire unsatisfied.” [{16}](#) For example, we attempt to find meaning while

searching for what is beautiful. C.S. Lewis referred to this in a sermon entitled *The Weight of Glory*:

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have not visited.[{17}](#)

Lewis’s remarkable prose reminds us that meaning must be *given* to us. “Meaning is never intrinsic; it is always derivative. If my life itself is to have meaning (or *a* meaning), it thus must derive its meaning from some sort of purposive, intentional activity. It must be endowed with meaning.”[{18}](#) Thus we return to God, the giver of meaning.

Meaning: Gods Gift

Think of all the wonderful gifts that God has given you. No doubt you can come up with a lengthy record of God’s goodness. Does your list include meaning or purpose in life? Most people wouldn’t think of meaning as part of Gods goodness to us. But perhaps we should. This is because “only a being like God—a creator of all who could eventually, in the words of the New Testament, work all things together for good—only this sort of being could guarantee a completeness and permanency of meaning for human lives.”[{19}](#) So how did God accomplish this? The answer rests in His amazing love for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Consider the profound words of Carl F.H. Henry: “the eternal and self-revealed Logos, incarnate in Jesus Christ, is the foundation of all meaning.”[{20}](#) Bruce Lockerbie puts it like this: “The divine nature manifesting itself in the physical

form of Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the integrating principle to which all life adheres, the focal point from which all being takes its meaning, the source of all coherence in the universe. Around him and him alone all else may be said to radiate. He is the Cosmic Center.” [{21}](#)

Picture a bicycle. When you ride one you are putting your weight on a multitude of spokes that radiate from a hub. All the spokes meet at the center and rotate around it. The bicycle moves based upon the center. Thus it is with Christ. He is the center around whom we move and find meaning. Our focus is on Him.

When the apostle Paul reflected on meaning and purpose in his life in Philippians 3, he came to this conclusion (emphases added):

7...whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value *of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order *that I may gain Christ*, 9 *and may be found in Him*, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 *that I may know Him*, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order *that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead*.

Did you notice how Christ was central to what Paul had to say about both his past and present? And did you notice that he used phrases such as “knowing Christ,” or “that I may gain Christ?” Such statements appear to be crucial to Paul’s sense of meaning and purpose. Paul wants “to know” Christ intimately, which means he wants to know by experience. “Paul wants to come to know the Lord Jesus in that fulness of experimental knowledge which is only wrought by being like Him.” [{22}](#)

Personally, Paul’s thoughts are important words of encouragement in my life. God through Christ gives meaning and purpose to me. And until I am glorified, I will

strive to know Him and be like Him. Praise God for Jesus Christ, His gift of meaning!

Notes

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12. H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1952), 90.
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14. C. Stephen Evans, *Why Believe? Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God*, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 58-60.
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17. C.S. Lewis, in "The Weight of Glory," quoted in Alistair McGrath, A

Cloud of Witnesses, 127.

18. Morris, 57.

19. Ibid., 62.

20. Carl F.H. Henry, *God Revelation and Authority*, Vol. III (Waco, TX: Word, 1979), 195.

21. D. Bruce Lockerbie, *The Cosmic Center: The Supremacy of Christ in a Secular Wasteland* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1986), 127-128.

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Islam and Christianity: Common Misconceptions Reveal Their Stark Differences

written by Don Closson

Muslims and Christians often misunderstand what the other actually believes about God and salvation. Don Closson attempts to clear up some of these misconceptions.

In a recent meeting of evangelical leaders, anti-Islamic comments made by Christians in the Western media were denounced as “dangerous” and “unhelpful.” Ted Haggard, President of the National Association of Evangelicals stated that “Since we are in a global community, no doubt about it, we must temper our speech and we must communicate primarily through actions.” [\[1\]](#) Another

prominent president of a Christian relief agency added that “It’s very dangerous to build more barriers when we’re supposed to be following [the] one who pulled the barriers down,” an obvious reference to the sacrificial death of Christ. They also concluded that it was “naïve” to merely dialogue “with Muslims in a way that minimized theological and political differences.” [\[2\]](#)

So what kind of exchange of ideas is helpful between Christians and Muslims? We might start by beginning to clear up some of the common misconceptions that each hold about the other. This has become more important recently due to heightened religious passions since 9/11 and the war in Iraq. Muslims, both here in America and abroad, are highly suspicious of America’s intentions in the world and some Americans see every Muslim as a potential terrorist who threatens our freedom and democracy. There are obviously reasons behind both of these perceptions. America does tend to favor Israel over its Arab neighbors, and Muslims have committed atrocities against civilians around the world, but this only means that we must work harder at communicating clearly with Muslims when we have opportunity. The over one billion Muslims in the world constitute a large part of the mission field given to us by the Lord’s Great Commission. We cannot turn away from them simply because of the difficulties we face.

That said, we need to realize that both Muslims and Christians hold to ideas about the other that are either completely wrong or merely too broadly applied. Some of these misconceptions are cultural issues and some are theological. Culturally, there are significant differences in how Islam and Christianity relate to society and government. Gender roles are also a source of confusion. Theologically, there is much to clarify regarding the respective roles of Jesus and Muhammad in each religious tradition. There is also misunderstanding regarding the origins and transmission of the sacred texts, the Koran and the Bible. Although the religions share commonalities—one God, the reality of a spiritual dimension, a universal moral order, and a final judgment—Islam and Christianity differ significantly in the details and in the most crucial issue of how one is justified before God.

Jesus and Muhammad

Let's look at some common misconceptions that people have about Islam and Christianity, beginning with how people often confuse the roles that Jesus and Muhammad play in their respective traditions.

Christians often make the mistake of equating the place that Muhammad has in Islam with the role played by Jesus in Christianity. Although Muslims believe that Muhammad is the final prophet from Allah, most do not teach that he was sinless. On the other hand, Muslims see Muhammad's life and example as near to perfection as one can get. One Muslim scholar has noted, "Know that the key to happiness is to follow the sunna [Muhammad's actions] and to imitate the Messenger of God in all his coming and going, his movement and rest, in his way of eating, his attitude, his sleep and his talk..." [{3}](#) Every action of Muhammad is considered a model for believers. Some Muslims even avoid eating food that Muhammad disdained. At the same time, Muslims are offended at the term "Mohammedanism" sometimes used as a reference to Islam. It is not Muhammad's religion; he is only a messenger of Allah. Muslims believe that Muhammad's messages revived and reformed religious truth that had been lost.

Even so, any disparaging words aimed at Muhammad will be taken very seriously by a Muslim. As William Cantrell Smith once said, "Muslims will allow attacks on Allah: there are atheists and atheistic publications, and rationalistic societies; but to disparage Muhammad will provoke from even the most 'liberal' sections of the community a fanaticism of blazing vehemence." [{4}](#)

Muslims accuse Christians of elevating Jesus in an inappropriate manner. They argue that Jesus was just a prophet to the Jews, and that he heralded the coming of Muhammad as the seal of the prophets. The problem with this view is that it doesn't fit the earliest historical data we have regarding the life and teachings of Christ. There is considerable manuscript evidence for the authenticity and early date of the New Testament. In these early manuscripts, Jesus claims to have the

powers and authority that only God could possess. These teachings and events were recorded by eyewitnesses or by second generation Christians like Luke who was a close companion to Paul.

What is missing is an early text that affirms what Muslims claim about Jesus. Muslims argue that the New Testament has been corrupted and that texts supporting the idea that Jesus is the Son of God were a later addition. But again, the burden of proof for this accusation is one the Muslim apologist must bear. However, they do not provide any evidence for when or where the early manuscripts became corrupted. Muslims argue that the New Testament depiction of Christ and of his death and resurrection cannot be correct because the Koran teaches otherwise. Although Christians affirm the importance and authority of revelation, true revelation will be confirmed by history.

The Bible and the Koran

There is an inherent problem when we consider the nature and content of the Bible and the Koran. Both traditions claim that their book is the result of divine revelation, and both maintain that their books have been preserved through the centuries with a high degree of accuracy. For instance, when touring a local Islamic center, I was told by the guide that the modern Koran contains the exact words given by Muhammad to his followers with absolutely no mistakes. Christians maintain that the Bible we possess is 99% accurate and has benefited from over 100 years of textual criticism and the possession of thousands of early manuscripts. The problem is that the Koran and the Bible make contradictory truth claims about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and what God expects from those who love and follow Him.

The Islamic view of the Bible is complicated by the fact that the Koran tells Muslims to accept both the Hebrew Scriptures and the "*Injil*," or the gospel of Jesus, and even calls the "Book," or Bible, the "word of God" in Sura 6:114-115.[\[5\]](#) On the other hand, Muslim apologists argue that both the Old and

New Testaments have been corrupted and contain little if any truth about God and His people. They contend that a lost gospel of Jesus has been replaced with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

This view contains a number of problems. The Koran calls the Bible the word of God, and acknowledges that it is a revelation from God. It also teaches that Jesus was a prophet and that his teaching has authority. Finally, when the Koran was given by Muhammad it supported the New Testament of Muhammad's time by telling Muslims to go to Christians, who had been reading the Bible, to affirm Muhammad's message.[{6}](#) If this is so, we can assume that Muhammad believed that the Bible available in the seventh century was accurate. The Bible we use today is virtually unchanged from the Bible in the seventh century. In fact, it is probably more faithful to the earliest manuscript evidence. If the Bible of Muhammad's time was accurate, why isn't today's copy? Again, Muslims must do more than just claim that errors have occurred in the Bible, they must be able to show us when and where the errors occurred.

The Koran suffers from textual questions as well. Between Muhammad's death and the compilation of the Koran, some of what Muhammad had recited as revelation had already been lost due to the death of companions who had memorized specific passages.[{7}](#) Later, when multiple versions of the Koran caused controversy among Muslims, the Caliph Uthman ordered Zaid bin Thabit to collect all the copies in use, create a standard version and destroy the rest.

We have reasonably good copies of both the original Bible and the Uthmanic version of the Koran. However, both documents cannot represent revelation from God because the messages they contain cannot be reconciled.

Human Nature, Gender, and Salvation

Islam and Christianity view the human predicament differently. According to Islam, when Adam sinned he asked for forgiveness and it was granted by Allah. A

Muslim author writes, "...Islam teaches that people are born innocent and remain so until each makes him or herself guilty by a guilty deed. Islam does not believe in 'original sin'; and its scripture interprets Adam's disobedience as his own personal misdeed—a misdeed for which he repented and which God forgave." [\[8\]](#) In fact, it is common among Muslims to see human failings as the result of forgetfulness or as merely making mistakes. People are frail, imperfect, constantly forgetful of God, and even intrinsically weak, but they do not have a sin nature. As a result, salvation is won by diligently observing the religious rituals prescribed by the five pillars of Islam, reciting the confession or Shahada, prayer, fasting, divine tax, and the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Bible teaches that Adam's sin has affected all humanity. Romans 5:12 reads, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. . . ." Paul later adds that, "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." We are made righteous not by doing good works but by faith in the substitutionary death of Christ on our behalf. Jesus bore our penalty for sin; he literally stood in our place and took our punishment.

Not only do Muslims and Christians have different views on human nature and salvation, but they also have dissimilar perceptions about gender. Although both religions teach that men and women have equal status before God, in reality the experience of women differs greatly under the two systems. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which Islam rejects, helps Christians to understand how women can be equal to men and yet accept a submissive role in the family. The incarnate Jesus took on the submissive role of a Son and yet he was still fully God. There is no similar doctrine in Islam that teaches role differentiation between men and women and yet encourages gender equality before God. Islam places men over women in a way that Christianity does not. Islam allows for polygamy,

and while men can marry non-Muslims, women cannot. Muslim men can divorce with a simple proclamation, women cannot. And although women have inheritance rights, they are always inferior to a man's. Finally, Muslim women do not enjoy equal legal rights, and Muslim men are instructed to strike their wives if they are disloyal.

Religion and the State

How do the two traditions view the role of religion in society?

Christians in the West often view Islam through the lens of Western tolerance. In America especially, we are used to the separation of church and state, and assume that people everywhere enjoy such freedom. Many Muslims neither experience such separation nor see it as a good thing. For those who take the Koran seriously, Islam and Islamic law regulate all of life. The history of Islam supports the idea that the state should be involved in both the spread of Islam and the enforcement of religious duties by individual Muslims in Islamic societies.

Beginning with Muhammad, who was both a religious and political leader, down through the Caliphs and Islamic Empires, there has been little separation between religious and political law enforcement. Today in Saudi Arabia, the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (*mutawwa'in*, in Arabic) patrol public places in order to enforce religious laws, particularly the dress and habits of women in public.

In fact, the ultimate goal of many Muslims is what might be called a worldwide Islamic peace enforced by Islamic law. When Muslims talk of Islam being a religion of peace, it is often understood that this peace will occur only when Islam rules the world with Islamic law applied universally. As Syrian born Harvard professor Bassam Tibi has written, "...the quest of converting the entire world to Islam is an immutable fixture of the Muslim worldview. Only if this task is accomplished, if the world has become a 'Dar al-Islam [house of Islam],' will it

also be a 'Dar al-Salam,' or a house of peace." {9}

Unfortunately, Christianity has at times had similar views regarding the use of government to enforce religious laws. Between the fourth century and the Reformation, the Christian practice of religious tolerance was spotty at best. But the growth of the separation of church and state in the West, which greatly enhanced religious tolerance, has led to another misconception. Muslims often assume that everyone in the West is a Christian. When they see the sexual immorality, drug use, and decline of the family in Western nations, they assume that this is what Christianity endorses. Christians need to be careful to separate themselves from the culture in which they live and help Muslims to see that our secular governments and society have mostly rejected Christian virtues. It is also helpful to communicate to Muslims that becoming a Christian is more than believing certain things to be true regarding Jesus and the Bible. It is about becoming a new creature in Christ through the indwelling and power of the Holy Spirit. It is about trusting in the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross.

Notes

1. *The New York Times*, May 8, 2003,
<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/08/national/08CHRI.html?th>
2. Ibid.
3. Geisler, Norman L., and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), p. 82.
4. Ibid., 80.
5. See also Sura 2:75 and Sura 5:46, 67, 69, 71.
6. Sura 10:94.
7. Ibin Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p. 23.
8. Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, p. 43.
9. Downloaded from NewsMax.com on 5/22/2003 at tinyurl.com/2tbwo6