

Open Bible Christian Ministries Presents:

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) of Faith

The logo features the words "Open Bible" in a large, serif font. A small cross is positioned above the letter "p" in "Open". A decorative, wavy line passes behind the text. Below "Open Bible", the words "Christian Ministries" are written in a smaller, italicized serif font.

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Is There a God?

One of the first questions that comes to mind when talking about faith is simply, Is there a God? Interestingly enough, the Bible never tries to prove that there is a God. It states very simply, NKJ Hebrews 11:6 *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

Why is that? Because without God, it would be impossible for you to ask the question or find any sense in a response. The proof of God's existence is that without it, you cannot prove anything. God is the pre-condition of all intelligibility.

We look at our universe and it works in a uniform, law-like fashion. What would have to be true in order to make sense out of that? The answer? A Sovereign God.

When you talk with someone about the laws of logic which are abstract, universal laws, how is it possible to have such things which are neither matter nor motion? The answer? A Sovereign God.

What about the idea that we have just evolved from nothing? Doesn't everybody believe that is true? Even the scientific community is raising some serious questions about origins. You might have asked them as well: *How does order come from disorder? How does life come from non-life since life is not just a more complex form of non-life? What caused things to become more complex? Or, if everything came from the same identical primordial soup, where does variety come from? Then, what caused those non-intelligent life forms to jump to intelligent ones? How did the inarticulate move to being articulate? And then these language using life forms which did not have any trace of morality, how did they begin to have moral notions?*

Those, theories are fragile at best. What is the answer? NKJ Genesis 1:1 *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* Such a beginning accounts for the uniformity of nature, how we can account for things not seen or physical in nature. NKJ Hebrews 11:3 *By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.*

Where did your personality come from, or your ability to put words together in a coherent fashion, or your ability to distinguish between right and wrong.? How is it that you feel differently about stepping on a cockroach than you do another person's toe? If we are no more than a complex of biochemical factors that are controlled by the laws of physics, why is it that we go home and kiss our wives and tell our children that we love them? The answer? There is a Sovereign God who has personality and has made man in His image. That is where all these qualities come from.

We are not accidents but we are NKJ Psalm 139:14 *I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made, Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.* For NKJ Genesis 2:7 *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.*

What is God Saying to Me and How Can I Know Anything About Him?

How is it that we can know anything about God? There is a difference between God's thoughts and our thoughts. This is true both quantitatively and qualitatively. Three obvious differences are that God's thoughts are creative, i.e. they make things what they are. If I say I have three pairs of blue pants in my closet that might or might not be true and one would have to check and see. If God were to say there are three pairs of blue pants in my closet, there would be three pairs of blue pants in my closet because what He says will be true.

Second, God's thoughts are criteriological, i.e. they are the highest standard and test for everything else, They are the benchmark.

Third, God's thoughts are awesome and the degree to which you know more about Him, the more awesome He becomes. That is not true about anyone else. In fact, the more you see of another

person, even the greatest basketball player of all time, the less awesome they become and the more you think that given enough time maybe you could do the same things. Not so with God.

The quality and extent of our knowledge of another is dependent upon the other person opening up to us. If that is true in our relationships with other people, how much more is that true of the transcendent and incomprehensible person of God. What right would anyone have to say God is like this, or God will do that? No, knowing God must be based on His revelation of Himself. If God does not open up to us, we will never know Him.

So we read in the Bible that God spoke or the Lord said, or God commanded. God communicated with us and has left His communication in the form of writing. Why was it necessary to have a written word of God? Can't we just find out about God by looking at nature or creation?

Yes, we learn something of God by looking at nature, Unfortunately, men suppress the truth that is found there which only leads them into greater problems. NKJ Romans 1:20-23 *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man - and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.*

What was needed was a special revelation in what we call the Bible. In this we find what is revealed in nature, plus much more. The Lord is the One who commands His people. Since He is Lord, He must communicate with His people. How else could they call Him Lord? Without a word, there could be no relationship, no knowledge of right and wrong, no understanding of life. It is committed to writing so that we can have the predictions, promises and purposes of God recorded for us. We are not left to an oral tradition, but the writing of the Bible covers the wide spans of history.

Does this mean that God has told us everything? NKJ Deuteronomy 29:29 *The secret things belong to the LORD our*

God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. What He has given us enables us to see life more clearly and know what to do.

Has everything God has revealed been committed to writing? No. NKJ John 21:25 *And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.*

But God has given us everything we need. That Bible has adequate power, authority, and clarity to accomplish all God intends. It is clear and sufficient showing a person how to live their life, have their truth pure so that they lack nothing.

What is This Christian God Like?

God has revealed Himself to man and His means of doing this was the Bible. It is there in black and white for us. So what does this Bible tell us that God is like? What is the Christian God like? What is described in the Bible is the Christian God and not some generic Being who is out there. He is not the God of other religions, known in a different way.

People have varying ideas of what God is like. We hear this in such statements as *My God would not do... or My God would certainly allow or permit...* In such ways, we create our own gods which are like us. That being so, we make God after our image and stand in judgment of Him when He does not act in ways we think He should. However, in such cases, the one who is really God is ourselves. We tell God that when He does the things we want for Him to do, or He acts in a way that is pleasing to us, then we will allow Him to be God in our lives. That is not the Christian God of the Bible.

God's name is "I am that I am" (Jehovah or Yahweh in the Hebrew). He is the Eternal God. He has no beginning and He will have no end. *I, the Lord, am the first, and with the last I am he. I am the First and I am the Last, Besides Me there is no God.* (Isaiah 41:4; 44:6) In being eternal, God does not change but

remains eternally the same: *For I am the Lord, I do not change* (Malachi 3:6). So His name carries a history, a story, an emotional impact, for He is a covenant keeping God who is faithful.

He is eternal. Does that mean that God is outside of time? If we mean by that, time does not lord it over God, then this is true. God is not a temporal creature in the way we are. Time tyrannizes us. It does not God. Time never goes to fast or slow for God. He is the God of time, However, if we mean by that, the past, present and future are all the same for God in that He lives in some kind of eternal present so that past, present and future are all the same to Him, then that is not true. What that says is that our human experience of past, present and future is an illusion, not genuine reality. If we make time an illusion, then there is no distinction between wrath and grace, incarnation and resurrection, creation and consummation. When people say that God lives in an eternal present, they are undermining the significance of redemptive history. God does not create and judge the world ultimately at the same time. They are not simultaneous.

Is God then a temporal creature? There is something analogous to time in God's experience, but His experience of time is not our experience of time. He is Lord over time, even as he is Lord over all things.

God is a Spirit. *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.* (John 4:24) in other words, God does not occupy any particular place in the way that we do. He does not have a body or physical dimensions. To ask *How big is God?* Is to ask a question that does not make sense. What does make sense is to ask *Where is God?* He is present equally or fully in all places. He is not confined to one place at one time such as we are. *Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord* (Jeremiah 23:24) What separates us from God is not space or time. To meet God, one does not have to go to a particular place at a special time. As R. C. Sproul writes, *To be in the immediate presence of God is to step into another dimension.* Moreover, God is sovereignly invisible. *No one has seen God at any time.* (John 1: 18) Being in all places reminds us that God also knows all things, even the thoughts and intents of our hearts. *And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account* (Hebrews 4:13) Great

is our Lord, and mighty in power, His understanding is infinite. (Psalm 147:5)

Does God know the future? If you know something, then what you say about it is true. To know something is to have a justified, true belief. When we say that God knows all things, you must also say that God determines all things. Somehow God remarkably predestines but does not take away our free will in the process. So I go in Monday evening and order my extra cheese pizza because that is exactly what I want, and it is exactly the way God knew it would be. God knows all things and plans all things.

God is personal. He does not define Himself as some impersonal force or energy field, or influence in the world. No, He describes Himself as a living, personal Being. In fact, it is because He is a person with personality that we, who are created in His image, have personality as well. So we find in the Bible that emotion is attributed to God, thinking, decision-making, love, hate, will, and purpose as well.

God is all sufficient. God does not have need of anything or anyone. *The Father has life in Himself.* (John 5:26) He is totally independent. Everything else in this world is dependent on something, but not God. *Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.* (Acts 17:25) God did not create the world because He was bored or needed an object of His love. *If I were hungry, I would not tell you, For the world is Mine, and all its fullness.* (Psalm 50:12)

God is all powerful. *For with God nothing is impossible.* (Luke 1: 37) God can do everything that He wishes to do. He can do all His holy will.

God can do anything? Someone is sure to ask: Can God make a rock that is so big that He can't lift it? Very simply, No, He can't. But then God can not do everything. To say that God is all powerful is not to say that He can do everything. That is a positive. God cannot lie, cannot deny Himself, contradict Himself, or cease to exist. So if God made a rock so big that it overpowered Him, He would be denying Himself. He cannot do that. But God can do everything that He wishes to do, i.e. all His holy will.

God is most holy. In saying this, we are speaking of two aspects of God's character. To say that He is holy is to say that He is without sin, wrong, mistake, or error. *You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, And cannot look on wickedness.* (Habakkuk 1: 13) There is a purity about God that is not only majestic and beautiful, but also shows its excellence in His righteous actions. God never makes a mistake.

Holy also speaks of the fact that God is completely other than we. There is a profound difference between God and His created order. This refers to His transcendent majesty and makes Him worthy of all honor, worship and adoration. *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory ... Who shall not fear You, O Lord and glorify Your name? For you alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.* (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 15:4)

God is most just. God has a standard of right and wrong that are a part of His character and expressed in His law. He, therefore, stands as Judge of all the earth. His judgments are known in time, but they will ultimately be set down when all men stand before Him. On that day, every wrong will be righted, and every man will give an account of His life. God's justice is true and perfect, and all will affirm it. *Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne For all His ways are justice ... Righteous and upright is He.*

God is most merciful and gracious. One of the things that most people know about God is *God is love* (1 John 4: 16). *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abounding in goodness and truth.* (Exodus 34:6) God's mercy and grace is a holy mercy and grace, a just mercy and grace. Defined simply, mercy is the withholding of a deserved penalty. In other words, God shows His mercy to us when at our first sin, He does not destroy us or place us under His ultimate judgment. God is merciful so that we might come to a place of repentance, acknowledging our need for Him.

Grace is the giving of undeserved favor. God shows His grace to us when He permits us to enjoy a sunset, a fine meal, a new invention, good health. These are gifts from God which call for a response of thanks, appreciation, and worship. Saving grace

comes from the hand of God so that we might place our faith and trust in Him alone for our eternal salvation.

God is incomprehensible. God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It is not just that God knows more than we do, but it is entirely different from our knowledge. *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And my thoughts than your thoughts.* (Isaiah 55:8,9) Our knowledge of God is thus limited and finite. We can only know God to the degree that He chooses to reveal Himself. *The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong, to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.* (Deuteronomy 29:29)

God is sovereign. Nothing happens that is outside of God's plan, purpose, and control. But our God is in heaven, he does whatever He pleases. There are no surprises to God, no accidents. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, *The plans of His heart to all generations.* (Psalm 33:11) He is the sole determiner of all things. *Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'MY counsel shall stand, And I will do my pleasure.* (Isaiah 46:10)

All one can do before such a God is to bow in adoration and submission, asking for His mercy and grace.

Where Did I Come From, Why Am I Here and Where Am I Going?

Does the Bible have anything to say about where I came from, why I am here and where I am going? These are basic and fundamental questions which all of us must answer? Is it that we are a cosmic anomaly, that time plus matter plus chance brought about our existence? Or is there something different about men and women when compared with all the rest of living things?

The Bible tells us that man was made in the image of God. Everything man is, images God. What God is without a body, man is with a body. God thinks, has passions, makes moral decisions, has relationship, has dominion. So does man. *So God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:27)

Man is different from animals, not in virtue of some extra added substance, but rather in virtue of his unique capabilities for rational and moral behavior. Man's body is special because God has endowed it with abilities other bodies do not have, e.g. moral, intellectual, verbal. God has made man's body, His own image in the created order. Man is made with the breath of life. *And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.* (Genesis 2:7)

Man is a special kind of body. He is a thinking body (mind). He is a body that has compassion and reasons and makes decisions (heart). He is a living, animated body that has a relationship with God (spirit). When man was created, he was perfect, a true reflection of God's holy character. He exercised his ability in a God honoring way.

What is man to do? He was to glorify God and exercise dominion over the creation which God had made. *Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.* (Genesis 1:28) *Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* (1 Corinthians 10:31)

When God looked at the finished product of man and woman, and all His creation, He declared, *Indeed it was very good.* (Genesis 1:31) Man was satisfied in God and his place in the order of things, and God was satisfied with all that He had made. There was peace between God and man, and there was harmony between man and woman, and there was rest in the world at large.

Why Is This World So Messed Up?

If everything started out so well, how did we get into the problems we have today? The very simple answer is: Sin. *Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin.* (Romans 5:12)

There is a poster you can find in stores these days that says: *"This life is a test. It is only a test. Had this been a real life you would have been instructed where to go and what to do."*

We might chuckle at that and think for a moment it is true. But it is not. From the very beginning men and women have been given instructions as to how to live, and then the freedom to decide whether to obey or not.

So, Adam and Eve as the first of God's human creation, were given freedom to eat of all the trees in the Garden of Eden, save one. God gave to them a probationary command, *Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shag not eat.* (Genesis 2:16) This was a test of man's submission to the fact that good and evil are defined by God, not by man.

What was the temptation? The devil asked Eve, *Has God indeed said?* (Genesis 3: 1) Satan disputes the character of God. God had wanted Eve to be like Him, and that is why she was not supposed to eat of the fruit.

However, Satan changes the meaning of what it is to be like *God to mean God does not want you to be a competitor of His. God is doing this to hurt you, to deprive you.* What does Eve do? She decides to put the hypothesis of Satan next to the hypothesis of God and then she would be the final judge between the two. In that moment, she inverted the proper relationship with God and decided she would be God and the true God would be subject to her judgment. This is *moral relativism!*

So man fell into sin when he failed to glorify God and was selfish.

How could he do that? I do not know. Sin is irrational, then and now. Man who was made to have fellowship with God, who lived in a perfect setting, threw it all away. Thus, man was banned from the garden.

When Adam acted, he acted for all of us. He was our federal head (our man, our representative in Eden, so to speak). Adam stood for you and I on that day. It was like God said to Adam, *You are going to stand for everyone else who lives. What you do, they do.*

Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12) Death came to all men. Why? All sinned. The universal reign of death is explained by the fact that all men sinned. The way Paul writes this indicates that this took place once and for all at a point in time. It is not a continuing process, but a particular, discernible, past event. On account of the sin, death came. The particular sin is that sin of the one man, Adam, and so death passed to all men, for at that particular point all men sinned in Adam.

Paul explains the reign of death by two things. First, it was one man's sin. Second, it was the sin of all men. In other words, the one man's sin = the sin of all men. Death, sin and judgment are all tied to Adam's one sin.

And what was that original sin? Man was striving to be God.

What do we find as we look out on our world today, as we read the newspapers, as we watch the television? We find that sin has impacted the way man lives. It distorts man's abilities. Man was to have dominion in the world. Today we take advantage of the created order and our environment. Even worse, we lord it over other people. Now we stress our independence. We will decide what is right and wrong rather than obeying God's law. Then, we try to redeem ourselves and our culture through social projects, moral reform and technology. All to no avail, as things seem to be worse rather than better.

Life is not a test. It is the real thing. Often we look around and think if only all these other people would get their act together, then this would be an okay place to live. Unfortunately, we never hold up the mirror to ourselves, and ask the hard questions: *Do I love God with all of my heart, soul, mind and strength? Is*

*everything that I do to the glory of God? Do I love my neighbor as I love myself? God knows the answer to those questions and so do we. When we face reality, we have to say *All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23), including me!*

How Bad Can Sin Really Be?

We know something is wrong with us, so we have a choice. We can either go to the doctor and find out what is going on (which might really depress us, but could lead to a cure) or we can just deny it and hope it goes away. The same thing is true of our spiritual condition. We can either go to the Bible and find out what is going on (which might really depress us, but could lead to a cure), or we can deny it and hope that it goes away. You have probably lived long enough to know that it is not going to go away, no matter how many new leaves you turn over.

So how bad is it? The Bible tells us that every part of man's constitution is corrupted by sin and that nothing man does in his natural state pleases God. Man is totally depraved. It is not that we are as bad as we could be, but it does mean that sin and its effects have contaminated every part of our existence.

The Bible tells us that we are wayward, choosing our way rather than God's (Isaiah 53:6); that we are unable to please God even with our best deeds or thoughts (Romans 8:7-8); that we are willfully blind, not wanting to look at or know truth (Ephesians 4:17-19); that we are ungrateful (Romans 1:21); that we are disobedient (1 John 1:8); that we are hostile to God (Romans 8:6-8); that we have a bad master (John 8:4) and we have a bad record (Isaiah 69:5). In fact, there is not one who is righteous (Romans 3:10; Isaiah 64:6) and none of us can do anything good. (Proverbs 15:8)

Our whole nature is polluted. We stand guilty before God, who is the righteous judge of all the earth. So our record, our file, has been stamped with a big red, Guilty! That pollution reaches all the way into our heart, our inner most being, down at our core. We have a bad heart, spiritually speaking.

And we are hopeless to make it any better. We are in bondage to sin. Does that mean that I can blame it on the devil? No,

I cannot. The Bible teaches us that we do whatever we will, whatever we choose (Matthew 17:12). Though man's will is in bondage to sin, the sins he performs, he wishes to perform. In one account, Jesus tells those in front of him that a particular man *will*s to choose materialism as a lifestyle.

When we choose to sin, we choose between what kind of sin we will perform. Though man freely chooses, nothing he chooses can be anything but sinful. He is a slave to sin. So man is free even though he is morally in bondage. He is free to do what he wants, and as a sinner he freely chooses to sin.

What is the result of this sin? How bad is it? There are consequences for sin. There is punishment. We undergo spiritual death (Ephesians 2:1) we have offended the purity of God and His justice (I John 1:5; Exodus 34:7) so that we are repugnant to God (Luke 16:15) and repudiated by Him (Psalm 1:6).

Moreover, we undergo present grief (Genesis 3:16-17; Proverbs 11:5). Sin brings disruptions in this life. Its effects are cosmic (Romans 8:23). The human family is disrupted so that we find divorce, abuse, rivalries, etc. Our human personality is disrupted as we struggle with depression and anxiety, etc. It ends with physical death (Ezekiel 18:14; Romans 6:23) and separation from God (II Thessalonians 1:8-9; Matthew 25:41). These are all aspects of God's punishment on sin in this life. But there is also a final judgment that comes after death when all men will give an account before God for the things done while we lived on this earth.

Is Death The End and What Will Happen To Me When I Die?

In the movie *Field Of Dreams*, Shoeless Joe Jackson asked the question when seeing the beautiful baseball field, *Is this heaven?* The response of Kevin Costner character was, *No, this is Iowa.* Is this life all there is? No, it is not. Death is not the end of your existence. There is something beyond that stretches into eternity.

However, at death, the fate of each person is irreversibly set. Your will is set for eternity.

People have varying ideas of what happens when a person dies. Some believe that good people live on, everybody else gets annihilated. Others believe that everyone gets to go to heaven, except for the really awful people like Attila the Hun, Hitler, and Saddam Hussein. Still others would tell us that even such sinful people get to go to heaven, but first must go through a purifying process so that they can be made ready for heaven. There is nothing in the Bible that supports any of these conceptions or beliefs.

Instead, the Bible tells us, *it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.* (Hebrews 9:27) At that point, there is a separation of people. Those who are in right relationship with God will be with him in heaven while those who have are not face the punishment of God, being assigned a place in hell.

Many people make light of such a place, thinking that they will be among friends and able to party all the time. Such is not the picture which the Bible gives to us. And pictures are what the Bible gives us, images that are to impact us with the severity and length of the punishment. They are not literal snapshots, so to speak, but literary images meant to capture our attention. The truth is that hell itself will be much worse than the pictures which are given to us, just as heaven will be much greater than its images.

Good news about hell. The good news is that God is worthy of your respect. He is holy and just and He does not play games. He does not say one thing and mean another. That is good news because it means his character is faithful and consistent to His Word as is found in the Bible. The doctrine of hell is good news because it reminds us that every wrong is to be avenged in history. Evil will not prevail.

Moreover, it is good news because God respects human dignity. God grants perpetual existence to everyone. He does not simply discard man as junk. God says, *I so respect your choice that I will not send you into non-existence, but I will give you the reward of your words, forever.* You see, God honors human choices through all eternity. He is sovereign but he will not override human personality. When you make a choice, God honors it, forever. In other words, what you sow, you will reap.

Bad news about hell. The bad news is that we all deserve it. There is not one righteous person, no not one. What should we do? The Bible instructs us to *flee from the wrath to come*. In other words, we ought to be afraid of hell.

Why? The Bible tells us that it will be a place of emotional anguish. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. People will know eternal shame and contempt. It is a place of physical anguish where there is no rest or peace. There is relational anguish as you are a part of the worst maximum security prison imaginable, without guards to intervene or regulate. You will be with the devil and all his angels for eternity. Then there is the spiritual anguish of bitterness of soul as one is confronted with the justice of God and their own foolishness. It is utter darkness. No, it is not a place of partying and frolicking. It is a place that we should do everything to avoid.

The justice of God. But some will ask: *Is that fair of God? Such a doctrine of hell is unpleasant. I don't like to think of God in that way.* It is not the doctrine which is unfair, but our own estimate of sin's wickedness. Sin is not just an alternate lifestyle. We do not have an appropriate appreciation for how wicked rebellion against God really is. If you think the doctrine of hell is unpleasant to you, it is nothing in comparison to how unpleasant your sin is to him.

The punishment of sin is a good thing. If left unpunished, sin would be far more unbecoming and unpleasant. But God is so holy and good, that he will not let sin pass. If God were to tolerate sin, he would not truly be God.

But why so long? Is an eternity really just? Why not just three years of torment, and then a promise to be better? Why an eternity? The length of punishment is not based on the infinitude of our sin. You are right, no finite person can sin infinitely. However, one sin, by itself, alone, warrants from a holy, absolute, sovereign God eternal damnation. Hell is infinite in duration because God's infinite purity has been violated. It is the infinity of his purity that requires hell to be infinite in duration.

You see it is not the person committing the crime, but the one against whom the crime has been perpetrated that set the punishment. When a person hits a dog with their car and it dies, what is the punishment? Well, there is none. Why? Because it is only a dog. What if a dog attacks and kills a person, what

happens? The dog is put to sleep. Why? Because they killed a person, and a person, made in God's image, has value.

What if you insult your next door neighbor, what happens? Nothing, legally. What if you were living in Iraq, and you insulted Saddam Hussein? You would lose your life. What is the difference? The position of the person. Rebellion against a holy, infinite, sovereign God demands an infinite punishment.

Now can you see why the Bible tells us to flee from the wrath to come?

So Why Should God Let You Into His Heaven?

That is a question all of us need to think about? Most of us have some kind of reason why we believe heaven is going to be the place of our eternal destiny. So what is yours? God should let me in because...

Sincerity is one reason people present. I am very sincere in my beliefs and I think that God will appreciate how hard I have tried to be good or kind or helpful to other people, and faithful to what I believe. However, we all know that sincerity doesn't always please the other person. There is the bank robber who is very sincere in his line of work as he steals the money. Or there is the husband who sincerely loving his wife buys her a big screen TV for their anniversary so "they" can watch Monday Night Football together. He might be sincere, but the love is more for himself than her. No, sincerity will not work because doing what is sincere does not always merit favor. Besides, God is perfect and he commands us to be perfect like he is.

Other people like to compare themselves with others and argue that while they are not the best, at least they are not the worst. They are no Hitler, or Unibomber. Besides, God must grade on some kind of curve, doesn't he?

But think for a moment of the magnitude of our sin. Let us say that we only sinned three times a day. How many times is that in a

year? Over 1,000. How many is that in a lifetime of seventy years? Over 70,000!! Three sins doesn't seem so bad. But 70,000!!

Put it in some other terms. What if I had 70,000 parking tickets and the police finally arrested me and brought me to trial? What do you think the judge is going to do? At the least, take away my license, and give me a huge fine! But here I am before the judge, and I tell the judge that I had parked in this state over 100,000 other times and had done it legally, putting money in the meter, whatever. What do you think the judge is going to say? Will he say, That's great, you can go free. No way. The judgment will stay the same. Might even get a little worse because I still do not see the magnitude of my offense. But then I tell the judge that I have a friend who has over 200,000 parking violations. Do you think the judge will now let me go free? No way!! I must pay for the violations.

Neither is God the righteous judge of all the earth impressed with the number of good things we have done, nor the number of people who are far worse than we. No amount of good things that we do, even religious things can ever pay the penalty for the violations, the sins of our lives. The price must be paid. God is holy and just and he will not allow the wicked to go free.

Besides, no amount of good deeds can ever change what is really wrong with me, which is my heart. When I do good things, I do it to merit favor with God, or others, or myself. All of those are selfish reasons. Even our good deeds are tainted by our sin so that even our best efforts and intentions fall short of God's holy character. Instead, of helping my case before God, they just compound my situation and make it worse.

Can a Person Be Made Right With God?

That is a question that the man who is responsible for the oldest book in the Bible asked. His name? Job. He is responsible for the book right before The Psalms in the Bible. So people have been asking this question from the start. It is an important one. Why is that? Because I know that I have a rebellious heart, that I really

do want to be number #1, numero uno. Moreover, I realize that I stand guilty before a completely and totally holy God. Add to that the fact that I live an unholy and unproductive life. What can I do? Can I ever be made right with God?

The most wonderful answer is **Yes, a person can be made right with God!** From the time that men began writing down the very words of God, we find that God promises in His electing grace to give people just what they need:

- A new heart
- A new record
- A new life

God says: *"Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will **cleanse you** from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a **new heart** and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will **put My Spirit within you** and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them".* Ezekiel 36:25-27

What enables God to be able to do this? The Bible tells us that God sent His Son, Jesus, into the world to make that possible. It is Jesus who produces a new heart, a new record, and a new life.

The Bible calls Jesus our Savior. What is it that Jesus saves us from? First, he saves us from sin and its consequences.

NKJ Matthew 1:21 *And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.*

As we have seen already, the scope of sin is comprehensive. Therefore, the scope of salvation is comprehensive as well. Christ's deliverance from sin includes the removal of guilt in that we are given an entirely new record before God. All of our sins are forgiven – past, present, **and future**. We have a clean slate before God with respect to our sin. But even more than that, the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that is all the good and right things which have been done by Jesus, are placed in our account as well. The new record is not simply clean, but now includes the positive righteousness of Jesus.

But more than that, we have been delivered from the pollution of sin and have been given a new heart. Now, there is the desire to please God and obey Him. Because of that new heart we are no longer alienated from God nor are we alienated from other people. We actually find it possible to live in a loving way to the people around us because of this new heart which Jesus gives us.

What is more, we are delivered from the psychological, mental, and physical problems that have plagued us. Sin has affected our thinking, our attitude, our emotions, and our choices in life. But now we have a new life in Christ which impacts every part of our lives. We find that God is concerned about the physical and well as the spiritual.

NKJ 3 John 1:2 *Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.*

So we are saved, delivered from ignorance, misunderstanding, waywardness in us, an undisciplined lifestyle, and self-destruction. Jesus renovates us completely! Some of that process will not be complete until the resurrection. But think of what Jesus is yet to do in order to complete our salvation!! It should thrill and excite us.

With the Christian, the best is yet to come!!

How does Jesus make this possible? Through His death on the cross, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven. What is so special about that death which sets it apart from every other death that has ever occurred?

What is so Special About Jesus' Death?

Sin has a price because it violates God's holiness. Justice must be served. God's holy justice must be satisfied. Jesus was not simply a martyr but his death had atoning significance. No other religion matches that feature. Modern Judaism teaches salvation by penitence. If you say you are sorry to God, he freely forgives you. But modern Judaism does not teach that an atonement price must be paid.

Modern Protestant liberalism says that the cross is just a part of God's mission to bear God's antecedent forgiveness. The death of Christ to such people does not bring forgiveness. God had already forgiven. It was just part of Christ's mission to bring the message of forgiveness. For such people atonement is something eternal, not an event in time at all.

But the Bible teaches us that atonement is not eternal. It did not take place just in the heart of God. No, because of God's loving heart He sent His Son into this world to die at a time and place in history, to pay a price.

Without Jesus dying on the cross, there would be no salvation. On the eve of Jesus' death, He prayed to the Father *If it were possible, please remove this cup from me.* If it were possible, don't you think the Father would have done something else. Salvation necessitated Jesus's death.

NKJ Hebrews 9:24-28 *For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another -- He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.*

The atonement of Jesus stems from God's sovereignly exercised love. NKJ John 3:16 *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

God is loving by nature, but that does not mean that He had to save the sinner. He is still love and His love is not constrained. The choice and explanation of God's choice to do that is hidden in the unsearchable riches of His grace.

The love of God moves Him to provide the atonement. *His love is not moved by the atonement.* The atonement does not win the love of God for sinners. The atonement, the death of Jesus on the cross, is the provision of God's love!

In other words, Jesus does not bribe God into a good mood by dying on the cross. Jesus died on the cross because God set His love on us. It was the love of God that was the *source*, not the *result* of Jesus' death. Christ's mediation is the greatest display of God's *pre-existent love for sinners*. Contrast that with pagan religions. In Christianity, the deity supplies the victim which is rejected by those who are saved, but is highly valued by the Judge Himself. In paganism, the deity is bought off by sacrifice. Only in Christianity does the Judge send the victim into the world because He loves those who are running from Him!

So in what other ways is this death of Jesus different from any other death? Every other person who has ever lived was sinful when they died. Jesus was sinless. In fact, when Jesus stood in the courtroom of Pilate, this Roman governor declared:

NKJ John 19:4 *Pilate then went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him."*

His innocence is declared. He is not dying for himself, but for others. Nevertheless, Pilate does pronounce judgment on Jesus, and orders him to be crucified. A judicial sentence was carried out on an innocent person.

This is what Jesus came to do. His work was one of obedience, to do the will of the Father. He was willing to lay down his life, in obedience. NKJ John 10:17-18 *"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."*

This obedience carried him all the way to his death on the cross. NKJ Philippians 2:7-8 *but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*

It is through this one death that we are justified, made right with God. NKJ Romans 5:19 *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.*

In that obedience, Jesus provided a cleansing sacrifice. He pacified the wrath of God. He removed our alienation. He obtained redemption by paying the price of ransom. Jesus died for our sins. The Bible says that he died for the ungodly. What does that mean? Four things come into play here if we are to understand the significance of this death.

First, the work of Jesus is the work of *expiation*. Jesus died as a blood sacrifice. Why is such a sacrifice necessary? Because the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Christ's death purged away sin and cleansed our consciences. What is expiated? Guilt. Jesus' death was vicarious, that is, in the place of another. It was substitutionary in nature. Our guilt has been covered and our condemnation taken away – *forever*.

Second, the work of Christ is the work of *propitiation*. Propitiation means to turn away wrath, to placate, to pacify, appease. God is angry because sin violates His holiness. He is wrathful toward sin. Propitiation is not the cause of God's love, nor is it the turning of God's wrath *into* love. God sent Jesus to propitiate His wrath. In this way, God's love does not violate God's integrity, nor does it compromise His justice. Justice is satisfied with the death of Jesus (Romans 3:25-26).

Next, the work of Christ is also the work of *reconciliation*. The object here is alienation. God has a holy enmity against our sin. The work of Christ on the cross produces reconciliation as we are reconciled to God. It is not our enmity that is set aside, but God's (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

Last, the work of Christ is also the work of *redemption*. This denotes the price paid to set someone free, to deliver them from bondage, to release a person from unwanted domination over his life. In the Bible it means deliverance from bondage bringing restoration of privilege through the payment of a ransom price by someone who has a prior and more fundamental claim to whatever is set free. Christ has paid the ransom price for us and set us free from the bondage to sin, its guilt, its curse and its power. The price was the blood of Jesus and it was paid to God. It was rendered to God to pay off the penalty of sin and release the captives from the realm and power of Satan. Jesus satisfied God's demands.

His work is complete and it is finished. There is nothing to be added to it. Human work and merit may not intrude into the work of Christ and rob Him of the glory that He alone deserves as Savior. Jesus uniquely satisfies the guilt, wrath and alienation. *Only God the Son, Jesus, can redeem us through His blood; not the Father, not the Holy Spirit, not us.*

So, what must I do to be made right with God?

What Must I Do to Be Made Right With God?

The truth is that if you have gotten this far, and are genuinely asking this question, you are not far from the kingdom of God and eternal life. In fact, it is not what you can do for God but what God has done for you as you would ask Him to be merciful to you.

God gives you the faith to believe, the grace to receive, and the power to obey. That is what He promises to those who will call on Him.

NKJ Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

NKJ Romans 10:13 For whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.

What do I tell God? Tell Him that you want to transfer your trust from yourself, your good deeds, and what you have been doing to try and merit favor with God, to what Jesus Christ has done for you on the cross. Are you willing to trust in Jesus alone as God's means of your salvation and eternal well being? Then, tell God that.

Tell Him that you want to receive the resurrected, living Christ as your Savior.

Tell God that you want to receive Jesus as the Lord of your life. You are yielding your will and life to Jesus so that whatever He

says in the Bible, you are willing to do. Are you willing to recognize Jesus' authority over your life? Then, tell God that.

Lastly, tell God that you repent of your sin. Repentance is not just saying to God that you are sorry for the wrong things you have done. It is an active turning around. Instead of moving away from God, with God's help you are now going to move with the same energy as before, but now, towards Him. In other words, you want to please God with all that you do. Are you ready for that change of heart that will turn you back toward God and His ways? Then, tell God that.

Here is a simple prayer that summarizes those ideas. If you like you can use it to say to God those things that He is putting in your heart right now.

"God, I thank you for what You have done in my life. I admit and confess that I am a sinner, that I have disobeyed what You have said in the Bible. Thank you for providing a way of salvation for me in sending Jesus to die on the cross in my place. I would now transfer my trust from myself to Jesus as Your only means of eternal life. Jesus, give me a new heart, one that wants to please you in every way. I turn from my sin and my self to You so that You might give me a new life. Thank you for saving me and giving me the gift of eternal life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."

There is a Bible verse that I want you to read.

NKJ John 6:47 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

Do you believe in Jesus as God's means of your salvation? Then what does Jesus say that you have? That is right, eternal life.

If God were to ask you today, why He should let you into His heaven? What would you tell Him? That is right, that Jesus died in your place and rose again so that He might purchase for you a place in heaven, and welcome you into the kingdom of God as a part of God's family.

There is one other thing that might be well for you to do. In a quiet place, sit down with paper and pen in hand, and begin to write down a list of things that you know that you have done wrong in your life, sins. Ask the Holy Spirit of God to bring them to your remembrance and as He does, just write them down. It might take more than one sitting (it would for me). Write until the Holy Spirit does not bring anymore to mind.

When you have finished, realize that, as a Christian, a part of the family of God, that God has forgiven you all of those sins. Listen to what the Bible says to you:

NKJ 1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

NKJ Psalm 103:11-12 *For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

You have been set free from the guilt of your old record, your old “rap” sheet. God has given you a new record and it is the record of Jesus Christ who is the righteousness of God.

NKJ 2 Corinthians 5:21 *For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

As a Christian, Jesus’ record becomes yours, so you might want to take that list of past failures and run it through your paper shredder, or destroy it so that you remember it no longer.

What Happens Now? Where do I Go From Here?

Just as a way of reminder, let us review what God has done for us already? He has given us a *new heart*, one that is desiring to please Him, and is sensitive to spiritual things. Then, He has also given us a *new record* and removed our guilt and shame. We are declared righteous by God because of Jesus. Lastly, He has given us a *new life* that is purposeful, productive and becoming more like the character of Jesus.

God also provides the means whereby we may continue to grow as Christians. Here are some essential ingredients that you will want to add to your life now.

First, *God has given you the Bible*. Make a practice of reading one chapter from the Bible each day. Where should I begin to read? The Gospel of John is an excellent place to start because it will give to you a clear understanding of the life of Jesus. Is there a particular version of the Bible that I must read. No. But we recommend that you try reading the New King James Version because it gives you a sense of the majestic while being also very readable.

As you read your Bible you might want to underline or highlight statements or verses that are especially meaningful to you. It is even good to write down some thoughts on another sheet of paper as you are reading. This way if you have questions, you will have them available to ask another Christian. The Bible is a principle way that God speaks to you.

Second, *God has given you prayer*. This is the way we talk to God. It completes the loop of the conversation. God speaks to us through the Bible. We speak back to Him in prayer. You can pray at any time, in any place, about any subject that comes to mind. There is no secret formula to prayer, no special words or language that have to be said in order for God to hear you. Listen to a couple of promises that come from the Bible about prayer:

NKJ Hebrews 4:16 *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

NKJ Philippians 4:6-7 *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

NKJ Matthew 21:22 *And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive.*

Here is a little acronym that can serve as a reminder of the types of things you can talk to God about when you pray. It is **A-C-T-S**.

Adoration - Tell God the qualities that you appreciate about Him, e.g. He is love, just, holy, our helper, our strength, our healer, our provider, etc.

Confession - Ask God for His forgiveness as you think of the ways you have continued to disobey Him.

Thanksgiving - Thank God for answers to prayer or any and all the good gifts He has given you, beginning with your salvation.

Supplication - Ask God for His help in every area of life. God delights in those who fear Him and who hope in His mercy.

Third, *God has given us worship*. Another important means of grace is the worship of God with other Christians. Our church is made up of people who are very similar to you. All of us are sinners who have been saved by grace. We still fall short of the glory of God even though we desire to please God in all of our ways.

The Bible commands us to join together with other Christians. There is a special blessing that God gives in such assemblies. Can't I worship God in a park by myself? Yes, you can worship God at any time and in any place, but that is not a substitute for gathering with other Christians each Sunday in worship. It is at such times that we can sing God's praises, have God speak to us through the Bible and the sermon, and respond to Him in prayer and confession.

Let us invite you, if you live in the Baltimore County/ Harford County area to come and worship with us. You can get directions by calling us at 410-593-9940.

Fourth, *God gives us other Christians with whom we can fellowship, spend time with and receive help from*. We learn from each other. The Bible says: NKJ Proverbs 27:17 *As iron sharpens iron, So a man sharpens the countenance of his friend*.

A church family is so important in this respect. There are friendships that you can build which will serve to strengthen your faith, help you with your burdens, and to whom you can begin to be a blessing yourself. Your questions, enthusiasm for God, and

new insights are a welcome addition to a church family. God has a purpose for your life and you will begin to discover that in the context of a church family.

Last, *God gives us the opportunity to share what Christ has done for us with others*. In fact, it would be a good idea if you were to tell someone in your family, or a friend, or someone at work what God has done in your life. God can use you to share with them the truths of the Bible and point them to God and Jesus.

Please let us know about what God has done in your life, your experience in finding a church family and what you are learning from the Bible. We would be glad to pray for you and with you and send you additional literature that will help you in your Christian experience.

Preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching
those things which concern the Lord
Jesus Christ, with all confidence...

- Acts 28:31

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