

FAQ's of Pastors

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Christmas – Is it Christian or Pagan?

My understanding is that December 25 was originally a pagan festival celebrating the Unconquerable SUN, the time of winter solstice, when the days began to lengthen again in the Northern hemisphere. The church in those early days wanted to discourage such festivals, yet they had much momentum against them.

So the church, decided to hold it's own festival on that day, hoping that it would displace the pagan festival. They decided to use it to celebrate the birth of the Unconquerable SON. Jesus Christ. This also was part of the development of the Church calendar, which celebrates certain aspects of Jesus ministry and life on certain days.

While it is true that it is unlikely that Jesus was actually born on that day, nevertheless, that day has been historically set aside as the day to celebrate and remember the incarnation.

The ideal of festivals and celebrations has always been apart of the life of God's people. God commanded Moses to observe a number of festivals and celebrations including Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, The day of First fruits (which became the day of Christ's Resurrection), Feast of Pentecost (which became the day of the giving of the Holy Spirit) and the Feast of Booths (in gathering of Harvest).

From these, we can discern that God does want us to set aside times of celebration. I see Christmas in this light. While there is no question that it has become secularized, and commercialized, there is still something profound about celebrating Christmas Eve and taking the next day to recognize and remember God himself becoming a human being.

The exchanging of gifts is a reminder that God has given us the most precious of all gifts, his own Son, God with us, Immanuel. Let's keep the best of this alive and use Christmas as an opportunity to talk to neighbors and strangers about the true significance of Christmas. Let's use it to teach our children of the amazing thing that God has done for us.

Pastor Les

Crucifixion to the Resurrection not really three days?

The Hebrew usage of days and nights does not necessarily refer to 12 hour periods. Hebrew language can refer to any part of a day or night as a day or night.

Jesus comment on Jonah is clearly a reference to what is know and a "type". Jonah's experience in the fish was to prefigure Christ's experience. Jesus is confirming that Jonah was indeed there for three days and three nights and his "just as" phraseology is a clue in Hebrew that this as a "type" reference. The Hebrews were not as precise in their usage of numbers, which in many cases were largely symbolic. In Hebrew, 40 days and 40 nights could refer to exactly that number of days but could also be used as a type reference to mean "a long time of about 40 days". In Hebrew thought, if someone was somewhere for 37 days, they would probably still use the "forty days" reference because

it is "type" language.

So to the Hebrew mindset, this would not be seen as an inconsistency. Jesus was actually in the tomb three days and two nights, but because of Hebrew "type" language, this would still be considered to be part of a "type" of three days and three nights and not an inconsistency.

Pastor Les

What does the title Lord of Hosts mean?

All of the references to LORD of Hosts use the personal name of God YHWH. (I AM THAT I AM or I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE) This name was considered so holy that it was not to be spoken, and so the Hebrew has only the consonants but no vowels. That means that we don't know how to pronounce it. Most modern usage substitutes Yahweh, but we don't really know if this is correct. Apparently we don't have any reservations in pronouncing it.

So whenever they would see YHWH written, they would say Adonai, which means Lord or Master. To remind them of this, they would write the vowels for Adonai under the consonants for YHWH. Some overly zealous translators, were unaware of this and put the two together coming up with the name Jehovah. This is actually a mixing of two words and never occurs in Hebrew, so is an incorrect name for God.

Hosts in Hebrew means "armies" and has a connotation of total power. LORD of Hosts means all of the armies of heaven that God has at his disposal. We can think of the ten thousand times ten thousands of angels surrounding the throne of God as being part of the "Hosts".

Daniel 7:10 A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

Bottom line is... Don't mess with the LORD of Hosts!

Pastor Les

Should we tithe on all income including inheritances, etc.

The general principle is that we should give back to the Lord, the first fruits of all our "increase". Anything that is income into our household, like inheritance, tax returns, capital gains I would think would qualify.

On top of that, we are exhorted to give freewill "offerings" above and beyond the principle of first fruits. The Widow gave her "two copper coins" which was all she had to

live on (Mark 12:42). This expression of her love for and trust in God was commended by Jesus as she gave more than all the wealthy people who put in great sums out of their abundance.

Basically, everything I have belongs to God, and I should be thinking of myself as his money manager. For me personally, a huge breakthrough in my relationship with God came when I started to obey in this area. The blessings that God bestowed on me were overwhelming.

If we go to heaven after we die, why does the bible say that the dead in Christ rise first?

We know that as believers who belong to Christ, for us to be "away from the body is to be with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8). This means that when we die, our souls go immediately to be with Christ. This was true for the repentant thief on the cross to whom Jesus said: "this day you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). So our souls will be in Christ's presence.

However when we die our bodies are buried, or destroyed. Then on the day of the last trumpet, our perishable bodies will be reconstituted, changed to become imperishable.

1 Corinthians 15:51-57 "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Our resurrection bodies will then make us fit to live in the newly created "New Heaven and New Earth" described in Revelation 21.

The passage in 1 Thess 4:16, simply states that when Christ returns (the last trumpet), those who have already died will be resurrected first, and then those believers left alive, will be caught upon the air with the Lord.

This is the "blessed hope" that Paul refers to in Titus 2:13. So, we should not fear death, for we know that we will be instantly in a better place. Praise the LORD!

What does the Bible say about Wedding Bands or Rings?

There is no specific mention of wedding rings in the Bible. This is one of those traditions that has its roots in a desire to have something external symbolize a covenant commitment. My understanding is that it originated in Europe.

This idea of having an external symbol testify to a commitment does occur frequently in scripture. In commanding circumcision of males, God was reminding the Israelites that they were a community established by Him and that they were to be a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation (Ex. 19), God's own people, consecrated to serving Him.

Baptism is another example. It is commanded as an external witness to an inner reality, faith in Jesus Christ and the triune God. It is a visual depiction of dying to self and being raised to newness of life.

The only danger in such symbols is that we give them more significance than they really have. The idea of wearing a ring to symbolize my commitment to my spouse is a noble idea. It lets others know that I have a wife and live in a one flesh union that God has ordained. It also reminds me of my commitment and calling before God to honour and love my wife. However, in some traditions, like Roman Catholic, the rings are blessed by a priest using holy water and tend to take on a superstitious connotation in the minds of some. For this reason, some protestants, in the 17th century declined to exchange rings (The Puritans). They saw this as being too superstitious and did not want their people ascribing anything supernatural to the wearing of a ring.

Basically, we at Harvest do not see this as a significant issue. Most couples do opt to include exchanging rings as a symbol of the covenant commitment made in the wedding vows. We appreciate the wearing of this external symbol of the inner "one flesh" union that God ordains in marriage, however, we would never say that the rings are anything more than a symbol. We do not perform a "blessing" of the rings as we do not bless inanimate objects, which would foster superstition.

If a couple decided not to use rings, we would want to ensure that their reasoning and thinking on the issue was valid. We would likely honor whatever they decided, as long as the rationale was biblical and honoring to God.

Pastor Les

What does it mean to honour the Sabbath?

The commandment to keep the Sabbath is rooted in God's design for a people to have one day in seven set apart for rest and refreshment. Just as God rested from the work of creation after six days, we humans are so designed that we need one day a week to refresh. For the Hebrews, this Sabbath was this day. They were to do no work, except that which was essential. As far as possible, they were to do all preparation the day before. The Sabbath principle was also applied to agriculture, where fields were to lie fallow, one year in seven.

Keeping the Sabbath was also a way to honor God, obeying is commandment and setting the day aside for rest and reflection.

Unfortunately, by Jesus day, the rabbis had added all kinds of restrictions to the law given to Moses, even works of mercy were excluded. Jesus was often condemned by them for healing on the Sabbath, which was in no way forbidden, if fact was commanded. (even relieving animals of distress was OK on the Sabbath).

Once Christ had risen and the church age began at Pentecost, the believers began to gather for worship on the first day of the week, the day that Jesus rose. Jewish believers continued to observe the Sabbath, while gentiles began to observe a day of rest on Sunday, the first day of the week. As gentile Christians outnumbered Jewish ones, Sunday became the norm. however, there is no scriptural prescription for which day should be observed.

It is important, however, to observe the Sabbath principle, which is to devote one day a week to rest and reflection. For some this is Sunday, for others, it could be another day.

For us as Pastors, Sunday is a work day. I usually do not finish doing small group curriculum until about 4:30 pm, so my day of rest is Monday.

As believers, we have a great deal of freedom in this area, however, it is important to have a conviction to appoint one day (24 hour period) as a day of rest. For us as pastors, this is one of the accountability questions that we ask each other. (Have you observed one day of rest this week?)

There is nothing that will burn you out faster than ignoring this principle. It is also disobedience to God's desire and design for us as His people.

Should someone feel guilty after sinning or not?

Here we need to differentiate between actual guilt and a sense of guilt.

Actual guilt is our legal culpability before God. We know that we are all guilty of sin before God and deserving of death. By virtue of our union with Christ by faith, we are declared righteous (justification) and our actual guilt is removed. This is true for past present and even future sins. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1)

The "sense of guilt" (a feeling) that we have is something else. Many people feel guilty for things they should not feel guilty about, but because of their ignorance of God's Word, they continue to beat themselves up emotionally for things that are not sinful (example - eating meat on Fridays). Conscience is not always a reliable indicator as it is culturally conditioned. That is why everything must be examined in light of God's word.

Conversely, many don't feel guilty when they should (because their consciences are seared by sin) and so again, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God must bring conviction to break through.

Hence a follower of Christ should examine any sense of guilt in light of God's Word. If I have acknowledged my sin before God, made confession to those affected by it, made good on any restitution required, then I must stand on God's Word that "as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). I have no business continuing to wallow in a sense of guilt. That is me focusing my energies on my self and my own feelings. The follower of Christ should live an "other centered life".

On the other hand, the consequences of my sin remain and I may continue to feel a sense of sorrow and regret for the pain that I have caused others. This is not really a sense of guilt but remorse for the consequences of sin. In this case, I need to acknowledge my feelings before God and do what I can to help others. Many times such remorse moves people into ministries which help others to recover from the kinds of things that my sin has caused. (Example, someone who has had an abortion, may feel a call to work in a pregnancy crisis center helping others struggling with a similar situation.) I believe that God honors such convictions and effort which is motivated not out of a sense of guilt, but out of a love for others.

Christ's death on the cross ought to convict me of sin, bring about true repentance, and release me from both guilt and a sense of guilt. He sets me free. As I am set free I acknowledge the past, but also testify to the One who set me free, so that others can also be set free and be exhorted to sin no more.

Hope this is helpful.

What about Speaking in Tongues?

There are actually three manifestations of "tongues" that we see in the New Testament church. The first was the Pentecost experience where Peter was preaching (Acts 2) and people all heard him in their native language and understood what he was saying. We don't really see that happening today. It was special manifestation indicating the power and gift of the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost. (Theoretically, it could happen again if God so chose... all things are possible with God)

The second is the spiritual gift of tongues which is manifested in a personal prayer language, where a believer prays in words and utterances that he himself does not understand. These are the "groanings too deep for words" of Romans 8:26. This private prayer language is likely what your friend experienced from those who prayed over her. Because this type of prayer can often "blow people away", Paul advises those in the church not to pray in tongues in public, because it causes confusion, and people do not understand what is being prayed. Rather he counsels them to pray in an language people can understand so that they can say "Amen" to what is being prayed (1 Cor. 14:16)

The third manifestation of tongues is when the Holy Spirit falls on someone and they speak in a tongue unknown to them and someone else in the group is given through the Holy Spirit, the interpretation of what is being said. In this case, Paul cautions that this should be done in good order and an interpretation always given. If a person does not

have an interpretation, then they should be silent or at least pray for the gift of interpretation. The main point here is that people be built up and edified. (Read 1 Cor. 14 for a full treatment on this)

At Harvest, we believe that the gift of tongues and the interpretation of tongues are still given today, however, it is often difficult to judge whether a person is using this gift "in the Spirit" or "in the flesh". Unless there is an interpretation, no one can judge what is being said. Sometimes the tongue is used humanly to achieve a "wow" factor, which is not of the Spirit. For this reason, we do not provide opportunities for the public overt manifestation of tongues in our gatherings.

However, we have no problem with people praying in tongues as a private prayer language between them and God. Paul himself admits to praying in tongues quite often. Some of our leaders do practice such private prayer in tongues.

Some denominations place too much emphasis on tongues claiming that unless a person speaks in tongues, that they have not been baptized "with the Holy Spirit". This is not Biblical, for a person cannot come to Christ apart from the Holy Spirit. (John 3).

If your friends thought that the speaking in tongues was uplifting, then I would not make an issue of it. You might explain what you believe the Bible teaches about tongues if they ask. Otherwise, I would focus the conversation on the gospel and Christ's finished work on the cross to bring about salvation for those who believe.

Why should a wife take her husband's last name?

There is nothing in the Bible about this. It is primarily a cultural tradition.

One could argue that for a woman to take her husband's name is a sign of submission, and wives are called to submit to their husbands. (Eph. 5:22), however, there are many examples of women who have taken their husband's name yet do not live in Biblical submission. Conversely, I know of women who have kept their maiden name, yet are models of submission.

God is not concerned with externals but with the heart that is given to Him. A woman's submission to her husband reflects a heart that is submitted to Christ first.

The issue for anyone wrestling with this question (Do I take my husband's name or not?) is always one of motive. What is my reason for not doing so, given that it is a cultural norm in our society. If there is a valid reason (like a medical doctor who does not want to confuse her patients, or an author who is well known) then the decision can be justified. Remember that you will likely have to explain it often if you chose to go the counter cultural route.

Today, there are so many people just living together who are not married, that failure to take a husband's name, may suggest to an outsider that you are not married. Taking your husband's name does make a public statement about your relationship and there is some value in that.

Bottom line. It is a personal choice, but it is one that does say something about who we are and what we believe.

Why does the Old Testament law prohibit certain foods?

In the law of Moses, there is a tremendous emphasis on Holiness and separation. Israel was called to be a Holy nation and a Kingdom of Priests (Lev. 19). As part of the Holiness code, as a love response to the God who redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and continued to give them life, they were commanded to restrict their diet to those foods designated as "clean". Looking back, we can see the incredible wisdom of this. Often, food preparation was primitive and not eating pork, and other "unclean" animals was certainly a blessing and prevented many diseases.

Jesus, is the ultimate fulfillment of the law, and in Him, Holiness is brought to perfection through the Holy Spirit and through faith in Him. Hence, there is no longer any need for the Levitical dietary code. The book of Hebrews makes this clear. Jesus also spoke of that which defiles a person is not that which he eats, but that which comes out of his mouth (i.e. cursing, bitterness, anger). It is the heart that God is concerned with.

Also in Acts chapter 10, we read the story of how Peter, a devout Jew who abided by the dietary laws, saw a vision which declared to Him that all foods were now "clean". This vision also showed him that God was extending salvation to the gentiles (non Jews) and that he should no longer make such distinctions. A huge question in the early church was whether Christians needed to become Jewish in order to be saved. This vision and the conversion of Cornelius in chapter 10-11 of Acts convinced the apostles that gentiles were also being saved and that they did not need to obey the dietary laws, nor did they need to be circumcised.

Paul also addresses this question in Romans 14, where he discusses meat sacrificed to idols. The bottom line is that all things are permissible if they are received in thanksgiving. However, we should be careful not to offend those who may not yet be convinced of such freedom. For example, if I were eating dinner with an orthodox Jew, I would not likely order pork, just out of respect for him, even though, I am free to eat pork. The same is true of drinking. Even though, as a believer, I am free to have a glass of wine with dinner, I would not do so, if I knew that my brother was struggling with alcoholism.

What does the Bible say about blessings and curses?

The Bible consistently speaks of the importance of our words. In Hebrew thinking, a word spoken, (dabar) was an event, which once set in motion could not be rescinded. Blessings, especially those given at the end of one's life to a son, were often prophetic, being inspired by the Holy Spirit. We see this in Genesis 49 as Jacob blesses each of his sons. In any case blessings are significant because they are prayers offered to God on behalf of the person blessed. Given by a Godly person, a blessing has an element of

divine approval, yet we cannot assume that when we bless someone on our own that God's hand is in any way forced by it. If the blessing is given in the power of the Holy Spirit, then obviously God intends to act to bring it about, as He inspired it.

Even those who are ungodly can be used by God to pronounce blessings even when they intend to curse. This is clearly the case in the story of Balak and Balaam, where Balak hire Balaam to curse Israel (Numbers 22-24). Even though he was hired to curse, he was compelled by the Holy Spirit to bless instead.

A curse on the other hand is a statement of hatred toward another. We are commanded by God to love our neighbor and even our enemies, so we should never find a curse forming on our lips. To curse another is clearly sinful. Only those motivated by evil will practice cursing.

Does a curse have any force? Someone who is evil, acting in concert with evil, may be able in the spiritual realm to marshal demonic forces on their behalf. However, anyone in Christ has full authority in His name over such forces, so we should not be afraid of anything like this. Nevertheless, spiritual warfare is real and there are many examples of Christians, being opposed by demonic forces as they preach the gospel and minister in Jesus' name. In such cases, these demons can be expelled in Jesus' name.

Can someone curse themselves? Given the depravity of human nature, sure why not... does God consider this sin worse than any other.... I think not. There are many examples of even witch doctors coming to Christ and renouncing their evil ways. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.
(2 Cor, 5:17)

This is not an exhaustive reply as this is a big subject... but I hope it helps.

Will we go through the Great Tribulation?

Our position and outlined in the statement is definitely premillennial. We believe that the scriptures teach that Christ will return and inaugurate a 1000 year (millennial) reign on earth. This is described quite clearly in Rev. chapter 20.

The next question is refers to the timing of the "rapture". This term is not found in the Bible but is used to refer to believers being "caught up" in the air to meet Christ at the last trumpet described in 1 Thess 4:15-17.

It is true that no one knows the day or the hour (Matt. 24:36). The reference to not even "the Son" knowing is a reference to the fact that in Jesus' humanity (as part of His "humbling himself" (Phil. 2:8)) He did not know everything. Certainly, his wrestling in the garden of Gethsemane with "the cup" that he was asked to drink (his suffering & death) would indicate that He did not have access to all knowledge.

What we do know about the Day of the Lord is that it will occur at an unexpected time when people are saying peace and security (1 Thess 5:3).

As to the question "Will the church go through the tribulation?", the view on this has

changed throughout different church climates. In times of persecution, there was no question that the church would go through the tribulation. In times of peace and prosperity, the view was that it wouldn't. In our materialistic western culture, we like to think that God would not put his saints through tribulation, however, we must recognize that many believers were and are being persecuted and tortured for their faith. They are now experiencing tribulation and suffering for the sake of Christ. Suffering has always been a part of the Christian's call and identity in Christ. Why should the generation that sees the Antichrist be exempt?

Having said this, I believe that it is unlikely that God would subject his people to the final outpouring of his wrath described in the final judgments. It seems reasonable to believe that the saints would have been raptured at this point. This position is sometimes known as "Pre Wrath" and was first articulated by Marvin Rosenthal. It has also been articulated by James MacDonald in a series of sermons on the end times.

So, you might conclude that our position is pre-millennial, pre-wrath. However, having said that, we must realize that we are dealing with apocalyptic literature here and there are some good arguments that also can be made for other views. In our Bible Doctrine 3 class at Veritas, we spend two sessions exploring these different views. Wayne Grudem's "Systematic Theology" has an excellent chapter on all of this.

Our main concern as followers of Christ is to "watch" and always be ready.

Pastor Les

How does the gift of Healing work? Are all Healings of God?

There is no question that God heals miraculously and that the gift of healing is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. While some believe that this gift ended with the apostles, there is ample evidence in the early church that miraculous healings continued to encourage and uplift God's people. Even in our own experience, we can testify to those for whom the doctors held little hope, yet have been restored by fervent prayer in a way that baffles science. These simply cannot be explained in any way other than by God working in response to prayer.

Some people have been endowed by the Holy Spirit with a supernatural ability to bring people before God in prayer in a way that often, but not always results in God healing them. We would say that such a person has the spiritual gift of healing. Those with this gift will acknowledge, that it is not they personally that heal but that it is God that heals. They would also acknowledge that He does not heal on demand but only according to His will. Some are not healed physically. Some may be healed for a season, only to succumb again to disease. Remember that God heals every disease except your last. We are all appointed to die physically. Even Lazarus who was raised from the dead, died at some point.

The point is that God is not primarily concerned with our health, but rather is concerned about our heart. Often, our patient endurance brings him much Glory. Many have died

painful deaths yet in doing so have shone like bright lights of faith. In doing so they have brought much Glory to God.

As to whether we should proclaim a healing or not is an issue of what will bring Glory to God. If I believe that God has healed me supernaturally, I should testify to that, but not in an arrogant boastful way, but simply on the grounds of the evidence. I was once sick, now I am well. that is not to say that I may not get sick again. All I can testify to is the present state of affairs, based on some evidence. It would be wise to get some medical confirmation before I go public, so that I am not claiming something that is not in fact true. Feelings are not a reliable indicator of healing. I should not be afraid of getting sick again, as if by this it might not bring Glory to God. It is not only a healing that Glorifies God but also what is going on in my heart. Patient endurance and joy in the midst of trial can glorify God just as much.

The difficulty is that healings can also occur through the satanic realm. Witch doctors, Voo Doo artists, and new age cults exist that do appear to have some success in healing. While we do not understand this, we acknowledge that many deceivers have gone out into the world and their power comes from Satan, the prince of this world. In these situations, there is always a hook that snares the person, who may be physically healed for a while, but is psychologically and spiritually ensnared by those who practice these things. Often such healings are accompanied by bizarre behavior and strange events.

How then do we tell if a healing is truly of God? I would suggest that three things should be present.

1. There is an actual medically verifiable change that is unexplainable.
2. This change came about in the context of a community of faith in Jesus Christ and was the result of prayer to God in the name of Christ by those that belong to Him.
3. The healing was accompanied by the fruits of the Spirit being manifested. These are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, goodness, gentleness and self control. As a result it brings Glory to God and encourages his people.

Hope this is helpful.

Is cremation a valid option for Christians?

There is no biblical prohibition against cremation. Traditionally Christians have chosen burial as the preferred method, largely as a result of belief in the resurrection of the body. It was felt that it would be "easier" for God to resurrect the body, if it were all together in one place. However, the scripture says that "all things are possible for God".(Matt. 19:26) God can just as easily reconstitute the body from ashes as from the grave. This is also important for those who are destroyed violently, such that there are in fact no remains at all. Think of the believers who died in the 911 twin tower collapse. There would be no remains to speak of, yet they are certainly not beyond being resurrected.

Can I pray in Yeshua's name?

Absolutely yes... Yeshua is Jesus' name in Hebrew and it would have been how he was addressed by his disciples. Even today in Israel, believers praise and worship Yeshua, Ha Messhia (Jesus the Messiah).

Each language has their own pronunciation of the name of Jesus, and most of them use the "Yeh" sound rather than the "Gee" sound, so you would be in good company.

The only thing to remember that in our culture, if you pray out loud, some one may get confused as to who Yeshua is, as we refer to Him as Jesus, so it is often a good idea to use both names so that people know that you do mean Jesus of Nazareth.

Can I converse with God in a two way dialogue in prayer?

The Holy Spirit indwells me as a believer, yet he is fully God and as such is so totally "other" than what I am that He does not normally communicate to me as if I were having a conversation with my wife.

While God indeed is our friend and we are called into a relationship with Him, this relationship is not equally reciprocal as if I were conversing with my buddy. He forever remains LORD of the relationship and I am in no position to expect or demand that He "converse" with me at will.

I believe that the practice that you are referring to is foreign to the Christian experience and dangerous.

If I ask God a question in prayer, and then let my mind go blank, and wait to see what fills it, likely what will happen is that my own mind will manufacture something that I expect to hear. Or, my inter-psyhic self may give an answer, which is something that I am subconsciously afraid to hear. Or even worse, I may open myself up to demonic influence, for we know that there are many spirits that have gone into the world (1 John 4:1) and that Satan masquerades as an angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14)

The way that God normally answers prayer is that I present my petition before Him and then wait in faith knowing that God will answer me according to His time frame. He may decide not to answer, because I have asked a silly question for which I already have everything I need.

The Psalms, which are great examples of prayer, are full of laments that God is far away. Ps. 10:1 "O Lord why do you stand far off?" Ps. 22 "O God, My God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me? Jesus himself in Gethsemane asked that the cup would be taken from him. Did he get an audible answer? No answer was forthcoming... and He knew what it meant.

The way God normally answers is through an inner conviction or deep sense in my inner spirit that the questions that I asked two weeks ago has just been answered. I know the answer and I know that it is from God... how? I just know.

Having said that, there could be unique occasions where God may answer audibly and I actually hear a voice. But, this is rare and exceptional and not an everyday part of the Christian experience.

What develops relationship between two persons is vulnerability. When I open myself up and pour out my heart to God, withholding nothing from Him, then He honors that by taking note and responding in mercy. As I do that over a period of time, simultaneously being in His word, repenting of sin, worshiping and seeking Him... I get to know Him and He gets to know me. The proof of this is the fruit of the Spirit in my life (Gal. 5:22). I display, love, patience, kindness, goodness, self control, faithfulness, etc. I renounce and reject all evil and I love my neighbor as myself. The inner witness of the Holy Spirit which dwells in me testifies to my spirit that I am a child of God.

What is a sin leading to death?

A sin leading to death would be a renunciation of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Someone who renounces Christ, is cutting themselves off from salvation. God no longer hears their prayer, so there is no point in praying about that. Rather, what is required is repentance and a coming back to Christ. Without the Holy Spirit's convicting work, this is not possible, so the one who blasphemes the Holy Spirit, turns away from the One who can save them.

Of course a sin not leading to death is any other sin which can be repented of, thus restoring fellowship.

Our struggle with sin is actually a sign that we are in Christ. Those outside of Christ do not struggle with sin for their sin nature rules the roost of their lives. The very fact that we are convicted, repent and ask forgiveness is a sign that we are in Christ.

Remember that Christ died for every sin of ours, past present and future and so there is no condemnation stored up against us, but our sin does break fellowship with Christ, so our conviction and repentance are critical in restoring the relationship.

As we grow in Christ, the episodes where our flesh takes control should be fewer and fewer and less intense. We are exhorted to "walk by the Spirit" and "be filled with the Spirit". As we do so, the influence of indwelling sin is continually weakened, but it will never be totally done away with in this life. This is why we groan to be clothed with Glory in "The Day" when Christ will be revealed.

Who exactly comes to life and reigns with Christ 1000 years?

This passage refers to the first resurrection which is also described in 1 Thess. 4:14-16. When Christ returns, at the last trumpet, those believers who have already died will come back with him (their souls) and be reunited with their resurrection bodies. Those who are still alive will be caught up with him in the air. This exact timing of this event, called "the rapture", is unknown. The most likely scenario is that this will coincide with Christ coming with the armies of heaven (Rev. 19:14) where He defeats the antichrist and the false prophet who are then thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20). At that point Christ will inaugurate "the millenium" which is his physical bodily rule on earth for 1000 years. Those who were in Christ when he returns (or had died in Christ) will be reigning with him. In Rev. 20:4, John sees those who were martyred during the great tribulation as part of this group who have participated in this "first resurrection". We will all reign with Christ for 1000 years. The subjects of this reign will be those on the earth who survive the great tribulation and are converted upon the return of Christ. This will include many, new Jewish believers (Zech 12:10-14).

Unbelievers who have died will not participate in the first resurrection, but will be resurrected at the great white throne judgment, where they will be judged based on what they have done (Rev. 20:11-15). If anyone's name is not found in the book of life (in Christ), they will end up in the lake of fire with the devil and his angels.

Of course all this is called, our "glorious hope" (Eph. 1:18) and could occur at any time, however, it will likely not occur until the "man of lawlessness" is revealed. (2 Tim 2:3)

Of course, all of this should motivate us to share the gospel and to have a heart and a passion for the lost who are without Christ, and without hope in the world.

How could Jacob wrestle with God and see God face to face and not die?

It is likely that in this encounter with God that Jacob was wrestling with an angel representing God. Jacob's entire life seemed to be epitomized by a struggle to obtain a blessing from God. At this pivotal point in his life, he is not only struggles by prevails. God does bless him. Jacob's word's "I have seen God face to face" is an admission that "the man" was in fact a messenger and representative of God. However, I don't think we can conclude that Jacob saw the full glory of God face to face. Rather, as with other similar statements (e.g., Judg 13:22), when one saw the "angel of the LORD" it was as if they had seen God.

What is the significance of Elijah and Moses appearing during the transfiguration?

Both Moses and Elijah are the two "hall of fame" prophets in the life of Israel. Moses prophesied that Jesus would come and Isaiah predicted that someone would come in the spirit of Elijah to announce the coming Messianic arrival. Thus, their appearance together symbolize the fullness of the Old Testament prophesies concerning Jesus. It is as if, in their meeting together, the complete plan of God for the salvation of the world is being finalized. Jews, to this day, when they celebrate the Passover, leave an empty

chair for the prophet Elijah, who they believe will come to herald the coming of the messiah. Ironically, Jesus, the messiah has already come and so has Isaiah, in the person of John the Baptist.

If God is inherently good and ultimately perfect and is sovereign over everything, how is there evil in the world?

God is inherently good in and of Himself and there is no darkness in Him, nor any evil. However, in deciding to create intelligent beings such as angels and humans, He needed to make a decision as to the sort of creatures these would be. If He merely created robots, programmed to do only good, then there would have been no evil, but neither would it have demonstrated His Glory, for there is not much glory in creating robots.

In giving his creatures freedom of will, He opens up the possibility of evil, for now both angels and people created in His image have an opportunity to choose that which is good, or, by default, the opposite of what is good. If I have a choice to love or not, then God being love itself is pleased with my choice. If I choose not to love, this is the antithesis of what God is, so by definition that which is anti-God is evil. There would be no evil if there were no freedom of choice.

However, such is the greatness of God, that even in the presence of evil, He is able to glorify himself by conquering evil with good. Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of that. Through the evil of the crucifixion, He defeats the evil one, the architect of the original rebellion in the angelic realm. Not only that, He provides a way that we can participate in conquering the evil that lurks within and without.

Ultimately, His plan of salvation brings more glory to Himself, even in the presence of evil, than if evil had never existed.

The very existence of "good" means that "good" must be distinguishable from something that is "non-good". Otherwise, the moral realm would not exist. There can be no talk of good without the opposite of good being a possibility.

The existence of evil, by contrast, accentuates goodness. The presence of death, accentuates life.

In creating the universe, God glorifies Himself. The contrast between good and evil accentuates the goodness of God and His triumph of grace in the midst of evil.

Does that make God the author of evil? Absolutely not! There is nothing but good in Him. Yet that which is good, demands a decision from someone who is a free agent in the universe. Does the free agent agree with the good and choose the good, or does the free agent oppose the good? In opposing the good, we oppose God and so inaugurate evil. It is not God who inaugurates it, but the one who chooses anti-God, anti-good.

Evil has no existence apart from the one who chooses it. It is not a commodity "out there" in the universe. It is always a present only in a created being, a Person, whether angel or human.

In choosing to disobey God, in the garden, Adam and Eve turned their backs on God and sin entered the human race. Previously free moral agents, they ushered in a new reality for humankind, slavery to sin.

But God, in his infinite love, initiates a plan turn rebels into worshippers through the redemption in His Son. In doing so, he reveals what the ultimate good is, self giving sacrificial love, as represented in the cross of Christ.

God did not create evil, He created people, whom he desires to win back through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, he will not win them back by force, but by love. Those that oppose and resist, He will eternally punish. All of which, vindicates Him as good and true and just and righteous. There is no evil in Him.

Why do we see genocide in the Bible?

What we see in the Biblical view of history is God selecting a particular people (the Hebrews) to be a people for Himself, through which he would reveal Himself, and with whom His presence would dwell. In the promise to Abram in Genesis 12:1-4, He says that "whoever blesses you, I will bless and whoever curses you, I will curse". Israel's role was to be a witness and a blessing to all nations by bearing witness to the one true God, YHWH.

By contrast, other nations, were far from God and fell into all sorts of idolatry. In Romans, Paul writes that no one is without excuse in knowing God, in that the heavens and all creation testify to his Glory.

Romans 1:18-23 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Those nations and peoples that did not acknowledge God or seek Him, have always been liable to the judgment of God. In His great mercy He often allows great wickedness to go on, hoping that the people will repent. He often would send prophets, like Jonah, to preach to cities like Nineveh, which God had devoted to destruction. (Jonah 1)

God uses Kings and nations as instruments of His wrath. "Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will. "

In the case of nations that God commanded be completely destroyed, this should be seen as a judgment on them for their wickedness. In many cases, the entire nation was destroyed, including animals. In some cases, the animals were spared. In some cases the women and children were spared, depending on what instructions God gave through the prophet.

Even Kings and rulers who did not believe in God, were used as instruments of His divine judgment, sometimes to chastise God's own people. (as in the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

History itself is story of the judgments of God on nations, peoples and individuals. Sometimes, God gives a second chance, but He is not obligated to do so. "The soul that sins shall die." Ezek. 18:4 .

Praise God for His amazing grace in Jesus Christ to all of us, who have all deserved death due to our sin, yet He has given us life. This life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life. (1 John 5:12)

What is the relationship between David as Shepherd of God's people and Jesus?

In 2 Samuel 7, God promised David that someone from his "house", meaning his lineage would reign on the throne of Israel forever. Since the death of David that phrase "my servant David" has been used in a prophetic sense referring to the Messiah, Jesus, who is a "type" of David.

Jeremiah also equated the Messiah to the true Shepherd from the line of David, calling him "a righteous Branch," "the LORD Our Righteousness" (Jer 23:5-6). The identity is also implied elsewhere in the Prophets (Jer 30:9; Ezek 37:24-25; Hos 3:5).

In John 10 Jesus declared, "I am the good shepherd" (v.14). In addition to describing the pastoral aspects of his ministry, it certainly appears that he had Ezekiel 34 in mind. He was declaring to those discerning Jews that he was the true and righteous Shepherd of whom Ezekiel spoke, the Messiah. He would lay down his life for the sheep, not exploit them.

This could also be a direct reference to the thousand year reign of Christ on earth (Rev. 20). In that era, King David will have been resurrected and be reigning with Christ (along with the saints). In that sense, David himself, in a glorified resurrected body would be set over the sheep of Israel as "a prince" shepherding his sheep under the one Great Shepherd, Jesus.

Should we as Christians have fear of worldly things?

Fear is a useful emotion because it keeps us from doing stupid things. It is good for a young child to have a healthy fear of traffic. However, when fear continues and develops

into a state of anxiety, we know it is not God honoring and indicates a lack of faith. Jesus chastised his disciples for being anxious:

Matthew 6:31-34 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Moreover, our confidence in Christ should be so great that we have no fear of anything that man can do.

Proverbs 29:25 The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.

Such confidence is deeply rooted in our relationship with Him. David had such an amazing, intimate relationship with God that he wrote: Psalm 118:6 The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?

Rather than fear man or circumstances, we are told repeatedly to fear God. This is not a cowering fear but a deep reverence. If we truly feared the God who can see every move we make and who knows every thought we think, we would surely be radically transformed.

In the end, only perfect love drives out fear. 1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Being perfected in love only comes from being wholly united to Christ who is our peace. In Him there is perfect freedom from anxiety.

We are to cast our cares upon Him, and focus on serving and living in Him alone.

Colossians 3:3-4 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

So leave fear behind and learn to walk in love. This can only be done in the power of God's Holy Spirit living in us. When the world of fear sees it, it can only marvel and God gets the glory.

What is the rapture?

We believe in "the rapture" as the catching up of believers who are alive at the last trumpet when Christ returns for his own. This is described in:

1 Thessalonians 4:15 - 5:1 "For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord,(1) that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who

have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words."

The question as to the precise timing of this event is subject to much speculation. We believe that it will occur before Christ returns to set up the millennial Kingdom described in Rev. 20. How long before is not disclosed to us. Some believe that it will be before the great tribulation that precedes the end. Others believe that it will be just before Christ returns. The real issue for many is whether the church will go through the great tribulation which is coming prior to the end. Most western evangelicals have believed that God would not subject his beloved church to intense trial. This view, however, is not consistent with history. The church has gone through many trials and many have testified to the faith by giving their lives. Today, in many parts of the world the church is severely persecuted and going through trials.

However, there is a point in the unfolding of events during the end times, where God begins to pour out his wrath on all those who stubbornly refuse to repent and acknowledge Him as Lord. It would seem that it is inconsistent with the love and mercy of God to pour out such wrath on his own people who cling to Him in faith. Thus we believe that while it is likely that the church will go through tribulation, we will be spared the final wrath of God on an ungodly world.

Pastor Les

As an adult, can someone be baptized more than once?

The scriptures are clear that a person needs to be baptized only once (Eph. 4:5). However, many are "baptized" in way that is unbiblical. For example, we do not see the practice of the baptism of infants in scripture. What we do see is people coming to faith in Christ and then, as a public act of confession of faith, being baptized as a testimony to that.

If someone were baptized as an infant, and subsequently comes to faith, we would ask them to be baptized as a believer because the infant "baptism" was not a personal profession of faith and hence not really a baptism, in the Biblical sense.

It is also important that the baptism be conducted under the authority of a local church. In fact baptism in the New Testament age, was a clear signal that a person was now aligning and identifying themselves with the church of Jesus Christ and entering into fellowship with the local church.

The issues in a case like yours are: 1. Was I a believer in Jesus Christ at the time of my baptism and was this an act of identification with Christ as a testimony to the new birth which had taken place within me? 2. Was the person who baptized me acting with the authority of a group of believers who were functioning as a church and hence a part of the Universal Church of Jesus Christ? 3. Was I baptized in the name of the Father, the

Son and the Holy Spirit? (Matt 28:19)

If the answers to all three questions is yes, then you do not need to be baptized again. The number of witnesses present does not really matter, after all, God sees everything. When Philip baptized the Ethiopian official, there may have only been present a small number of people in his entourage, yet it was still a valid baptism, because it was clear to them what he was doing. Phillip himself was likely the only believer present.

How does one discern the right time to 'step out' in faith or 'wait on the Lord' in faith?

Abraham was called to trust in God's promise and wait in God to fulfill it. He responded to his wife's anxiety by taking his cue from the world's way which was to use the handmaiden as a surrogate wife. This became a problem because Hagar was not his wife and was not the recipient of the original promise. Abraham took matters into his own hands and as you said, made a mess.

The key issue in personal decision making is "Is this course of action in line with God's word" For example, many people pray that God will supply them a job and spend months "waiting on God". However, the scripture tells us that idleness is not God honoring and that if a man is not willing to work, he should not eat (2 Thess 3:10). Just jumping in and working at whatever comes along, is better than idleness and often leads to other opportunities.

Another guide is the counsel of Godly people. In situations that are not clear, sitting down with a Godly mentor can help shed a different light on the situation. Due diligence and Godly counsel are God honoring (Prov. 24:6)

In John 6:65, it says no one can come to Jesus, unless he is granted or allowed to by God. Does this mean that some people cannot come to Jesus, no matter how much they try or want to?

Salvation is clearly of God. Ephesians 2:8-9 says " For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

No one is able to "work up" his own salvation. God draws people to Christ by revealing "The Truth" to them through the Holy Spirit. I believe that the significance of this is that the human heart is so hard and calcified, that unless God intervenes, no human being can be saved. God has intervened through sending his Son, but also through the Father drawing and the Holy Spirit illuminating and quickening faith, which is a gift of God.

To be sure, that faith must be exercised, which is a human act of the will, but it is always an act *in response* to what God does within.

The question always comes up: "To what extent do people then have free will?" Regarding temporal things, there is no question that we have free will in that there is no impediment to our willing. But for the unregenerate person, the will is captive and bound and unable to choose God. (John 8:34, Eph. 2:1). It is God who chooses to reveal Himself to us, through the gospel and gives us New Life in Christ.

In Acts 13:48, Luke writes: "And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." So who was it that believed? Answer: Those appointed to eternal life.

We need, however to keep this truth in tension with the truth that God does desire everyone to be saved. 1 Timothy 2:3-4 says "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

While God desires all to be saved, we know that not all are saved and so we must defer to the mystery of secret will of God through which He draws and quickens faith in some, but not all.

Our job is to preach the gospel and testify Jesus Christ as the way of salvation. We do not know in whose hearts God will move, but we do know that He will not turn away those who come to Him with humble and contrite hearts. (Is. 66:2)

We ought always also to pray for those who are not saved petitioning God to soften their hearts and respond to the Truth. But we must also boldly proclaim the gospel, warning and admonishing them to trust Christ to keep them from the judgment to come. (Col. 1:28)

Are the Jews still the chosen people of God?

The main passage to study regarding the role of Israel is Romans chapters 9-11.

In the Older Testament, Israel is the chosen people of God that God used to bring salvation to the world. The prime purpose of Israel is to be a blessing to the world by bearing witness to the one true God and Jesus Christ, the Savior.

Once Jesus died and rose again, salvation was made available to the gentiles, who are described as being "grafted in" to the one people of God. (Rom. 1:17-22) Those who rejected Christ are still part of the "people of God" but do not partake of the benefit salvation which is by faith alone in Christ's finished work on the cross. This "hardening" (Rom 11:25) is temporary and will ultimately be reversed and all that God has appointed for salvation will be saved (Rom. 12:26).

Meanwhile, we are not to be arrogant towards Jews who do not believe. We are to esteem them as God's people.

Rom 9:4-5 "They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the

covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.

5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen."

Has the church replaced Israel as the people of God? No.... the church is made up of those who cling to God in faith through Jesus Christ who is the only way to the Father. The Jews still have a unique status as God's people though they are temporarily blinded due to unbelief.

There is a small but growing messianic community in Israel and throughout the world of Jews who have come to faith in Yeshua (Jesus) as the Son of God. These Jews are doubly blessed. They are "Israel" twice over. ethnic and by faith.

We should keep praying for the Jews that their eyes will be opened and that they will come to all the fullness of faith that we have been blessed with.

Why does God use a false prophet like Balaam to speak the truth about God?

God is not limited in revealing truth and often uses the ungodly and even animals (like Balaam's donkey) to reveal truth. For sure Balaam practiced divination for money and was well known as an influential seer. For reasons that we do not completely understand, God allows Satan a measure of influence in the spiritual realm and so mediums, witches, psychics, fortunetellers, etc. have a measure of success in prophecy. Scripture, however, prohibits this activity among God's people and anyone in Israel who practiced these things was to be put to death. (Lev. 20:27). Balaam was a such a person and was hired by Balak to curse Israel. Balak was attempting to inculcate satanic powers to curse Israel. God intervened and revealed Himself temporarily to Balaam to issue a prophecy regarding Israel, that scripture attests is from God himself. Does this mean that Balaam became a believer? No... he continued to practice his divination and seductively influenced Israel into Baal worship and was eventually killed by Israel in a war with the Midianites. (Numbers 31:8).

The point is that God can use even unbelieving psychics to reveal truth, but that truth must be authenticated subsequently through divine inspiration. The unique role of Balaam is testified to in the book of Numbers, so we can look back and see that God did indeed use Him to reveal truth. But that truth was not truth simply because Balaam so prophesied, but because his prophecy was subsequently ratified by scripture as from God.

How can we know if any prophecy given by divination might be from God? We cannot and we are to assume that it is not of God. Balaam was a very unique situation. We are commanded to stay clear.

Divination is clearly prohibited in scripture and is equated with rebellion against God (1 Sam. 15:23)

God also used ungodly kings and nations to chastise Israel to bring them back to him.

Is Acupuncture OK for Christians?

The problem with acupuncture from a Christian perspective is that it is founded on a Chinese Taoist view of reality. That view sees everything in the world and us humans as part of a universal consciousness that is essentially energy. The energy has positive and negative forces associated with it (ying and yang). The theory is that we get ill because the yin and yang are out of balance. The energy centers in our body have to be rebalanced, and the needles do this by draining away energy from key spots. The whole issue of energy fields, ying and yang and so on is based on a dualistic world view that is non biblical and is clearly Pantheism or at best Panentheism.

We know that illness comes because we are in a fallen world tainted by sin. God has given us the ability to reason and to comprehend the universe to some degree and so modern science and medicine are helpful to the extent that their help is based on a rational investigation of cause and effect.

Many in the medical community claim that acupuncture does operate in a legitimate way by relieving pain through stimulation of neuro pathways or release of endorphins. These practioners may not subscribe to the Taoist philosophy. They use it because it "works". But will it lead me and them to eventually embrace a spiritual trap?

The other issue is to consider the therapist himself. What does the therapist really believe? Are he or she performing any spiritual gymnastics on me that I don't know about? Although the acupuncture itself may not be based on occult practices, who knows about the therapist?

My own personal advice is to stay clear of acupuncture.

Here are some other links where you can read about the Christian perspective on acupuncture.

<http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/14661.htm>

http://www.wfial.org/index.cfm?fusea...Age.article_10

Is faith a gift or a choice?

The scriptures describe faith as both a gift of God and as something which must be exercised by a human agent.

For instance, in Eph. 2:8-9 we read "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

In the same way, in the passage you cited, faith is a spiritual gift. These passages

remind us that we can take no credit for our own salvation. It is a gift of God. And so our faith which saves us is a gift of God.

In John 15:16 Jesus says "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide," Jesus reminds the disciples that their faith is of God.

So faith is not something that we bring to the cross of Christ, as our contribution, but is rather something that flows from the cross, through a gracious act of God.

At the same time , faith is a human activity that must be exercised by a human agent. Faith is not a commodity, by rather a giving of myself to Christ as a response to what He has implanted in me.

Just as it takes two to make a marriage work, our union with Christ is initiated by Him, but we must "say yes" to Him. It is He Himself who empowers that faith in us through the Holy Spirits, which is why it is a Spiritual gift.

I love the analogy of the bridegroom and the bride. Jesus, my bridegroom looks deep into my soul and says to me "you are mine". And, I given the gift of faith by God Himself, exercise it in all humility and respond "And I am Yours"

But because it is all of Him, I take no credit for my faith. Rather I bow down and worship.

How great and merciful is the God who has saved us!

How do Old Testament Saints get to Heaven?

The Old Testament prophets portray a belief in the afterlife as going the Sheol. This was seen as a shadowy undefined existence to which life was preferred.

Yet at the same time the faithful believed that God was present even in Sheol and that He would rescue his faithful from the shadow of death unto Himself.

Psalm 49:14-15 Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning. Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell. 15 But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me. Selah

The theme of salvation permeates the old testament, not only as looking back to what God had done for Israel in the deliverance from Egypt, but also looking forward to a time when God would redeem his people from the depths of Sheol.

Implicit in all of this is a belief in God as "savior and redeemer" . In one of the oldest books, Job writes:

Job 19:25-26 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth.(1) 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in(1 my flesh I shall see God,

David, also wrote much in the Psalms of God his redeemer.

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

So, whereas, the Israelites did not have a specific doctrine of the afterlife that is explicitly stated anywhere in scripture, we know that they trusted that God would vindicate those who clung to Him in faith and kept themselves blameless.

In terms of salvation, it has always been through faith in God. Israelites trusted in God's provision and His Word and although they did not have access to the specifics of redemption, they knew that God would accomplish it by laying their sins upon another (the messiah) who would render them forgiven and righteous.

Isaiah 53:4-11 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? 9 And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; (1) when his soul makes (2) an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. 11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see (1) and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Thus, faith in ancient Israel looked forward to what Jesus Christ would do on the cross. Their faith was that God would act to redeem them and this promise was the source of their hope and joy.

Whereas, we look back to the cross and can understand that redemption has been wrought, they looked forward to what God would do.

In the same way, we look forward to the consummation of our salvation, when Christ returns.

In either case, salvation is by faith in God. The evidence of such faith is obedience to what God has revealed at that point in history. Israel displayed their faith and love for God in obeying the Torah, complete with sacrifices that pointed ahead to the Lamb of God. We display our faith also through the obedience to Jesus' commands to love God and one another, always remembering His sacrifice for us.

Can I be healed if I just have enough faith?

The Apostle Paul speaks of a "thorn in the flesh" that he had prayed about three times and yet he was not healed. Did Paul lack enough faith? In think not!

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations,(1) a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Most "name it and claim" proponents will quote Jesus' many allusions to "faith" as the critical component in healing.

Matthew 9:22 Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And instantly the woman was made well.

There is no question that faith is a component in healing. However, we must always remember that, it is the object of our faith and not the faith itself that is the key. We are told to have faith in God.

Mark 11:22 2 And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God.

The difficulty comes when people begin to think that they can faith in faith. Then, their own faith becomes the determining factor in healing. If they only had enough faith, they would be healed. This leads to incredible guilt and despondency when one is not healed. God is seen the genie in the bottle that can be manipulated if only you can muster up enough faith.

Rather than mustering up enough faith, we are told to pray. Hezekiah was told that he was about to die. He did not attempt to muster up his faith as though he could change the outcome, but rather humbled himself before God and asked for a respite. God graciously gave him another 15 years to his life.

Isaiah 38:1-5 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said to him, "Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die, you shall not recover."(1) 2 Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, 3 and said, "Please, O LORD, remember how I have walked before you in faithfulness and with a whole heart, and have done what is good in your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly. 4 Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: 5 "Go and say to Hezekiah, Thus says the LORD, the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.(1)

Similarly in James 5, we are told that if anyone is suffering, they should pray. If anyone is sick, they should call for the Elders to anoint them with oil. After every service we have our Elders at the front of the church ready to pray with people and anoint them if asked.

James 5:13 -Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him

sing praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

What about speaking in Tongues?

There is no question that the gift of tongues is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as it is mentioned several times and the Apostle Paul devotes significant time to it in 1 Corinthians 14.

There were three uses of tongues evident in the early church. The first of course was at Pentecost, when people had gathered in Jerusalem and heard the apostles speaking in their own native language even though the apostles did not know those languages. The Holy Spirit supernaturally transliterated what they were saying so that people could understand.

The second use is a private prayer language, where people are moved by the Holy Spirit to pray with groans and utterances too deep for words. (Rom. 8:26). In this case the language is used to praise God and pray directly from one's own spirit. Paul write in 1 Cor. 14 that such language edifies the person who prays, so it should not be discouraged. However, he also teaches that such language should not be used in public as it does not edify the hearer unless there is an interpretation so that those who hear can understand. In fact, he comments that if someone comes into a service and everyone is praying in their own tongue that people will think that "you are out of your minds" 1 Cor. 14:23.

The third use is where the Holy Spirit has something to say to the church and says it through a tongue and simultaneously provides someone with the gift of interpretation, so that a third part suddenly realizes through the Spirit that they were just given the meaning of what was said. In this case, it is similar to the gift of prophecy (preaching) and needs to be used in good order to build up the church.

1 Corinthians 14:26-29 26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.

One can tell from what he is writing that this is in the context of a participative worship service, where people are free to share as they are moved. However, Paul also points out, that it is better for people to speak intelligible words so that people understand and the church is built up.

The difficulty with this third category is that it is difficult to guard against the use on

tongues used "in the flesh". Often in charismatic services, several speak in tongues and there is no interpretation. We must conclude then that either a person is using his or her private prayer language in public or that they are just speaking on their own.

At Harvest, we feel that the worship service should be all about Worship and the Word. We believe that people are built up and edified by preaching the Word of God. In our context, we do not provide an opportunity for such confusion to develop and believe that this is God's heart in his writing through the Apostle in 1 Cor. 14.

As far as a personal prayer language is concerned, if someone desires this gift, the should ask God for it, but always with the understanding that it is the Holy Spirit who decides what gifts I get. (1 Cor. 12:11). If it is truly a "gift" of God, then no one should have to teach anyone else how to do it. If we attempt to do this, we may be usurping the role of the Holy Spirit and setting up false expectations.

We are also to be content with the gifts that we have and use them to edify and build up the church.

When did the communion change to grape juice and why?

For the first 1860 years of the church's existence, wine was used exclusively for communion as there was no alternative. The American temperance movement in the 1800's was fueled by the cultural experience of the devastating effects of alcoholism. The response to this was to declare alcohol itself as evil and the temperance movement, in an attempt to radically amputate the source of this evil, managed to have alcohol declared illegal, which led to the prohibition era.

Certainly this is was a moralistic response to the problem. As we know alcohol itself is not evil, but the abuse of it. Any legalistic response is sure to cause problems as we saw with the underground use of alcohol during the prohibition years.

In the church, the situation changed in 1869 when Dr. Thomas Welsh found a way of pasteurizing grape juice so that it would not ferment. This launched the entire juice industry and gave the church a way to use "the fruit of the wine" in communion without alcoholic content.

The rationale for the change to grape juice has been hotly contested in the church with valid arguments on both sides of the issue. Some believe that because Jesus instituted the table, using fermented wine, that the symbolism of the fruit of the earth fermented naturally is highly symbolic and should not be tampered with. Wine is often spoken of in scripture in a positive tone while it's abuse is clearly condemned. Others argue that, for anyone struggling with alcoholism, the use of wine is placing a stumbling block before them that is unnecessary, given the ready availability of juice.

For us at Harvest, we have followed the evangelical tradition of using juice, so as to remove any temptation to those who might have come from an alcoholic background. As

the elements are symbolic, whether we use grape juice or wine, should not make any difference, provided that our hearts are right and that our focus is on Christ, whose sacrifice is the object of the symbolism.

However, I do not believe that we should be dogmatic about it. I have often participated in communion in churches that use wine, without raising any issue of conscience. This I believe is in the spirit of Romans 14:2-6

Romans 14:2-6 One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. 3 Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. 4 Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master (1) that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. 5 One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

God says in proverbs to walk blameless how is that possible when we are not perfect?

Great Question

While believers do sin, they do not sin by necessity. Because we are in Christ and the Holy Spirit resides in us, we are free to sin or to not sin. Unlike the unregenerate person who is a slave to sin, we have been set free.

However, because the "old man" in us is still not completely dead, we are commanded to put him to death. It is precisely because he has been crucified with Christ, that we are able to put him to death and commanded to do so. (Col 3:5, Rom. 6:6, Eph. 4:22)

Nevertheless, we do sin and Romans chapters 6 & 7 testify. However, if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Blameless does not mean sinless. The blameless person is the one who has a right relationship with God and others. As we become aware of our sin, we are to immediately repent, confess it to God and walk in His light. The person who has nothing inhibiting his relationship with God (i.e. no unconfessed sin) is blameless in the sense that there is nothing, to his knowledge, that stands between him and God.

This also applies to relationships with each other. If I remember that my brother has something against me, I am commanded to go immediately and be reconciled, so that nothing hinders our relationship. (Matt. 18:15) This is why we are to keep short accounts with God and with each other.

The issue of knowing whether or not God is disciplining me is a subtle one. We usually

give discipline a negative connotation, but the word actually means to teach or instruct. We discipline our children, not as punishment but as a means of teaching them to do what is right. So God brings things into our lives to teach and instruct us.

Hebrews 12:6-8 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

When we are going through trials, it is sometimes hard to know whether this is from God's hand to teach us or whether this just from living in a fallen world. We do know that God is sovereign and that nothing that happens to us happens without his express knowledge and consent (Job. 1:12). His heart is always that we learn to handle it as he would handle it, with patience and perseverance, relying on Him for strength, regardless of its source. While we cannot control what happens to us, we can control our attitude to what has happened. It is primarily our attitudes that God is concerned with as everything in this life is temporary and transitory.

When we sin, He chastises us to teach us not to sin, so anything that we are suffering as a result of our sin is likely an aspect of his discipline (although it could also be just the natural consequences of our foolishness).

But not everything that happens to us is God's will. Much happens in the world that opposes God's will as so we are to pray "Thy will be done". Again, it is our response and our attitude to what happens that God is concerned with. It is in the midst of great suffering and trial that we often grow the most and God is with us, comforting us, and cheering us on.

Hope this helps

What does it mean to surrender?

I would say that the heart of surrender is faith. Faith in not just one aspect of the Christian life, but it is the whole of the Christian life. Insofar as our relationship with God is concerned, it is all about faith. Consider:

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

We know that we as people are prone to anxiety and worry on many fronts. Such anxiety is the antithesis of faith. Jesus often chastised his disciple for having so "little faith". He pointed them to the birds of the air, who don't sow nor reap, yet the heavenly Father looks after them. Are we not of more value? (Matt 6:26-28)s to place your faith completely in Jesus Christ, not only for salvation but for his sustaining grace in all circumstances.

The Greek word for faith used by the New Testament authors is *pistos*. In English, it is

translated faith, but in Greek it has a much stronger connotation. It literally means to cling to, to hang on to without reservation, to put all your eggs in the one basket. A better translation might be trust. To have faith for salvation means to put all our trust entirely and exclusively in Jesus Christ. There can be no other back up plan. It means to be completely and totally sold out to Him. This kind of faith without reservation is only real if it is acted upon. To have complete faith in God is to be released from ALL anxiety and worry. It is the essence of surrender.

Faith means believing the Word of God and acting upon it no matter how I feel knowing that God promises a good result. While I may feel anxious, faith means that I cling to God's promise to look after me and act so as to obey His Word. confident that He will bring about that which is good for me.

To boost your faith, make a practice of being daily in God's Word. Look for his promises and pray them back, affirming your trust in Him. Then go out and do what He says holding nothing back.

Read the 11th chapter of Hebrews several times over and ask God to boost your faith.

Remember what Jesus said:

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

His promise is to be with us always:

Isaiah 43:1 "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. "

What kind of fruits should I display as a Christian?

I would say that there are two kinds of fruit in a believer's life, external fruit and internal fruit. External fruit refers to the impact that we have on others. If we are in Christ, we should be having a positive impact on the lives of others. Others should be coming to faith through us and people should be growing in the relationship with God and ministering to others. This is why we do small groups, so that we can all have an opportunity to reach out and minister to others. It is also why we are called to "Get Out There" and make disciples. Evangelism and sharing your faith is not an option for the believer. We are commanded to go and make disciples.

Internal fruit is what we see listed in Galatians 5:22-24 as the fruits of the Spirit. As we put off our old self and put on Christ, we will be conformed bit by bit to His image. That means that the fruits of the old nature: anger, malice, complaining, coveting, selfishness, rebellion, immorality, should be replaced by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self control. Others will see that in our attitudes as we interact with them. These fruits come from within as the Holy Spirit drives our hearts and actions.

While we cannot tell, nor are we called to judge, another person's spiritual state, we can certainly see the fruit if the Holy Spirit manifest in their attitudes and actions. it will be evident in their demeanor.

As a wise man once said "Who you are speaks so loud that I can't hear anything that you are saying". If we are "in Christ", we will reflect some of his glory:

2 Corinthians 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,(1)are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

When is a believer filled with the Holy Spirit and how are the subsequent “fillings” in the book of Acts to be interpreted?

Jesus makes it clear in his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 that no one can even "see" the Kingdom of God unless they are born of the Spirit.

John 3:3 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

John 3:5-6 5 Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

Thus the Holy Spirit gives new life to the believer and fills and empowers the believer upon his conversion. The gifts of the Spirit are the benefits received as a result of this new birth and play out in the believers life as he continues to grow in sanctification but putting off the old self and putting on the new man created in the image of Christ (Eph. 4: 22-24)

I would say that the gift of the Holy Spirit is essential, without which no one can be converted. The gifts are also essential for they give testimony to the fact that this new birth has taken place.

Thus, we see that a believer receives the gift of the Holy Spirit upon coming to faith in Christ, for apart from Him, no one can be born again.

The situation in the book of Acts is unique. Those disciples who believed in Him after the resurrection had not yet received the full empowerment of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. At Pentecost, the full empowerment of the Holy Spirit came first upon the disciples and subsequently on those who believed their message, when they believed.

The situation in Acts 8: 12-17, was again unique. Those who believed in response to Philip's message were Samaritans who were baptized into Jesus Christ. In order to authenticate their conversion, leaders from the Jerusalem church. Peter and John, were

sent to them and as they laid hands on them, they experienced their own "Pentecost" validating to all that the Holy Spirit was not just given to Jews but to Samaritans as well.

This occurred again in Acts 10:44, where Cornelius and other gentiles came to faith and received the Holy Spirit in yet another "gentile Pentecost" . This again was a confirmation that gentiles too were to be included in the church.

So God in his wisdom confirms to all that the Gospel has indeed come to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth, as promised in Acts 1:8.

Following Pentecost, the Holy Spirit now fills each believer at conversion. As believers continue to walk in Christ and put off the old nature and put on the new nature, they receive continual and fresh "fillings" of the Holy Spirit as they surrender themselves more fully to Christ and live for Him.

[Ephesians 5:18](#) 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

The real question in the Christian life is not "Do you have the Holy Spirit?" but "Does the Holy Spirit have you?"

For more detail on this be sure to take our Encounter 2 class "How to Walk with Christ" scheduled next on Sat. Feb. 28. 2009

Does a person really have free will?

The term free will has many connotations so we must ensure that we understand what we mean by the term. Certainly, we are free to make everyday choices, such as whether to have a Coke or a Pepsi, a pizza or a hot dog, etc. However, when it comes to things of God, human beings are free to act only in accordance with their nature. In Genesis 1 and 2, God created man in His own image and gave him freedom to obey or to disobey, to trust or not to trust God. His true nature at this point is one of innocence and complete freedom. Once man sinned in Genesis 3, he lost that freedom and became a slave to sin (John 8:34). Therefore, his will that once was free is now bound and is bent in on itself, so that he can only will his own continued depravity. The doctrine of the Total Depravity of Man comes from this conviction: that there is no aspect of the human psyche that is unaffected by the fall. Therefore man can no longer choose the good and actually flees God. (Luke 18:19).

Said another way, we are all in our natural state dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and cannot will ourselves to life. A corpse cannot make itself alive. Only through the intervention of God who gives us new life (being born again) can we be lifted out of our helpless state. God does this by regeneration the sinner, giving them new life and the gift of faith, which is then exercised by the person bringing them to new life in Christ. This is all of and through the work of the Holy Spirit. Once we are in Christ, we are now set free (John 8:34) and are again free to choose to love God or not, to trust and obey or to disobey. If we live according to our sinful nature, we will suffer the consequences and

die, but if we live by the Spirit of God we will live. (Rom 8:13) So only the believer is now truly free. But his freedom is exercised to do the things of God

Another way of looking at it is that freedom means that there is now no impediment to our willing the good. As long as we are slaves to sin, we cannot will the things of God. It is like a log placed across a railroad track that prevents a train from rolling. Once the impediment is removed (new birth) then the train is now free to run on the track. But one may ask, is the train free to fly? It is not *the nature* of a train to fly. It is only its nature to be a train.

We were designed by God to have fellowship with Him, Glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Once sin entered the world, we lost that freedom. Now the work of Christ on our behalf is to remove that impediment and we are now free to be what we were designed to be. That does not mean that we are free to make up our own rules and do whatever, for that was never God's design for us. Our maximum happiness and joy is found in being what He designed us to be: Worshippers of God, Glorifying Him and enjoying Him forever.

What happens to babies who die or to those who die in the womb?

The scriptures portray God intimately and lovingly involved with the people that he has created. Psalm 139 shows us that God knows us even before we are born and knits us together intricately in our mother's womb.

Psalm 139:13-17 For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.(1 Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them. 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

Such is God's love for the people that he has created that His greatest desire is that none should perish but come to everlasting life (1 Tim 2:4). God's heart is the salvation of all people, born and unborn.

Yet we know that because sin has entered the world through Adam, all people are conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5) and inherently sinful. (Rom 5:12). So an infant in the womb participates the universal sinnership of humanity and, apart from God acting, can in no way be saved.

The glory of the gospel is, however, that God has indeed acted in Christ Jesus. Jesus came to take the penalty for our sin upon himself and give himself a ransom for many. Those who are the beneficiaries of salvation in Christ are those that are chosen from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4) . Salvation is clearly by faith, for those who are able to repent and believe, but for those who are not able to believe (infants, the severely

mentally retarded, the unborn) we would say that God's mercy encompasses them and he gives them new life as a gift of pure grace.

In order for someone to be condemned to hell, they would have to be able to actually act out their sinful nature and be guilty of an actual sin.

In Revelation 20:12, we see a scene in heaven which is the great white throne judgment at the end of the age. The books are then opened and the dead are judged by what they had actually done. No one is condemned based on what they might have done. A infant or an unborn child while a sinner by nature, has not yet acted out their sin and so, on what basis could they be sent to hell? If they were, they would be suffering torment for something that they would have done if they had been born. This would be untenable and would violate the justice of God.

So all babies who die in the womb or before reaching a "condition of accountability" are included by God in those who are ordained to eternal life. (the elect) Essentially, God gives them new life by grace because of his great mercy. He sovereignly regenerates them, giving them eternal life as an act of pure grace.

The question then often arises as to the "age of accountability" . John MacArthur points out that it is not really an age by a condition. Each human being reaches that condition at a time that only God knows. Some, who are severely mentally retarded, may never reach that point. Others may reach it quickly at an early age. The point is that we need to help our children understand that they are sinners and to teach them to repent and trust Christ for salvation. Unbelief is the greatest sin, for though it one closes the door to salvation.

Those who have lost children in infancy and through miscarriage and abortion can rest in the assurance that their children "always behold the face of the father" see Matt 18:10".

The question of how one will react when they meet someone whose life they have taken through abortion, is no different than a murderer who is subsequently saved and meets his victim in heaven. It will be a joyful reunion. All sin will be no more and both will rejoice in God's sovereign and wonderful mercy.

I can imagine the reunion of the Apostle Paul and Steven, who was martyred while Paul looked on giving his assent and guarded the clothes of those doing the stoning. Paul repented of his sin and became a new creation in Christ. Both have embraced and are giving glory to God for his amazing mercy which has together saved them.

For a fuller treatise on this pick up a copy of John MacArthur's book "*Safe in the Arms of God*" or check out his two sermons on *The Salvation of Babies who Die* available on line at

<http://www.ondocctrine.com/2mac0142.htm>

Pastor Les

More on the Unborn

Scripture is clear that life begins at conception. Psalm 139 indicates God's intimate handiwork in knitting us together in the womb. However, I understand that one out of every four conceptions result in miscarriage. While each one is a human soul and micro-body with an established DNA, only God knows what characteristics that person would have had, had they actually been born. There is no reason to doubt that each one will be redeemed purely as a result of God's mercy and Christ's finished work. (for reasons see my previous entry)

We also understand that redemption applies not only to individuals who have received Christ, but also extends the entire creation. Romans 8:21 tells us that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay. The reason that we look forward to "The Day" is that all that is wrong with the world will be made right, including ourselves. We are on the leading edge of the messianic Kingdom, which has begun but is not yet complete.

In one sense, people who never make it out of the womb are incredibly blessed for they have been created by God for God. In Mark 14:21, Jesus, in commenting on Judas' plan to betray him says that it would have been better for him had he never been born. Absolutely, if he had not been born, he would not have condemned himself to eternal hell by betraying, instead of believing in the Son of God.

In terms of whether or not we will recognize those unborn children, scripture is silent, so I cannot say for sure. However, given what we know about the incredible love and mercy of God, I would expect that we would be able to recognize them, if that brings Glory to God. The other thing to remember is that our state in heaven will be neither male nor female, but we will be like the angels. (Matt 22:30) I am not sure to what extent family ties, which are so important here on earth will be important in heaven. Certainly we are now much closer to our friends in Christ than we are to many family members. Jesus always reminded his followers that real life was about the Kingdom and not about earthy family ties. (Matt 12:48-50, Luke 9, 59)

I think the main thing is to leave all this in God's hands and not try to speculate beyond what we have been given.

[1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known](#)

Does Baptism Save a Person? Are Believers Who Havn't Been Baptized Still Saved?

The scriptures testify to only one way of being saved and that is through faith in Jesus Christ.

[Acts 4:12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."](#)

1 John 5:11-12 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Faith is always accompanied by action. He who says that he believes but does not obey God nor bear fruit in keeping with repentance is simply a professor but not a possessor of faith.

James 2:26 For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

The scriptures are also clear that believers are to be baptized in obedience to Christ.

Acts 2:38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 28:19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in⁽¹⁾ the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

The basis for our salvation is faith in Jesus Christ which is a personal trusting in Him alone for salvation. Someone who is in this state will desire to be obedient to God in all things and will desire to be baptized. Baptism does not save them, but is an outward expression of an inner reality, union with Jesus Christ. If someone died before having had an opportunity to be baptized, we would still say that they are saved, because of their faith. This was certainly true of the thief on the cross who confessed his faith in Jesus, but did not have a chance to be baptized. Jesus told him that "[Today, you will be with me in paradise](#)" (Luke 23:43)

On the other hand I would say that those who claim to belong to Christ but resist being baptized are living in a state of disobedience. One who possesses true faith will seek to please God in all things. I would have to challenge those who claim to have faith yet have not been baptized to examine themselves to see if they are truly in Christ.

[2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?- unless indeed you fail to meet the test!](#)

We don't want anyone to fail to meet the test. It is time to get real and get serious before God. If not baptized, get it done!

Is it possible for someone saved to lose their salvation as Hebrews 6:4-6 implies?

The issue in this passage is whether the person who has "tasted" of the heavenly gift of salvation was ever really saved or not. The author is saying that if they have had some experience of the power of the Holy Spirit and have had some enlightenment in that they have understood the gospel and have experienced something of the power of God, yet have not borne fruit (verses 7 & 8), but rather have borne thistles & thorns, then in reality they never truly possessed Christ but only were professors. If they then renounce Christ, they are closing themselves off from the Holy Spirit who is testifying to Him and so, it is not possible for them to come to true saving faith because they are hardening their hearts to Christ and holding him up to contempt and ridicule.

A person who has true saving faith and a relationship with Christ is not in this category. That person has not just "tasted" but has swallowed and made Christ his own.

The author here is warning the Hebrews that some of them may be in the first category and that they had better check themselves to see if they are really in the faith. If they fall away, it shows that they were never really in at all.

That is my take on the passage. For a more detailed discourse see Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology, pages 796-800.