

“Hot Button Questions”

Part 2

3/20/19

Q: Is it appropriate for the lost to be given the opportunity to give their life to Christ at the end of Wednesday night bible study?

A: Yes. However, on Wednesday nights we come together for the express purpose of teaching the Bible to God’s people. Jesus told Peter 3 times, “Feed my sheep.”

Paul the Apostle instructed the church about their local gatherings, saying, “What then is *the right course*, believers? When you meet together, each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation (disclosure of special knowledge), a tongue, *or* an interpretation. Let everything be constructive *and* edifying *and* done for the good of all the church” (1 Cor. 14:26).

Paul’s focus here is clearly on the believers. The local church is primarily called to be a place of encouragement, edification, exhortation, and spiritual growth for the saints.

Having said that, I try always to remain open to the Spirit’s promptings regarding inviting the lost to be saved!

Q: Are the phrases "prosperity gospel" and "word faith message" synonymous? Okay...

A: One dictionary definition of "prosperity gospel" is, "a belief among some Christians that God rewards those who live faithful lives with material wealth."

And the "word faith" movement teaches the power or "force" of faith. Proponents believe they can use words to manipulate the faith-force, and thus actually create what they believe Scripture promises (health, wealth, etc.).

So yes, the prosperity gospel and word-faith message are in the same camp.

Let me say first that I believe God wants to bless His children. Verses like, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17).

Or, "Tell those who are rich not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which will soon be gone, but their pride and trust should be in the living God who always richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment" (1 Tim. 6:17).

And, “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matt 7:11)

Clearly, God is a giving God. But here’s the catch: These verses have little to do with material wealth.

One commentator writes, “The ‘good gifts’ James speaks of may most fairly be understood as the best gifts, those of grace, the spiritual blessings spoken of in Eph. 1:3,

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,”

When Jesus says that the Father gives “good gifts” to those who ask Him, it says nothing about those gifts being material riches, nor do James’ words about “good gifts” from the Father.

I think the whole idea that Christianity is the gateway to spiritual wealth if you only exercise faith is contrary to New Testament teaching.

For instance, one verse that is often quoted to substantiate this position is found in Gal. 3:13-14, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree”), 14 that the

blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

Now, you will hear the teachers of the prosperity message say, "Abraham was a wealthy man. And the Bible says that all the blessings of Abraham are mine. That includes his wealth. So I receive that! Wealth is mine in Jesus!"

But look closely at the last part of the verse. It says, "that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

"That we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

So this passage about the blessings of Abraham has nothing at all to do with the material wealth given to Abraham. The verse clearly specifies it is about being made righteous by faith, and receiving the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation.

Listen: One of the things you really have to be careful about is the practice of applying the OT promises that were given to a certain person or nation, in a certain context, for a certain time, under a certain dispensation, that were never intended to apply to us.

The NT makes it very clear that most Christians are never going to be wealthy. This is why the writer of Hebrews instructs us:

“Stay away from the love of money; be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never, *never* fail you nor forsake you.” ⁶ That is why we can say without any doubt or fear, “The Lord is my Helper, and I am not afraid of anything that mere man can do to me” (Heb. 13:5-6).

Jesus Himself urged us, “Don’t store up treasures here on earth where they can erode away or may be stolen. ²⁰ Store them in heaven where they will never lose their value and are safe from thieves. ²¹ If your profits are in heaven, your heart will be there too” (Matt. 6:19-21).

Jesus isn’t teaching irresponsibility here, or to be unwise in preparing for a time when you can no longer work. But notice how He turns our attention away from having a primary focus on money onto the eternal riches that are rewarded to those who seek Him first!

James wrote that you can’t measure faith by how much “stuff” someone has. “Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” (James 2:5)

If they're rich in faith how can they also be poor? Because faith is not measured by the things you possess. It is measured by the spiritual fruit you're producing. Jesus said "You shall know them by their fruits" not their money! (Matt 7:16)

Jesus warned us, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions" (Lk. 12:15).

As I read my NT, I don't see an emphasis on riches and material things AT ALL. I find a continual encouragement to turn your focus onto spiritual riches instead.

Col 3:1 "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."

Q: How do people who are mentally disabled or have dementia achieve salvation?

A: Okay, the question is about someone with a mental deficiency being unable to grasp the gospel, thus to respond appropriately with repentance to be saved.

The Bible does not make a direct statement regarding the after-life of those who have mental challenges that prevent them

from clearly understanding and believing in Jesus as Savior. But a close look at related passages of Scripture appears to indicate that those unable to believe in Jesus due to age or ability will be covered by the grace of God.

One example can be found in 2 Samuel 12:23 where David's newborn son is sick and then dies. When asked about the event and his response, David answered, "Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." David was confident he would one day see his son again in heaven.

I believe we can place our trust in the God of whom Abraham said, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25) The answer is, "Yes!"

Q: Please explain the importance of supporting Israel when Jews, generally speaking, do not believe Jesus is the Messiah. To me, it seems like there is this newfound interest in supporting Israel. I honestly don't understand the emphasis that is being put on supporting Israel from a christian perspective. Being a veteran and militarily speaking, I get it, but not as a christian. I'm confused.

A: First, Christians should support the nation of Israel because Israel, the nation, is exceedingly special to God. We read in Deuteronomy 7:6-8 these words:

"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

Secondly, God's eternal purpose is to bless the world through Israel. He has already done so in measure, for "salvation (thru Christ) is from the Jews" (John 4:22), but the fullness of future blessing is indicated in the glorious promise of Isaiah 27:6: "In days to come Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit."

Third, we owe a huge debt to Israel. All that we have worth having has come to us through the Jews. Our Bible is a Jewish Book, and our Savior is a Jewish Savior.

Fourth, Christians should support the nation of Israel because of the Abrahamic Covenant. We read of God's promise in Genesis 12:2-3, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will

curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 27:29; Numbers 24:9).

Now, it's true that Israel, today, rejects Christ as a whole. The nation is a secular, unbelieving nation. But some are being saved, and the day will come when they will experience a great turning to Christ.

The Bible says that during the Great Tribulation, the Jews will lose half of Jerusalem during the battle of Armageddon. And just when Israel is on the brink of total defeat, Jesus is going to come and place His feet on the Mount of Olives.

All the Jews of Israel believe that that is what their Messiah is going to do! When He comes, they are going to run out there to meet their Messiah and they're going to bow to worship Him and they're going to notice that He has nail prints in His hands and His feet.

Zechariah 13 says, "And one will say unto Him, where did you get these wounds in Your hands? And he will reply, these are they in which I was wounded in the house of my friends." And they're going to believe!

Q: Why is Satan (apparently) in the presence of God when they discuss testing Job and later Peter in Luke 22? Where would

this take place? Surely not in heaven at the throne of God where God resides and from where Satan was exiled?

A: Okay, In Job 1, Satan stood before God to give an account of himself. But we notice that God initiated the meeting, led the proceedings, and remained in absolute control. The result was that Satan's power was limited and God was glorified.

Here are some things to remember:

- 1) Satan does not have open access to God's presence. He is summoned by God.**
- 2) The visits are temporary. His time before God's throne is limited.**
- 3) In no way is the purity of heaven tainted by the brief, God-ordained presence of a sinful being, who is restrained by God's power.**
- 4) Satan's access is only granted prior to the final judgment. After the judgment, God creates a new heaven and new earth, wipes away all tears from our eyes, reveals the New Jerusalem, and promises the complete absence of sin.**

Q: A family member has walked away from Christianity due to two sticking points about God that have derailed their belief. They say they've never received an adequate answer. First, they say:

1.) I have a serious issue with our every action being already predetermined, yet asking for forgiveness and salvation. This takes me down a rabbit hole of "whhyyyyyy?"

A: This question assumes that human beings have no free will, no ability to choose. So the question rests on a false premise. It confuses God's foreknowledge (I know you're going to sin) with God's irresistible will (your every move is controlled by me).

First, guilt could not exist without the ability to choose. The Bible says that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Ro. 3:23). And again, "in fact, all the world stands hushed and guilty before Almighty God" (Ro. 3:19).

How could God attribute guilt where choice is non-existent? He can't!

James assures that "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;" (1:13) So God is NOWHERE in our sinful decisions.

Now, if God can't tempt us, then how can our sins be caused by His irresistible will? They can't. As Joshua said, "Choose you this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

The good news is, we have a choice whether or not to serve God. You have a choice whether or not to turn to Christ! Have you done so?

Next time, more Hot Button questions on things like “How can I trust the Bible?” And “What about Christians voting?”