

Your Questions, Part One

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Introduction.

- A. As Christians, each one of us has an individual responsibility to learn of God and find Him in His word. Sometimes, this process of understanding is simple; sometimes, it is not. Sometimes, we find ourselves echoing the words of the Ethiopian eunuch, who cries out, "How can I understand, unless someone guides me?" To help with this search for truth, we reawakened the "Your Questions" box on the wall by the door.
- B. Anyone who wants to know something can write it on a piece of paper and put it in the box, and although I make no special claims to spiritual understanding, what I do have is a lot of time in which to find and think about answers. Ask, and we'll see what I come up with. Some of these answers will be clear-cut; others will not be, simply because God has not chosen to reveal everything to us, merely the things we need to know. However, whenever I am driven to speculate, I will clearly label it as such. With all this in mind, let's turn to God's word this evening to come up with some answers to your questions.

I. Satan.

- A. The first grouping of questions that we're going to look at tonight concerns the nature and activities of Satan. The first of these questions asks, "Where does Satan abide?" To answer this question, we first have to note that Satan, like God and the angels, is a spiritual being. As such, he has neither a literal physical body nor a literal physical dwelling place. However, just as it is correct to say that God and His Son dwell in those who are righteous and good, so Satan dwells wherever evil is strongest. Consider, for example, John's words in Revelation 2:13. This passage indicates that the rulers and the people of Pergamos were so evil that their city could legitimately be described as Satan's dwelling place. Satan still dwells in similar locations today.
- B. The next question inquires, "Is Satan omnipotent?" When we speak of someone being omnipotent, we describe him as possessing the highest degree of power. Because of this, someone who is omnipotent cannot be defeated. Satan can be defeated, so we can confidently say that no, Satan is not omnipotent. Look at how the Hebrews writer describes the conflict between Satan and Jesus in Hebrews 2:13. Christ, who is omnipotent, revealed in His death and resurrection that Satan, although powerful, is not as powerful as God.
- C. After this, the following question asks, "Is Satan omnipresent?" Just like omnipotence, omnipresence is a characteristic we usually associate with God. A being is omnipresent only if at any given moment, he is present in every possible place. When we consider Satan, we recognize that this is not true of him, so we must say no, Satan is not omnipresent. Here's why: Look at the language of Revelation 12:7-9, which describes the conflict in heaven at the time of the exaltation of Christ. During this conflict, Satan was cast out of heaven, a state which presumably continues to this day. Satan is not in heaven, therefore not omnipresent.
- D. This same series of questions continues by asking, "Is Satan omniscient?" This is the third of the traditional three attributes of God. A being who is omniscient is all-knowing. He is aware of everything that was, is, or will be, and nothing escapes his notice. When we compare Satan to this definition, it becomes apparent to us that no, Satan is not omniscient. For one thing, he failed to understand Christ's role in the scheme of redemption. Look what 1 Corinthians 2:7-8 says on the subject. In context, Paul probably speaks here of earthly rulers, but what he says applies with double strength to Satan. The reason why the plan of salvation succeeded is because God's intention was unknown to Satan. That's why the Bible often describes it as "the mystery." Satan thought that he was winning a great victory when he killed Christ, but in fact, he was sowing the seeds of his own destruction. Satan did not understand that, so Satan is not omniscient.
- E. Our last question about Satan asks, "What is Satan to our everyday temptation?" In answer, it is fair to say that Satan is responsible for our everyday temptation. He tempts us by twisting our own desires and using them against us so that we seek to do evil instead of good. Look, for instance, at the way Satan is described in 1 Thessalonians 3:5. Paul here worries that the Thessalonians have fallen away from the faith, and he implies that the only means by which this might be accomplished is through the tempting agency of Satan. James 1:14-15 sheds more light on the subject. When we combine this verse with 1 Thessalonians 3:5, it becomes apparent that Satan tempts us by enticing us with our own desires to do what is evil. When we read this passage, though, we must be careful not to assume that this describes a process that operates without Satan's help. After all, if it is possible for humankind to sin without Satan, it must be true that we have natures that are inherently evil, which contradicts the fact that we're created in the image of God.

II. Paul and the Sanhedrin.

- A. Our next chunk of questions addresses the subject of Paul and the Sanhedrin. Along these lines, the first question of the series inquires, "Did the members of the Sanhedrin have to be married?" There is no certain answer to this question, but they probably did have to be married. The Sanhedrin was the ruling body of the

- Jewish people during the time of Christ and the apostles. It was led by the Jewish high priest and made up of 70 of the most prominent Jewish priests, nobles, and scribes. In addition to this "great" Sanhedrin, there were also "little" Sanhedrins, smaller councils that were responsible for oversight of regions of the Jewish realm.
- B. Both of these bodies had a history stretching back to the earliest days of the Jewish nation. The great Sanhedrin was established in Numbers 11:16-17, founded to help Moses rule the people. Its members are called "the elders of Israel." We find a similar passage about the ancestors of the lesser Sanhedrin in Joshua 20:4, which describes how Israelite cities were ruled by a council of their elders that met in the city gate.
 - C. Now, from this, we can reason to at least two reasons for believing that the elders of the Sanhedrin, whether small or great, were married. First of all, our own system of church governance is a descendant of the Jewish system. Our elders of the church are equivalent to the Jewish elders of the city. Because our elders must be married and have children, it stands to reason that Jewish elders had to be married and have children.
 - D. We also find support for this view in Psalm 127:4-5. This psalm describes the blessed state of the man who has children. One of the results of his fatherhood is that he is not ashamed and is able to speak with his enemies in the gate. This begs the question: what does having children have to do with speaking in the gate? Remember: the city gate was the place where the elders of the city—the ancestor of the little Sanhedrin—met. If a man had to have children before he could "speak in the gate," it is likely that being married and having children was one of the traditional requirements for being an Israelite/Jewish elder. No verse comes right out and says it, but it is probably true that members of both the great and little Sanhedrins had to be married.
 - E. The second question in this series is "Was Paul a member of the Sanhedrin?" Once again, no passage points straightforwardly in either direction, but it is probably true that Paul, back when he was Saul, was a member of at least a little Sanhedrin. There are several verses that imply this. First, let's look at Galatians 1:14. In this passage, Paul describes himself as advanced in rank beyond his contemporaries. In Acts 26:9-10, we see more insight into what this advance of rank was. He says that when Christians were to be put to death, he cast his vote against them. Now, in the historical record, we only find evidence that two Jewish legal bodies were allowed to sentence men to death: the great Sanhedrin and the little Sanhedrins. In order to cast his vote against Christians, Paul most likely would have had to have been a member of one or the other.
 - F. Now, this line of questioning is leading up to a third question that the questioner left unsaid, but I'll ask it anyway. It asks, "Was Paul ever married?" Once again, however we answer the question, there is an element of speculation in either direction, but the best answer is once again, "Probably." Before we delve into this further, let's be clear on a few things. First, during the time of his missionary journeys, Paul was definitely unmarried. He tells us so himself, and we have no reason to disbelieve him. However, this does not preclude the possibility that Paul was married before he came into prominence as a preacher. Indeed, he likely was.
 - G. There are two reasons for saying this. The first reason is the line of questioning we've just gotten through looking at. If members of the Sanhedrin had to be married, and Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, then he had to have been married. Obviously, this is not and cannot be an ironclad case, but it is probably true.
 - H. The second line of reasoning comes from Paul's own discussion of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 25. In these two chunks of Scripture, there are several things worth noting. First, this is one of the passages that tells us Paul was unmarried during the time of Acts. It's quite obvious. Less obvious, though, is the message Paul sends about himself by the way he aligns himself. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul gives instructions to three different groups of unmarried people: virgins, those who have never been married; the unmarried, which in context probably means those who are Scripturally divorced; and widows, those whose spouses have died. In his discussion, Paul aligns himself not with the virgins, but with the unmarried and widows, who were once married but are no longer. This probably means that he himself was married. From here, we might be tempted to ask what happened to Paul's wife and children, if any, but Scripture says nothing of this.

III. Worship Times.

- A. The final question we're going to look at this evening concerns our worship times. It asks, "Why have church on Wednesday when the Bible only says Sunday?" This is a good question, and it deserves a good answer. The short version of the answer is that some of the acts of worship we perform are not limited to Sunday.
- B. Let's look at this in Scripture. Traditionally, we say that there are five acts of worship: Bible study, singing, prayer, the Lord's Supper, and the collection. Of these five acts, when we look at the New Testament, we see that two of them are only associated with Sunday. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul instructs the Corinthians to give on the first day of the week. Similarly, in Acts 20:7, we learn that Christians met on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper. We follow this example by only doing these two things on Sunday.
- C. By contrast, the other three acts of worship are not limited in time. From James 5:13, we learn that we are to sing whenever we are joyful and pray whenever we are suffering. Thus, they are not limited to Sunday only. In the same way, Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for studying the Bible daily together, not just on Sunday. Therefore, we can fairly conclude that God allows us to sing, pray, and study together whenever we wish. Any time will do; most churches in the US have simply chosen Wednesday to carry out these commands.

Conclusion. However, the most important question is "What must I do to be saved?"