

JANUARY 10, 2021

Questions Answered During Live Q&A

1. I am a new believer finding my way to Christ. As I read the bible I am finding that I am placing myself within the story itself, as the characters being described. Is it wrong to read the bible in this way?
2. Can/How do Christians hold true to their faith while also being allies to those who do not hold the same worldview as us.
3. There are many folks who believe that Jesus did exist and did represent God, but the Apostle Paul and later Gospel writers wrongly portrayed him as the Messiah/only way to God. How would you respond to these rebuttals?
4. How should I approach other Christians who don't take Jesus seriously? And those who take Jesus too seriously but are aggressive?

All questions answered during the Live Q&A with Greg Koukl can be found here:
<https://youtu.be/G9ldQQ1JOHg>

Questions Answered During Bonus Video

1. How do I know whether Biblical accounts/manuscripts that we read are corrupted or written with political agenda?
2. COMMENT: It's interesting that the term "liberal" refers to Christians who do not take Jesus seriously, don't believe in the resurrection, the need for salvation, or that Jesus is the only way. In Canada many evangelical Christians who do believe these non-negotiables you are discussing would never choose to identify with the conservative camp because of the tone, accusations and alienation that accompanies their message.
3. How do you think God shows his love to cultures that are not readily exposed to Christian views? I think about predominantly Muslim or Hindu cultures where people do not hear about Jesus. I think that a pluralistic view can be appealing to some since we don't think that God would choose some people's salvation over others.

All questions answered during the Bonus Video with Greg Koukl can be found here:
<https://youtu.be/nFul3Ovp00>

Additional Questions

1. **Why do you think the Lord is allowing for this pandemic to occur? And what is our calling as Christians to do in the midst of it all?**

Paul: I'm not sure why God allowed this pandemic, nor am I convinced that it's always for us to know. Where we often get into trouble as Christians is when we start putting words into God's mouth. Over the years I've learnt that God is ok with silence, whereas

I'm not. What I do know is that God is using the pandemic to refine his church and to grow our faith, hope and love. Which is what God is always about in our lives. So what can we do in the midst of this pandemic? Pray, worship, meditate on his Word, give, serve, share and point people to Jesus.

Ryan: Paul's answer is the short answer. If you have time here is a very long answer.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GaVkkp3SVc>

2. Do you think King Solomon went to heaven?

Ryan: I'm not really comfortable making a call regarding who goes to heaven and who does not. This ultimately is not for us to know or decide. It sounds as though you might be wondering if Solomon could go to heaven with so much disbelief (Ecclesiastes) and sexual addiction in his life (1 Kings 11:1). Yes. No one is too far gone for the grace of God. It just depends if he really repented of his sin and had faith in God. There is some evidence through Proverbs (which he wrote segments of) to indicate a genuine faith in God later in his life. I do not condone Solomon's actions (especially to have a harem of wives!) but we need to humbly remember we are all battling sin. It is too difficult for us to know what is in the heart that God can fully see (1 Sam. 16:7).

3. Why did God create the devil? God knew that the angel would fall and cause suffering to many, still God allowed this to happen. Free will doesn't seem to answer this if the choice is either follow God and be saved by accepting Jesus' sacrifice or perish in the eternal fire?

Chris: My kids have restitution consequences. If they "sin" against their brother they must have a time out and sit at the Board which has the consequences on it. They must explain their actions and what they were thinking and feeling. Then the party which was offended gets to choose the consequences which are acts of restitution. Those things are things like "play a game with the objective to lose to the injured party" or "help clean his room." One day one boy was being particularly annoying and poking his little brother. The little brother looked at the restitution board, looked at his brother, looked at the board, punched his brother and then walked himself over to the board. He is my son for a reason! I would be miserable if I had nothing but "good" choices. I needed to sample consequences and poor choices in order to sincerely want to make the "right" choice later on.

Would God have the opportunity to develop our character if we didn't have the opportunity to make poor decisions?

Allowing us free will with genuine consequences allows us to wake up and see the devastating consequences of sin and choose better. But without the contrast, would we all genuinely choose good? Or would a lingering desire to punch our brother exist? Or is there an alternative universe in which God could contrive only situations in which we never met with temptation?

I have kids. I am going to be honest here, when it comes to my kids the world could be full of a million of the exact same candy, sooner or later my kids will want the one their brother has. Satan isn't anything special. He was just the first to betray God's trust and so he is the most experienced at evil.

I wondered about the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall for a long time and finally arrived at the conclusion that it is a story about relationship. God tells us what is needed

for a genuine relationship with him, namely: trust. We cannot have a genuine relationship with someone without giving them the opportunity to be trusted. God gave us the tree, and a simple rule. This rule was God's boundary. Boundaries are healthy and good and even God had them. That God had a boundary also shows God put Himself in a position to be betrayed, a position of vulnerability. He evened the playing field with us relationally and made us His equal in this act. God reveals that his own nature is tied up in being unconditionally respectful of our choices, and putting Himself in a position of being vulnerable with us. If God constantly moved us in and out of situations so as we were never experienced the opportunity to make (and want to make) a poor choice, *we would never experience the character development to desire good over evil and we would never be in a position of vulnerability.* Without the character of wanting what is genuinely good, and subsequent willingness to be vulnerable, we would never experience genuine love. We would be nothing but pets. Personally I don't want to be a pet. I understand that I have an evil heart by nature and a perverse desire to know what all the options are, not just the good ones. But through the grace of God I am on a path which desires to be less like me and more like Jesus.

4. **Jesus was the ultimate example of fulfilling the law, which included caring for the poor, sick and widows. While it's important to hold on to the deity and resurrection of Jesus, letting go of his example of how to live seems just as foolish. Do you believe Jesus' action to the physically poor were only symbolic to emphasize the spiritually poor? Or that he genuinely meant that the physically poor should be cared for as well?**

Ryan: This is not Greg Koukl writing. Unfortunately we do not have the space to ask him this great question! I will speak to it from my perspective as best I am able to though! I really appreciate how deeply you were reflecting on this.

I do not think Greg was advocating that we let go of *the way* Christ lived as *an example*. I believe he was trying to state that Christ needs to be *more* than example, he needs to be our Saviour. Unfortunately people can take a reductionist view of the Gospel: Jesus came to show us the way to live our lives. This message is popular in our culture today, and it is true, but it's not *the whole truth*. Greg was trying to emphasize an often understated point, that is: in addition to showing us *how* to live Jesus actually *delivers us* from our sin (our very failure to live this way) so that we are actually able to begin living up to these very high standards!

From my point of view Jesus showed us the way to live, but that way to live is impossible. Who can really live their life without hating someone in the heart? Looking lustfully? Never being judgmental? Never implicitly feeding into oppression? Jesus needs to be more than an example. He needs to deliver us from these failures so that we can actually begin, through his power at work in us, to pursue this high calling.

I believe that there was often spiritual and literal meaning to Jesus' actions. So when Jesus heals lepers he literally heals them but leprosy is also a metaphor for our sin condition. Likewise, Jesus bringing good news to impoverished people is also a spiritual metaphor that when we become poor in spirit (humble) Jesus meets us. To say that something has a broader meaning is not cancelling out the other, specific meaning. So in a nutshell: it's not an either-or situation. It's a both-and. But what needs to come first is Jesus as Messiah/Rescuer. Putting "Jesus as Example" first is just another

works-based religion.

Paul: To be clear, Greg never said that caring for the poor, widow, stranger, etc is not important or merely symbolic. Greg pointed out that these themes and their importance is found throughout Scripture. The point Greg was making was that “Jesus didn’t die because of what he taught but because of who he claimed to be: God.” Taking Jesus’ teaching/example without accepting his Deity (Godhood) is not taking Jesus seriously.

5. What about Luke 4:16-21? (In reference to Jan 10, “Taking Jesus seriously.”)

Ryan: Please see answers to question #4 and question #12 in addition to Greg Koukl’s bonus video where he answers more questions.

As for the passage you cite, I believe you were referencing it because in it Jesus claims to come for the poor, the prisoner, the blind, and the oppressed. Indeed, Jesus did come for the disinherited and the marginalized! But this is not the totality of his mission (see Question 12). The “poor, prisoner, blind, and oppressed” also has a second meaning referring to spiritual poverty, bondage and enslavement to sin, and being blind to the truth (see Question 4). As Christians we are saved *by and through* Jesus (and we cannot sideline this) so that we can begin living out his example which includes matters of justice. Hope this helps!

6. Can you explain why Jesus was Baptised and its importance and controversy when it happened.

Ryan: [This TGC article](#) explains it better than I can. In short: Jesus himself states why he was baptized in Matthew 3:15, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Jesus is fulfilling his role as the obedient Son of God by practicing the required righteousness, Baptism.

7. How can I receive and practice the gifts of the Holy Spirit during these chaotic times?

Ryan: The same way you would before Covid-19! God generously gives the Holy Spirit as a gift to those who come to know him through Jesus. Luke 11:5-13 is a beautiful parable about the generosity of God. He is not holding onto or keeping the Spirit back from you. If you know Jesus you have the Holy Spirit. Through the Spirit we are given special gifts (supernatural talents) in order to serve the Church (Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Cor. 12). Those are already within you, pandemic or not. They may be laying dormant because you are not practicing or utilizing them (yes, you get rusty) but they haven’t left you because the Spirit hasn’t left you. So how do you receive the gifts? By accepting and knowing Jesus. How do you practice them? Look for opportunities to utilize the supernatural gifts you have even with church and ministry closures. Some gifts may look different during Covid-19, you just need to get creative. For example, I do not get to teach as much as I usually do, so I am teaching through writing more, kind of like I am doing right here right now.

8. How can I grow as a Christian in the midst of this pandemic? How to gain strength to follow Jesus and do his call?

Ryan: I would recommend a few things. First, take advantage of what your local church offers in terms of worship services. Hebrews 10:25 warns us not to “forsake assembling

together.” Even though we’re unable to assemble physically we can still assemble in other creative means. Engage in online services first and foremost and then depending on your schedule you could join: virtual prayer meetings, a LifeGroup, or another ministry. We grow best in some form of community; this is how God has wired us. It’s harder during a pandemic but not impossible. Second, I would suggest reading a book about spiritual disciplines to learn about these tried and true practices that can help your spiritual growth and faith formation. *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster is a classic. *Habits of Grace* by David Mathis is also a good resource. We are able to partake in spiritual disciplines regardless of what happens with Covid-19. Finally, if you’re feeling stuck in some kind of rut, sin or addiction I would encourage you to reach out to a trusted Christian friend or pastor to have a phone call. You do not need to battle these struggles alone. There are people who want to help you “bear the burden” (Gal. 6:2). Research opportunities through your church to face these struggles with resources such as Freedom Session or Counselling.

9. What does "accepting Jesus as Savior" really mean? I am aware of Acts 16:31 and Rom 10:9 (Believe in Jesus and be saved ...), & that our fruits demonstrate that we are Christ followers, but is this ... an intellectual transaction? An emotional connection maybe? Or a collection of shifts?

Carmen: Well I think of it as a simple transaction. I think too many people have complicated things with this, or “Christianized them.” You know, the well-meaning Christian, 2 inches from your face, yelling “Have YOU accepted Jesus into your HEART?!”:-) Which is what can lead to this question. But you’re right: **believing Christ** is what does it. In the same way that Abraham “believed God” and was saved as well (Gen. 15:6).

And you’re right. In believing Christ (and therefore repenting of the sin which separated you from Him to begin with) the Holy Spirit will now “move in” and empower you. This will be demonstrated to others in a new mind, and new fruit, and a willingness to obey God; even in the midst of an unbelieving world.

So when talking to people who ask me about this, I have often said, “Hey, don’t worry about mechanics. Just decide that you’re going to follow Him.” Or, “Get to know Him,” in the case of someone who knows nothing about Christianity and who’s kicking the tires.

10. What advice would you give to churches wherein progressive Christianity is infiltrating and, in some cases, dividing the church. Any tips on navigating that while endeavouring to maintain unity?

Paul: Pray, pray, pray! The gospel of Jesus Christ has always been a point of tension and has always faced attempts to undermine. Much of our New Testament was written as a response to attacks at the very foundation of the gospel. So pray for your church leaders, elders, staff for a Spirit and posture of truth and grace, courage and compassion, humility and clarity to prevail. Also remember that this is not just a battle of words. As Eph 6:12 so clearly says, “our battle is not with flesh and blood but . . . against spiritual powers.” So pray to God in light of the spiritual battle being waged for the souls of people. Engage in conversation with great humility and compassion, being careful to listen and seeking to discern what’s really going on in the person’s heart, not just in their head.

Lastly I would also encourage a God perspective on this. It's not our battle, it's his. This is not our story but his. So we're not trying to coerce or guilt people into believing but rather are seeking to join God there where he's working. Focusing on God means rejecting the desire to "win" arguments. Focusing on God also means taking a longer view of life. Though someone might seem far from God and unwilling to surrender today doesn't mean that by God's grace and power they might not have a change of heart later. So we patiently persevere in relationship with others while humbly and courageously holding to the gospel we have received that "*Christ died for our sins according to Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . .* (1 Cor 15:3ff).

11. Is it possible for Jesus, being God, to be afraid? (Talking about the garden of Gethsemane)

Ryan: This is a thoughtful question. Honestly not something I have considered until now. Jesus was fully God but also fully human. He experienced our common temptations toward sin and brokenness (humanity) yet remained without sin (divinity). I would assume Jesus had access to a full range of human emotions. The shortest verse in the Bible tells us "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). None of our human emotions are inherently "sinful" or "wrong." They are neutral. It is the misapplication or misuse of our emotions. Therefore for Jesus, as God, to feel human fear, I would say makes sense. There's nothing "sinful" about fear in and of itself. I would say the pain and torment Jesus was about to undergo is as justifiable a reason as any I can think of to experience fear.

12. If we are speaking to a liberal/progressive Christian and make the argument that Jesus' identity is more important than his teachings, how would we answer an accusation from them that we are not "taking him seriously" or dismissing his teachings?

Paul: Thanks for engaging in this crucial conversation and for your question. I don't think that Jesus' identity is more important than his teachings. His teachings flowed from his nature and identity, namely that of being God in the flesh (John 1:14). The point that Greg was emphasizing is that Jesus didn't die because of what he taught but because of who he claimed to be: God. Taking Jesus' teaching without accepting his deity is not taking Jesus seriously, nor will it save us from our sins. Greg made this point because it's popular and acceptable to believe in Jesus as a "good teacher" while rejecting his claim to Deity (Godhood). This is just another form of works-centred religion. A way of sidestepping our brokenness and need of a Saviour. Jesus himself faced this very problem while here on earth. Checkout Luke 18:18-19 where a man calls Jesus "good teacher" and Jesus replies "no one is good, except God alone." IOW Jesus was pressing him on the issue of Deity as opposed to simply being "a good teacher/example." If all Jesus is to us is "a good teacher" then we are still lost in our sins. The beauty of the gospel is that, as 1 John 4:14 puts it, *We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.* The Father didn't just send the Son to be a good example, he sent him to be our Saviour, and that's why he was crucified. Because of his identity/divinity. This continues to be a stumbling block for people today.

13. What would his tips/recommendations be for engaging with someone in apologetics

without coming off as arrogant or too aggressive in our arguments?

Chris: Ask a lot of questions (Jesus did this a lot). Wait until they ask you for your opinions and then be brief. Pray a lot in between. I have had friends start by telling me what *they* think and keep at it for over a year before finally asking me what *I* think. Or even pausing long enough to hear an answer. If people aren't ready to listen they won't. I think it's why Jesus spoke in public where people could come to Him, and in synagogues where the audience has come with the implicit openness to hearing about God. Until then praise God for the time you have to research their statements and look up convincing arguments and practice them in private.

I also trusted God to build my skill set by giving me appropriate people to "spar" with. I learned to accept defeat and treated it like a fencing skill set. Everytime I fail, I look up what I could have done differently and I pray about it and I thank God when a chance comes to do better or differently. Remember you won't win them all. Not even Jesus did, or else that whole Judas thing would have never happened. So it's a partnership between you and God; developing your skill set! This attitude might help you to relax a bit about defeats as well and keep plugging away at it! Cheers and praying for you!

[Also, I enjoyed this book.](#)

14. We know that there are paradoxes or mysteries to the Christian faith. For example, the paradox of God's full sovereignty versus our free will. In his talk Greg asserted that pluralism is not logical, even from a mathematical perspective. You can't go to heaven, stay in the grave, reincarnate etc all at the same time. It's one or another, but not all. Mathematically many will be wrong (law of averages). Is it ok to use mathematics as proof in this situation when in other Christian realms such as the trinity math is a paradox (3 in 1)?

Ryan: Wow. This is a very astute and philosophical observation. It represents a deep engagement with the message. This is not something that I have given much thought to, so I'll try my best to respond.

I agree that there are many paradoxes in the Christian faith. But we need to remember the definition of a paradox: "a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may *prove to be well founded or true*" (Oxford). The way I see it is that the paradoxes of "Sovereignty vs. Free Will" and the Trinity are paradoxes that, if we have the ability to comprehend the greatness of God's divinity, would still be founded and true principles. They only *seem* to contradict from a limited perspective. At the end of the day we have not been lied to or misdirected. God is telling us the truth about his nature. Another important point about these is that they are paradoxes that are supported by Scripture. Scripture teaches Free Will & Sovereignty and 3-in-1ness.

When we turn to the matter of pluralism it's a different matter. First, pluralism is not really a paradoxical statement. To say that "many religious paths lead to God" is not a seemingly contradictory statement. It's actually pretty clear: religions are like trails that lead to the same summit. The only paradoxical element would be that all these religions contradict each other on different points. But in the pluralist worldview they actually don't: they're just the different natures, terrain and views of a trail. So I don't actually see pluralism as a paradoxical statement. *But* even if it is a paradox there are two key differences: (1) this is not a paradox that has Scriptural basis; and, (2) in this paradox

God would be shown to be a liar. As Greg carefully over-viewed on Sunday, Jesus is pretty clear on his claim to be *The* (only) *Way* to God. No where in the Bible do you find a pluralist claim or a teaching that seems to contradict this. And if at the end of the pluralist paradox we find God lying to us about Jesus being the way to the Father that's also problematic. God hasn't been honest about reality. In short: just because the Christian worldview contains many paradoxes does not mean it is open to every paradox.