



Q & Hey

Thanks for asking about stuff that I know.



The Disobedient Spirits in Prison

Q: I am a believer who quit church some time ago. I also believe in the salvation of all mankind, praise the Lord! I recently found your website which I think is fantastic.

I have been tearing my hair out trying to reconcile the Scriptures regarding the state of the dead (“the dead know nothing,” Ecclesiastes 9:5) with 1 Peter 3:19 where Christ descended to preach to disobedient spirits in prison. There seems to be some controversy regarding who these spirits

are. As I understand death, the spirit returns to God and the soul no longer exists, or is said to be in Sheol/Hades. So if the dead are dead, how did Christ preach to them if they are men?

Maybe these spirits are not the spirits of men? If they are the spirits of men, how can it be? I also thought that without a soul there is no consciousness.

HEY: The spirits referred to in 1 Peter. 3:19 are not the spirits of men. These are the same spirits of 2 Peter 2:4 who were disobedient in the days of Noah. The King James Version, I believe, calls them “sinning angels.”

Dead humans are never referred to as spirits; they are referred to as souls. This term (“spirits”) applies to immortal celestial beings that have never taken flesh.

Apparently, these spirits were involved in events prior to the flood and have been thrust into the “gloomy caverns of Tartarus” (*Concordant Literal New Testament*), “to be kept for chastening judging” (2 Peter 2:4).

Jesus did not preach to anybody or anything during the three days he was in the tomb. Indeed, the dead know nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5), and that includes Jesus Christ. For three days, Jesus Christ did not exist. He was dead, and He would have remained dead had His Father not roused Him (Acts 2:24; Romans 8:11). Read 1 Peter 3:18-20 carefully:

Being put to death, indeed, in flesh, yet vivified in spirit, in which, being gone to the spirits in jail also, He heralds to those once stubborn, when the patience of God awaited in the days of Noah.

“Being put to death in flesh, yet vivified in spirit” is no more a simultaneous occurrence than “I was sick, yet I got better.” Our Lord was first put to death, and then

three days later He was vivified in spirit. He heralded to these spirits *after* His resurrection—probably before greeting Mary in the garden.

You are correct about the state of the dead, and this passage, though it appears at first glance to overturn it, does not.

I am a champion of the second glance.

The Scriptures cannot contradict themselves.

I am glad to hear that you are rejoicing in the salvation of all, and that you enjoy the website.

Obeying Paul's "commandments"

Q: Paul has a lot of commandments to "do this," and not "do that," lest we be "castaways." We know that there is universal salvation, but between that and the here and now, we have Pauline commandments. For example, in Galatians 5:13 Paul says, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh." In 5:16 of the same book, Paul says, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." In 5:19-21, Paul lists seventeen things that we should definitely not do. If we walk in the Spirit, the Spirit produces fruit (9 things) that are most desirable. And in Galatians 5:24, Paul adds: "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." And people that do such bad things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:21). There is a lot of "don't do" here. My question is: How is this accomplished?

HEY: First of all, it is important to note that Paul gives exhortations, not commandments. These are not "musts," as with the Law of Moses; Pauline teaching is antithetical to the Law of Moses. In other words, you will not lose your salvation if you don't do what Paul says. Why? Because your salvation is not in accord with works, lest anyone should be boasting (Romans 3:27-28).

With the gospel of grace, God does not save us in accord with our acts (2 Timothy 1:9). This was not the case with the Law of Moses. Though it presented itself as a means to salvation by acts, the Law of Moses could never accomplish it; better to say that human flesh could not accomplish the Law of Moses.

Second, you assume that because there is an exhortation in scripture that you have the ability to do it. Not so. All ability comes from God. For as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:7—

Now what have you which you did not obtain? Now if you obtained it also, why are you boasting as though not obtaining?

These exhortations, therefore, are not an opportunity for us to show God what we can do, but rather an opportunity for God to show what He can do through us. Philippians 2:12-13 is a mouthful of truth:



Be carrying your own salvation into effect, for it is God Who is operating in you to will as well as to work for the sake of His delight.

We carry out salvation into effect relatively, but absolutely it is God working in us.

Anyone who habitually does the list of seventeen things in Galatians 5 "shall not be enjoying the allotment of the kingdom of God." An allotment is a special holding, such as a particular piece of real estate. An allotment has to do with a special position of ruling and reigning with Christ; it does not have to do with general salvation. I would still not have you placing the cart before the horse; you are still unable to effect the ideal apart from God's enabling. It's just that no one whom God has predestined to a position of ruling and reigning with Him will be found enmeshed in these sins.

The "condemnation" of God

Q: How does Mark 16:15-16 fit into your view that there is no "hell," as Christianity terms it. In this verse, Jesus said to His disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned."

Unfortunately this is a verse from the NIV, but I am just wondering your thoughts on this verse.

HEY: People tend to read things into the word “condemned.” They assume Jesus is talking about an eternity of fiery torment. But there are no flames in the premises of the context.

The word “condemn” is translated from the Greek word *katakrino*. This is a two-part Greek word; *kata*=down, and *krino*=judged. The literal meaning of this word, then, is “down judge.” It is an adverse judgment. For example, a bank robber is condemned to ten years in prison (a “down-judgment”) as opposed to being made president of the bank, which would be a favorable judgment. What happens to him after his condemnation? After ten years in jail, he gets out. The word condemnation itself carries no suggestion of eternal consequence.

My book on hell (*Martin Zender Goes to Hell*) will help you to see that, while on Earth, Jesus proclaimed the thousand-year kingdom, in which Israel would rule the world. He Himself said again and again that He came proclaiming this Kingdom, which was a time-enduring kingdom. Whoever believed His message and were baptized into it would be saved and enter into that kingdom. Entrance into the thousand-year kingdom is the salvation of the context. Nothing is said here of eternal life or eternal condemnation. Conversely, whoever rejected Jesus’ message would be condemned (*katakrino*, “down-judged”), and the condemnation of the context—while not explicitly stated here—is refused entry into the thousand-year kingdom. The question you need to ask, and the question that is answered plainly and simply for you in my book, is: What happens to the people who are refused entrance into the thousand-year kingdom? Are they banished forever from the presence of God? I’ll give you a sneak preview of the answer: “No!”

Am I hearing God or myself?

Q: I was excited to get your book on free will (*The Really Bad Thing About Free Will*). I will admit that I had the feeling I was about to step WAY out of the norm. When I read your book, I finally found some ground that I could stand on and someone who could show me what I was thinking. My question is,

how do I tell if God is telling me to do something, or if it’s just me?

HEY: God will tell you whether it’s right or wrong, either by 1) conscience, 2) Scriptural revelation, or 3) circumstance. Sometimes we wait and wait for a sign from God, and the sign never comes. That’s because God no longer gives signs. Rather, the “sign” comes via a circumstance run through the filter of Scripture and conscience. God is in charge of all circumstances. If your house is burning down, you don’t need a sign from God to get the heck out of the house. God has created the circumstance, so react to it; you’re going to do it anyway. There are no green lights in God’s will, only red lights. React to circumstance, then trust God to change the circumstance if He wants you to stop.

As we mature in Christ, we graduate out of this “Him versus us” mentality. This type of thinking is in accord with the old humanity. In the old humanity, we considered our old selves to be alive, kicking, and always able to upset God’s apple cart. Paul has told us, however, that the old humanity has been crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6). Thinking in accord with the old humanity is a fine way to give yourself way too much power and credit. Your old humanity has been crucified; stop digging up the corpse. When we constantly ask God what His will is and insist that He “speak to us,” we tacitly deny that He is working His absolute will in every circumstance (Ephesians 1:11). Since Paul completed the Word of God (Colossians 1:25), God doesn’t audibly speak anymore, not even through prophets. The Scriptures tell us what we need to know. How does God then communicate presently? Through conscience (Romans 2:15) and circumstance (Ephesians 1:11). So please, stop waiting around to discern “the will of God.” Read Paul’s letters, look around you, pay attention, and act. —MZ



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 © 2015 by Martin Zender/Published by Starke & Hartmann, Inc.
 email: mzender@martinzender.com