Common Questions in the

Christian Faith

Volume Two

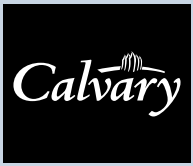


By John H. Munro

Volume Two

THE VERDICT

WITH PASTOR JOHN H. MUNRO



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Introduction

WE LIVE IN A CONFUSING WORLD. We are constantly bombarded by information and so-called experts on social media, news outlets, advertisements, entertainment—and it's difficult to know who or what to believe.

At the same time, today's culture often encourages us to bypass the mind. Just have "an experience." "Follow your gut!" "Trust your feelings." "Think with your heart." "I have my truth and you have yours." Our society is very susceptible to the view that morality and truth are decided by each one of us. All of this makes it very easy for us to be deceived and manipulated by ourselves and others.

So what are we to believe?

Contrary to what you may have heard, the Christian faith is not outdated, hateful, or ignorant. God exists, and He welcomes your questions. He loves you.

Because of His love, He sent His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to save you, to reconcile with you. And He has revealed Himself in His Word, the Bible. He promises: "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

The purpose of these booklets is to help you ask the honest and difficult questions you may have about the Christian faith and to help you identify and begin to understand the answers found in the Holy Scriptures, which are the Word of God. The Bible has guided multitudes of people for centuries. Of course, the ultimate verdict is yours.

I am praying for you as you embark on this spiritual journey! Ask for the Lord's guidance as you seek the truth with an open and humble heart.

Warmly in Christ,



The Questions

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QUESTION ONE

How do I cope with struggles?

How does faith in God help me cope with the struggles of life?

LIFE CAN BE DIFFICULT, unpredictable, and even frightening. Each day brings its own challenges and struggles. You may be experiencing crippling anxiety, family heartaches, a health crisis, financial fears, or all-consuming grief. These excruciatingly painful situations threaten to defeat us, discourage us, embitter us, and overwhelm us.

Social media and the internet are full of suggestions and techniques. So-called experts are around every corner to provide external solutions or encourage you to find the answer within yourself, your own efforts and abilities. Well-meaning people try to comfort you with platitudes. But none of them have the answer.

We must recognize that we are powerless to control the storms and struggles of life. We must look outside of ourselves for guidance and direction. We must look to Almighty God.

Remember who God is, and why He can be trusted

When we face struggles and challenges in life, we often focus on the circumstances—our hurts, our needs, and our expectations—rather

than focusing on and trusting God. As we wrestle with the struggles of life, it is essential that we adjust our focus. Take your eyes off your circumstances and remember who God is.

God is supreme

He is eternal, self-existent, self-sufficient. He is the Creator of the universe, the great "I AM." In a world where we are constantly trying to improve or reinvent ourselves, God is our unchanging and unchangeable Rock. "He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken" (Psalm 62:2). God is constant in His character, and absolutely faithful to His Word and His promises. Unlike anyone else, He is 100% dependable, "a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

God is sovereign

Not only is God eternal and unchangeable, He is the all-powerful ruler over all things. He oversees every aspect of the affairs of people and nations (whether we believe in Him or not) to accomplish His purposes. And He will always see His plans to completion. He declares: "I am God, and there is no other... My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose... I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it" (Isaiah 46:9, 10, 11).

God loves you

We trust friends and family members when we know that they have our best interests at heart. They love us, and they care what happens to us. Does it surprise you that this great eternal God who is the supreme, sovereign Creator loves you and wants to have a personal relationship with you?

Where is the proof of this love? As imperfect, sinful people, we are unable to reach this almighty, holy God by ourselves, so He reached out to us. In Jesus Christ, God revealed Himself and offered the way of salvation. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God the Son, died for your sins on the cross to reconcile you to God. We receive God's love by trusting in Jesus Christ—and knowing and living in this love will transform your life and your perspective.

No matter the circumstances, God has a purpose

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). This verse offers us wonderful assurance, but it does not mean that everything in life is going to be good. Struggles are a part of life and the Christian experience. Pain and suffering. Life-altering tragedy. The death of a loved one. These things are unbelievably devastating. Life is forever changed.

Yet, through the darkness, the difficulties, the disappointments, and the confusions of life, we are called to trust God. Not only is He a loving Heavenly Father, but He is also sovereign and all-powerful. We have His promise that He is working all things together for our good. Are you taking this assurance to heart?

In some situations, His purposes may eventually be revealed to us. Other times we may never understand why certain things took place. Trust your all-powerful Heavenly Father, knowing that He loves you, and He has a plan. Find peace knowing that He is accomplishing His purposes in the events of your life.

How to find strength and renewal

This passage has been a great encouragement to me in the dark times of life, offering tremendous promises in the face of seemingly insurmountable problems:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;

they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.
— Isaiah 40:28–31

This waiting for the Lord is not like being in the doctor's waiting room. This waiting on the Lord is admitting that you cannot handle the situation on your own. This waiting is looking away from your struggles, challenges, and tough circumstances, and choosing to have a confident, patient trust in God, knowing that He will act even though you are uncertain of His timing and what He will do.

In the difficult, dark, and fearful situations of life, trust in the Lord with all of your heart. Don't be anxious at the size of the crisis or the circumstances of your problem. Focus on God to whom you are now bringing all of your cares. He is all-powerful. No situation is too difficult for Him or too insignificant. He is the God who can move mountains. And He loves you with an everlasting love.

For more in-depth discussion on this topic, consider reading *Trusting God in Tough Times*, available on TheVerdict.org.

“They who wait for the Lord
shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with
wings like eagles;
they shall run and not
be weary; they shall walk
and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

QUESTION TWO

Is it possible to lose my salvation?

How do I know if I'm really saved?

OF THE INNUMERABLE QUESTIONS I have received as a pastor, this may be the topic addressed most frequently. Is it possible to lose my salvation? How do I know if I am really saved? What happens if I have doubts, or no longer believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it possible to commit some unforgivable sin and be eternally lost?

Most authentic followers of Jesus Christ have grappled with these questions. Indeed, for those who believe that salvation is an eternal reality, there can hardly be a more serious concern.

My strong conviction is that not only can we be saved by the grace of God, we can also have assurance that we are eternally secure. But this assurance applies not to those who merely *profess* salvation, but to those who actually *possess* salvation. In other words: saying that you are a Christian does not make you a Christian. Salvation is a personal living relationship with Jesus Christ.

The basis of our eternal security

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah writes: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

As flawed, sinful people, we are heading for the greatest of all dangers: God's judgment, an eternity in hell, death without hope.

But God Himself planned a rescue mission before the foundation of the world. In John 10, Jesus explains His role as Savior in these beloved terms: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Jesus goes on to explain: "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:28–30).

The Good Shepherd not only dies for the sheep, He keeps His sheep secure for all eternity. Eternal life would not be eternal if we could lose it! Our salvation is guaranteed by the person and work of the Good Shepherd, the very Son of God. And God the Son and God the Father are one in essence (John 10:29–30) and one in securing our salvation. No one is greater. No one is more powerful. No one is more faithful. There is no greater security system than this.

Furthermore, "no one will snatch them out of my hand." We are secured because we are in the hand of the Good Shepherd. If our salvation depended on our grip, we might lose it, as our hand could slip. I've even heard some say that while no one could ever snatch us from the hand of Jesus, we could choose to take our hand from His. But surely that can't be right. Who is stronger? The Lord Jesus or you?

Think of this: When my grandchildren were small, I would hold their hand. Suppose I was holding their hand in the middle of a busy parking lot. They might want to pull away and run after a dog or a friend, or simply want to be on their own. But because I love them and because I am more powerful than they are, there is no way I would let them pull away from my hand in a dangerous situation. Here then is the security of salvation, the very promise of God: those who have truly trusted the Lord Jesus as their Savior "shall never perish."

Biblical evidence of authentic salvation

It is not uncommon for someone to have made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as a child. Then as a teenager or young adult, you wonder if you are truly saved. Or perhaps you responded to an altar call at a service many years ago. Perhaps you repeated a prayer as instructed. Now you wonder whether your faith, your salvation, is real.

It is good to examine our faith, so that our salvation does not rest on an experience or on something that has been told to us by someone else. Don't point to a date. Go back to the central truth of the Gospel. Examine your heart. Have you trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior? Do you understand that your salvation is given by the grace of God, based on faith alone, in Christ alone? Do you believe that it is the completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross that saves you—not anything that you have said or done?

Scripture also explains that genuine faith does not exist without evidence (James 2:18–26). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is not that our good works save us or that we must lead a good enough life to retain our salvation. From first to last, salvation is a gift of God's grace. But the lives of those truly saved by grace will reflect the inner working of the Holy Spirit and demonstrate, however imperfectly, that we are "new creations" in Christ.

"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit" (Luke 6:43–44). "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22–23).

The fact that an individual says they are saved does not mean that they are saved. To depend on an experience or profession and then live a life that bears no fruit and contradicts that profession of faith can offer no real assurance of salvation. In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus warns

of those who will call Him "Lord, Lord" but who will be told, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

Backsliding versus unbelief

Of course, every follower of Jesus Christ struggles with sin. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). And a prolonged period of backsliding may cause an individual's salvation to be questioned. Yet, those who have exercised saving faith in Jesus Christ are still eternally secure. Authentic salvation is demonstrated not by a perfect life, but by spiritual growth throughout life, despite times of struggle and backsliding.

Others profess to be authentic followers of Jesus and become part of the Christian community. Outwardly they appear to be Christians, but in their hearts, they have never been genuinely saved. Hebrews 6:6 refers to those who "have fallen away." Is this referring to people who once were saved but now have lost their salvation? No, this passage and others describe individuals who were never truly saved in the first place.

Consider Judas. Outwardly, like the other disciples, he was a follower of Jesus. But clearly he did not have an authentic faith. It is possible to be exposed to spiritual light, to sample it, to know of the work of the Holy Spirit, and never truly be saved. These are not believers who struggle with sin and may backslide for a while, but rather those who superficially embrace the truth but then firmly and willfully reject it.

Faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive

Some of you are familiar with my testimony. I was saved at age 12 in a boys' summer camp. Yet a few years later, as a teenager visiting my grandmother, I vividly recall having serious questions about my salvation. Was I really saved? What if I had deluded myself? I read and reread some of the Scriptures that I knew so well. I prayed and battled with the devil who loves to create doubts. Finally, towards the end of the stay with my grandmother, I had a fresh assurance of my salvation. I knew I was truly saved through faith in the Lord Jesus and was eternally secure.

Having doubts is not necessarily a denial of faith. Faith and doubt are not mutually exclusive. There is a difference between doubt and unbelief. Lord Tennyson wrote of "the sunnier side of doubt." That is, our doubts can have a sunny side if they lead us to examine our faith. Our doubts can stimulate our faith to grow stronger.

Thomas, the disciple, had doubts, but worshiped the resurrected Jesus, "My Lord, and my God!" (John 20:28). Most of us can also identify with the words of the father who brought his son to Jesus to be healed: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). The way to deal with our doubts is to receive a fresh vision of the resurrected Savior as we prayerfully read and study the infallible Word of God.

The unforgivable sin

God in His mercy forgives every sin (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). Yet Jesus did speak of a sin which will not be forgiven. "Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew 12:31–32).

In this passage, the Pharisees recognize the power of Jesus but question its source. They accuse Jesus of doing miracles by Beelzebub (Satan)! This, of course, is absurd. Satan doesn't fight against himself. The Lord Jesus is the only One who is stronger than Satan and his demons, and He has defeated them.

This unforgivable sin is not a sin of the flesh, such as murder or sexual immorality. Rather, it is a determined, deliberate, and decisive attitude of rejecting Jesus and His works done in the power of the Holy Spirit and attributing these works to Satan. This is what the religious leaders were doing. It was blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. They were deliberately and continuously closing their minds and hearts to Jesus Christ. It is not that God would not pardon them, but they would not seek God's pardon. This is the ultimate unbelief—turning from the irrefutable and indisputable truth.

Followers of Jesus Christ do not and cannot blaspheme against the Holy Spirit. They are indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit. Those who commit this eternal sin have hard hearts and continually resist the work of the Holy Spirit and the call to repentance. Those who have placed saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be guilty of this eternal sin.

Live a life of hope

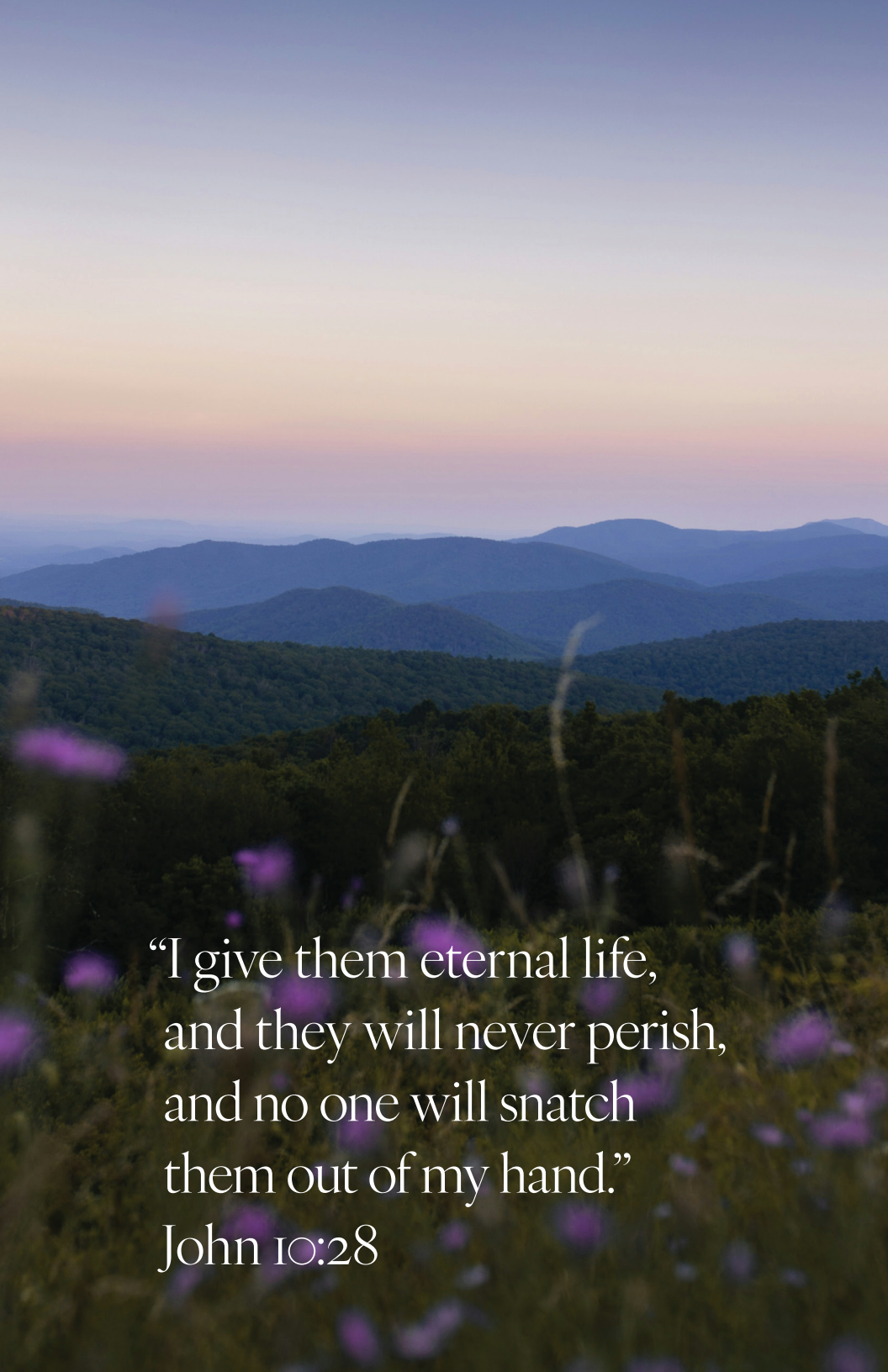
Don't allow uncertainty to steal your joy. The Christian life is a life of hope: we have a glorious future. The devil may remind us of our sinful past, but we remind him of our certain future!

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3–5).

This assurance of eternal life and heaven, this living hope, flows from our spiritual rebirth. There is no hope without being "born again"—without trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior. In our natural state, we are sinful and spiritually dead. We need new life, and this is what God in His grace gives us. It is a certainty in accordance with God's "great mercy" and is grounded in the promises of God and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

If our entrance into this inheritance were dependent on ourselves or our performance, there would be no hope. But it is "guarded" by God's power; that same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Our hope rests on the faithful promises and power of God. So it is impossible for this hope of salvation to be lost by us. It is all of God's mercy and grace, protected by His power and promises: an unbreakable security system. The reservation has been made, and God will not cancel it. He gives us eternal life, and we shall "never perish."

For additional discussion on this topic, consider reading *Eternal Security: Finding Certainty in a Chaotic World,* available on TheVerdict.org.


“I give them eternal life,
and they will never perish,
and no one will snatch
them out of my hand.”
John 10:28

QUESTION THREE

How can I know God's will for my life?

How can I be certain and make right decisions?

IS IT POSSIBLE TO KNOW GOD'S WILL for your life? Which career to pursue? Who to marry? Where to live? In looking for guidance from God, do we just open the Bible and choose a verse at random? Or is God going to reveal His will to us in a dream or a vision, or writing in the sky, or in some other supernatural way?

God is certainly able to get our attention in any way He chooses. But it's helpful to remember that living a God-centered life and following Jesus Christ is a daily, continuous process, and God has already revealed much about His will in Holy Scripture.

What does Scripture tell us about God's will?

God wants you to be saved

I have talked to people who are frustrated that God has not revealed His specific will for their lives. But they are not living godly lives! First and foremost, God desires you to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3–7). God loves you and seeks a personal relationship with you, and He has provided a means by which you can know Him. Repent of your sin and trust Jesus Christ as your Savior. "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

God wants you to read and obey His Word

Once you have trusted in Christ, what then? Speaking of Himself as the Good Shepherd, Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Central to doing the will of God is obeying His teaching. Jesus said if we love Him, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). Are you reading the Word of God on a regular basis? Are you growing in your faith? Do you have a local spiritual home where you can be part of a community of believers?

God wants you to become more and more like Jesus

The apostle Paul writes: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:3–5). God calls us to sanctification, the lifelong process of being made holy—being made more and more like Jesus Christ.

Does this seem unattainable? When we are saved, God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit who indwells us, empowers us, and gradually transforms us. It is the supernatural power of the Spirit of God which enables us to live a godly life. God never calls us to do anything for which He does not also equip us. And as a follower of Christ, God is calling you to be different, to be holy, to be salt and light in a troubled world. He calls us to display and proclaim Christ to others.

God wants you to approach every task in a way that glorifies Him

"So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Students, God's will for you is to study hard, shine for Christ, and be salt and light on your campus. Live a holy life and demonstrate what it means to be an authentic follower of Jesus Christ to others.

Adults, our daily work is not something to be reviled or endured as we long for the weekend, our next paycheck, or our eventual retirement. Neither are we to waste time complaining about the boss, about the job, about our fellow workers, and so on. Followers of Jesus are to

work heartily, enthusiastically, and faithfully to the glory of God. Once we realize this, each day becomes an exciting opportunity to fulfill our God-given purpose and serve and worship Him.

Discerning God's will

As you work faithfully and enthusiastically day by day to the glory of God, I assure you that God will lead you. He will open doors for you and make His way clear. We often make the will of God a tremendous mystery, but those who have the Spirit of God are to be led by the Spirit. Do what you are doing at present to the glory of God. Don't be anxious about what is going to happen next year. Of course, plan ahead; but make sure your plans are subject to the will of God.

God leads and guides us as we live for His glory in the routine tasks of life. Think of Gideon threshing wheat when God spoke to him. Think of Samuel in Shiloh as a young boy helping in the tabernacle when God called him to serve as His prophet. Think of David taking care of sheep when God called him to be the king of Israel. Think of Matthew collecting taxes when Jesus called him to follow Him. Think of John Munro practicing law when God called him into full-time pastoral ministry. Isn't it marvelous to think how God calls ordinary people doing ordinary things to accomplish His extraordinary eternal purposes?

So don't fret or worry. Follow the Lord Jesus. Pray. Read His Word. Seek to obey Him, and walk in the Spirit. The Lord is well able to reveal His will to you through His Word, through His Spirit, through circumstances, through godly advice, and through your godly desires in terms of what you should do in specific situations. Here is the point: Be faithful today. Live a holy life to the glory of God where you are today. This is God's will for you.

QUESTION FOUR

What is so important about marriage?

Is divorce permissible? What about remarriage?

MARRIAGE HAS BEEN A CORNERSTONE and building block of civilizations throughout the world for thousands of years. But in recent decades, different groups have sought to redefine traditional marriage in the name of personal fulfillment and freedom. Why is this such a point of contention? Why is marriage so significant to those of us who follow Jesus Christ? And what does the Bible really say about divorce and remarriage?

What does Jesus say?

Matthew 19:1–12 is an important passage in understanding biblical teaching on marriage, human sexuality, divorce, and gender issues; I'll be referring to it in addressing this question and the next.

The context of the passage: the religious leaders, the Pharisees, are jealous of Jesus. Despite their knowledge of Old Testament Scripture, they are spiritually blind and do not recognize Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. So they repeatedly test and challenge Him with questions on difficult subjects, hoping to manipulate Him into saying something that will alienate the Jewish crowds or anger the ruling Roman authorities. Repeatedly throughout the Gospels of Matthew,

Mark, Luke, and John, the Pharisees are skillfully routed by Jesus, who uses these opportunities to deliver authoritative teaching to His followers.

In this situation, the Pharisees pose a controversial question about divorce. Instead of being drawn into the details of the controversy, Jesus refers to the original scriptural account in Genesis dealing with the marriage between Adam and Eve.

Marriage is ordained by God

Notice the initial statements by Jesus in Matthew 19:4–5: "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?" Jesus is redirecting our attention back to God's original plan.

It is important to grasp that God brings together the man and the woman. Jesus says, "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). Marriage is not just a human contract between a man and a woman, but a holy covenant entered into between three persons: the man, the woman, and God (Malachi 2:14). So let's be clear. Marriage is not a social construct. Marriage is not a human invention. Marriage is God's idea.

Marriage is not meant to be temporary

In Matthew 19:4–5, Jesus makes the point that in marriage the man leaves his father and mother. The most important relationship for a husband is not his relationship with his parents, siblings, or friends, but his wife. In marriage, a new family, a new unit in society, is being formed. Two people become an indissoluble union of "one flesh."

This word expressed as "hold fast," means to be glued or welded together. Think of it—God glues them together. So marriage is not meant to be a temporary arrangement. We don't get married until we fall in love with someone else. We don't get married until we meet someone we think is more exciting or who makes us happier. In God's

perfect plan, marriage is for life. It represents a serious and important decision which should not be rushed or taken lightly.

However, we live in a throwaway society. If something doesn't work, we can just get another. And as we have permitted ourselves to reduce marriage to a mere legal union, divorce has become common. Many couples prefer to head to the divorce courts rather than working out their problems.

The biblical position on divorce

The original law given to Moses allowed a man to divorce his wife if he "found some indecency in her" (Deuteronomy 24:1). Some interpreted this to mean that sexual immorality was the only legal ground for divorce. Popular rabbis have interpreted this more broadly to include other grounds, such as burning a meal or having displeasing physical features or habits. When a divorce did occur, a divorce certificate was to be granted as a public announcement. Remarriage by the couple was prohibited after an intervening marriage (Deuteronomy 24:1–4).

But Jesus is not drawn into this debate and chooses to answer in a different way. He reminds the religious leaders that God's plan for marriage from the beginning is that the marriage bond be indissoluble. "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:6). Divorce is a tearing apart of what God has glued together. No wonder divorce is such a traumatic and painful experience for everyone involved.

When Jesus replies in this way, the Pharisees try to counter and ask, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce?" (Matthew 19:7). Jesus explains that under the Mosaic law divorce was "allowed" because of the "hardness of heart" (Matthew 19:8). In other words, this original idea of divorce was given as a concession, not a command, and was certainly not God's original plan: "from the beginning it was not so" (v. 8).

This initial reply by Jesus might surprise many people since He seems to take an even stricter position. He clearly states that divorce and remarriage are unlawful and amount to adultery (see Matthew 5:32

and 19:9). But He is making the point that divorce is a breaking of what God has joined. If you divorce and remarry, you are going against God's purpose and pattern. So we must reject the common view that divorce is a good option if you are simply not happy, unfulfilled, or fall in love with someone else.

Two exceptions where divorce is permitted

However, Jesus goes on to reiterate the exception to the rule. The exception is for 'porneia,' the original Greek word. Porneia refers to destructive immoral sexual acts which include adultery, homosexuality, prostitution, incest, and pedophilia. So the "one-flesh" marital bond is violated by sexual unfaithfulness. Sexual immorality strikes at the sacred marriage covenant. It is not only a sin against your husband or wife, but a sin against God.

The story of Hosea in the Old Testament is an example of an adulterous wife being forgiven. This beautiful picture reminds us that God's grace and forgiveness are greater than any sin. But if the offending husband or wife does not repent, or the breach is so flagrant that the spouse cannot move forward, he or she may pursue divorce. (Divorce is permitted but not required.) And the common biblical interpretation holds that in these circumstances, the spouse can not only divorce but also remarry.

In 1 Corinthians 7:10–15, the apostle Paul writes that divorce may also be permitted when a believing spouse has been willfully deserted by an unbelieving spouse and reconciliation is hopeless (perhaps the unbelieving spouse has remarried). In this situation, it is the unbelieving spouse who initiates the separation and divorce, not the believing spouse. So these two biblical exceptions (immorality and abandonment) flow from the violation of the covenant of marriage: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh.

Important notes for prayer and reflection

This is not an exhaustive treatment of the biblical teaching on divorce, and I realize it may be tough teaching to hear. However, it is

essential to remember that all of us have sinned and all stand in need of God's forgiveness and transforming grace.

I also want to make it clear that I am not advocating for a wife to continue to live with a man who is abusing her. Wives who have abusive husbands need to separate for their own safety and the safety of their children. They should obtain biblical counsel, and in a safe context determine whether reconciliation is possible.

What about those who are already divorced and remarried? What are you to do now? Go back to your first spouse? No, divorce is not an unforgivable sin, but you must repent and claim God's forgiveness. Then, live as one forgiven, and honor the marriage covenant you have with your current spouse.

What are you to do if your marriage has problems? Be willing to retrace your steps. That takes humility, an acknowledgment you are off course, and a desire to change. If you have wronged your spouse repent and humbly ask for forgiveness. Don't fixate on how to justify a divorce. Together, refocus on pursuing Christ and seek to rebuild your relationship.

Feeling unloved, unappreciated, unhappy, unfulfilled, misunderstood in your marriage? These feelings do not entitle you to end your marriage. Get on your knees and pray for help, strength, guidance, and wisdom. Open your heart, your home, and your marriage to Jesus Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit of God to renew your love for Christ and your love for your spouse.

QUESTION FIVE

What about sexuality and gender?

If God is love, why are there different views about homosexuality and gender?

A POPULAR MINDSET TODAY is that each person is his or her own authority in interpreting life and in determining the right path for him or herself. So although many people claim to believe in God (and also in the Bible), they make themselves the ultimate authority.

As we deal with important questions about gender and sexuality, we must be clear as to our authority. On what basis do we determine what is good and bad, and what is right and wrong? Are these matters of personal preference? Or must God's standards be followed?

For followers of Jesus, every aspect and dimension of our lives, including our sexuality, must be brought under His lordship and the authority of Holy Scripture. He has a plan for our lives, and we are to trust Him.

I am aware of the pain and struggle of many who grapple with these issues. I pray that God will bring you clarity and peace. I would also re-emphasize that every one of us is made in the image of God and deserves love, dignity, and respect.

What does Jesus say?

As I explained in the previous question on marriage and divorce, Matthew 19:1–12 is an important passage in understanding biblical teaching on marriage, human sexuality, divorce, and gender issues.

The religious leaders, the Pharisees, are jealous of Jesus and do not recognize Him as the long-awaited Messiah. By publicly asking Him questions on difficult subjects, they hope to trap Him into saying something that will alienate the Jewish crowds or anger the ruling Roman authorities. But Jesus is the Master Teacher and uses each of these confrontations to expose the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and offer essential teaching to His followers.

In this passage, the Pharisees pose a controversial question about divorce. Instead of being drawn into the details of the controversy, Jesus refers to the original scriptural account in Genesis dealing with the marriage between Adam and Eve.

God's original plan

In the beginning God created two sexually distinct human beings: male and female. "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Genesis 1:27–28).

God's plan for marriage is one man and one woman—not two men or two women—but a man and a woman. The man "holds fast" not to another man, but to a woman, "and the two shall become one flesh" (Matthew 19:5). Sexual intimacy is a beautiful gift to be enjoyed within the context of this new family, the closest of all human relationships.

Our culture insists that same-sex unions are normal and to be applauded. But the teaching of God's Word is clear. Marriage is not just a private matter between two consenting people who love each other. Marriage is ordained by God as between a man and a woman.

Common questions related to homosexuality

"My homosexuality is part of who I am. It's wrong, even cruel to ask me to change."

Sexual orientation is more complicated than genetic factors. All of us have sinful desires which manifest themselves in all kinds of ways. The fact that someone feels inclined to pursue certain behavior does not mean the conduct is good or right.

Human beings are not robots. We are people who make choices and can exercise self-control. Our personalities, family backgrounds, and environmental factors may make us susceptible to certain temptations, but they do not excuse our conduct. God created us with a capacity to choose. And God holds all of us accountable for our choices.

"My same-sex relationship is my business. My partner and I aren't hurting anyone."

It is true that these are intimate, personal matters. But we cannot pretend that homosexuality is not contrary to God's commands and His divine design. Even some churches, which are called to proclaim God's truth, have compromised God's standards in a vain attempt to be seen as relevant and progressive. Ultimately, those who persist in sin and do not repent and believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ will experience God's judgment. But God is gracious and gives us time to turn to Him.

"Jesus is love. He would never stop two men or two women who love each other from expressing their love and commitment for one another. And if you stand in my way, you don't love me!"

Loving someone does not mean that we always affirm what they do or say. Loving and approving are very different. As followers of Christ, we can and do love those who pursue same sex relationships or queer lifestyles, but we are not required to affirm what they do.

Being an authentic Christian means following Christ's teaching. Speaking of love, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my

commandments" (John 14:15). Loving God and loving others means humbly obeying God and seeking the best for others. Jesus calls His followers to be different, to be counter-cultural, to be light and salt in a dark and corrupt world. When we are following Jesus, we are not to be conformed to what others say and do. Rather, our lives are to be transformed as we love and obey Him.

"Jesus never explicitly condemned homosexuality. He condemned the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the Pharisees and was the least judgmental of people. I believe in Jesus and the New Testament and reject the outdated, judgmental teachings of the Old Testament."

Many people are familiar with various passages in the Old Testament which clearly indicate that same sex relationships are contrary to God's design and result in His wrath and judgment. These passages include the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:1–5, 14–17, 23–29) and the prohibitions given to Israel regarding homosexuality in Leviticus 18 and 20.

However, the biblical condemnation of homosexuality is not confined to the Old Testament. In Romans 1:26–27, the apostle Paul discusses that homosexuality and lesbianism are acts of unbelief and a rejection of God's good design for those He created. Paul explains that when there is a breakdown of a godless society, the distinction in male/female relationships is blurred and confused.

Jesus knew the Mosaic law and came not to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17–18). The silence by Jesus on the specific subject of homosexuality would have been understood by everyone as an acceptance by Jesus of the Mosaic teaching, not a rejection of it.

In Matthew 19, Jesus repeats and confirms there is only one type of sexual union permitted by God. To argue that Jesus would have been tolerant of homosexuality and lesbianism is not consistent with the biblical evidence nor with who Jesus is. Jesus certainly welcomed

sinners, but He never compromised God's holy standards. To the woman who had committed adultery, He said, "Go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11).

The question of gender

Scripture makes it clear that God has made each one of us male or female. And God does not make mistakes. He loves you and made you in His image! You are a unique person. You are a certain size. You have a certain color of eyes and color of hair—all made by a good God who knows you and loves you. Our gender is not something we choose based on our preference, or how we feel, or how other people regard us. Our gender is the sovereign choice of God.

At the heart of transgenderism is the decision that each person is his or her own authority. Truth is determined by me. Happiness and self-fulfillment are the goals. You cannot question my feelings, my reality. This spirit of radical individualism is rooted in our rebellious hearts. In the Garden of Eden, the devil said to Eve, "Did God actually say?" (Genesis 3:1), encouraging her to reinterpret the clear command of God. When there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6, 21:25).

For followers of Jesus, authority is not rooted in our individual desires, prejudices, feelings, opinions, or traditions, but in the inspired Word of God. Your feelings can't always be trusted. But you can always trust God. He is our Creator, the ultimate authority, and we are accountable to Him. "So then each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

Life is hard. But if you are struggling with this issue, don't listen to those who say the reason you find it hard is that you are really a male (not a female) or a female (not a male). God our Creator assigns our gender. He made us male and female. Your gender is not a matter of your personal choice, but a matter of God's creation. Transgenderism denies the fixed nature of gender and so challenges the authority of God.

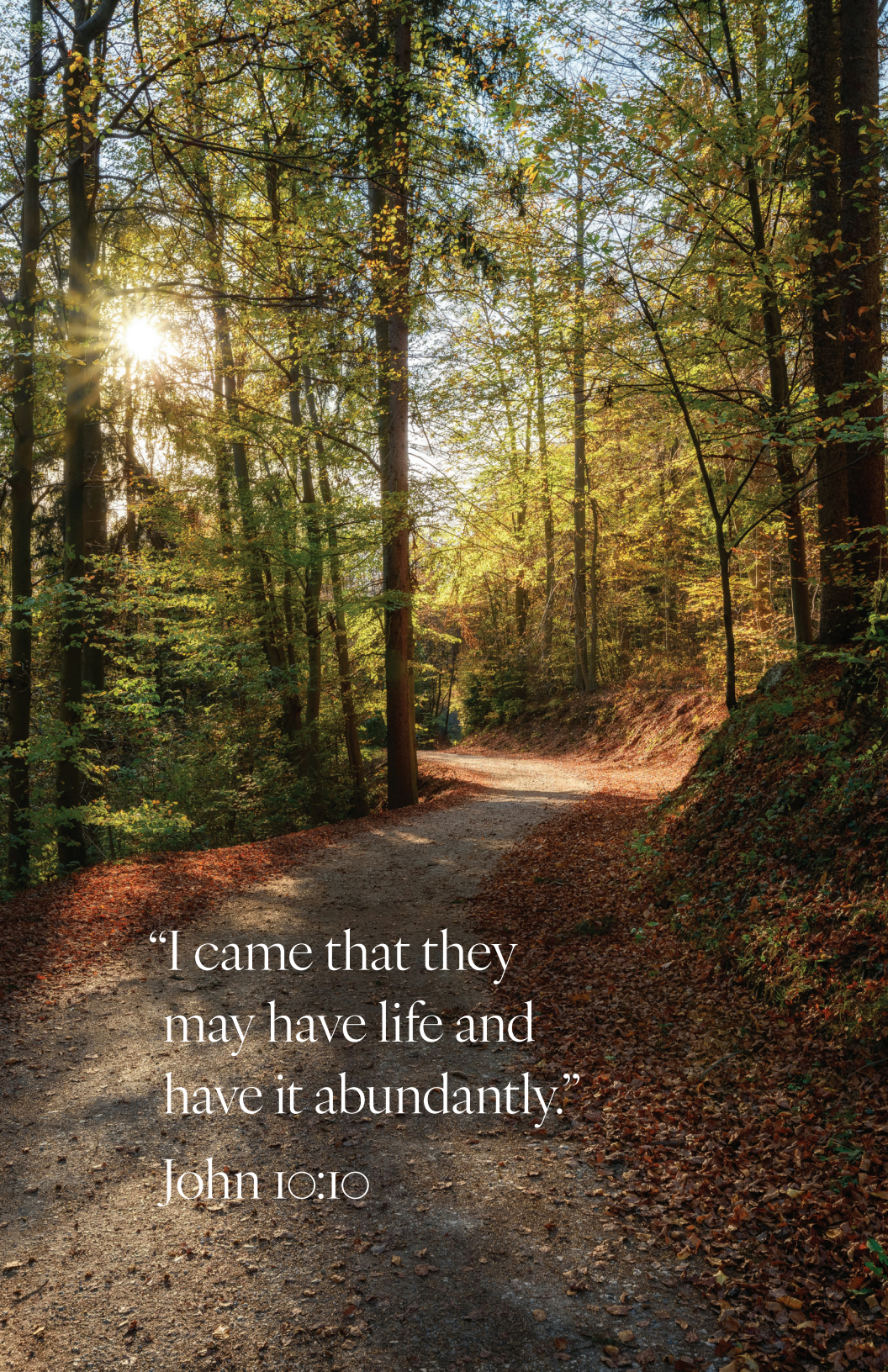
Understanding your identity

In discussing matters of sexuality, gender, and all kinds of struggles, our culture suggests that we identify ourselves or others with these labels. As if these behaviors define who we are. No wonder so many people despair! Don't buy into the lie that your sexuality or your struggle is your identity.

In Jesus Christ there is forgiveness of all sins. Some may struggle with sexual sins. Others may struggle with sins of self-righteousness, covetousness, or pride, all of which are devastatingly condemned by the Lord Jesus.

All of us are sinners before God. Jesus came to forgive us, heal us, save us, and empower us to be the kind of people God intended us to be. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

To go against God inevitably leads to pain, brokenness, shame, and guilt. But fulfillment, joy, and meaning in life are found in following God's design and God's will for your life. Find your greatest joy and fulfillment when you receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and realize who you are in Christ.


“I came that they
may have life and
have it abundantly.”
John 10:10

QUESTION SIX

What will happen in the future?

What does the Bible say about the future? Will there ever be world peace? How will the world end?

LEADERS MAKE GREAT PLANS. Politicians make high-sounding speeches. International peace summits are held, but our world is still full of suffering, violence, injustice, and war. Will there ever be world peace? How will the world end? Is there life after death? What's going to happen?

In the grace of God, these and many other questions are addressed throughout Scripture, particularly in the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. Using the basic outline of Revelation, we can see the major events of God's prophetic calendar, leading up to and including the glorious second coming of Jesus Christ.

God has graciously revealed Himself in Holy Scripture, the Bible, to help us know Him and the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Fears about the future abound, but God does not want you to be afraid. He wants us to have an opportunity to prepare. Ultimately, the message of Revelation is that Jesus Christ is coming back as He promised, and every person must have a personal response.

Outline of Future Events

The Rapture of the Church 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

The Tribulation Revelation 6–18

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ Revelation 19

The Millennial Kingdom Revelation 20:1–10

The Great White Throne Judgment Revelation 20:11–15

Eternity: A New Heaven and a New Earth Revelation 21–22:5

The Rapture *1 Thessalonians 4:13–18*

Scripture teaches that the next event in God's prophetic calendar is the magnificent rapture of the church. The Lord Jesus will instantly collect all His followers (living and dead) into His presence in heaven before the events of the Tribulation.

"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. 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" (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

So not all followers of Jesus will die. That last generation will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and so be forever with the Lord. Imagine going to heaven without dying! The return of Jesus for His followers will occur "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:52). The rapture could take place at any moment!

The Tribulation *Revelation 6–8*

Following the rapture, the Tribulation will be a period of seven years when God's wrath falls on the world in an unprecedented way (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:21). With the people of God now removed, God's judgment is revealed and carried out through a scroll with seven

seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls, each of which announces different categories of disaster and judgment.

Even during the Tribulation, God graciously provides opportunities for the Gospel of Jesus Christ to be proclaimed: 144,000 Jewish witnesses (Revelation 7), two witnesses at the Temple in Jerusalem (Revelation 11), and by angel proclamation (Revelation 14:6–7). As a result, many people will turn from their sin and be saved during the Tribulation, though they will be persecuted and some will be martyred.

During the Tribulation, the Antichrist (an evil world dictator) will come to power. A chaotic world will look to him for answers and direction, and he will amass tremendous power and influence. For a time, it will seem as though the Antichrist has successfully brokered world peace.

But in the last three and a half years of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will openly persecute all those who do not receive the mark of the beast (666). The Antichrist will break a world treaty with Israel and demand to be worshiped. Those who refuse to worship him will be killed. But when the Antichrist and his armies seek to destroy Israel, Jesus Christ will return and destroy the Antichrist and his followers. As a nation, all of Israel will recognize Jesus as the true Messiah.

The second coming of Jesus Christ

Revelation 19

The first coming of Jesus Christ was as a lowly baby born in a manger. God chose to enter time and space in the humblest of circumstances. Despite Jesus' ministry, the crowds thought that the Messiah would be a warrior king sent to overthrow the Romans. Jesus was despised and rejected by His own people, mocked and unjustly condemned to die by crucifixion. When He was nailed to a cross, it seemed that His kingdom was at an end.

But, of course, this was all part of God's plan. Jesus' death on the cross was a larger victory for all time—the perfect sacrifice for our sin. And through the power of His resurrection, our Lord conquered sin and death and provided the way of salvation for all who believe.

The second coming of Jesus Christ will be very different from His first. In the future, He will come in power, majesty, and triumph, accompanied by the "armies of heaven" (Revelation 19:14), which includes all His followers.

It will be the most dramatic and most visible event in human history. "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him." (Revelation 1:7). The unbelieving world last saw Jesus on a cross; now He is seen as the conquering King who will judge all evil. He returns to the earth to set up His kingdom and reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. There will be no mistake as to who He is and the truth of God's Word.

Throughout history and even during the Tribulation, people have been given opportunity after opportunity to repent and to place their trust in Jesus Christ. Now judgment finally comes on those who refuse to place their trust in Christ and to submit to His sovereign power. A God who is good, a God who is just, must also be a God of judgment.

The Antichrist and the false prophet who oppose Israel and the Lord Jesus assemble their armies. But they are decisively defeated at the battle of Armageddon and subsequently thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:11–21). All of the enemies of our Lord Jesus Christ are defeated in a spectacular display of God's power, glory, majesty, and might.

The Millennial Kingdom *Revelation 20:1–10*

The second coming of Jesus Christ and His decisive victory signal the beginning of Christ's reign on earth: the Millennial Kingdom (also sometimes referred to as "the Millennium"). King Jesus will visibly reign for 1,000 years, and the earth will be transformed. All Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26) and will be regathered as a nation (Isaiah 11:12).

Christ will reign as the Messiah King not only over Israel, but the whole world. "And the Lord will be king over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9). "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord,

as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14). And the followers of Jesus Christ will reign with Him (1 Corinthians 6:2–3; 2 Timothy 2:12).

The Millennium will be a time when creation will be restored to what it was prior to the Fall. The earth will flourish (Amos 9:13), and the desert will blossom like a rose (Isaiah 35). Universal peace, joy, holiness, righteousness, and justice will prevail (Isaiah 2:1–4). Evil will be repressed as Christ will rule with "a rod of iron" (Revelation 19:15).

Satan, the devil, will be bound for these 1,000 years, after which he will be released for a period (Revelation 20:2–3, 7–8). But during his thousand years of confinement, Satan does not change his nature. At the conclusion of the Millennium, the dragon (Satan) immediately tries to take over the throne of God and lead people astray, but he is thrown into the lake of fire to be "tormented day and night forever and ever" (Revelation 20:10).

During the Millennium, many people will be born, but not all of them will come to saving faith in Christ. At the end of the Millennium, these unbelievers will join the devil in rebellion against God, demonstrating that even in the millennial reign of Christ, the human condition is unchanged. Despite living in an almost perfect environment where Satan is bound, where there is a knowledge of God, and where there is a revelation of the glory and power of our Lord Jesus Christ, the innate wickedness of the human heart is apparent.

The Great White Throne Judgment

Revelation 20:11–15

After the Millennial Kingdom and the final defeat of Satan, there comes the final irrevocable judgment of God. Every person who has ever lived will be physically resurrected to stand judgment, regardless of the circumstances of their demise.

God's throne is "great" because it is the highest place of authority. "White" emphasizes the holiness, the purity, and righteousness of God's judgment, unlike the judgment and courts of man. "No creature

is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

God knows everything and has kept a complete record. People are judged "according to what they had done" (Revelation 20:12–13). Those whose names are written in the book of life are eternally saved (Revelation 20:12–15, 21:27). When God looks at the record, He sees no sin for followers of Christ because our sin has been blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ. "And the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

"If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15). At the great white throne, everyone is on the same level. The powerful and the famous are all there, as are the masses of ordinary men and women known only in their small circles. Everyone who has lived for self now faces God. This is the final judgment. Hell is real, and so is heaven.

Our eternal destinations *Revelation 21–22:5*

After the final judgment is complete, the apostle John receives a vision of "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1). Isaiah received a similar vision (Isaiah 65:17). Think of it, a fresh and beautiful new creation. What we could never achieve, God will do in the future.

It will be a perfect environment, in contrast to this present world which is dying (Romans 8:21–23). The holy city, the new Jerusalem, the capital of the new earth, will come down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:2). Heaven comes to earth in all its beauty: a bride adorned for her husband. Heaven and earth will merge and be the eternal home for the people of God.

But even in the midst of this magnificent description of the new heaven and earth, the apostle John gives a warning (Revelation 21:8). He reiterates that there are two destinies. "The one who conquers will have this heritage" (Revelation 21:7). But those who do not know Christ personally as Savior and Lord, those whose sins have been laid bare and judged, will be cast into the lake of fire with the devil and

his angels. Heaven is only for those who have "conquered" through salvation in Jesus Christ.

Final warnings *Revelation 22:6–21*

As Revelation ends, the Lord Jesus Himself attests to the accuracy of this prophecy. Jesus repeats a final warning. Not everyone is going to enter the new Jerusalem (Revelation 22:11–13). God, who is eternally holy, will reward everyone according to what they have done. Only those who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ will enter the new Jerusalem. Those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ and been cleansed will be eternally excluded (Revelation 22:14–15).

A serious warning is given to those who will add to or take away from this book (Revelation 22:18–19). No further revelation is to be given. There are to be no private visions or communications coming directly from God to us about these prophecies! The canon of Scripture is closed. All we need to know is found in Holy Scripture. God is the God of eternity, and His Word is "trustworthy and true" (Revelation 22:6). God's grace is on those who know Christ. And He is coming soon.

So ends this fascinating book of Revelation and God's plan for history. No matter who you are, you can receive God's gift of salvation, participate in this glorious future, and be part of this eternal family of God.

Human history on this planet is drawing to a close. Soon all those who love Christ will be caught up to be forever with Him. We who follow Jesus Christ don't worry about a nuclear holocaust or an economic disaster or a famine or any other disaster. Because Jesus is coming soon. Are you ready?

For more information on the book of Revelation and its key themes, consider reading *For the Time is Near: Lessons from Revelation*, available on TheVerdict.org.

QUESTION SEVEN

Are heaven and hell real?

How could a loving God send anyone to hell? What will heaven be like? How do I get there?

THE BIBLE SAYS, "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Judgment? Isn't the whole idea of hell and judgment terribly outdated? Hell is scornfully rejected by the skeptic, joked about by the comedian, dismissed as an outdated notion of a primitive religion by many preachers, and ignored by many. As if by saying we don't believe in hell, it will quietly go away and cease to exist.

Hell is also rejected because it seems to be totally incompatible with a God of love, compassion, and patience. How could a loving God consign anyone to hell? It's unimaginable, morally outrageous, an intolerable concept. Even if we accept that man has offended God because of his sin, the penalty seems unnecessarily harsh.

If there ever was a subject where we attempt to give our own views and ideas, it is on this serious subject of eternal punishment. But your ideas (and mine), the opinions of popular culture, philosophers, theologians, educators, are all really irrelevant. If the eternal God who loves us and who created us has spoken clearly, shouldn't our goal be to study and understand what God has said?

The reality of hell

It may surprise you to learn that Jesus spoke more about hell than anyone else. Of the 12 times hell is spoken of in the New Testament, 11 come from the lips of Christ. He is the chief witness to the reality of eternal punishment, and to deny the reality of hell is to deny the teaching of Jesus.

The lake of fire is prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41), but it will also be the eternal destiny for all those who are unsaved. This is hell, the unquenchable fire, the outer darkness, the eternal punishment, the bottomless pit, the second death, and eternal destruction. Scripture uses various metaphors to convey the horror and finality of eternity outside the kingdom of God, apart from Jesus Christ. Hell is a place of torment, a place of isolation, a place of darkness, a place from which there is no escape.

Make no mistake, hell is not annihilation or oblivion. It is eternal conscious punishment. When Jesus describes the separation of the sheep and the goats, there are those who go into "eternal punishment" and those who go into "eternal life" (Matthew 25:46). We read in Mark 9:43, 48, that the fire is unquenchable, and the worm doesn't die, as its work is never done. Hell is being cast away from the presence of God, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:42). Hell is unending anguish (Jude 7; Revelation 14:9–11).

Ultimately, Jesus wants us to know that nothing is more important than entering the kingdom of God (Mark 9:43–47). This is why He came. The reality of eternal punishment is central to the mission of Jesus, and He wants you to be clear on what is at stake.

On the cross, Jesus bore the wrath and judgment of God for our sin. If there is no hell, no eternal consequences for our sin, there would be no necessity for His death. But if you do not opt to receive salvation through Jesus Christ, God's wrath is still against you, and you will eternally perish. Jesus comes so that we "should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, 36).

Those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation receive eternal life and will go to heaven when they die. Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ will be eternally damned and go to hell. This may not be politically correct, but it is what the Word of God says.

How could a God of love send anyone to hell?

Perhaps you are struggling with the idea of God sending anyone to hell. We must remember that God is not only loving and merciful; He is also holy, just, and righteous. Not all evil is punished in this life. The wicked often flourish. But in the final judgment, God will execute perfect justice.

No one will be in heaven who should be in hell. No one will be in hell who should be in heaven. The judge of all the earth shall certainly do what is right (Genesis 18:25). Peter said, "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34–35). Some judges are far from perfect in their dispensing of justice. Some are biased; others are incompetent, lazy, or vindictive. But God has all the evidence and will always act with perfect justice.

Our problem is that we want to judge God's actions by our own finite and imperfect ideas and standards. We don't want to think that those who experience eternal punishment deserve their eternal destiny. We tend to think that sin is a fairly trivial thing. In reality, sin is an enormous act of rebellion and wickedness against God who is perfectly holy.

Consider that long before anyone is sentenced to hell, God extended His grace, mercy, and patience to each and every person. Have you ever wondered why God has allowed this world to continue? "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He wants to give each one of us every opportunity to be saved. This is the love of God, the mercy of God, the

grace of God. Not only has He provided the way of salvation, He is patient with a rebellious, stubborn world, wanting no one to perish.

As sad as it is, eternal punishment is appropriate for those who choose to continue to rebel against God, to deny Him, to reject His Word, and refuse the offer of Jesus Christ as Savior. In the end, they receive what they deserve, and what they have chosen. C.S. Lewis writes: "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done' and those to whom God says in the end 'thy will be done.'"

The unending joy of heaven

In contrast, heaven is the eternal destination for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior. At the final judgment, when God looks at the record, He sees no sin for followers of Christ because our sin has been blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7; Revelation 20:15, 21:27). Praise God for providing the way of salvation!

Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Revelation 21–22:5 tells us in fascinating detail of a new heaven and new earth where followers of Christ will spend all eternity. What will it be like?

Heaven is the very presence of God (Revelation 21:3). In heaven, God will dwell forever with His people. Think of it! God not only saves us, but He also takes us into His own home, where we will see His face (Revelation 22:4). All those saved by His grace will serve and worship Him for all eternity (Revelation 22:3), glorifying and enjoying God forever.

Heaven is the removal of all evil and suffering (Revelation 21:4). Life as we know it on earth with its heartaches, sorrows, tragedies, violence, and death will be eternally gone. There will be no more night (Revelation 22:5). Blackness, fear, pain, worry, and anxieties are gone forever. There is no need for the sun or moon, "for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb" (Revelation 21:23).

All effects of sin will be gone. Our current world (even after the Fall) is breathtakingly beautiful. Can you imagine the glorious beauty of heaven? The reality will exceed the description (Revelation 21:9–19, 21).

The "dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:52). We will have perfect resurrected bodies, and never again experience illness, weakness, or aging. And we will be united with all of the people of God forever. What a joyful reunion!

In life we often say, "All good things must come to an end." We try to hold onto brilliant memories and tender moments, but all these experiences end. This life is fleeting. Yet through Jesus Christ, we have the opportunity to enjoy a glorious eternal life in heaven.

The way to heaven

God Himself guarantees this certainty of the new heaven and the new earth. "These words are trustworthy and true" (Revelation 21:5–6). This is not fiction. This is not the product of someone's imagination. This is the very Word of God.

But we must be clear. Not everyone will go to heaven. In Matthew 7:13–14, Jesus speaks of two paths: a narrow gate and a wide gate. He emphasizes that only the narrow way leads to life. The easy way leads to destruction. He is talking of these ultimate destinations: eternal life or eternal destruction, heaven or hell. Many who think they are on the right road will be eternally lost (Matthew 7:21–23).

Don't buy into the common view that if you are good and sincere, God would never send you to hell. That is to embrace a delusion and deny the consequences of sin. In the Garden of Eden, Satan tempted Eve to question the truthfulness of God's Word, saying, "You will not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). Today, we hear "Don't worry. Live as you like. It will all turn out alright in the end."

Do you want to go to heaven? Do you want eternal life? God loves you and has offered a way of salvation. Make sure your trust is in Jesus Christ.

"If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Romans 10:9

Conclusion

THE VERDICT IS YOURS. Following Jesus Christ and growing in the Word of God is a lifelong journey. Don't be discouraged if you have doubts and questions as you read the Bible and think about these important matters. Ask God to guide you and help you.

Faith involves believing in what is unseen, but that does not mean that truth does not exist. God has revealed Himself in His Word so that you can seek Him and find Him as He promised.

In fact, God loves you so much that He created a way of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ so that your sins could be forgiven and you could have eternal life in heaven.

Have you trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?

If you are following Christ, are you growing in your faith and living a life that is obedient to God's Word?

I pray you will experience the peace, joy, and purpose that is found only in Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the choice is yours.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." — John 3:16

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." — John 8:12

"Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." — Romans 10:9–10

Do you have questions about Jesus Christ? Would you like to talk to a pastor or have someone pray with you or for you? Contact us at Calvary Church at 704.543.1200 or *calvarychurch.com.*

THE VERDICT

WITH PASTOR JOHN H. MUNRO

"Where the Gospel is preached, the lives of men and women and boys and girls are transformed. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, our Lord Jesus offers us forgiveness of sins, peace with God, supernatural power for living, and a future hope for eternal life." — John H. Munro

The Verdict is a radio and podcast ministry featuring the expository Bible teaching of Pastor John Munro.



Born and raised in Scotland, John graduated from the University of Edinburgh and practiced law in Scotland before God called him to full-time ministry. He and his wife, Gudny, moved to Texas, where he attended Dallas Theological Seminary.

For more than 30 years, John has dedicated his life to pastoral ministry, preaching and teaching the Word of God. He presently serves as Senior Pastor of Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina.

On The Verdict, listeners are challenged to turn to the Bible and render a "verdict" as they consider their personal response to the truth of God's Word. John Munro presents a clear examination of Scripture, offering insight and application for all backgrounds, from those unfamiliar with the Gospel to mature believers following Christ.

Discover the many ways to hear The Verdict, including the daily program and John's weekly Avizandum podcast. Find full details, including how to partner with our ministry at ***TheVerdict.org.***

The Verdict is a media ministry of Calvary Church in Charlotte, North Carolina.
At Calvary, our mission is to be and make authentic followers of Jesus Christ.

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