



Questions & Answers

The following questions were submitted at the weekend for a panel to answer. We could not get through all of them and so promised to post some answers onto the website.

- The answers retain the characteristics of the weekend panel and are therefore conversational.
- We hope that they are well considered although we definitely do not claim that they are exhaustive.
- Some of them are about sensitive or controversial issues and the answers reflect the views of the different panellists. We are as one with each other on most things but as grown up Christians we must acknowledge some differences on some important but ultimately secondary matters.
- We hope that they are helpful and that at the very least will make you think about some of these issues yourselves.

QUESTIONS 1-3 ABOUT A BIT OF THEOLOGY

Q1 If God gave us free will how can he have a plan for us?

- God is totally sovereign – in control – over all things – even our choices.
- We are totally responsible for all our choices – we make real choices.
- God's Sovereignty & Human Responsibility are like 2 tracks of a railway line – they never cross and they never depart from each other. They both go in the same direction.
- We do not have "free will" in an absolute sense – nobody does except God.
- Free will is an illusion. If you remember what Matt said in his first talk, everyone has no freedom. According to Ephesians 2 we follow "the way of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air".
- God's sovereignty works in and through all our choices – yet in such a way that God is not the author of evil and we are responsible for our choices.

Q2 Would a person be forgiven of their sins, in OT times, if someone offered a sacrifice on their behalf?

- I'm going to let Hebrews 10 answer this one, see specifically verse 4. "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming – not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. 4 It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

Q3 In Job, how was it possible for Satan to be in the presence of the Lord?

- Firstly, Because God allowed it. Secondly, we see lots of examples in the OT of sinful people being in the presence of the Lord, see for example: Genesis 4:16 - Cain was in the LORD's presence; 2 Kings 23:27 – Judah and Israel were in God's presence even while sinful until he removed them

QUESTIONS 4-8 ABOUT SHARING YOUR FAITH

Q4 What if you have unintentionally put someone off Christianity by being too enthusiastic? Would you start afresh with them?

- Say sorry – and explain – “sorry how I was before. It's just that this is so important to me, but I think I overstepped the mark.”
- They may allow you to start afresh – if so – take that opportunity and remember to pray for opportunities – but also to pray for gentle wisdom so you don't repeat it again.
- Sometimes no matter how gentle you are, people will hate Jesus – so it's not always possible to share your faith and stay friends with people.
- Been there, done that. In some cases terminal but in others I had a second chance. In the end I am grateful that The Lord uses me at all and that salvation is all of him.

Q5 How do we keep on sharing the gospel in our family when they have heard it many times but still haven't responded? Do we give up and wait for God to open their eyes?

- How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!' Romans 10: 13-15.
- I didn't believe the first time I heard the good news, I was hearing the gospel for about 8 years before I believed. Just keep going, without you telling them who else will?
- Be prayerful and patient. It became a subject I was not allowed to raise with my brother and sister for twenty years (even though I kept trying) but just recently The Lord has opened up some new opportunities. He also sent them other Christians to be a witness for which I am grateful. I remember that I must be willing to play the same role in witnessing to the families of other Christians.

Q6 I have some friends that stopped coming to church a few years ago, what's the best way to approach them and talk to them about faith & Jesus?

- Hopefully you will have been praying for them.
- It slightly depends on the relationship you still have with them now but a fairly direct approach may be helpful. If they're your friend then simply ask “You used to come/ you used to believe, so where are you now?” If you want to be helpful to your friend then you need to know where they are, what they believe and why they stopped coming.
- Be patient and keep working on the friendship.

Q7 How would you explain to a non-Christian how God is a God of grace & love when there is so much suffering in the world?

- I would begin by agreeing that suffering is a terrible thing. Nobody likes it. I would mention that everyone has a “problem” explaining suffering – even atheists and evolutionists. In fact they have much greater difficulty in explaining it. That’s just the way it is – in fact it is “good” because it gets rid of all the weak and diseased and disabled!
- Even though Christians have an “answer” to suffering – there is still a mystery to it. But because we know our Father is loving and wise, we can trust him.
- We do not have a God who is removed, but one who came and lived a life of suffering and suffered and died for a people who rejected him. No one can sensibly look at the life of Jesus and then say that God is not loving or full of Grace.
- Jesus Christ gives the clearest answer to suffering – he hates disease and death because it came through our sin and rebellion. Jesus endured it all on the cross, both to pay the price for our sin and also to prove one day he will take it all away!
- If you are dealing with somebody who is genuinely suffering, or wrestling with pain, why not offer to pray for them, and show them practical love too.

Q8 How would you witness to an evolutionist, especially when they bring up scientific “facts” that you can’t answer? How do you get a debate about creation to the gospel? Would that be more helpful?

- Don’t worry if you can’t answer all the facts. If you don’t know, say, “I don’t know!” But then say, “let me see if I can find out how Christians understand this ‘fact’” (this gives you a chance to continue later).
- Asking questions can often help. For example you could ask about their beliefs. This may help you work out if they are genuinely interested or just looking for an argument. You could also ask some questions of your own e.g. “If evolution is true – and we’re just matter – then why do we matter at all? If there no such thing as right & wrong -so can I steal your car?” There will be plenty of facts that they won’t know about either but your aim is not to make them look foolish.
- Remember you are not trying to score points off them but you are trying to make them think. Be respectful and clear and always keep in mind that you are hoping to commend Christ and not your own debating skills.
- Like all other issues, ultimately we believe in creation because Jesus did. So try to encourage the discussion to move to “who is Jesus?” Everything comes back to Jesus. Jesus is the basis, the author and perfecter of our faith. In the end you believe in Creationism because of Jesus. So when they ask you why then that is a good time to talk about Him.

QUESTIONS 9-11 ABOUT MY WALK WITH CHRIST

Q9 I'm really excited from this weekend, but how do I keep this passion when I go back to my family and friends who are not interested?

- In the long term, The Lord Jesus Christ is the only one who can give us passion for Him, for His people and for the lost. Remember what the disciples said on the road to Emmaus, "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road?" Although this needs to be understood in context, it's a useful principle.
- Fill your mind every day with Bible truth that will remind you of Jesus, his life, his death, his love and his resurrection.
- Geeks go to things like Comic con where they meet other Geeks and get excited about geeky things together. Football fans go to football games with other fans to get excited about football together (unless you support Gloucester City). So your church should be somewhere you can go and get excited about Jesus, the bible, mission etc. with others. Conferences are great but your church is where The Lord wants you to serve.

Q10 I've lost the love and compassion for the lost and the desire for them to be saved that I once had. How do I get it back?

- Love is not some gooey warm feeling inside; love for the lost is not getting that warm sentimental feeling whenever you see someone who isn't a Christian.
- Love is a decision to place the needs of others above your own (as seen on the cross) and love is shown by your actions. In Revelation when Jesus is talking to the churches he tells the church that has lost its first love to "do the things that you did at first" He wants them to decide to show love and then work it out.
- So make that decision to love them again and get stuck in doing something that shows your love for the lost.

Q11 If I can't go out on the mission field what can I do?

- Admittedly there is something different about leaving all your friends and family behind and going to another country to proclaim Jesus. However, your mission field is wherever you are; it is your family, your friends, your work colleagues, and the people you walk past, your neighbours. So do what you can where God has put you.
- On another note, you can pray for missionaries, you can work for a mission agency, you can give money to support mission, you can get involved in radio mission, you can learn another language and start a Christian blog in that language, there is lots of stuff.

QUESTIONS 12 & 13 ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF BACKSLIDING

Q12 "He who began a good work." How can this be applied to people who have fallen away from Christ? How can I be assured as a Christian that I won't fall away?

- The verse comes from the book of Philippians, the same books goes on later to say this"-continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling". As Christians we need to be working hard at being a Christian, you can't just float your way through the Christian life, it is one long battle. The promises that Paul gives is that as long as you don't give up that no one can snatch you from his hand. The warning is part of the way in which Christ keeps us.

- If they are truly saved, they will at some time repent and return to Christ. If they were never truly saved, they may repent and become a Christian or, sadly, they may never repent and return – but this is because they were never a real Christian. WE DON'T KNOW THEIR HEART – so all we can do is love them and urge them to repent and believe the gospel – the way back to Christ is the same for everyone. For ourselves we must heed the warning of scripture and of the person who has fallen. Keep walking close to Jesus every day – keep encouraging one another every day to follow Jesus.
- It is possible for someone to fall away and sin grievously, but then to be restored to repentance. At the same time it is possible for someone to profess faith but turn out to be a fraud. Heb 6:4-12 is significant here. It lists all the things it is possible for someone to experience without becoming a Christian in V4-5, even to the point of sensing the Holy Spirit at work in a church but not being inwardly changed by the Holy Spirit in regeneration. The key issue here is fruit, as expressed in V7-8: a real Christian is demonstrated by the marks of God's grace at work in their life, which is why the letter-writer in V9ff is confident of better things about the Hebrews. The key thing in the Christian life is to show the same diligence to the very end, and to imitate those who have gone before us and at the end of their lives have inherited the promises. We shouldn't spend long hours introspectively doubting ourselves, because we know how bad we are. We should focus our worship on Christ (Heb 12:1) and fix our faith on him – the secret of our perseverance.

Q13 If you have done so much wrong in your life and you say you are a Christian and still doing bad things, does that still make the person a Christian?

- Everyone is sinful and we all continue to sin even after we have been saved. But thanks be to God we have been forgiven it all in Christ. However the bible is clear that we shouldn't be using our forgiveness as a reason to carry on sinning and that we should be working hard to fight against the sin in our lives.
- The problem with persisting in sin is that it robs the true Christian of assurance. It may also reveal that the person is not really Christ's. The answer for that person, as it is for all of us, is to come repentant to the foot of the cross.

QUESTIONS 14 & 15 ABOUT THE BOOK OF ACTS

Q14 Is the early church in the book of Acts a model example of what the church should look like today? If not, why not?

- This is a bit of a yes and no answer: All passages need to be understood in their context. Acts was in some ways unique and foundational, but in other ways it is an example for the church. We need to think through these things carefully as we read the book. We get the clearest help deciding which principles are for us today, if they are also repeated and re-emphasised elsewhere in the Bible, especially the NT letters. E.g. this is why Acts 2v41-47 is something we should be praying and working towards in our churches – but why we don't look for apostolic miracles. This helps us to look for foundational principles which we hope to see in every church even though they are also influenced by culture and history.
- I'll go with no, the disciples weren't perfect and so the early church was obviously also not perfect. There would be good things such as their love for the poor, their desire for the teachings of the apostles and their love of prayer. But there were also bad things, how they didn't think the gospel was for non-Jews and how even with thousands of people in the church they had no obvious desire for fulfilling the Great Commission until God forced them to spread out through persecution.

Q15 Paul seemed to have loads of success quickly. Why? And why is our work so slow often today?

The answers approached this question in several different ways and they have been edited to include a summary of what was said.

- **Some things were different then.** There was instant impact on the Day of Pentecost. The early church began in a time of Holy Spirit Revival, which God had prepared over a long period of time. Christianity was new and the Roman/Greek/Pagan gods were all “old and spent” – so there was a vacuum waiting to be filled.
- **Some things are different today** In the West, there is a season of hardness/apathy/atheism... which we can trace to several “human” reasons (liberal church for 200 years, people “bored” with Christianity, thinking they’ve tried it and its failed etc....).
- **Sometimes we need to look beyond the UK.** Around the world – the Gospel is still working in amazing ways with thousands coming to faith daily. Even in the UK – the Gospel is working. We can identify but must not fear atheism, secularism and false religion... they will perish soon enough.
- **We have to have a proper perspective on Paul’s life.** He was prepared, called and chosen by God for a very specific purpose at a very special time. His life was marked by the struggle and battles of missionary life. Anyone who suggests that it was all ‘water off a ducks back’ for Paul should read 1 Cor.4:9-13; 2 Cor 11:16-12:10; and most of all 2 Cor. 1:8-11. He plumbed the depths of human frustration, setbacks, persecution, and finally a martyr’s death. It was a lifetime of service and in the end he measured success simply by a desire to please His saviour and follow him in sacrifice and service.
- **We should ask ourselves some questions.** One reason why we may be making so little impact is that we are afraid to pray bold prayers, and afraid to take our faith into our public life. We are content to let it be shut up inside our church walls (where a secular world would like it to stay). If we are to see the Christian Church grow in Britain, we must really strive to work for the gospel. Reading the biography of George Whitefield by Arnold Dallimore is instructive in this – a life of gospel passion that encountered struggle and trouble every day of his life, but the Holy Spirit was his strength in weakness.
- **Ultimately our trust is in God’s plan and power.** It is God who saves; when his word goes out he will accomplish what he wants. Our task is to proclaim clearly and faithfully and to boldly and wisely take the opportunities that he gives us.