

DOES GOD EXIST?

*A nonprofit effort to
convince mankind
that God is real
and the Bible
is His Word.*

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FIRST CENTURY ATHENS
AND THE
21ST CENTURY WORLD

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Articles in this Issue:

- First-Century Athens and the
21st Century World 3
- Where Does Hatred Come
From? 8

Guest Articles:

- Why Is Our Existence
Important? 12

Special Features:

- Scientists and God 20
- Cynthia's Corner 21
- Book Reviews:
Happiness Is a Fat Gecko 22
Darwin's Secret Sex Problem 23
- Dandy Designs:
The Not So Common,
Common Pigeon 24
- Intelligent Alien 25
- News and Notes 26

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Correspondence should be addressed to John Clayton
1555 Echo Valley Dr., Niles, MI 49120-8738
e-mail: jncdge@aol.com

Home phone: 269-687-9426 FAX: 269-687-9431

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Phone: 574-514-1400 or by e-mail: marcusen@michiana.org

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FIRST CENTURY ATHENS AND THE 21ST CENTURY WORLD



As I read the history of the first-century church in the book of Acts and see the world today, I am amazed at how similar they are. In Acts 17:16–31 we read of Paul’s confrontation with the world of his day. The affluent people “spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas” (verse 21). That is such an accurate description of the world we live in today. Like the Athenians, the affluent world around us ignores the poverty and pain of their fellow humans. Instead, they spend their time talking about the latest ideas and wanting to hear something new. Verse 22 tells us that the Athenians were incredibly gullible and entertained any weird view of the day. Between the web and the tabloids, we see a gullible readership who just want to hear something new and then argue about it, be it political, religious, social, or medical.

Acts 17:20 tells us that the Athenians were searching for meaning in life and because Paul brought “strange ideas to our ears and we would like to know what they mean,” they were willing to give Paul a hearing. Paul responded by telling them that he observed they were religious, but they were ignorantly worshipping something which they called “the unknown God.” Paul pointed out three main mistakes the Athenians were making which people still make today.

MISTAKE NUMBER 1 WORSHIPPING IN IGNORANCE

The Athenians were treating God as if he were human with human characteristics. In verses 24–25 Paul says, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything.” The stories of God in the culture of Athens portrayed God with human weaknesses — sexual, racial, economic, psychological, and political. Tales of sexual exploits, wars, violence, and jealousy of the gods fill Greek literature. In verses 29 and 30, Paul tells the Athenians that God would no longer tolerate this ignorance.



The Parthenon in Athens Today

The Athenians centered their worship around appeasing their gods. To avoid the jealousy of the gods and stay on their good side, the Athenians had elaborate sacrifices and services. Skilled artisans con-

structed beautiful gold, silver, and stone images to please the gods and goddesses. Today we have many people who center their worship of God around shrines, temples, huge crosses, and elaborate religious services, all dependent upon human skill.

All of this is ignorant worship. We do not worship God because he needs our worship. Jealousy, bad self-images, depression, and ego problems are properties of human beings, but not God. We are called to worship God for our own well being. Worship helps us to build unity, to focus on a power higher than ourselves, to motivate us to service, and to encourage us to focus on life skills and attitudes that sustain us. We need the fellowship and encouragement of fellow Christians, and when we forsake services, we only hurt ourselves. Hebrews 10:25 tells us WE need worship, and James 5:13–20 spells out how our worship benefits us.

MISTAKE NUMBER 2 FAILING TO UNDERSTAND THAT GOD IS THE CREATOR

In verse 24 Paul tells the Athenians that he is presenting “God who made the world and everything in it.” Romans 1:18–32 finds Paul explaining how rejecting God brings immorality, violence, and chaos into the lives of people. Because they did not understand the nature of God and ignorantly placed God in a box that was human in nature and function, the Athenians viewed God as irrelevant to life. In today’s world, most young people who have left faith in God have done so because they have not seen any evidence for God’s existence, and they see faith as irrelevant to their lives. Paul tells the Athenians that everything points to God and his creation of the cosmos. Romans 1:18–32 explains to us that we can know there is a God through the things he has made.



The Areopagus (Mars Hill) in Athens Today

The notion of God as the creator has escaped our world today. Like the Athenians, we have not understood that there was a beginning, that God caused the beginning, and that his imprint is on all we see around us. We have been told that evolution explains all these things, but in reality, evolution does not address the question of creation. Evolution assumes that time has been created. Evolution assumes that space has been created and that matter/energy has been created within space/time. Evolution assumes that forces we are just beginning to understand shaped the matter/energy in space/time so that stable physical matter came into existence and that the properties of that matter/energy caused it to become organized into galaxies, and stars, and solar systems. Evolution assumes that within one of those solar systems a planet was created within the Goldilocks zone where water could exist as a liquid, and carbon and oxygen and heavy metals were produced to allow tangible matter to exist for long periods of time. Evolution assumes that within a limited time these materials came into existence in an environment and with a catalyst that could produce life. Once all those assumptions have been made, evolution attempts to explain how it changed from that first life to us. Evolution tries to explain how once the creation happened, things got to be as they are today. That is not creation.

The Athenians did not understand that they had a unique role in the purpose of the creation. God is not just the creator of space/time and matter/energy, but also he created us. In verses 26–28, Paul told the Athenians that God created them to have a special relationship with him.

MISTAKE NUMBER 3 FAILURE TO UNDERSTAND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

Paul points out to the people of Athens that they were searching for God and not finding him. That was because they did not understand that “in him we live and move and have our being.” Jesus pointed out in Luke 16:15 that God knows our hearts. Matthew 6:8 finds Jesus telling us God knows what we need before we ask. Matthew 10:29–31 points out that even fine details are known to God.

We, like the Athenians, feel that God is “out there somewhere.” We seem to think that God does not know what we do, so we can hide from God. The Bible goes to great lengths to point out that this is a

lack of understanding. David thought God would not know about his sin with Bathsheba. Jonah thought he could run and God could not keep up with him. Like the Athenians, we have detached God



Tourists on the Areopagus

from reality, and that causes us to live two lives—one at church and one everywhere else. Hypocrisy results from ignorance about our relationship with God.

That ignorance dilutes our prayer life making it a ritual instead of a loving partnership.

That weakens us and makes us vulnerable to judgment. It is not just the judgment of humans that is at work here, but also the eternal judgment of God that is described in verses 30–31.

In twenty-first-century America, the “unknown God” may



Acropolis and Parthenon from the Areopagus

be football, or politics, or personalities, or money. The Athenians were with Paul and his message until he mentioned the resurrection of Christ from the dead. At that point, the Bible says, “when they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some sneered, but others said, we want to hear you again on this subject.” In today’s world, many mock any suggestion that there is a spiritual existence or that any claim about Jesus could be valid. In our world, people will mock any view that God is real and that the Bible is his word.

The Athenian world collapsed because of their disbelief. There is no substitute for God and his Spirit or for the Word that was given for all of us. Our world also hangs in the balance, torn by ignorance and lack of direction because of a rejection of the path God has called us to walk.

—John N. Clayton



Modern Athens with ancient ruins



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WHERE DOES HATRED COME FROM?



When I was a small child, my father taught in an all-black college in Talladega, Alabama. He was the only white professor on the faculty, and there was a great deal of controversy about a white man teaching in an all-black college. This was catalyzed by the fact that my father was an atheist, was educated in Connecticut and New York City, and got his doctorate under the guidance of the famous philosopher John Dewey. There were times when people in the community expressed overt hatred toward us. I remember one incident that my mother told about over and over to dramatize our situation. I had a tonsillectomy at the time all of this was going on. My mother told me that the doctor wheeled the gurney into the waiting area, with me on it covered with blood. He pushed the gurney toward my mother and shouted, “Here nigger lover, you clean him up!” That was over 70 years ago, and fortunately, things have improved in Talladega, but the question that always arises with a story like this is where does such hatred come from?

In the musical *South Pacific*, there is a song that speaks to this question. It talks about the fact that a child has “to be taught before it’s too late, before you are six or seven or eight, to hate all the people your relatives hate, you’ve got to be carefully taught.” The fact is that somewhere in the past any hatred, be it racial, ethnic, or political has to have a cause. That cause can have two possible origins. Either it naturally resulted from our biology, or it was programmed into us and has a design. This is very much like our discussion of the existence of the cosmos—either it is a product of chance processes in the natural world, or it is a product of design.

In our discussion of the creation, we have pointed out that our only assumption is reality—that we exist. If we accept the fact that we exist, that there is a reality, then the creation either had a begin-

ning, or it is eternal. All evidence shows the creation of space/time and matter/energy had a beginning. If it had a beginning, then either it was caused, or it was not caused. We have pointed out that to say it is uncaused means something had to come from nothing. For that to



Eagle Nebula (Messier 16)
“Pillars of Creation” region

be true, all conservation laws of science have to be in error. The last consideration in our cosmological argument is the question of what the cause was. Was the cause blind, opportunistic chance, or is there evidence of purpose and design in the creation?

I suggest that we can make the same kind of argument. There is no point in debating whether hate exists. While atheists like Richard Dawkins deny that evil exists, there is no necessary connection between hate and evil. Hate is not the only evil that ex-

ists. Either hate had a beginning, or it is eternal. Inanimate matter/energy cannot love or hate, so obviously hate had a beginning. Is the beginning of hatred something that was caused by the creator, or is it a natural product of the existence of living things? We can narrow this discussion by pointing out that hatred is not a part of the animal world, it is a peculiar attribute of humans. Animals do not hate. Some may want to dispute that saying that the dog next door hates them, but the fact is that animal behavior is always tied to survival. The dog’s survival depends upon having a territory where he feels safe. He perceives you as invading his territory and threatening his survival by removing his safety. When an animal kills another animal, it is not out of hatred. The animal that is killed is either a food source or a threat to the territory of the animal or its offspring. Hate does not motivate instinctive drives, and a vast percentage of animal behavior, if not all of it, is instinctive.

If we can agree that hatred is a peculiar attribute of humans, we can narrow the discussion. I assume you agree that this is a human issue — not an aspect of the animal kingdom at large. The choice then becomes whether hatred in humans is present because God built it into humans, or whether it is a product of humans accepting the belief that their existence is ruled by “survival of the fittest”? More to the point, is there a solution for hatred? Is there some way that the kind of occurrence in Talladega 70 years ago can be stopped and changed?

From the beginning of human existence on Earth, there has always been the option of love or hate. If you view humans solely as a product of mechanical chance processes, then the first humans had a choice as to how to live. They could behave like animals and function on the assumption that only the fit survive, or they could love and care for one another. It is the assumption of “survival of the fittest” that causes conflict and war. Like with animals, territory becomes important, and competition for mates changes from the purpose of procreation to mates being secured to show status and prestige. In today’s world, we have prominent people like Peter Singer, the Ira W. DeCamp Profes-

sor of Bioethics at Princeton University, suggesting that the unfit should be weeded out of our population emptying our prisons and mental institutions. This view of humans tells us that war and conflict are inevitable. Hate has long been a catalyst to participation in everything from racial conflict to world war. Hate is a tool for shaping human culture on every level because it is emotional and utilizes behavior to promote its agenda. I remember my father having a heated debate with a man in Talladega in which the man was so angry



that I hid in fear behind my mother. As he screamed at my father with his fist in the air and his face flushed with rage and anger he said, “Before you know it, the blacks will take over everything.” I am sure that man attended some church on Sunday morning, and he probably opposed any concept of evolution, but his objection to my father educating blacks was an evolutionary argument based on survival of the fittest. He feared invasion of what he perceived as his territory and felt his survival was threatened if blacks became educated. I am confident that many people voted for or against Barack Obama solely because of his color, not realizing that their vote reflected a belief in survival of the fittest.

I have friends who are atheists and trained in anthropology who agree with much of what I have said here but do not believe that Christianity offers any real alternative. Can hate be eliminated or at least reduced by Christians? There is evidence of caring in many of the remains of ancient humans. Anthropologists have found human

specimens who had been cared for even though they were crippled or had problems that would have made them “unfit.” The notion that early humans were barbaric and no different from the animals is not true.

Out of the economy of language in the biblical account, we can draw a few insights into God’s view of humans. The first incident



that we can view as one of hatred involves Cain and his killing of Abel. We all know the story, but notice what the Lord says to Cain after he murdered Abel: “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it” (Genesis 4:6–7). First John

3:12 tells us that Cain chose to let sin master him. The Bible tells us that God has given us the ability to choose between good and evil and between love and hate. Without that choice love cannot exist, especially the *agape* kind of love that humans can uniquely have for one another and for God. Ephesians 3:10–11 and 6:12 spell out this unique capacity for love which gives us purpose in existing, but also provides us with the ability to choose hate, evil, and Satan’s way. The choice that Cain made is available to us all and defines hate as a choice—not an evolutionary imperative.

As the biblical history unfolds, we see people drifting away from the love and peace to which God called us. In Genesis 6 we see the culmination of this process. Verse 4 tells us that the “nephilim” were on the Earth in the time of Genesis 6. The Hebrew word *nephilim* means “fallen ones” (not aliens or giants) and refers to men of violence and hate. Verse 13 tells us that the Earth had become “filled with violence” which was detestable to God. Humans rejected God’s plan and his desire for them to live in love and peace. Instead, they chose war, hate, and conflict even more violent than anything seen in the animal kingdom. For many years, Israel functioned under God’s care and direction. Reading Deuteronomy 28:1–14 one sees God’s desire and plan for Israel. There is no political structure in this plan—just peace and love and good things. There is no struggle for control or territory in God’s plan, but in 1 Samuel 8:6–20 Israel demands that God give them a king—a political ruler. God warns them of what the consequences of that choice will be—all of the evil things that come from human political rulers. Israel wants to be the “fittest.” They want to assert control, and they are willing to

accept the consequences of that choice—war, greed, power, evil, and hatred. The rest is history.

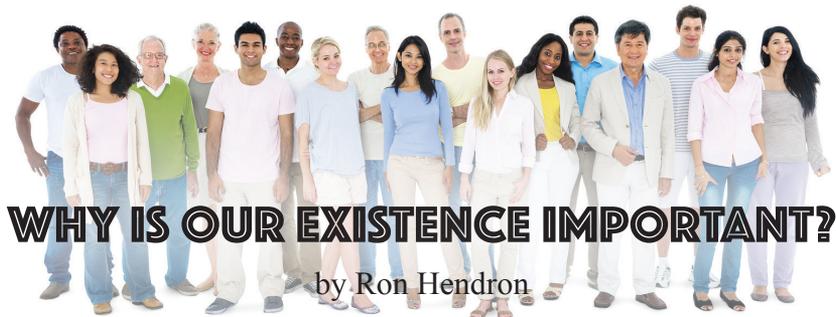
It is only with the coming of Jesus Christ that this changes. Jesus brings what he calls, “A new commandment, that you love one another” (John 13:34). Christ advocates loving your enemy and doing good to him (Matthew 5:38–47). This is radical, but it is what God intended from the beginning. It violates everything that “survival of the fittest” maintains. It reduces or perhaps eliminates hate. How can I hate a man who protects me and feeds me and allows me to live without threat? Jesus divorces himself from politics. The command to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” removes the followers of Jesus from the conflict which the political world inevitably brings. This is a higher calling, and it offers the hope that through Christ the world may someday eliminate hate.

When the church in Galatia started to allow the seeds of hate and division to creep in, Paul warned them saying, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to another gospel which is really no gospel at all”—meaning no good news at all (Galatians 1:6). They were leaving the teachings of Christ and turning back to the nationalistic beliefs that created racial and ethnic hatred among the people of that day. He then brings them face to face with the way out of hate and violence and strife: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

So is there a solution to hatred? It may be a pipe-dream, but I believe the answer is “yes!” Getting people to understand that humans are special and that we are not driven mechanically by “survival of the fittest.” Being human involves a spiritual dimension that surpasses chance, politics, or race. As a disciple of Jesus Christ, I believe that Christianity holds the keys to eternal freedom from hatred, and I would desire that for everyone.

—JNC





WHY IS OUR EXISTENCE IMPORTANT?

by Ron Hendron

Why do we exist? In Genesis, the Bible explains how we were created, but it does not explain why. God was and is fully capable of being happy on his own. He is complete without us. There are many scriptures where God seems to be very troubled by our actions—individually and collectively. So why go through the headache of creating humankind?

The clue is in how God has chosen to reveal himself. There are many names for God, but the one we are most familiar with is *Elohim* (plural) which refers to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is not a hierarchy within the Godhead. We serve one God who exists in three persons who operate in perfect unity. God could reveal himself in many ways, but he chooses a Father-Son revelation. It is fair to say that “family” is God’s choice for revealing himself.

LOVE AND FAMILY

We know from the Scriptures that God is love (1 John 4:16). He does not try to love or work at loving—he IS love. In pulling these realities together, it seems that we exist because God’s love propels him toward family relationships. We see even more evidence of this in Revelation 21:7 which tells us “those who are victorious will inherit all of this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.” God has designed a final place for us to dwell with him—face to face, a father with his children.

He also makes known what will NOT be there. Revelation 21:4 tells us, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” The season of evil is over. We will not even need faith anymore because God will be visible and we will be able to talk to him face-to-face. We will no longer be exposed to or tempted by evil,



have our faith tested, or have a need for hope (Hebrews 11:1). The ultimate plan of God will be complete, and we will be one family.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

God had an excellent plan for his children from the beginning, so what went wrong? The life we are living now does not look anything like the life described in Revelation 21 or Genesis 1–3. Genesis tells us that God created a wonderful place for the first family members, and he commanded them to be fruitful and multiply to grow God’s family. Their home was a beautiful garden called Eden. God shared with them many things he wanted them to do, and one thing he did not want them to do. He told them not to eat from a specific tree called “the knowledge of good and evil.” It was literally the only thing in the entire garden that could kill them.

The family got along well until they met a neighbor. This neighbor seemed friendly enough and acted as if he had their best interest in mind. But his message seemed to contradict their Father’s message. The neighbor had a message that seemed more appealing, so they followed his instructions and ate from the tree that the Father had forbidden. The effect of this decision was immediate, and it changed every aspect of their lives for the worst. As it turned out, their neighbor, the serpent, lied. So the question becomes, “Why would the Father allow the serpent to be there knowing he had the potential to ruin everything?” We know that this serpent is Satan whose very name means

adversary because he is eternally against us. John 8:44 tells us that Satan has no truth and that he is the father of lies.

What we know about Satan is very limited. It is clear that angels could rebel against God and that Satan and his followers did. Ezekiel 28 and Luke 10:18 suggest that Satan was cast away from God’s family. Revelation 12:9 indicates that Satan had angels who were cast away as well. Job 1 and 2 show us the war between Satan and God. Revelation



20:10 tells us that there will be an end to Satan's influence and that he will be eternally cast away from God's family.

So Satan is here for a season. He opposes God and desires to fight and even destroy God's children. When Satan rebelled, why did God not "zap" him out of existence or at least banish him from the Earth? Why give Satan the opportunity to deceive God's very first children? There has to be a reason for his existence, his proximity to Adam and Eve, and his predicted end. God was the source of the only information that Adam and Eve had, so they received one point of view. When Satan entered the picture, he offered an alternate point of view. This was the first time Adam and Eve had "choice," an alternate view opposed to the words of their Father. When the opportunity became available, they made a choice which ruined everything. Why would God allow this to happen? Is it not counterproductive?

WHY WOULD GOD ALLOW IT?

We find part of the answer in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. Love is not self-seeking, it does not control other people's choices. God's love would be tainted or incomplete if we did not have other options. Satan is an alternative choice. God said, "Do not eat from this tree or you will die (Genesis 2: 17). Satan said, "You will not die" (Genesis 3:4). Satan deliberately misleads Adam and Eve with a very creative and crafty presentation. After all, he convinced two people who lived in a total paradise to feel as though they had been short-changed. You would think that Satan would not stand a chance against God who created everything and is the giver of life and all good things.



That is not the case. Satan is very capable of legitimizing the choice by offering a point of view that seems attractive. How does he have so much leverage?

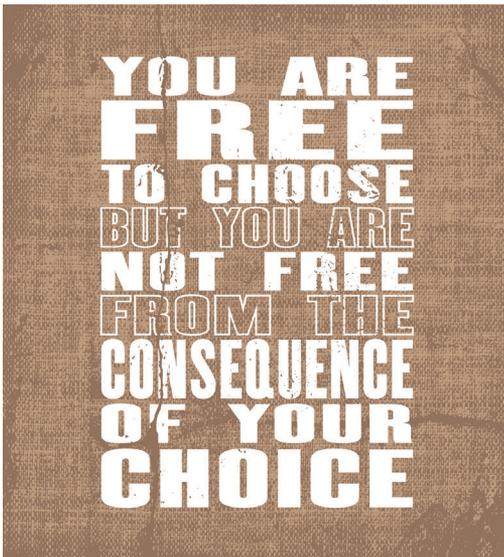
We find a clue to this phenomenon in Matthew 16:23 where Jesus said, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns." Satan can appeal to desires that are already in us by pressing a pleasure button. How does Satan compete with God? By offering pleasure. God told Adam and Eve, "Do not eat from this tree or you will die." Satan told them "Actually you will be like God." He offered them pleasure. After all, who would not want to be like God?

His selling point is that you get to be the ruler of all you want to do. Jesus followed verse 23 by saying in verse 24, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.” The competition for your allegiance is to be your own god and do whatever makes you happy.

The idea of having a loving, caring God to turn to is very appealing. Having to adapt to living within God’s family structure is the disconnect. In today’s world of people who claim to be Christians, we find those who talk about God and pray to God for personal needs; but do not go to church, do not promote the gospel by serving or by financial support, and explain away sin. They excuse themselves by saying, “I am a work in progress.” There are many blessings in this life, but the Christian’s ultimate reward is eternity with our Father, together as family experiencing joy without interruptions.

BEHAVIOR HAS CONSEQUENCES

From Genesis to Revelation, one truth stands out — behavior has consequences. The choices we make dictate our behavior. We know that God’s love propels him towards family. His love leads him to offer choices because controlling people is not love. Although tragic consequences resulted from Adam and Eve’s decision to listen to a serpent rather than respecting their Father’s desires, the Father loved and cared for them anyway. It is evident that God is willing to love his children despite their poor choices. So why does behavior matter so much to him? Books have been written to answer this question, but you can find the answer in John 14:21 where Jesus said, “Who-



soever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Behavior is important within God’s family structure. He makes it clear that he does not accept just anything as love. We cannot love God in a way that is based on making us “happy.” Self-centered relationships are always strained. It is important to remember that we are all

family. Our love towards God means following his commands, but our love for others has a different dynamic. God is Father, and we are brothers and sisters. In our physical families parents are engaged differently than a brother or sister. God has commands regarding how we are to love people and following them is an expression of love toward the Father. First John 3:10 tells us, “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God’s child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.” Just like we cannot love the Father any way we want, we cannot love each other any way we want. God has commands to navigate our earthly family structure as well as navigating our love for him.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS

Two Scriptures represent the Father’s desire for behavior between brothers and sisters. First Corinthians 13:4–5 says, “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered.” Galatians 5:22–23 tells us, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-

control. Against such things there is no law.” The phrase “against such things there is no law” means that there is no scenario to which these behaviors do not apply. If we apply them to our friendships, our family, and to



church relationships, all of those relationships would be healthy. If others returned these behaviors, we would have the beautiful thing called harmony. People who behave poorly in those areas tend to repel others or experience a lot of friction in their relationships.

Churches that behave poorly in these areas tend to repel people from attending and in some cases may keep people out of heaven (Matthew 23:1–3). Healthy church relationships were intended by God to be the trademark of the church family. Jesus proclaimed this in John 13:35 by saying, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Loving one another is no easy task. People who demonstrate healthy relationships still have the challenge of interacting with those

who do not. There are misunderstandings and differences of opinion as to what the church should be doing. Hundreds of dynamics are at play at any given time, so these two scriptures are more focused on interaction within relationships, whereas other scriptures may be more focused on morality. Both are important. Being a loving, caring, kind person who is addicted to a substance is still a problem. Just before “fruit of the Spirit” listed in Galatians, there is a list of acts of a sinful nature, or “acts of the flesh.” Any of those behaviors can cause trouble in family relationships and friendships, and discord that can damage God’s church family. Discord is a clashing or sharp disagreement. Discord causes people to take sides. Discord can divide friendships, families, marriages, and congregations. Discord is a tool Satan uses to divide and conquer. He wants our sinful nature and desires because he knows they will destroy us. Satan makes the alternative point of view to God’s Word seem attractive. James 1:14–15 tells us, “Each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death.”

CONCLUSION

Behavior is important. It can build up or destroy. It has the potential to put to death unhealthy relationships with others and build a positive relationship with God. An unhealthy church family paints a poor picture of God’s goodness to the world. Good behavior brings harmony and peace, and it opens the door for others to desire to be part of God’s family. The word “discord” is also a musical term meaning “lack of harmony in tones.” When our behavior falls in line with the Father’s, it is almost as if WE become beautiful music.



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SCIENTISTS AND GOD

Editor's Note: Atheists attempt to suggest that scientists are intelligent people who have rejected faith and do not believe in God. The fact is that some of the most productive scientists who have ever lived were believers in God. We share some of their thoughts with you in this column.

ARNO PENZIAS

(1933-)

American Physicist

Nobel Prize winner for physics

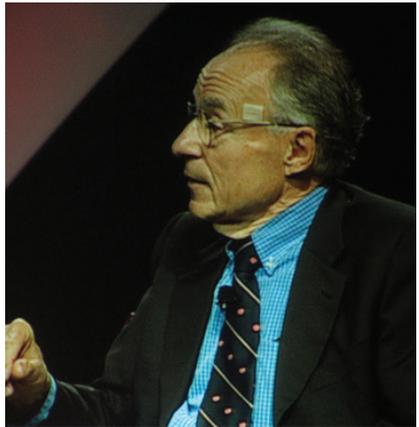
for universal microwave background radiation

which led to the Big Bang Theory.

Vice President for Research AT&T Bell Laboratories
and Member National Academy of Sciences.

“Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, one and very delicately balanced to provide exactly the conditions required to permit life. In the absence of an absurdly-improbable accident. The observations of modern science seem to suggest an underlying, one might say supernatural plan.”

“The best data we have (concerning the Big Bang) are exactly what I would have predicted had I nothing to go on but the five books of Moses, the Psalms, the Bible as a whole . . . If there are a bunch of fruit trees, one can say that whoever created these fruit trees wanted some apples. In other words by looking at the order in the world, we can infer purpose and from purpose we begin to get some knowledge of the Creator, the Planner of all this. This is, then, how do I look at God? I look at God through the works of God's hands and from those works imply intentions. From these intentions, I receive an impression of the Almighty.”



Haberman, Joshua. *The God I Believe In*. New York: The Free Press, a division of Macmillan, Inc., 1994, page 184.

Cynthia's Corner



EVIDENCE FOR GOD IN A SINFUL WORLD

Atheists try to use the evils in this world to argue that God does not exist: “If God is loving, why does he allow evil?” Or, “Because there is so much evil, how can a loving God be in control?” Blaming God for evil is illogical because God is love (1 John 4:16) and the source of all things that are good and loving (James 1:17). Evil is a consequence of rejecting God and following our own sinful desires. God created us to love and to be loved and to have fellowship with him (Genesis 1; 2; 1 John 1:3). To do this, he gave us a free will—the ability to choose to love him and follow him, or not. Love cannot exist unless there is a choice—not any kind of love. Sexual love without choice is called “rape,” and even the world recognizes that rape has nothing to do with love. In Genesis 3 we see that Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and listen to Satan. We also see the consequences of their sin and their choices.

The consequences of rejecting God and his ways are evident today in this world of sin and evil. God gave humans a free will. When we reject God and all that he represents, we follow our own desires, which God says are sinful. (Romans 1:18–32). In so doing, we have to realize too that there is another powerful spiritual force in the world which the Bible calls Satan, the “prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4). The Bible also refers to him as “the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4) and “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

When we choose not to follow God and his teachings, we become vulnerable to the temptations of Satan. Whether we recognize his power and influence or not, he is the source of sin and evil, NOT God! James 1:13–14 tells us that God does not tempt any of us, but each one is tempted “by his own evil desire.” In 2 Thessalonians 2:7–10 we read, “the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; ... the work of Satan which is displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, ... that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.”

The word of God is truth (John 17:17). When we reject God and his word, we are open to Satan’s control. The sin and wickedness in the world are evidence of the rejection of God and his word.

—Cynthia Clayton

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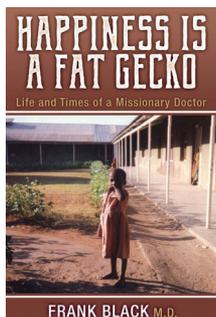
BOOK REVIEWS

The books that are reviewed in the Book Reviews section are not available through us, but can be obtained from a local bookstore or through many online bookstores.

Happiness Is a Fat Gecko

by Frank Black, Dog Ear Publishing, © 2017,

235 pages, \$14.50 (paperback), ISBN-13: 978-1-4575-5951-8



Happiness Is a Fat Gecko will make you realize how blessed you are not to live in a developing nation. I have known Dr. Frank Black for a very long time, and have appreciated his dedication to the Lord. Dr. Black worked in the emergency room of Methodist Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana, for 19 years. He had been looking for ways to use his medical training and his Christian faith where they were most needed. He and his wife Lou Ann moved to Chimala, Tanzania, Africa, for five years.

This book tells the story of their experiences.

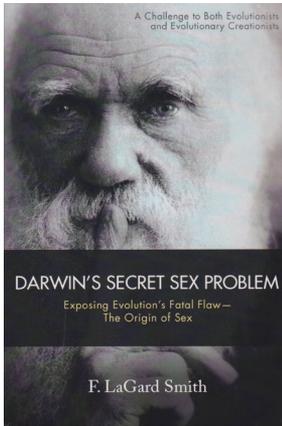
This book does not belittle or denigrate Africa or Tanzania, but it is a strong apologetic for the validity of the Christian system. The relationship of humans to nature and the value of the moral laws that Christ taught are contrasted with witchcraft, sorcery, and native medicine. The fact that a doctor would leave one of the largest hospitals in the United States where he could have money and power, to go to a country with a shortage of even basic medical equipment, and where local people rely on shamans, is living Christ's example.

The title comes from the fact that geckos (small lizards) are welcomed into the houses where Dr. Black worked because they eat mosquitoes, and malaria is a major plague in Tanzania.

The book is well written, easy to read, and hard to put down. The 48 short chapters contain humor, personal stories, and feelings from Dr. Black. We spend way too much time and energy fussing with each other over things that do not have much relevance to most people in the world. People like Frank Black do things that have eternal significance without a lot of recognition. I am sure this book will affect you as it did me. I recommend it highly.

Darwin's Secret Sex Problem

by F. LaGard Smith, Westbow Press, © 2018,
325 pages, \$24.95 (paperback), ISBN-13: 978-1-9736-1706-8



You might think that this book is a sordid review of Charles Darwin's personal life, but all you have to do is to read the subtitle to find out what the book is really about, "Exposing Evolution's Fatal Flaw—The Origin of Sex." In the acknowledgement Smith writes, "The thesis of this book is that an essential feature of Darwinian evolution—the origin of sex—is being overlooked, a feature which fatally undermines today's orthodox scientific paradigm of a natural progression from microbe to man." This is not a fundamentalist rant written by a poorly informed religious person. Smith explains the scientific issues

clearly and with humor. The book contains 355 quotes from the leading evolutionists and scientists of our day. The thoroughness of Smith's case is remarkable and makes this book unique.

The book is divided into four parts. "Millions of Missing Sex Links" explores how much is missing in the hardware that is necessary for sexual reproduction to occur. How can you have symbiotic relationships if participants evolve independently? The cooperative nature of a penis and a vagina by a chance process is explored and coevolution is shown to be unworkable and answers from evolutionists are inadequate.

"The Gap Evolution Couldn't Possibly Jump" deals with problems of mitosis and meiosis, and debunks the classic explanation in modern evolutionary biology books. Part three is titled "Evolutionary Sex in the Bigger Picture" and deals with the inadequacy of natural selection to explain the huge transitions involved in explaining changes from asexual to sexual reproduction.

The final part "The Futility of Commingling Evolution and Creation" attacks theistic evolution which Smith calls "evolutionary creationism." Not taking the Genesis account as historically correct is denying the very inspiration of Scripture according to Smith.

We recommend this book to the educated reader who understands the science involved, and knows something of the religious objections to evolution. The book is reader friendly. There is a glossary of terms, and each chapter has a summary and an open-ended question to be considered. Smith writes with humor and understands the Bible and the scientific issues very well. You will learn from this book, no matter what your belief system is.

DANDY DESIGNS

The Not So Common, Common Pigeon



You may think that pigeons are more of a nuisance than anything else. Many of us have had to scrub pigeon droppings off of statues or home decorations. The sheer number of pigeons that we see in our cities can make us take these birds for granted. *Discover* magazine for August 2018 published a dossier of

the unique features of the common pigeon that show it is incredibly well-designed to survive in almost any environment on Earth. Here are some interesting characteristics:

- Pigeons are one of only three kinds of birds that have an enlarged crop which is an extension of the esophagus. They use this crop to store food which they eventually give to their young.
- Most birds drink by taking in water and then putting their heads back to allow the water to run into their stomach. Pigeons have a unique beak that acts like a straw enabling them to suck up the water.
- Wing muscle makes up about 60% of a pigeon's body weight so they can cover 500 miles a day and reach speeds of 50 mph.
- Experiments have shown that pigeons can navigate by sound, magnetic fields, landmarks, the Sun, and even smell. Like the Arctic tern, the common pigeon seems to possess multiple navigational tools.
- Pigeons have a concept of self and can recognize themselves in a reflection. There are only six other animals that can do that.
- Pigeons can recognize letters of the alphabet better than babies and toddlers.
- Pigeons have a “fright molt” ability to shed feathers when attacked.

Humans have used pigeons for food, for carrying messages, and for psychological testing. In fact, the famous psychologist B. F. Skinner taught pigeons how to play Ping-Pong. Our most abundant birds like pigeons and crows were designed to do remarkable things. God frequently advises us to learn from his creation—including all life forms. We can learn from the common pigeon which is not so ordinary after all.

INTELLIGENT ALIEN



Science fiction writers and UFO proponents like to propose strange looking aliens that can do incredible feats. The common octopus is a beautifully designed and incredibly intelligent animal that could compare to any alien of science fiction.

The octopus has no bones in its body, in fact, the only hard part of an octopus is its beak. That means that the octopus can take any shape and fit through almost any opening. One famous example is an octopus that escaped from an aquarium in New Zealand. That animal picked apart the lid on its aquarium, crawled out, went across the room and down through a drain hole that led to the sea and has never been seen again.

Octopus arms are muscular, boneless, and lined with suckers that are covered with chemoreceptors similar to our own taste buds. An octopus can taste everything it touches. They live in oceans around the world from equatorial waters to Antarctica and the Gulf of Alaska and from deep-water trenches to shallow reefs.

The arms are also filled with neurons, so the brain cells of an octopus are in its arms and not its dome. The octopus has sacs of pigments which are controlled by the muscles. It can release this “ink” as a defense mechanism. Its arms also have cells that reflect and scatter light. That means an octopus can control what it looks like. It can resemble a sea snake, a fish, anemones, jellyfish, sand or seaweed. It is a master of disguise. In addition to the right color and form some octopus species copy the movements of whatever animal they imitate. The camouflage does not seem to be accidental but is controlled by the octopus itself.

For a soft-bodied animal to survive in the ocean, some unique characteristics must be designed into its DNA. We think the number of features the octopus has is astounding. To have one unique characteristic might be possible — produced by a mutation and supported by natural selection. To have all of the abilities of an octopus would not happen by one mutation. Fossil evidence indicates that octopuses have been around throughout the history of the oceans. They even predate the dinosaurs.

Octopuses resemble an intelligent alien, and they certainly make E.T. look like nothing special. They give evidence of the Designer of life. Source: *Discover* magazine, July/August 2018, page 56.

News and Notes

STAY UP-TO-DATE ON NEWS AND NOTES. The stories in News and Notes are condensed from articles previously published on our website DOES GOD EXIST? TODAY. You can use the QR codes with each of these articles to see the original posts for more details. There are also many other interesting and informative articles on that website each day. We encourage you to follow us daily on <https://doesgodexist.today>. On that website you can also subscribe to our free weekly e-mail update. We call it “The Best of the Week from DOES GOD EXIST?” It contains links to the most popular of our posts on DOES GOD EXIST? TODAY and our Facebook page (facebook.com/evidence4god).

DNA BARCODING AND EVOLUTION. The journal *Human Evolution* published an article about new research on DNA barcoding. There are two different types of DNA. The more familiar is nuclear DNA which is the genetic blueprint for every single individual passed down from parent to offspring. The second type of DNA is found in the mitochondria of cells. The mitochondria generate energy for the cell, and mitochondrial DNA contains 37 kinds of genes. One of those is the COI gene which is used to create DNA barcoding. You could compare these DNA barcodes with the barcodes on products which we purchase from a store.

Researchers at the Biodiversity Institute of Ontario have analyzed the COI of 100,000 species by examining millions of DNA barcodes. They conclude that most animals appeared simultaneously. This is another blow to the belief of those who say gradualism is how the diversity of life-forms came into existence on the Earth. The DNA barcoding research supports the view that catastrophic events gave rise to sweeping changes on Earth which led to the emergence of new species including humans. Source: *Tech Times* May 30, 2018, by Nicole Arce from the journal *Human Evolution*.



OLDEST LIVING PERSON. *The Week* (June 1, 2018, page 10), reported that the oldest living person was Koku Istambulova. According to her passport, she is 129 years old. She is a Muslim woman living by strict Islamic codes in Chechnya.

Istambulova does not view long life as a blessing. She says “I have not had a single happy day in my life. Long life is not at all God’s gift for me, but a punishment.” Istambulova saw Nazi tanks, Stalin’s deportation, and the death of all of her children. Her faith is one of strict rules and regulations with very legalistic guides for life. As a Muslim woman, the role she was forced into is very restrictive.

So the oldest living person says she has had a life of misery. It is important to note that the things that made Istambulova’s life miserable were the violent acts of humans and the legalism of man-made religion. Those factors contributed to her misery instead of addressing it and solving it. In contrast to Istambulova’s situation, Christ came to eliminate the things that bring misery in life. It is sad that Istambulova has never known the peace, love, family, and joy of being free from the legalistic human rules based on race or gender.



VOLCÁN DE FUEGO. It is Spanish for Volcano of Fire, a volcanic mountain in Guatemala. It has been active on-and-off for years. On Sunday, June 3, 2018, it erupted with fury. Volcán de Fuego is famous for spewing out smoke daily and being continuously active at a low level. This time it erupted violently resulting in many deaths. Molten lava, flying rocks, hot gasses including sulfur dioxide threatened homes and lives in the area. At the same time on the big island of Hawaii, Mount Kilauea was erupting and creating massive destruction. The question is, “Why do we have volcanos?” Perhaps we should ask, “Why do we need volcanos?”



The answer to the first question has to do with the composition and structure of Earth. The crust of the Earth, along with the upper mantle below it, is divided into sections called tectonic plates. Volcanos (and earthquakes) often occur near the boundaries of those plates. The movement and repositioning of those plates created the continents we have today. Beneath Earth’s crust, there is hot and partially molten material in an area known as the mantle. Pressure and the decomposition of radioactive material within the core of the Earth cause the elevated temperature. The fact that the minerals are in a molten state because of the extreme heat allows the movement of the tectonic plates on the surface. A volcano is a rupture in Earth’s crust that allows the escape of hot lava and gas from a magma chamber below the surface.

The answer to the second question of why we need volcanos is that they are part of Earth’s recycling system. Erosion of Earth’s

surface leaches away nutrients from the soil. Volcano eruptions bring to the surface essential nutrients to nourish the soil allowing plants to grow and making farming more productive. They also bring to the surface valuable minerals that we need for modern, advanced civilization. Volcanos have also created many islands, such as the Aleutian Islands and the islands of Hawaii. The movement of tectonic plates and the eruption of volcanos have occurred throughout Earth's history. Without the movement of the tectonic plates with the resulting earthquakes and volcanos, Earth's crust would be flat and covered with water. We would not be here.

Volcanos play a vital role in giving us this vibrant, life-supporting planet. They are another evidence of God's creative power.

SUPREME COURT DECISIONS. In June 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down some decisions which were important to our First Amendment freedoms of speech and religion.

One of the cases involved a Christian cake artist in Colorado by the name of Jack Phillips. Phillips designs artistic cakes for special occasions. He will design cakes for anyone, however, he does not use his artistic talents to decorate cakes for events that go against his Christian convictions. That would include cakes to celebrate a divorce or Halloween or — and this is the sticky part — a same-sex wedding. When he chose to practice his faith, he was severely punished by the Colorado Civil Rights Commission for refusing to create a cake for a same-sex wedding. He had no problem making cakes for the men who were getting married, but he could not be involved in an event that violated his strongly-held faith.

The Supreme Court agreed that he had been wrongly treated by the state of Colorado. This is a victory for Christians who want to live out their faith, but it is not a clear and final victory because we do not know how the court would have ruled if the Colorado Civil Rights Commission had not been so over-the-top in their judgment against Jack Phillips.

In another decision the high court struck down a California law that required people who operate pro-life crisis pregnancy centers to tell their clients where they can get a state-funded abortion. Of course, the law did not require abortion clinics to advise patients on how to get help for preserving their child's life. The court invalidated a law that was a clear violation of freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

FREEDOM OF SPEECH ON CAMPUS. College campus free speech continues to be threatened. Georgetown University is



the nation's oldest Catholic and Jesuit university. In the fall of 2017, a pro-family student organization named Love Saxa was attacked by LGBT students for promoting pro-family values in line with the teachings of the Catholic church. The university investigated the challenges to Love Saxa and found them groundless, but took the student money intended for Love Saxa and gave it to LGBT organizations on campus.

Members of a student group called Young Americans for Liberty (YAL) were arrested for passing out copies of the United States Constitution to students on the sidewalk at Kellogg Community College in Michigan. This seems hard to believe since the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of worship, and freedom of assembly. Only after the YAL won a legal suit did the college administration allow the freedoms that the Constitution guarantees.

Administrations of colleges and universities have been restricting freedom of speech on campus, but mostly when it relates to religious or conservative views. Tomorrow's leaders are being trained to accept only the views of their liberal colleges. We object to the loss of liberty in other parts of the world, but we have our own battles taking place on American soil. Freedom of speech on campus is only one area of concern.



LEGALIZING SIN INDUSTRIES. We now have casinos in virtually every state in the United States and online gambling will soon be approved. The push for state-sanctioned prostitution is gaining momentum. Legalized marijuana is now a major industry. The trend is certainly toward legalizing sin industries.

Here in Michigan, local governments are being swamped with applications for permits to open marijuana shops and dispensaries. From a biblical and logical viewpoint, we seem to be on a collision course with total collapse. Students of history tell us that the fall of Rome did not come from without but from within.

The usual justification for legalizing sin industries is that the government can control (and tax) the industry when it has a legally sanctioned framework. Following that argument, prohibition was a failure because those promoting alcohol just went underground and the use of alcohol continued. The comparison is made to marijuana by those promoting the legalization of marijuana as a recreational drug. As is our usual approach to any issue, we ask the question, "What is the evidence?"

1. Does legalization result in control and produce fewer problems?
2. Already we see the failure of the recreational marijuana craze in Los Angeles. Marijuana at the government-approved stores is

selling for \$25.00 per gram, and on the street, the same thing can be purchased for \$5.00. On the street, you are not paying state excise tax.

3. The problems of lung damage continue to exist. Legalizing marijuana does not eliminate the health hazards.

4. Legalization of marijuana increases usage which in turn produces sharp increases in cases of car accidents, abuse of other people, the neglect of children, and crime. We also see cases where children ingest marijuana that is left unsecured around the house.

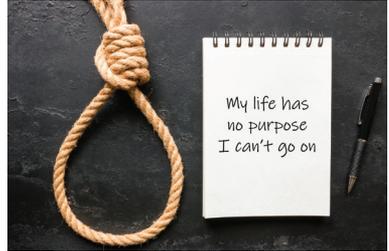
5. The use of any drug puts the person at risk of being led to another more effective drug. Gateway cases with marijuana are increasing, and the cost is already creating a burden. States adjacent to states where marijuana is legal have been threatening lawsuits because of the increased burden produced by people carrying drugs across state lines. This also creates problems for families and businesses where recreational drugs have created financial hardship and psychological problems.

Legalizing sin industries has never worked, and for Christians it is especially important to “avoid all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).



SUICIDE RATE INCREASE. When a celebrity commits suicide, it makes front-page news and dominates the tabloids for months. What many of us do not realize is that 44,965 Americans killed themselves in 2016 and that from 2010 to 2016 there has been a 70% increase in suicide among girls ages ten to nineteen. The nation as a whole has seen a 28% suicide rate increase from 1999 to 2016.

The experts are trying to explain all of this. Certainly, there is more than one factor involved, but we suggest that a major factor is our country’s strong movement away from faith in God to a rejection of religion as a whole. Jesus Christ has given us a purpose in life. The unique teaching of Christ is that everyone, no matter what his situation or appearance or abilities, has a purpose in living. In addition to that, Christianity provides a way to deal with the failures in life. No one needs to live with a load of guilt. We can be forgiven of our sins and overcome our guilt, and we can turn the mistakes of the past into a ministry to help others walking the same path that we walked.



What can you expect if you are taught that you are an accident, that you have no purpose, and that life is merely a chance-driven battle for survival of the fittest?



It is not hard to see the attractiveness of ending your life when you have no purpose, and you face struggles that seem impossible to overcome. How could we not have a suicide rate increase? Source: *Time* magazine, June 18, 2018, page 10.

ARE YOU JESUS? This is a true story relayed to me by a friend of the person involved. I heard it many years ago, and recently one of the persons involved met me and reminded me of what happened. It has a message for all of us as we consider if anyone would ever ask us, “Are you Jesus?”

Some salesmen were at a regional sales convention in Chicago. They were rushing through security with tickets, briefcases, and the usual airport hassle. One salesman inadvertently kicked over a table which held a display of apples as he hurried to get to his flight. Apples flew everywhere. The guilty salesman rushed on without looking back. The other salesmen stopped, looked at each other and then followed his lead. But one salesman stopped and called his wife to tell her he would be taking a later flight.

He returned to the area of the display and realized that a mentally challenged, blind person was operating it. She was crying softly with tears of frustration running down her cheeks. As she groped for her spilled produce, the crowd swirled around her, and no one stopped to help. The salesman knelt on the floor with her and gathered up the apples. He put them back on the table and helped organize her display.

The salesman noticed that many of the apples were battered and bruised. He set those aside in another basket. When he finished, he pulled out his wallet and said to the girl, “Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did. Are you OK?” She nodded through her tears. “I hope we didn’t spoil your day too badly” he continued. As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, “Mister, . . .” He paused and turned back to look at her and responded, “Yes?” “Are you Jesus?” she said.

I question whether that could happen in today’s world, but the question remains whether anyone could ever mistake us for Jesus? The person who gave this account to me pointed out that the goal of our lives should be that we would be so much like Jesus that an innocent, mentally-challenged blind girl could not tell the difference. If we claim to know Jesus, then we should live, walk, and act as he would. Knowing him is more than simply quoting scripture and going to church. It is actually living the Word as life unfolds day by day. Are you Jesus to the people you meet?



Visit: www.doesgodexist.today

This journal is a part of a program of service titled Does God Exist? The purpose of the program is to provide thinking, seeking people with scientific evidence that God does exist and that the Bible is his Word. It is our conviction that all men can logically and rationally believe in God. In addition to this bi-monthly journal, the Does God Exist? program offers DVDs, CDs, courses, books, and other materials. These materials are offered on a loan basis or at our cost. We also are more than willing to correspond with you and answer any specific question(s) you might have. If you would like further information on borrowing or purchasing these materials, we would be glad to send it to you. Check the boxes below to describe what you would like and mail it to us. We will get it right out to you.

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