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Can You Answer This?

Questions Youth Are Asking Today



by C. Mervyn Maxwell

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Question. I don't dig this bit about loving God. I believe there's a God and all that, but how can you love someone you've never seen? I can't get myself to love a "being" in any case.

Answer. Love is a complex thing and comes in different degrees and variations.

We feel a different sort of "love" for a pet dog than we feel for our mothers, or again for a sweetheart when we first fall in love with her than for a wife after we have lived with her for many years.

Teen-agers, experiencing for the first time the particular kind of love sweethearts feel for each other, often assume that they are expected to love God with this same type of love. This is not so. The Bible recognizes the different kinds of love when it says we are to "love" everyone, both our "neighbors" and our "enemies," but also says we are to "love" *only one* spouse. The Bible does not expect us to love God in the way that we love our girl friends but more nearly in the way we feel about our parents in our better moments.

Don't worry about God's being a "being." People are human *beings*, and you don't have any trouble loving some of them!

Question. If God made everything as perfect as Professor Clark insists He did in his articles in the "Signs," where did disease germs, poisonous plants, and birth defects come from? Who made them?

Answer. They came from several sources. I'll suggest three.

1. *Mutation.* The carrot and the hemlock are both members of the same plant family, even though the one is a food and the other a poison. The startling difference between them is a result of submicroscopic differences in their genes and chromosomes. Somewhere since creation a mutation took place.

2. *An enemy.* The Bible points its finger at an evil unseen intelligent being which it calls the devil and Satan as the instigator of many of our woes. See Revelation 12:12; 2:10. Jesus presented Himself as sowing "good seed" in the world and Satan as an enemy sowing "weeds." Matthew 13:24-30.

3. *Changed environment.* Mutations and the devil produced changes in nature. Once these changes took place others followed, for it is a commonplace that when the balance of nature is upset, undesirable

changes almost always follow. For example, in Europe rabbits are a vital part of the economy, but introduced into the entirely different environment of Australia they became serious pests. In a national forest deer are a delight to the eyes, but when one forest administration decided to kill the deer's natural enemies, the mountain lions, the result was such a proliferation of deer that they overgrazed the area and became a nuisance. The common germ *Bacillus coli* is harmless in the intestinal tract, but gives considerable trouble when it migrates into a different part of the body.

Question. Preachers tell us we're supposed to love God because He is like a father to us. I don't know how to love my father. Once when I was a kid at home, my father made me walk backward all around the house with a shotgun aimed at my head. If God is like that, I don't know how I can love Him. Mother was good to me, but Dad was a devil.

Answer. The Bible encourages us to think of God as our heavenly Father because ordinarily a father shows a helpful and affectionate interest in his children.

God is not actually *just like* any human father, of course. All men are more or less sinful and more or less limited in their finances, intelligence, and so on. God is completely good, and His resources are limitless. God is different from anybody's dad; He is a much better father than that.

But since God is neither male nor female, you might try visualizing Him as your heavenly Mother. The Bible says He is much better, even, than human mothers: "Can a woman forget her sucking child," it asks, "that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?" Yes, it replies, rare as such a thing would be, "even these may forget." "Yet," concludes God, "I will not forget you." Isaiah 49:15, RSV.

Question. My husband recently left me, and what he sends me for our small children is hardly sufficient. I try to put a few dollars in the offering, but when there isn't enough for food for the children, does God expect me to pay a full tithe on what I get from my husband?

Answer. When I was a young pastor, it was hard for me to study what the Bible says about tithing with people in financial difficulties; but then I began to notice more clearly just what the Bible does say on

the subject. It tells us that God Himself says, "Bring ye *all* the tithes" into the church treasury, and "I will . . . pour you out a blessing" so great and wonderful "that there shall not be room enough to receive it." See Malachi 3:8-11. Then I began to see that it is poor people even more than rich who ought to pay tithe, because it is they who need to have blessings poured out on them more than there shall be room enough to receive.

I congratulate you on what you have been doing thus far, but on the authority of God's Word I strongly recommend—for your own sake and for the sake of your children—that you cast yourself on the promises of God and pay a full tithe.

It will be exciting to watch the blessings as they come.

Question. I notice that the "Signs" lists protest marches along with rape and homicide as "signs of the times," making it appear criminal or immoral or something. Our principal would never have approved the installation of a snack bar in our student union if we hadn't had a sit-in on his front lawn for a week.

Answer. As a teacher myself I think it is fair to say that most teachers I know are only too pleased to have students show sufficient school spirit to present concrete proposals for the improvement of their school and sound reasons to support their suggestions. They are especially pleased if a student can also present practical suggestions as to how their ideas can be put into effect.

Teachers try to train young people to think, from which it follows that they are not likely to be terribly impressed by students who insist on having their own way but do not present clearly developed, logical reasons to support their positions.

Next time you want some improvement in your school, I suggest you begin where the Bible says to begin: "Go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you." Matthew 18:15, 16, RSV.

Unquestionably there is a wall of professionalism, age, and authority that separates students from teachers. Don't let this wall fill you with fear. Surprising as it may seem to you, many teachers are almost unaware that this wall exists and cannot understand why students do not come to see them.

Go and see the officer in charge of what you want changed. On your first visit, don't "demand" anything; just "suggest" and "inquire."

In a casual way discover the arguments which the faculty may raise against your proposition, then ask the officer if he would mind leaving the issue open for a while until you can come back and see him again. In the meantime *marshal all evidence* you can muster to meet the objections he raised on your first visit, and then go back to him again, taking one or two other students with you if you think it will help. In a calm, winsome way let him know that you are very much in earnest about your proposition and that you have excellent reasoning to support your case. If he still refuses, ask *him* to suggest who else there is to whom

you might present your case. After reviewing your preparation and improving it, go and see this other officer.

In this way you will learn how democratic procedure works, and you will also develop arguments that are very likely to be irresistible.

To compel a principal to give in to you by means of popular protest can be a rather petty thing to do. It can indicate that you have lost hope, not only in democratic procedure, but also in your own ability to think and to persuade. It can also indicate that a student isn't big enough to allow another person—in this case his principal—to follow the conclusions of *his* way of thinking.

In a college where I used to teach, a boy who was running for president of the student body had several planks in his platform that consisted of things he was going to get for the students by forcing the faculty administrative officers to concede to him. Just before he announced his platform, however, his advisor suggested that he go and see each of the administrative officers privately. He did so—and was amazed to discover that without exception they welcomed his suggestions and began to work out with him how his ideas might be put into effect.

Question. I have tried repeatedly to quit smoking. I have even prayed about it a lot, asking God to help me; but it doesn't do any good. Why doesn't prayer work for me?

Answer. God has not promised to overcome our bad habits for us, but to help us to overcome them. He intends to make us, not spiritual weaklings but spiritual giants.

The key to your situation—one which basically all Christians experience—is in 1 Timothy 6:12: "Fight the good fight of faith."

It is not sufficient simply to have faith; we must be prepared to fight the fight of faith, to believe our beliefs even when for the moment all the evidence seems to be running the other way.

It is no simple thing to believe that Christ can give you the victory when you are tortured with temptation and longing to give in.

Since faith comes from reading the Word of God (Romans 10:17), it will be of great help to you to have ready in your mind a number of pointed Bible promises such as, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," or "Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory." Philippians 4:13; 1 Corinthians 15:57.

When you feel tempted, repeat these verses over and over, expressing with them the prayer, "Lord, I believe it, I believe it." As you cling to specific promises like these, insisting in your own mind on believing even when you feel like doubting, you will know what it means to fight the good fight of faith.

It will also help if you can participate in a "Five-Day Plan to Stop Smoking." Under separate cover I am sending you information about the next Five-Day Plan to be held in your area. I will be glad to do the same for any other reader who requests it.