

## Paul's Favorite Question - Part 3

Barry O'Dell

Paul's favorite question - "*Do you not know?*" - is found fifteen times, but in only three of his letters. Of the fifteen times it appears, he asked the Corinthians eleven of those times. Being questioned is not always a bad thing. If we are questioned about our faith, we are caused to be more thorough in our study. Being questioned can help us uncover blind spots in our own thinking, too. Those are good things! If we are holding to the truth, there should be no fear of being questioned. The truth does not fear interrogation.

Paul asked, "*Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world...Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*" (1 Cor. 6:2-3). Within the immediate context, Paul was addressing yet another problem in the church at Corinth. Christians were taking other Christians to court in front of nonbelievers (1 Cor. 6:1, 6). He shamed them for such conduct! Listen to this rebuking question: "*I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? No, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren*" (1 Cor. 6:5). The Corinthians should have been embarrassed over this conduct! There were really three faults - (1) they were taking each other to court, (2) they were doing so before unbelievers, and (3) there was apparently no one within the congregation spiritually mature enough to help brethren who were at odds with each other.

It is acknowledged by most people that these two verses are somewhat difficult to understand. The saints shall judge the world and angels? To what could Paul be referring? For instance, Jesus said, "*For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son*" (Jn. 5:22). Paul wrote that judgment will take place at the throne of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). Are these passages contradictory?

First Corinthians 6:2 - "*Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?*" Understanding the immediate, historical context it is clear that the church in Corinth should have had members who were "*wise*" and "*able*" to deal with whatever issues were coming up among the membership at large instead of going through a legal process in front of non-Christians (v. 1, 6-7). There are two reasonable, generally accepted interpretations of this phrase. First, while Christ is the Judge of all (2 Cor. 5:10), Jesus also conveyed judgmental authority in the kingdom to His apostles (Matt. 19:28). In turn, Christians should be able to discern apostolic doctrine as revealed by their teaching and writing and come to the same conclusions they did. Second, Christians should be able, "*by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*" (Heb. 5:12-14). Children of God can look around them and know that certain behaviors are sinful. In that sense, they "*judge*" the world. Both perspectives are certainly plausible.

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First Corinthians 6:3 - "*Know ye not that we shall judge angels?*" There are two groups of angels mentioned in the Bible - those who are "*ministering spirits*" doing God's will (Heb. 1:14) and those who were "*cast down*" and are waiting for judgment (Jude 6). As mentioned above, God gave to Jesus the authority to serve as Judge (Jn. 5:22). God will judge the world by the One He has ordained and raised from the dead (Acts 17:31). There is a day of universal judgment coming. Scripture says that certain angels are "*reserved unto judgment*" and "*reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day*" (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). There is much we do not know about angels. Anyone who pretends to have all the answers on that subject is just that - pretending! While there is a lot of mystery surrounding angels, there are some things we can know. They are not divine beings like God, but neither are they human. They shouted for joy at creation (Job 38:7), but are not ever presented in Scripture as eternal in existence. Humans are "*a little lower than the angels*" (Ps. 8:3-5; Heb. 2:9) and are not eternal beings as God Himself is (Ps. 90:2). Angels are not beings who are worthy of worship (Rev. 19:9-10). How then will saints judge angels? It again seems to be a plausible explanation that saints, i.e. Christians, will judge angels in the same way they will judge the world. We can look at their conduct as revealed in Scripture and come to the same conclusions that the Judge has reached. While Christians are not THE judge, they can know what THE Judge has decreed and reach the same conclusions.

**N**ot Dying. Death. I am looking forward to death. Not dying. Death. Dying is the ugly part, but death for the faithful child of God opens what comes after the ugly part has passed. There are only a few people on this earth who really know me. With them, I can lower my guard. A hard sentence receives context. A bad day remains one day instead of becoming the whole case. That small freedom makes me long for heaven. Heaven is the world where the redeemed will deal with one another in the light of the full truth. Every soul will be known truly, judged rightly, and dealt with according to the full truth. God already deals with us through the full truth. Nothing is missing from His knowledge. He judges with the whole case before Him.

**Until I Went Into The Sanctuary.** Asaph knew what he saw. The wicked were prospering, and the ungodly appeared to be getting away with it. What he saw nearly became the whole matter in his mind. *“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked”* (Ps. 73:2-3). Limited knowledge presses hard when it feels complete. Asaph had facts in front of him, but those facts were not the whole case. His own understanding could not carry the weight. *“When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end”* (Ps. 73:16-17). God corrected Asaph in the sanctuary. Asaph did not become God there, and he did not receive every hidden fact in every wicked man’s life. He stood before God, and the visible world lost its power to act like the final court. Something like that happens when the Lord’s people assemble. The building is not the house of the Lord; the people of God are. When the Word is opened and worship places my mind before God, I remember that what I can see is not the whole world.

**A Foretaste Of Heaven.** The church is designed to be a foretaste of heaven. Brethren still deal with limited knowledge here, but the Word teaches us to deal with one another as people who know God has the whole case. We tell the truth and act responsibly while refusing to treat partial knowledge as final judgment. That is why the church should be the safest place on earth to be known. A brother can confess sin and receive correction without being reduced to the worst thing he has done. A wounded soul can ask for help without his weakness becoming his name. That does not make sin small. God has named sin, and Christians must not rename it. The church becomes a foretaste of heaven when brethren tell the truth under the rule of God and still remember that God knows more than they know.

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*“When the Word is opened and worship places my mind before God, I remember that what I can see is not the whole world.”*

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**Righteous Judgment Is Narrow.** Jesus commands righteous judgment. He also forbids the kind of judgment that stops at appearance and speaks as though appearance is the whole case. Man can only obtain limited knowledge, so man’s judgment must stay within the limits of what God has revealed and what man can actually know. *“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment”* (Jn. 7:24). We must act with limited knowledge, and we must remember that our knowledge is limited while we act. If we wait for perfect knowledge before we act, we will never act. If we act as though our present knowledge is perfect, we will judge unrighteously. If I am driving through a neighborhood behind a car with its left turn signal flashing, I know one thing for certain: the left turn signal is flashing. That signal gives me enough information to order my conduct. I should slow down, pay attention, and drive as though he may turn left. That is wisdom. The evidence in front of me makes the turn likely enough that I would be foolish to ignore it. But if I treat that signal as the whole case, I will often be wrong. He may have forgotten the signal. It may be on by accident. The bulb may be malfunctioning. I know enough to act safely. I do not know enough to speak as though the matter is settled. A Christian may know enough to act. That does not mean he knows enough to condemn. Righteous judgment is narrow, and righteous condemnation is narrower still. A man may know that a brother has missed the assembly. That fact may require concern, a call, a visit, and a question. It does not give him the whole case. His absence may come from rebellion, or his absence may come from sickness that no one has learned of yet.

**The Whole Case Belongs To God.** God has revealed enough through Scripture to teach the rule. He has not given me private revelation to judge every hidden case. The preacher’s duty is to teach the revealed rule, the hearer’s duty is to obey that rule, and God’s office is to judge the whole case. If I stepped into that office, I would keep people out whom God would receive, and I would receive people whom God would reject. I feel so strongly convicted of this that if I saw Adolf Hitler in heaven, I would not question God’s righteous judgment. I would understand that my knowledge is incomplete. *“That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right”* (Gen. 18:25)? The Judge of all the earth does right now, and He will do right then. He knows the whole ...

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case now, and every redeemed soul will live in the light of His full knowledge then. No soul in heaven will be handled by limited knowledge.

**Conclusion.** That is why I am looking forward to death. Not dying. Death. I am looking forward to the world where the redeemed will know one another in the light of the full truth. I am looking forward to the freedom of being known without being misread, corrected without being reduced, and received without pretense. Heaven is the world where God's people finally deal with one another according to the whole case.

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## ***God Will Not Rescue You From Your Bad Choices***

*Barry O'Dell*

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**L**uke records, *“And he brought Him to Jerusalem, and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said unto Him, ‘If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest at any time thou shalt dash thy foot against a stone’”* (Lk. 4:9-11). In his temptation of Jesus, Satan was quoting Psalm 91:11-12 in an effort to get Jesus to prove who He was. Jesus' response? *“It is said...”* (KJV). The Greek states that whatever Jesus was about to say had been uttered in the past and still stands in the present. *“Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”* That is a reference to Deuteronomy 6:16 where God through Moses was warning Israel about forgetting Him and turning to idolatry. That warning was followed by an admonition to faithfully adhere to all God had said (Deut. 6:17-25).

Psalm 91 is about God being a *“refuge and fortress”* for those who put their trust in Him during even the most difficult times (Ps. 91:5-7). The Psalm was written about deliverance from enemies and the security that could be trusted (Ps. 91:14-16). The Psalm was not about intentionally putting oneself in a dangerous situation and waiting to see if God would do something. You don't tempt God's goodness! Scripture is full of reassurances that God is good and will not forsake His people. However, we cannot say *“I am going to do ‘X’ and see if God will deliver me if things go wrong.”*

*“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me”* (Heb. 13:5-6). That appears to be a quote of Psalm 118:6: *“The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: What can man do unto me?”* Similar to Psalm 91, chapter 118 is about a time of distress (v. 5), being surrounded by enemies (v. 10-12), and pushed by violence (v. 13). God was there for the psalmist! God is described as good and merciful (v. 1), a helper (v. 13), and a source of light in dark times (v. 27). The author of Psalm 118 was in no way proposing that he could intentionally put himself in dark times just to see if God would act. That would be testing God.

James wrote, *“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers”* (Jam. 1:13-16). Trials and temptations come to us all. Notice - tempted, lured, enticed by desire, and sin. First Corinthians 10:13 also assures us that when temptation does come, God will provide a way of escape. Neither of those passages are suggesting that a child of God can deliberately make bad choices that will put him in harms way and then expect God to “do something.” Satan was misappropriating Psalm 91 and the goodness of God in an effort to entrap Jesus in sinful behavior.

God will not save you from your bad decisions. He didn't stop Judas from betraying Jesus. He didn't stop Peter from denying Jesus. He didn't stop Ananias and Sapphira from lying to the apostles. He didn't stop Peter and Barnabas from being hypocritical. We each have choices to make. Sometimes we make the wrong choices and have to face the consequences of such. All of that being true, however, does not mean that we cannot repent of sin and be forgiven. David sinned terribly, was forgiven of the sin, but had to face the horrific consequences of his selfish and sinful choices (2 Sam. 11-12). The Christian is warned not to sin, but if we do, we have *“an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”* (1 Jn. 2:1-2). While forgiveness is extended, there may still be temporal consequences to face. Do not tempt God!

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- Bible only (2 Pet. 1:3)
- Name of Christ (Rom. 16:16)
- Began in Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3; Acts 2:1-4)
- Established by Jesus (Matt. 16:18)
- Purchased with Jesus' blood (Acts 20:28)
- Married to Christ (Rom. 7:4)
- Established in the 1st century (Acts 2:47)
- Jesus the Head of the One Body (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23)
- Added to the church by God (Acts 2:41, 47)

#### Salvation

- Saved by grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8-9)
- Not by faith alone (Jas. 2:14-26)
- Not by grace alone (Matt. 7:21)
- Belief and baptism (Mk. 16:16)
- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:37-38)
- Belief, confession, and baptism (Acts 8:37-38)
- Heard, believed, baptized (Acts 18:8)
- Baptized into Christ's death - raised to a new life (Rom. 6:3-4)
- Baptism - faith in God's working/operation (Col. 2:12)
- Faith and baptism (Gal. 3:26-27)
- Baptism does save us (1 Pet. 3:21)

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