

Questions and Answers 2006, Part 1

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Well, [August] is the time of year when we usually take a few Sundays to answer some of your questions. Preaching, by definition, is one-way communication, so you don't get to [ask] questions. Some people do ask questions, but I never answer [them] in the middle of the sermon. But, this is a great time because a lot of people are going [on] and coming [from] vacation, and instead of them missing part of a series, [I] do some question and answer and talk about a lot of different things.

A lot of times you might have Bible questions, and if you were to wait until I got to the place in the Bible that addressed your questions, you might have to wait for a long time. So, this is your opportunity to hear some things addressed in a shorter time than twenty years from now or whatever.

We're going to just start off here so we can try and get as many questions answered as possible. Question 1 is related to the doctrine of the Church, and it is this: Question 1, Part A. (I just want you to know, people don't put [their questions] in part a, b, and c, but they ask them that way. So I put them in that way because a lot of times they [say], "I have *a* question," which is really six.) [Question 1] Part A: "In light of the recent church discipline situation, why was the unrepentant person described as 'going apostate'?" That is a very good question.

First of all, you need to know [that] there are several different categories of disobedient people. I want to give these [categories] to you so

you understand the pool from which apostates come. First of all, there are unbelievers who do not profess to be followers of Christ, [who] do not profess to be Christians. They're agnostics, atheists, any false religion—ism, schism—you can put out. They are unbelievers. These people are not apostates.

Second, there are unbelievers who profess to be believers but know they're not. These are the people who come to church and say they are Christians and know they're not. They know they don't love God, they don't love God's Word, they don't love God's people, and they come to church for selfish reasons. Maybe they want their consciences massaged, or to ease their guilt, or maybe they want to drum up business in the foyer, or they want to look good in the community, or maybe they just have some sort of fascination with Christianity, or they like the morality of Christianity. [There are] lots of different reasons, but they know they don't love Christ, they know they aren't true believers, and so they come to church and sit among you and maybe they're sitting next to you right now.

Third, there are unbelievers who profess to be Christians [and who] don't know they're unbelievers. This is a whole different category. These are the people who are shocked on judgment day to discover they're unbelievers. They are in the church, they may be involved in ministry, and yet Jesus looks at them and says, "Depart from me you workers of iniquity, I never knew you"—Matthew 7:[21-23], read it. They are just shocked. They think they are on the narrow way that goes to heaven and they're on the broad way to hell and they don't find out until after they die or Christ comes back.

So, out of these categories of unbelievers, apostates come from the second and third. They come from those groups of people who are religious but unbelievers, whether they know it or not. Now, of course, among true believers—those who are truly saved, transformed, born again, [and who] have the Holy Spirit permanently abiding in them—there are basically two categories: one category would be those walking in the Spirit and [the other

would be] those living in unconfessed sin. There are other subcategories, but we'll just call that good.

When we talk about an apostate, we're talking about somebody who falls away from the faith he once professed. He professed to be a believer, but was not—whether he knew it or not—and then has fallen away.

The Greek word that we get “apostasy” from is “apostasia.” So it almost comes over directly into English. There are three other words that are also used to describe apostasy in the New Testament. For instance, in Matthew 24:9-10, speaking of those who fall away from the faith during the end times, we read this: “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will *fall away* and will betray one another and hate one another” [emphasis added]. The Greek word [that is] translated “fall away” in verse 10 is the Greek verb “skandalizo”—the word we get “scandalize” from. The point here is that these people are religious, they're among believers, but either tribulation, or distress, or some temptation, or whatever during the Tribulation times scandalizes them so they depart and deny Christ, though they once professed to believe in Him.

The noun form of the word is “skandalon” and it means “stumbling block, to put a stumbling block before somebody.” You know, in Romans 14:21 and 1 Corinthians 8:13, where it talks about the use of our Christian liberties, and you remember in there it says we need to be careful to not put a “stumbling block” in someone's way—a “skandalon”? Why? Because there may be a person who is either saved and we hinder his walk with the Lord by the use of our liberty, or somebody who is investigating Christianity, who is coming to church, and our liberty offends him so [that] he goes away. We have offended him—we have caused him to stumble. The verb form of the word speaks of the act of being a stumbling block, [and] the noun [form speaks] of the stumbling block itself.

Those who are religious unbelievers in a time of trial or temptation sometimes fall away from the faith they once professed. We all know about people like this. It's not that they are saved and then become unsaved; it's

that they professed to follow Christ and then rejected Him. They deny the faith, are led away, they desert Christianity, they become disgruntled or tempted, and they fall away.

In Luke 8:13, another word is used to describe the seed sown among the rocky soil. This word means “to depart from, fall away from, or become faithless.” It is the word “aphistemi.” The seed sown among the rocky soil is described in Luke 8:13 with these words: “Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation” ahistemi, “fall away.” So, again, just like the other two terms—“apostasia” and “skandalizo”—there is an association, an interest in religion, a knowledge received, and then a rejection of it.

Another word is used, for instance, in Hebrews 6:4-6. The author of Hebrews, speaking of those who receive full revelation of Christ and then fall away, says this: “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened,” and again, he’s not talking about believers here, he’s talking about those who have been enlightened—that is, had the gospel clearly explained to them. They know the truth, they know what they need to know in order to be saved. Then it says: “and have tasted of the heavenly gift.” That word “tasted” means they didn’t swallow it, they sampled it, they saw what it meant in the lives of other Christians and what it meant to be a believer, and not only that, [they] have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they’ve been around Spirit-filled people, worshipped with Spirit-filled people, associated themselves with spiritual people, and “the powers of the age to come” [Hebrews 6:5] because in the New Testament the Holy Spirit was even performing miracles. They even saw miracles, and then fell away. That group of people—those who have fallen away—again, they go apostate. [Hebrews 6:]6 says that even after receiving all of this knowledge both intellectually and experientially, they have fallen away. The word used there is “parapipto,” [which] means “to fall away or deviate from the right path.”

So, in the New Testament, when you're talking about apostasy, you have "apostasia," "skandalizo," "aphistemi," "parapipto"—all those words have this basic concept: somebody receives the knowledge of the truth—the gospel—associates himself with believers for a time, and then rejects Christ and turns his back and goes back into the world and unrepentant sin.

Now, when you talk about people departing from the faith, you have to ask, "What is that?" When the Bible speaks of "*the* faith," with the "the" in front of it, it's talking about all the doctrines of Christianity and the behavior that goes with obeying those doctrines—what it means to be a Christian. So when you talk about somebody denying "the faith," you're saying they are rejecting submission to the doctrines that define what it means to be a Christian.

Remember what Jesus said in John 10:27? He said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they" what? "They follow Me." That's what Christians are: they know Jesus, they hear Jesus' voice—His words, His truth—and they follow Him. That's a sheep. Now, of course, sheep who don't do that, they're just wolf bait. They wander off and they become prey—people in the world.

When someone determines in his heart to engage in sin, to not repent of it even though he has been confronted privately by two or more, then by the whole church, and he decides to just run headlong into his sin, he is taking the path of apostasy.

Let's just say for a moment that you come to Calvary Bible Church, you hear the gospel, maybe you're convicted of your sin in some sermon. You decide, "You know, I want to become religious. I think I want to become a Christian." So you start coming to church more faithfully, you start reading your Bible, you start learning things about the Bible—things you never knew before—you get kind of excited about the things you're learning. It's very fascinating to you. You decide to get baptized. You go to the baptism class, you then stand up in front of the church and you give a profession of faith that you are a follower of Jesus Christ and you've committed yourself to follow Christ.

You then decide to become a member. You go to the membership class, you hear about what the church believes [and] your responsibility [to the church], [and] you decide, “This is what I want.” You go and you ask for a membership form. You fill that thing out. You write out your testimony, you sign your name to it—“I am a Christian and I’m signing my name to this thing.” You then go and are interviewed by an elder and you defend your faith verbally before one of the leaders of the church. [You] say, “I am a Christian. Yes, I am a Christian. I want to be a part of this body. I want to be a member here.” Then the elders talk about it, and they agree to have you become a member, and then you stand up here on the stage during a fellowship service, and you commit yourself to the church as a Christian, to be part of this body.

During this time, you’re talking to people at work. People know you come here. You’re talking to people about the Bible—what you’re learning. Maybe you’re sharing your faith, maybe you’ve even been persecuted a little bit for the faith because you’re following Christ. Then, after a time, some sin comes along, some “skandalon”—some woman, some drug, some alcohol, pornography, stealing, lying, [an] illegal money deal, whatever. You get ensnared by this and now you weigh Christ and your sin in the balance, and Christ is found wanting to you. So you quit coming to church, and you start wandering away.

A friend finds out, he confronts you, [and] you say, “Sorry, I’m going to do this anyway.”

Two or more people come, [and] they say, “You know, you need to turn [from this sin].” Maybe more people come. Finally, it gets to the elders. The elders tell it to the church, and then [the church is] called to engage that person and to bring them to repentance through prayer, letters, phone calls, [and] one-on-one conversations. Why? [It is] because [that person is] taking the path of apostasy. I don’t care what he says about himself. If he once was here, once made the profession, knew the truth, and turned away from it, that is the definition of apostasy.

Now, if you want [to do] some further study on this, I would encourage you to go through the basic Bible doctrine series and listen to the messages on man and sin—that’s one lesson—salvation, and the relationship between faith and works.¹ There are three lessons—you can download them off the Internet [or] you can get them from the office. There are fourteen audio messages that go with these [lessons]. If you’ve never listened to them, [you should]. Every Christian should go through them. It is so critical to understand these things. I would strongly recommend them. If you’re looking for something to study, do it. I’d also encourage you to listen to a message on Judas from May 1, 2005, in the series on the chosen apostles.² Judas is the classic example of an apostate, having received full information and then turned his back on Christ. So that’s Part [A of Question 1].

Question 1, Part B: “Can someone who goes apostate be forgiven or granted repentance?” This often comes up when you talk about somebody [going apostate]. They’ve gone away, they’ve rejected Christ, [and the question is]: “Should we keep praying for them? Should we witness to them? Should we keep calling for repentance? Or should we get to the place where it’s just, ‘It’s over for you, pal.’? What do we do?”

Well, what does the Word of God say? Now, when the person asked this question, he or she referenced Genesis 25 and Hebrews 12:16-17. If you remember, Genesis 25 is about Esau, who despised his birthright. He was young, he was hungry—like young men always are. He came in from hunting [and] he was starving. He said, “Hey, can you give me that bowl of soup?”

Jacob, who longed for the birthright, said, “Yeah, if you give me your birthright.”

[Esau] said, “Sure,” [and Jacob] gave [Esau the] bowl of soup. [By trading his birthright for a bowl of soup], Esau despised his birthright, which is a huge thing. [He] saw it as no more valuable than a bowl of soup. Well,

¹These messages can be found at:

http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/teaching.aspx/basic_bible_doctrine_2003_2004

²<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/20050501>

later on, when Jacob got the blessing, Esau really wanted it. He wanted it so bad he wept for it, but he only wanted it for selfish reasons, and he wanted it but he never repented of despising it. So the author of Hebrews, in [Hebrews] 12:16-17, talks about Esau longing for the blessing and though he wept, “he found no place for repentance.”

Now, as we’ve just learned, walking away from Christ after receiving full revelation is eternally serious business. It is the most serious thing that could happen to anybody who ever comes into church. You [ask], “Well, why is that?” Listen to what the Scriptures say about those who come to church, learn the gospel, and then decide to walk away. Here it is [in] Hebrews 6:6. Those who receive full revelation—both intellectually [and] experientially—[who] fellowship with the saints, and then have fallen away, he says, “It is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.”

Later on, in Hebrews 10:26-27, we read: “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth,” notice again [they] receive the knowledge of the truth [and] what happens then? “There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,” [but] what does remain? “A terrifying expectation of judgment and THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.” That is not good. A *certain* “terrifying expectation of judgment.”

Peter, in 2 Peter 2:20-22, describing apostates, says: “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” notice again there is a receiving of the truth—they even start walking in the truth, they start turning their back on sin—but [he says], “they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.” What is the first state? The first state they were in was as an unbeliever living in sin, with the wrath of God abiding on them. The last state is [that] they are an unbeliever living in sin with full revelation of the truth, with knowledge of the gospel, knowing how to be saved, experiencing the fellowship of the saints, and having rejected

[it] so that it is no longer possible for them to be saved. That is a bad thing. That's as bad as it can get. He goes on to say [in 2 Peter 2:]21-22:

For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

The common factors in all of these verses describing apostates are: they all hear the truth, they all know the gospel, they all hang around believers and experience corporate worship and fellowship, and then after having all of that revelation—both intellectual and experiential—they turn their backs on Christianity and walk away. That is what an apostate is. The three terrifying sayings that describe them are: 1) "it is impossible to renew them again to repentance"; 2) "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a [certain] terrifying expectation of judgment"; [and] 3) "the last state has become worse for them than the first."

So, can an apostate be brought to repentance? No. No, he cannot. That's what the Word of God says. But there is hope. Some of you are thinking, "Well how can there be hope if there's no hope?" [There is hope] because only God knows who is apostate and who is just a believer entangled in sin. Only God knows that. We don't know. Only God knows if a person is beyond the point of no return. Apostates are described in this way as a warning for those who might be thinking of wandering away, as a warning that there is a place where you are given over, and it's over.

That is why, when we do public discipline and obey the Scriptures in that way, and the elders say, "We want you to contact the person," *we want you to contact the person*. I don't care if you know him or not, you write him a letter, you call him on the phone, talk to him, speak to him, whatever. Why? Because when somebody is committing to walk away from Christ,

he is placing himself in the most perilous and serious position that anybody could be placed in. It is a terrifying thing. And so, the best thing—the most loving thing—we can do for him is in unison, as a body of believers, beg somebody not to go in that direction. And you know what? Since I've been here, about half the people we've done that to have turned around and come back. Praise God for that. So, somebody who is an apostate comes in, gets the information, professes to be a Christian, and then decides to walk away from Christ. He goes apostate.

Finally, [Question 1, Part C]: “Is apostasy the ‘unpardonable sin’ spoken of in Mark 3:28-30?” Let me just read that text. Jesus, speaking, [says]:

Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin—because they were saying, “He has an unclean spirit.”

Now, formally speaking, the unpardonable sin is this: Jesus is ministering, He is preaching the truth, He is performing miracles by the Holy Spirit, and then people attribute His miracles to [being performed by] Satan. Jesus says, “You know what? You can sin against Me, but when I do things by the power of the Holy Spirit and you say that’s Satan, you know what? It is over for you. Period. That sin will never be forgiven.” That is the unpardonable sin. People like to ask this because they don’t want to commit the unpardonable sin. I mean, they like to sin a lot of sins, but they don’t want to commit that one—it’s kind of like you don’t get out of jail, you are just welded in the cage.

People [ask], “Is there any way I can still commit the unpardonable sin?” So, formally speaking, no [you cannot commit the unpardonable sin]. In principle, you could say that maybe any prophet of God who is coming, preaching the Word of God, performing miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit, if you attributed that to Satan, maybe during the Tribulation that sin

could be committed again. But you don't have to worry about that particular one today.

But get this: Any sin earns you a ticket to hell. Any one, no matter how small in thought or deed. Break one commandment [and] you break them all.

I am so surprised at how many people, when you're talking to them [and ask], "So [do] you see yourself as pretty good?" [respond with]:

"Yeah. Yeah."

"Do you know the ten commandments?"

"Well, yeah. I don't break those."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I'm pretty good."

"So, you've never lied."

"Well, I've lied."

"Have you lied at least once?"

"Well, yeah."

"What's that make you?"

"I guess a liar."

"There's no 'guessing.' You're a liar. Have you ever committed adultery?"

"No!"

"Have you ever lusted after somebody?"

"Well, yeah."

"There you go. You're guilty of adultery. Have you ever been angry at anybody? You're a murderer. Ever covet anything? You're covetous. [Have] you ever given to anybody anything that God deserved? You're an idolater. You're in bad shape, pal."

Any sin, to any degree, earns you a ticket to hell. Any sin is an infinite offense to a perfectly holy God. He will by no means allow the guilty to go unpunished. I don't care if you're an ax murderer or that you just thought one little, minor negative thought about somebody. You deserve hell. You *earned* hell.

But even though any sin gives you and earns you the right to go to hell, only one sin seals your doom. That is the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ as your Savior. That, figuratively speaking, is the unpardonable sin. When you get to the place where you die and you've rejected Christ, it's over for you. I'm telling you, if you place your faith in Jesus, it doesn't matter what sin you've committed. I mean, look at the Apostle Paul. He was nothing more than an attacker, a blasphemer of Christ, a murderer of Christians, the chief of sinners [see 1 Timothy 1:15]. God saved him, and [Paul went on to write] most of the New Testament.

God will save any sinner. His salvation is sufficient to forgive you of all sins no matter how small, no matter how great, no matter what degree. You could be the all-time, Olympic, ax-murdering champion and you can be forgiven of all of that. It doesn't matter who you are, or how much you've done. You could be Hitler and [be] forgiven. [God's] atonement is sufficient for all sin. But if you reject Jesus and die, your doom is certain. So, in that way, any sin earns hell, [but] one sin ensures it: rejecting Christ.

Question 2: "Pope Benedict VII has changed mass, and now Catholics can stand or kneel. Some archbishops have said that you must stand at all times during the mass or it is a mortal sin. What are your thoughts on kneeling or standing in prayer and worship? What is the appropriate stance?" I'm going to change that question into: "What does the Bible say is the appropriate stance in prayer and worship?"

First of all, realize that Roman [Catholicism] is a false religion. It teaches works salvation—that you have to earn your right to even have a chance to be saved. Do you realize [that] Catholics have no assurance of salvation? If you die and commit a mortal sin right before you die, you go to hell—you do not pass go, you do not collect heaven. Not only that, if you do get the last rites and do confess your sins, you still go to purgatory, where you have to atone for your sins and suffer for [what may be] millions of years.

Realize [also] that the Roman Catholic Church teaches that salvation by grace through faith is an accursed doctrine. Now, having said that, there are

Roman Catholics who are in the Roman Catholic Church who are saved. But they're not good Roman Catholics—they're bad ones. As a matter of fact, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, they're heretics. Though [these people] may be very committed to the Roman Catholic Church and may call themselves Roman Catholics, you cannot believe what the Roman Catholic Church teaches and be a Christian. So let's just get that straight. So, [Roman Catholics] are not a very good example [to use] to talk about proper worship, since unbelievers offer no acceptable worship to God.

[On to] the question, "What is the appropriate stance in prayer and worship?" Well, in some cases, it doesn't matter. In other cases it does. Let's just talk about some of the more general cases here. First, realize that our entire lives are to be acts of worship. We all know Romans 12:1 says you are to offer your body as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, "which is your spiritual service of worship." So, you are to be a living sacrifice. You are to crawl up on the altar, holy, acceptable to God, and live there all the time—when you're mowing the lawn, when you're painting the house, when you're driving down the freeway, you're worshipping. If you have your sins confessed, if you're walking in the Spirit, living in the Spirit, living for the glory of God, *everything you do* is worship. Everything you do is to be an act of worship—"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" [1 Corinthians 10:31]. That is, worship God in all that you do.

Music, contrary to what most people think today, is not worship. We can worship God *through* music, but music is not worship. Prayer is not worship. Do you know that the Bible says if you pray with unconfessed sin in your heart, it's an abomination and a sin? But prayer *can* be a form of worship, we can worship God through prayer if we worship and pray "in spirit and truth" [see John 4:24]. The same is true of anything you do as a believer.

So, having in mind [that] all your life is an act of worship, what's the appropriate stance or position [for worship]? Whatever stance or position you're in. See, that works. And, since the Bible says you are to pray at all

times in the Spirit [see Ephesians 6:18] and be praying always and never ceasing in prayer [see 1 Thessalonians 5:17], that means you are always to be communing with God. [So,] what is the appropriate stance in prayer? Whatever [stance] you're in when you're communing with God. So, in a general way, [your stance] doesn't make any difference.

But when you start talking about corporate worship, then it starts to make a little bit of difference, because when we gather together to [worship] on Sunday morning, there are more guidelines. For instance, Jesus commanded in Matthew 6:5 that we are not to worship to be seen by men. You know, we're worshipping here, [singing] a song, and somebody over to the side is jumping up and down and screaming out. Where is everybody looking? Over there. What is everybody thinking about? The crazy guy. Is anybody focusing on God? No, everybody is distracted from the words, they're distracted from thinking about God, and they're going, "What's that guy doing?" That's bad. Now, if you were on a trampoline in the Spirit, [it] would be fine to jump up and down in your backyard, but not here.

Another example might be 1 Timothy 2:9-10, where women are told not to dress or do their hair or wear jewelry during corporate worship in such a way that it might distract others. You know, some woman is up here in this gold sequined dress, and all the women are going, "Whoa! Look at that dress! I'd love to have a dress like that! Look at those earrings! Man, her wedding ring—that looks like an eight-carat diamond!" Nobody's thinking about God, nobody's worshipping God. They're just looking at the display case. And the guys, they're looking at the display case, too, but for a whole different reason. That would be inappropriate. [However], a woman like that might be in a certain circumstance where she is modeling gold and jewelry and is fine—[she could] be in the Spirit and worshipping God just fine.

Let's move away from prayer and worship in general, [and] let's talk about some specific things that the Scriptures mention. The Bible says to raise holy hands to the Lord [see 1 Timothy 2:8]. Periodically, I have people come up to me and usually they're from charismatic backgrounds, or more

the seeker thing, where people [raise “holy hands.”] [These people] come up [to me] and go, “How come you don’t obey the Scriptures and raise holy hands?”

Well, there are basically two reasons. First, [in] the texts that tell us to raise holy hands, that is a figure of speech describing that we are to worship in holiness. That’s what it’s talking about. It also talks about prostrating yourself or kneeling, [and] there are a lot of other positions that are prescribed. Those [positions]—like kneeling or bowing—would be emphasizing humility. But [as far as] lifting up holy hands [goes], God is more concerned that your heart is holy, [rather than in] the position of your hands.

Now, you think, “Well, I don’t know about that.” OK, well, the Bible says we are to greet each other with a holy kiss [see Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26]. Do you want to do that?

I always ask [the people who mention the raising of holy hands], “Do you want a bunch of strangers coming up to you [and] laying one on you? A kissing fest?”

And they’re thinking, “Well, you know, some holy hands is good, but I don’t want anybody kissing me.” When you look at the New Testament, [you see that] it was a common greeting for guys to give guys a kiss on the cheek and sometimes on the lips, and [for] women to do the same thing. Do we want to do that, too? It’s in the Bible. It’s even commanded. You know, when I go to Russia and people are so happy to see me, I get my American hand out there. You know, they just want to kiss all over me and it’s like, “Ha! Yah!” [and I] give them a little American culture really quickly. Yeah.

The principle behind holy hands is not the position of the hands. Even among those who think they should raise [holy] hands, do you do it like this, or like this, or like this? I mean, there’s even disagreement about how you should put your hands—the proper holy hand-raising position.

But listen, you can go to a rock concert today, [and you] see the people in the front row, and what are they doing? They’ve got their hands up and they’re swaying back and forth because the music is “ministering” to them.

It makes them feel good. Well, worship has nothing to do with you feeling good. I'm sorry. It has nothing to do with what you like. I am so sorry about that. Worship is about *God* and what *God* likes—conforming to God's truth with the mind, the emotions, [and] the heart. Yes, it's OK to do it with the body, too, but don't think that some position is what God is concerned about. He's concerned about the heart. He wants your heart and He wants it conformed to the truth—"spirit and truth."

When it comes to the holy kiss, the principle there is just affectionately greeting one another for corporate worship. We do some hugs, and some handshakes, and some "howdy-dos" and some, "Hey! How's it going?" and a little head maneuvering. You know, whatever works.

But, in doing this, you would never want to do anything that was improper, sensual, sinful, [or] contrary to God's Word. If it could ever cause anybody to stumble, that would be wrong. If it ever attracted attention to yourself and away from God, that would be wrong. So, position is not so relevant.

You could be in a group of hand wavers and you could wave your hand, [and] that's fine. But I've been places where one person is standing up waving his or her hands and nobody else is. What's everybody doing, then? They're looking at the person waving his or her hands. Is the position of the hands a big deal? No, distracting attention away from the Lord and worship—that's a big deal. So sometimes, when you're in a culture and that's how they do it, you do it that way. When you go to another place and they do it, you do it the other way.

If you want further study on this, here are some things you can do. There is a series on worship from 2003 that you can listen to.³ I preached two messages on prayer—[one on] July 25, 2004⁴ [and another on] August 1, 2004⁵—that will tell you more about worship and prayer so you can know all about that.

³<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/Series/Worship>

⁴<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/20040725>

⁵<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/20040801>

Question 3—this is another New Testament question related to end times: “Matthew 24 speaks of the end times and what must take place. Is the fig tree in Matthew 24:32 Israel becoming a nation in 1948, and are we the generation spoken of in Matthew 24:34 based on Matthew 24:32?” (You see? That’s a lot of questions there.)

So, let’s talk about Question 3, Part A: “What are the end times?” Well, when you go through the Bible, there are several different phrases that describe the end times. I’m going to give you some references [for] these [phrases]. For instance, this is how the New American Standard translates [the phrases]: “the end of the age,” which is Matthew 24:3; the “last times” [in] 1 Peter 1:5, 20 and Jude 18; the phrase “last days” appears in 2 Timothy 3:1, Hebrews 1:2, James 5:3, and 2 Peter 3:3; or the phrase “the end,” which is in Matthew 24:6, 14. [These] all speak of the end times.

In Matthew 24, the whole section is a response to the question asked in Matthew 24:3: “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” In other words, “When will the temple be knocked down and destroyed? What will be the sign of Your coming in the end of the age?” That is the question that launches Jesus into this big discussion of the end times. Jesus goes on to explain what will happen leading up to the Tribulation—that seven-year period right before Jesus returns—what will happen during the Tribulation, [and] especially the end of the Tribulation, what happens right before the Second Coming of Christ. And so, the context of Matthew 24, since context is king, tells us that the phrase “end of the age” and the phrase “the end” in Matthew 24 refer to the signs or times immediately preceding the Tribulation, the signs in the Tribulation, and the signs right before the Second Coming.

Question 3, Part B: “Is the fig tree in Matthew 24:32 Israel becoming a nation in 1948?” No. Realize that Jesus is using the fig tree as an illustration. You’ll see how he uses this [illustration] in Matthew 24:32. He just got through explaining the Tribulation, the signs of the Tribulation, right before the Second Coming, and the Second Coming. He says this in verse 32: “Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already

become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.” What’s that about? Well, it’s pretty easy. All you can say is [that] it is near, it’s right at the door. What is near and right at the door? The Second Coming, that’s it.

What was the question? “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” He’s answering it—if you want to know it, this is it. The whole point is this: When you go out into the yard and you see your fig tree in the spring budding and new leaves coming out, you think to yourself, “You know what? It’s spring and summer is coming.” No duh. The whole point Jesus is making [is]: “When you see all these things that I’ve told you about that are going to occur before the Tribulation, in the Tribulation, and right before My Second Coming, no duh.” That’s it. That’s what He’s doing.

Many people, though, have taught that when [Israel] became a nation in 1948, [it] was this huge prophetic fulfillment. And you know what? It was significant, but I don’t think it was necessarily a huge prophetic fulfillment. I’ll tell you why: most of the texts people use to refer to this are texts that talk about Jews returning to the land. Well, they were already there, for one thing, but, yes, many more did come after they became a nation. But, when you look at those texts that talk about the Jews returning to the land, most of them are in reference to the Jews returning to the land to worship the Lord during the millennial reign of Christ, or the 1,000-year reign of Christ on earth. Let me just give you an example of this, and as I read this text—Isaiah 27:12-13—ask yourself if this is what happened in 1948.

In that day the LORD will start His threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel. It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

Has that happened? No. The Jews are not worshipping the Lord now. The Jews have rejected the Messiah. They have committed themselves to reject Jesus—nationally speaking, most Jews do not believe in Jesus.

Now, if you want to get a really good chart, look at the MacArthur Study Bible, which, by the way, has recently come out in the New American Standard version. Look at Isaiah 65, [and] there's a great chart of verses that talk about this in there. There are tons of [verses] just in Isaiah. You could [also] look at cross-references and realize [that these references are] all through the Prophets and the Minor Prophets.

But when you look at these verses, you see that the gathering of Israel to the land to worship the Lord is something that happens *after* the Tribulation, the Second Coming, and then the millennium thereafter.

Now, this is why it is significant, or possibly is significant, that the Jews returned to the land in 1948. In 1948, what happened was they became a nation and a lot of Jews [went to the land]. Well, when the Tribulation begins, there has to be Jews in the land, they have to be building a temple, and they have to undergo persecution so that they can be refined and God can bring many of them to repentance. So, that has to happen, but it could be that the Jews that are there today are conquered, driven out of the land, every Jew that's there [is] either exterminated or chased out, and that 1,000 years from now they come back, become a nation and then Jesus comes back. That could be the case. I don't think so. I'm not a prophet, but I don't think so. I think that the time—like all good Christians believe—is at hand for Christ to return. But, you can't say with absolute certainty that the Jews in the land today have to be the ones [who are prophesied about]. If you think about it, we are in the time of the Gentiles. Babylon conquered Jerusalem, right? And, Greece, Rome, the Turks [did also]. I mean, for a long time [the Jews] have been displaced and just because they came back doesn't mean they can't be kicked out and brought back again. I don't think so, but it's not hugely important.

What is important is that before the Tribulation begins there have to be Jews in the land. And so, that is why I think that most likely their being

in the land is significant, because they're probably the ones who are going to be in the land when God decides to bring the Tribulation on them—the time of Jacob's trouble—to bring them to repentance.

Question 3, Part C: “Are we the generation spoken of in Matthew 24:34 based on Matthew 24:32, the fig tree illustration?” Look at Matthew 24:34. Jesus has been talking about the Tribulation period right before the Second Coming, and giving all the signs and even talks about the Second Coming itself. [He] then uses the fig tree budding in the spring as an illustration of knowing what's coming after that. Then in Matthew 24:34, Jesus says, “Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”

Now there are basically two interpretations of “this generation.” Is it our generation? Is it their generation? Is it some future generation? There are two major views of this. One is from the post-millennialists, or theonomic reconstructionists, or praetorists. If you don't know what those terms are, it's OK—I'm just telling you the groups in case you want to know them. This is what post-millennialists believe: when Titus came to sack Jerusalem in AD 70, when he defiled the temple, that was the Tribulation period and all the prophecies in the New Testament—all that stuff that Jesus talked about, the whole book of Revelation all the way up to the Second Coming of Christ and the Eternal State—has already been fulfilled. That's why they're called praetorists—they think it has already happened.

They believe that right now Jesus is ruling in His kingdom spiritually through believers. You and I have Jesus ruling in us, so His kingdom is now. Jesus is wanting us, as a Church, to get our act together and to infiltrate government, infiltrate the media, take control of the world, evangelize the lost until pretty soon Christianity becomes this global phenomenon. The reconstructionists, who are a subcategory of post-millennialists, want to reinstitute the Old Testament law so that then the Law of Moses [would be] the civil law. [That would mean] that we [would] start killing people who disobey their parents, chopping people's heads off who commit rape, [instituting] strong death sentences—all those things that are described [in

the Old Testament]. We [would] reinstitute the Law, and when the world is finally captured for the most part for Christ and there is this utopian state, then Jesus will come back to receive the kingdom that's already been set up. That's why it's called the *post*-millennial, post-kingdom, post-1,000-year reign of Christ. The 1,000 years is just an undisclosed, undefined term [used] to say a long time. So, in other words, think of evolution applied to end times—things are getting better and better and better and better and pretty soon they get so good [that] Jesus comes back and says, “Huh. Give Me My kingdom.”

That's what post-millennialism teaches. That is why when they interpret the phrase “this generation,” they see it to mean the generation of Jesus and the apostles. So when Jesus said, “this generation will not pass away” [the post-millennialists] say that was it. That's why the Tribulation has already occurred, and Jesus is already spiritually reigning, Satan is spiritually bound by the gospel, and all those things that are described in Revelation [have already happened].

Yet, this could not be [because] “all these things” which are mentioned in the verse did not take place by AD 70 when Jerusalem was sacked by Titus. There were no signs in the heavens visible to all, no Second Coming of Christ physically and bodily to earth, no separation of believers from unbelievers, no gathering of the elect. So that view doesn't work. Sorry. Not only that, the Bible says [that] things in the end times will proceed from bad to worse, not worse to good.

Never forget, though, that context is always the king of all interpretive principles. So, what is “this generation”? Man, time goes by fast. Now, I didn't give this to the early service, but I'm going to give it to you because it's kind of fun. This is going to take you back to grade school.

Do you remember near and far demonstratives? No. OK. I didn't either—I didn't learn those in school. I don't know where I was; I was sleeping that day. There are what are called near and far demonstratives. The near demonstratives [are] “this” and the plural form is “these.” So,

these music stands, *these* pews, *this* pulpit—those would be near [demonstratives].

Far demonstratives would be “those” and “them”—you’re talking about things that are away from you. You have a connotation of things near and things far. Jesus says, “this” near “generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” So it seems to say, upon first reading, if you don’t look at the context, that Jesus is talking about His generation. He’s saying, “this generation,” He’s speaking to people in “this generation”—it’s a near demonstrative, [so] it seems like that’s what it should be. But, remember the context [in Matthew 24:]3. What was the question? “What will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”

[Jesus responds], “Well, let Me tell you what’s going to happen before the Tribulation. Let Me tell you what’s going to happen in the Tribulation. Let Me tell you what’s going to happen during the Great Tribulation and the signs right before the Second Coming. *This* generation will not pass away until all these things take place.” What [generation]? The generation that witnesses the signs that Jesus just described [that] would happen right before the Second Coming.

Now, could that be this generation? I hope so. I don’t want to see the signs—I’m going to be raptured. But if you want to see them, you won’t get to unless you’re not a believer now and you become a believer [during] the Tribulation. But, this generation could see all of those signs. The Rapture could happen, and within the next thirty years or whatever—if the Rapture happened, of course, within seven years, the generation living would see those signs and would know from those signs that the Second Coming is near, just like people who have fig trees know when they start budding in spring [that] summer is near. That’s pretty much all it’s saying.

OK. Moving on. Question 4: “Could you please go over the passage in Exodus 4:24-26? Even after several readings and study, I can’t seem to work out what it means and why it’s there.” Well, let’s turn there. Exodus 4—one of those passages you never want to ask about but you [do] want to

ask about. So let's just look at it and it will be in archive now and I won't ever have to answer it again.

While you're finding [Exodus 4:24-26], let me tell you what has happened. Moses has already grown up in Egypt, he's killed the Egyptian, he's fled from Egypt, he's married the daughter of Reuel, who is also known as Jethro. [Moses] has had the experience with the burning bush, has been called by God to deliver the people of Israel from captivity in Egypt, the land promised to Abraham. Moses is on his way to Egypt to do what God asked him to do—deliver the people. This is what we read in Exodus 4:24-26: “Now it came about at the lodging place on the way,” that is, on the way to Egypt, “that the LORD met him,” that is, Moses, “and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah,” that's Moses' wife,

took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, “You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.” So He let him alone. At that time she said, “You are a bridegroom of blood”—because of the circumcision.

What is happening here? People read this and go, “*What?*” Moses is heading back to Egypt, and he has a son, and his son isn't circumcised. The problem is [that] Moses grew up in a Jewish household, [and] when he was older he got the education of all the Egyptians. So he was around the Jews—he even killed an Egyptian for harming a Jew. He knew about the instruction God gave to Abraham that all males should be circumcised on the eighth day and that any male—even a servant who wasn't circumcised—was to be cut off. He knew all of that.

Now, the question is: Why didn't he circumcise his son? Well, when you look at the text here, who is the angry person? Zipporah. What appears to happen here is that Zipporah, probably a pagan woman [who] is the daughter of the priest of Midian, did not want Moses to circumcise her son. So on the eighth day she probably caused a fuss and said, “You're not touching my son.” So Moses, then, listened to the voice of his wife, let her rule over him in this instance, and he submitted to her wishes.

God, on the other hand, was not willing to submit to Zipporah. Moses, who was the leader of his family—the head of his family—and was responsible to make sure that his family did what God said was right, is now on his way to be the great deliverer of the people of Israel. He’s on his way to Egypt. The problem is [that] God shows up along the way in whatever form—an angel or whatever—and says, “I’m going to have to kill you because you knew you should have circumcised your son and here your son is and he’s not circumcised. So I’m going to kill you because of your rebellion against me.”

Zipporah then realizes, “Uh, oh. I’m going to lose my husband.” So then she decides, “All right,” and she circumcises her son. Well, you know, circumcision is bad when kids get older. Not only does she not want to do it, but she has to do it to her son, who is now older, and she’s so angry and frustrated that her husband’s life is in peril and now she has to circumcise her son in haste in order to save her husband’s life that she grabbed the foreskin, threw it at [Moses’] feet, and said, “You are a bridegroom of blood to me” in anger.

God got His way. He said, “Be angry at your husband all you want, but I’m getting My way.” That’s what happened.

Now, there is such a cool question left, but we can’t [do] it. I told the people in the first service I wouldn’t tell you it even though I have a couple minutes [left]. We could almost do it, [but] it won’t fit on the tape and that would be a problem. I’ve tried this a couple other times and I’m going through the question and I say, “Yeah, now the important thing. . .” [and it cuts off], and then they all come into the office shaking their CDs, [crying], “What is the answer?” So, we better not cause that riot. Next week we’ll have some more great questions and hopefully some helpful answers. Let’s pray.

Father, we thank You for what we were able to learn from Your Word today. You are such a good God. You are so kind to us, You are so loving, You are so faithful. We thank You for Your Word, which gives us everything we need for “life and godliness” [see 2 Peter 1:3]. We are thankful, Father,

that You take care of us, that You watch over us, that, Father, You meet our needs, and, Father, [You] walk with us as we are in our trials because You have sent us the Paraclete—the Helper, the Comforter. Father, may we trust in You. May we pray to You frequently. May we worship You in everything that we do. And, Father, may we be careful not to use our worship or our prayer to sin or to cause others to stumble. Father, if there is somebody here who has never come to saving faith in Jesus Christ, I pray that You would save him or her now. That You would cause him or her to place his or her faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That, Father, he or she might be born again and transformed and changed forevermore into your child. Father, we pray for this, knowing that You will do it in Your good time because You are all-powerful and nothing is impossible for You. Father, we pray all these things in Christ's name, Amen.

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