

"SOME QUESTIONS ARE JUST PLAIN WRONG."

(Acts 4:23-31)

(Jeffrey Bingham)

"The Bible was written not to satisfy your curiosity but to help you conform to Christ's image."

Howard Hendricks

In these seventeen words, my seminary teacher, Howard Hendricks, dismantled so many false pursuits in the discipline of Bible reading and pointed us in the right way. In these few words, he provided me with a roadmap for a lifetime of Bible reading. The Bible, he was essentially telling us, was not composed in order to answer whatever question we might bring to it, but to bring us to sanctification. The brutal truth is that in many cases, the Bible may not address our questions. It may have no interest in them. We may be asking questions that are wrongheaded, that arise from impure theology and goals or desires that lead us toward evil or the evil one. Actions, motives and thoughts can arise from the sinful capacity within us. Our questions can be driven by sin as well.

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This is certainly something we see in the Bible itself. Some questions are just plain wrong. Take, for instance, the question of the Sadducees (who do not believe in the resurrection) in Matthew 22:23-28 concerning the dead man's widow and his seven brothers, all who married her in sequence: they ask, "In the resurrection therefore whose wife of the seven shall she be? For they all had her" (NASB). This is not an honest question. The Sadducees deny the resurrection. It is a query with the wicked intent to trap, to discredit and to mislead. So, the Lord Jesus rebukes and discredits them (verse 29): "But Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures, or the power of God'" (NASB).

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Much earlier in the Bible we see another question, one that sadly marks the fallen human race for the remainder of its history. Do you recall Genesis 4:9? "Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' And he said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper'" (NASB)? The Lord, of course, in this exchange asks a purifying question, one intended to communicate the responsibility Cain had to care for and love his brother, Abel. It is Cain who asks a contaminated question, one that rhetorically makes a statement of irresponsibility, hatred and murder: "I am not my brother's keeper, I am his assassin." The Lord, by the way, doesn't answer Cain's hateful question in a normal, informational manner. He pronounces a curse (verses 10-12).



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Professor Hendricks was trying to get me to shy away from demanding that my questions be answered when I read the Bible. He wanted me to be less concerned with what I wanted to know. Instead, he wanted me ask two fundamental questions each time I opened the Bible's pages: "Holy Scripture, what question are you answering?" "Holy Bible, what do you want me to know?" This is what he wanted to instill in me, because he knew what I needed to know. My questions can lead me several places, some of them less than honorable. The questions that the Bible is interested in answering and the things the Bible is interested in me knowing lead to only one place. They lead to Christ-likeness, to holiness, to righteousness and to sanctification. They lead to love for God and neighbor.

Professor Hendricks already believed John 17:17. He knew I needed to come to believe it: "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (NASB). He already trusted Matthew 22:36-40, but knew I needed to: "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets" (NASB). To paraphrase Augustine, the fulfillment and goal of the Law and of all the sacred Scriptures is to love God, who is to be enjoyed, and to love our neighbor, who can share with us the joy of loving God (On Christian Doctrine 1.35). You can never go wrong by asking the Scripture how it intends for us to live more like Christ. We should be asking this question in all our Bible reading: "How does this passage teach me to love?"

Some questions are just plain right.