Dear Lexie,

"Examine Yourselves"

One of the things that I dread most is going to see the doctor. Now, mind you, it has nothing to do with my doctor because I happen to be blessed with extremely competent medical professionals that oversee my care. However, trust me when I say my reluctance to visit a doctor has a lot to do with who I am as a man. I recently came across some data that startled me. Statistics of all ages and ethnicities are much less likely than women to visit the doctor. A survey revealed that when it comes to our health, we men are truly the 'less' sex. Something tells me that all the women reading this just let out a "Amen!" One study revealed that men don't get checkups as often as women, are hospitalized more often with preventable illnesses, and they die young. According to surveys by the federal Agency for Healthcare, Research and Quality, about 57% of men have visited the doctor within the last year, compared to their female counterparts. Believe it or not, the popular excuse that men sight for not visiting the doctor is that when the examination takes place, he or she might find something wrong.

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One of the things that I dread most is going to see the doctor. Now, mind you, it has nothing to do with my doctor because I happen to be blessed with extremely competent medical professionals that oversee my care. However, trust me when I say my reluctance to visit a doctor has a lot to do with who I am as a man. I recently came across some data that startled me. Statistically, men of all ages and ethnicities are much less likely than women to visit the doctor. One survey revealed that when it comes to our health, we men are truly the “weaker” sex. Something tells me that all the women reading this just let out a collective “Amen!”

One study revealed that men don’t get checkups as often as women, are hospitalized more often with preventable illnesses, and they die younger. According to surveys by the federal Agency for Healthcare, Research and Quality (AHRQ), about 57% of men have visited the doctor within the last year, compared to approximately 74% of their female counterparts. Believe it or not, the most popular excuse that men sight for not visiting the doctor is that when the examination takes place, he or she might find something wrong.

Self-examinations of any type can be tough because we may not like what we might find. The medical field has successfully shown the benefits of early detection and prevention of disease. So before our spiritual condition becomes even more contaminated by the sin virus, let’s just pause for a moment and conduct a self-examination to see if we can detect anything that might appear to be out of sorts. And when we do so, let us not compare our condition with the conditions of others but instead, may we always use the Word of God as our standard.

by Pr. Charles A. Tapp

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Proof of the Supernatural, I Think…

Jamie Jean

“For as bats’ eyes are to daylight so is our intellectual eye to those truths which are, in their own nature, the most obvious of all.” (Aristotle, Metaphysics, I (Brevior) I)

Something truly amazing has occurred to me: I think. Have you ever considered the implications of what it means to be conscious of self? Not only are we aware, but we realize that we are aware and can ponder the meaning of consciousness. Science cannot explain this uniquely, human phenomena. Please allow me to quote people much wiser than myself to further explain what I mean.

“Men of the greatest intellect cannot understand the mysteries of Jehovah as revealed in nature. Divine inspiration asks many questions which the most profound scholar cannot answer. These questions were not asked that we might answer them, but to call our attention to the deep mysteries of God and to teach us that our wisdom is limited; that in the surroundings of our daily life there are many things beyond the comprehension of finite minds…” (Ellen G. White, “Laws of Nature,” pp. 259-261 in “Testimonies for the Church”, vol. 8)

“All this time that we spend pondering the existence of God and searching for proof of the supernatural, is actually proof in its own right. The very fact that we can rationally think about, desire and search for something beyond our basic instincts is proof that there is something beyond ourselves and nature. If the laws of nature can only act on our natural selves, then what is outside the realm of nature (rational thought) must come from something supernatural.” (C.S. Lewis “Miracles”)

Nature, as science understands it, is governed by mechanical (non-rational) rules and actions. Naturalism is the belief that everything that exists is within the boundaries of nature. Rational thought, however, does not fit into the ‘laws of nature’ nor is it logical to conclude that a long series of non-rational, mechanical advances in a species would suddenly yield rational thought. Darwinian laws dictate that species advance towards attributes that are beneficial to the carnal necessities of survival. The beast in the field merely sleeps, eats, drinks, plays, struggles to survive and reproduce…nothing more, nothing less.

“Our ability to reason is a gift from God that reveals that we have been created in his image. An animal does not have the same knowledge of Good and Evil. The proof that we have been looking for is in our conscious search for God.” (C.S. Lewis “Miracles”)

When God presented all the animals to Adam to name (Gen. 2:20), Adam was unable to find a suitable partner among them and so God created Eve to be his helpmate. This showed that no animal was comparable to man, because only man was created in God’s image.

“Man was to bear God’s image, both in outward resemblance and in character. Christ alone is “the express image” (Hebrews 1:3) of the Father; but man was formed in the likeness of God. His nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things. His affections were pure; his appetites and passions were under the control of reason. He was holy and happy in bearing the image of God and in perfect obedience to His will.” (Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 44-45)

As a collective species, we strive for more and move beyond the boundaries of our ‘natural’ purpose or role. No other creature does this. No other animal builds a legacy and progresses towards the next step. We have gone far beyond what we as carnal
man require to survive. This is evident in every book written, symphony composed, and new invention. We are not designed to fly but yet venture into space. We are not aquatic and yet dive to the deepest, darkest caverns of the ocean in our search for greater understanding.

The realization that our existence and search for God is the very proof of something beyond ourselves is simple and beautiful in many ways. Faith is being certain of what we cannot see (Heb. 11:1). Human thought is ‘God-kindled’ and it’s a miracle we experience every day. But we have the freedom of choice of how we live our lives. As the great scientist Albert Einstein put it

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Our search for the supernatural or divine is nothing new, because there’s nothing new under the sun (Eccles. 1:9). The realization of the answer is nothing new either. The Roman philosopher Cicero (106-43 B.C.) stated it with a simple question: “Why then is the universe not accounted animate and wise, when it brings forth from itself creatures which are animate and wise?”

As sin further corrupts this world, the Devil strategically cuts off each successive generation from the wisdom of past generations, leaving us scrabbling to answer questions already answered in a constant search for what is always right there.

Further Study:

“Yet men of science think that they can comprehend the wisdom of God, that which He has done or can do. The idea largely prevails that He is restricted by His own laws. Men either deny or ignore His existence, or think to explain everything, even the operation of His Spirit upon the human heart; and they no longer reverence His name or fear His power. They do not believe in the supernatural, not understanding God’s laws or His infinite power to work His will through them. As commonly used, the term ‘laws of nature’ comprises what men have been able to discover with regard to the laws that govern the physical world but how limited is their knowledge, and how vast the field in which the Creator can work in harmony with His own laws and yet wholly beyond the comprehension of finite beings!” (Ellen G. White, Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 114.)
We, the modern readers who search the figure of Jesus down the years of Christian history and through the tangles of Christian mythology, have a sentimental tendency to believe that if only we could have known members of this original Judaean Church, we should have a clearer picture of what the historical Jesus was actually like. I think that this is a yearning which, had it been granted, might have proved illusory.” — A. N. Wilson, Jesus: A Life.

One of the advantages for professional Christians, i.e., theologians, is that there is no end to the material at hand written about the Christ. One can specialize, focus, narrow the search, just like any good scientist on the hunt or literary critic looking to tie up the loose ends. A living can be made, a career sustained, research performed and curiosity indulged. All this because—and we can be grateful for this—the subject, Jesus, is elusive in the extreme, slipping in and out of the light, always just out of reach.

By now, all these centuries later, the Jesus business is an immense industry. One can spend a lifetime inside the organizational machine, faithfully tinkering with the gears, rewriting the operating manuals, and offering tours of the plant. Rarely would the occasion arise to question the mission statement or, in the case of some variations on the theme, to ponder the profits won in the name of a first-century Jewish rabbi. There is simply too much at stake, too many events interpreted, innumerable private moments captured, diverted and sluiced through a corporate filter, too much memory and ego involved to ever hit the emergency switch and bring the whole train to a shuddering halt.

Reports of the imminent demise of religion are greatly exaggerated; those who predicted its passing so confidently back in the 60s are now rewriting their scripts to reflect the upsurge in passionate intensity. In America, every serious candidate for the presidency must pledge his or her allegiance to god and country, and find the born-again moment or a good facsimile of it, before being taken seriously for fund-raising and politicking. The fact that this was the first country to honor private belief by separating church and state provokes an equal and opposite reaction that chafes at the very freedom which guarantees its existence.

Where to begin with understanding Jesus? Who to believe? Which side to take in the wars of faith? If we are not to drown in the tide of scholarship or be sucked down in the maelstrom of fundamentalism we need to just... stand still and imagine. The great payoff of all the archeology, the historical and linguistic criticism of the Bible, the socio-political analysis of life as a Galilean peasant under the heel of Roman oppression is that we’ve caught clear glimpses of Jesus’ times. That is of immense value to organization and individual, scholarship and devotion, professional and pilgrim. But all that apparatus may not help to a quite simple end—imagining with the mind’s eye what Jesus must have been like from moment to moment.

Humility is needed, not ignorance. Knowledge in the service of faith, faith seeking understanding—all of that is to our advantage. And yet, for all that we know about Jesus and the Gospels I don’t think we’d feel at home in Jesus’ world. In fact, I’m not so sure we’d be at ease around Jesus. Our modern phrase, “I’m not comfortable with that,” might get us a quizzical look and a shake of the head. He did not come to make it easy on us; after all, he was an offense and a stumbling-block to almost everyone.

Garry Wills, eminent historian, classicist, and Catholic lay theologian, writes in his devotional What Jesus Meant, “He was a mystery in his own home. Other members of his family will be at a similar loss in coping with this disturbing person in their midst.” After all, he shocked and terrified his parents early on by slipping away from their homeward processional to argue and debate the priests in the temple. When Jesus is invoked as an example of love and obedience to parents, it’s usually meant in a
restrictive and conformist sense. “But there are many indications,” notes Wills, “that Jesus was more like those restive and resisting children who have all the idealism and absolutism of youth—young people who chafe against the boundaries of the past and are panting to explore new horizons.” Such young people often stir up resentment and anger. In Jesus’ case it was extreme: his own childhood friends and neighbors tried to kill him one Sabbath after synagogue. It gives new meaning to the practice of roasting the pastor at the Sabbath potluck.

But the point here is not to do what Jesus did. He had his life and purpose; we have ours. It would be misguided and wrong, I believe, to examine his actions in order that we might reproduce them in our time and context. In many Christian bookstores you can find bracelets, T-shirts, headbands, license-plate frames, mugs, belts and rings with the acronym WWJD—What Would Jesus Do? As well-intentioned as the sentiment might be (and I do mean sentiment) it completely misses the point. It reduces the complexity of a human life to a trite recitation of middle-class platitudes. It avoids the hard truth that there are many things that Jesus did that we wouldn’t and couldn’t do because of who he was, where he was, and the urgency of his singular mission in life.

What I am struggling to say is that the kind of radical change that Jesus called people to comes from the inside and works outward. It does not work if it’s imposed from the outside, a mere aping of the motion without the underlying emotion. Behind the emotion lies understanding and motivation, two pillars that may be grasped in a blinding flash (remember Saul’s ‘Damascus road’ experience?), but are built up over time like the growth of coral or the layers of a pearl. We want the shortcut to glory without the small gestures that come from a deepening union with Jesus.

Here is where I’ll stop because the cliches so easily come to mind. That way leads to paralysis. What is needed is the eloquence of simplicity, something truly easier said than done. As for Jesus, well, he is still there, the piece of our puzzle that never fits and in the end remakes us around his own mysterious form.

“There is much else that Jesus did. If it were all to be recorded in detail, I suppose the whole world could not hold the books that would be written.

Barry L. Casey, a long-time Sligo member and a co-leader of the Believers and Doubters Sabbath School class, teaches philosophy and communications at Stevenson University, Trinity University DC, and Washington Adventist University.
VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL 2013

By Darius Thibodeaux On April 12, 2013 · Add Comment · In Children's Ministry, Events

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