

DEAR GEORGE

October 2012 Dear George: Everybody seems to be getting tattoos these days. Does the Bible say anything about tattoos? Sincerely, Needling

Dear Needling: Indeed, it seems that many folks are now getting tattoos and it's good to ask if the Bible speaks about them. In the Old Testament in Leviticus 19:28, it says, "'Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord.'" That is the only place the Bible directly mentions them and it is part of the Old Testament Law. Since Christians are primarily governed by New Testament teachings, this commandment doesn't carry the same weight as it would for the Jews of Jesus' day, but the basic principle is clearly stated in this passage: Because we belong to God, our bodies are not to bear marks of the world. In the New Testament, the bar is actually raised when we are told that the body of each Christian is a temple of God and as such we are to honor God with our bodies (I Corinthians 6:19-20). Not only for tattoos, but for clothing, and piercings and jewelry and hairstyles, and anything else we do with our body, the question becomes, "Does it glorify God?" In this case, does getting a tattoo honor and glorify God or does it deface His Temple? Not all Christians agree on this, but I and most others will direct folks away from tattoos, including crosses and other Christian symbols. It seems like painting graffiti on the wall of God's temple. God has created our bodies in a beautiful design and to mark them up seems for most Christians to be an offense to God. One of the common misconceptions even among many Christians is that our bodies belong to us and that we can do whatever we want with our bodies. Indeed, if we do belong to Christ, that includes our bodies and I seriously cannot see Jesus getting a tattoo on His body. Since we are only borrowing His property, it's up to us to take good care of it. There are many ways that we can deface or disrespect God's temple including the use of tobacco, alcohol, too much food, drugs, etc so we must be careful about judging others on tattoos, but at the same time these sins do not give us an excuse to accept other sins. Another warning against tattoos would involve their connection to worldliness. As Christians, we are to be different from the world and avoid worldly ways. Also, in the end times, the Antichrist will use some sort of mark on either the forehead or the hand to identify or label those who belong to Him. It sounds much like a tattoo although other possibilities exist for this. At any rate, I wouldn't want to give him a head start by tattooing my body. Practically, many employers will not hire individuals with visible tattoos and many older folks that got tattoos when they were younger now wish they hadn't. Even though they can be removed, it is often very expensive. Does all this mean that people with tattoos are evil and that we should avoid or shun them? Absolutely not! We are called to love and care for all people and tattoos should not give us an excuse to label or avoid anyone. Jesus loves us all and we are called to love whomever He loves. None of us are perfect and so we live with each other in grace, but let's do all that we can to take good care of God's temple in every way we possibly can. I hope this helps. God Bless, George

Nov 2012 Dear George: I know that tithing is a Biblical principle, but how does it apply to wills and estates? Willing One

Dear Willing One: The Biblical concept of tithing is particularly highlighted in the Old Testament where ten percent of all income was to be given for the Lord's work. Many Christians see that as a minimum standard for believers today and recognize it as God's portion. Since He is the one that provides 100% of our income, giving 10% back in loving obedience allows us to use the other 90% for our own needs. It's

really a pretty good deal. I'll be glad to give you one dollar back every time you give me ten 😊. Malachi stresses tithing as a way to receive God's blessings in Malachi 3:8-12. Some folks say that the New Testament doesn't say anything about tithing, but actually Jesus reinforced it when He told us not to neglect it in Matthew 23:23. In other places, the New Testament goes far beyond 10%. Rather than setting a percentage figure, it often demands that we be generous and considerate according to God's blessings to us and the needs of others. Wills and estates are not income for the person who has left them behind, but many committed Christians see them as a way to make one last contribution to God's work on this earth and they will designate 10 percent of their total estate to their church. Some will give more than this especially if they have no children or if their children are either well supplied already, or if their children are irresponsible with money. If God has entrusted us financially, we have the responsibility to see that it is used to glorify Him both before and after we're gone. To leave it to someone without Godly values would not accomplish that purpose. On the other hand, if our children are walking with the Lord, it is certainly fitting to leave a portion of the estate to each child in addition to charitable causes. One other item to remember is to be sure to make a will. To die without one is to do a terrible disservice to your family as well as to the Lord. Heirs are often left to fight each other and/or the state in sad divisive showdowns. Clearly specify in writing with a properly constructed will before you die so there is no question as to your wishes. Many attorneys can assist in this job for a very small fee and it is some of the best money one can spend. In addition, some Christian financial counselors, like Everence in Harrisonburg, will assist believers in this task providing good Biblical advice and counsel at low or no cost. Unless the Lord comes first, all of us will be leaving this earth and we will leave the resources God has entrusted to us behind. Use this as an opportunity to make one last faith statement by putting your money where your beliefs are. And of course, don't neglect to make the most important preparation for your death-accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior and becoming a member of His family. Failure to do this will prevent you from entering Heaven even if you leave 100% of your money to the church. Only the blood of Jesus can save us from Hell. Thanks for asking a great question and one that every believer should carefully consider. May God bless you as you seek His will for your estate. In Jesus, George

Sept. 2012 Dear George: I've heard you and other pastors preach against pornography. What's so bad about it? It seems harmless since no other person is involved or harmed. Pondering

Dear Pondering: What a great question and it's one that many might be afraid to ask. Let's talk about what porn is and then why it is such a destructive sin. Pornography is defined as the explicit portrayal of sexual subject matter and may use a variety of media, including books, magazines, postcards, photos, sculptures, drawings, paintings, animations, sound recordings, films, videos, and video games. And it is pervasive in our culture today. Even many prime-time TV shows, mainstream magazines, and popular movies include pornographic content not to mention all that is now available online. To help us understand what's wrong with porn, we must understand God's purpose in sex. God created sex to be enjoyed only between one man and one woman within the boundaries of committed marriage. That is His standard and His model and anything outside of that model is sin. Because of the many implications and dynamics involved in sex, He knew what He was doing. Pornography is certainly outside of God's model because it promotes and encourages fantasies about someone other than one's spouse which seriously undermines the marriage relationship. Thousands of marriages have been destroyed by one or both

partners' involvement in porn. Pornography enables sexual expression without any prior spiritual or emotional connection. In addition, an emotional bond is created with every person we have intercourse with whether we intend it or not, and such bonds destroy those we already have with our spouses. Even fantasy encounters create powerful mental and emotional connections. In addition, one's spouse can never measure up to the perfect image portrayed on the screen. The pornographic model is also never exhausted from work, in a bad mood, or sick. All of these create unrealistic expectations within the marriage that will ultimately destroy it. Real life does not work that way. Let's also talk about the harm that is done to the pornographic models themselves. Many of them are being exploited by their photographers and producers purely for financial benefit. When we view porn, we help to provide the financial incentive for such abuse to continue. It is a huge industry that abuses and destroys many women and men. Pornography cheapens marriage, sex, and womanhood and advances the notion that women are only for one thing with no consideration of their souls or hearts. Pornography is also fiercely addictive. With access to computerized and televised porn, it is estimated that 67% of all men and 30% of all women are addicted to pornography. Visual images are very powerful and such addictions destroy lives of otherwise healthy individuals and relationships. For those already addicted, please get help immediately. Speak to your pastor or deacon or seek other spiritual and emotional help. Antioch offers financial assistance for Christian Counseling at Family Life Resource Center in Harrisonburg and other counselors. For others that struggle, an accountability partner (other than your spouse) can help keep one honest on this. In addition, filtering software should be installed on every computer in a Christian home and business to help protect us from temptation. The devil knows how to exploit our weaknesses. Let's not give him an opportunity. Harvest USA is another excellent free resource that is Biblically sound and very helpful. Their website is harvestusa.org. Finally, a good question to ask would be whether or not we could imagine our Savior viewing pornography. And since the obvious answer is, "No," and since He is our example, that alone should dictate our behavior in this and all areas. Thanks for asking such an honest question and let's pray for each other as we seek to glorify God with our hearts, souls, minds, and bodies. In Jesus, George

May 2012 Dear George: I attend church most Sundays, I pray, and I do many other good things. I'm basically a good person. This means I'm a Christian, right? Signed, Trying

Dear Trying: The things you mentioned are important for all Christians to do, but these things do not make someone a Christian. A person becomes a Christian by admitting that he or she is a sinner and turning from those sins, and by believing that Jesus Christ is God's Son and asking Him for forgiveness. A third step is also important and that is to let others know with your mouth and your actions what has happened in your heart. These steps are sometimes referred to as ABC. Let's look at each of these separately. In order to become a Christian, we must realize and Admit that we are sinful in God's sight and unacceptable to Him. When we see our sinful dirty selves beside a spotlessly clean Savior, we begin to realize how very far short of God's glory we have fallen and how badly we need His grace. If you've never done this, ask God to convict you of your sin. Realizing our sinfulness and admitting that we need to be saved is the first step. The second step is to Believe that Jesus is God's Son and that He died to save us from our sins. We must realize that there is nothing we can do to earn God's favor, including doing tons of good works, being a nice person, or even attending church every week. Our sins can only be removed by

believing that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins. It is faith and trust in His shed blood, and nothing else, that saves our soul and makes us a Christian. The third step is to Confess with our mouth, or to tell others about our decision. This certainly involves sharing the news with other Christians by taking our vows before the church. But it also means talking about Jesus at work, at home, and everywhere else. Everyone should know that we are a Christian by what we say. They should also be able to tell by our actions. One of the first actions that every Christian should take is to be baptized. Being a Christian means that we will live like Jesus so our first step is to be baptized like He was. Baptism doesn't save us, but it is one way we can demonstrate outwardly what has happened in our heart. Then our good works, church attendance, and kindness will follow and prove to all that Jesus really is our example. If you haven't taken these three important steps, please do not wait another minute to do so. Be sure not to trust in your good deeds, but in Jesus' blood and then live to please Him. If you have questions about this, please talk to me, Pastor Stephanie, or any of our Deacons right away. This is too important to put off. Also, if you have done the first two steps, but have not made your decision public, please let us know that too because this is part of what the Bible says Christians must do. A couple short verses are important to remember regarding being saved: Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Romans 10:9-10 If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. Thanks again for your question and trust Jesus to save you! In Him, George

Oct. 2011 Dear George: Do you put family or a church activity first? (examples: Church meetings, Prayer meetings, Hymn Sings, etc.) Priority Seeker

Dear Priority Seeker: This is an excellent question and one that every church member struggles with from time to time. There used to be a saying that whenever the church doors are open, every member should be present. While I can appreciate the loyalty and commitment expressed by this statement, it oversimplifies this important question. As churches grow, more activities often get added and seldom does anything get eliminated. As a result, the church calendar becomes very full and can actually do more to harm families than to help them. With all that is going on at Antioch right now, it is possible to be out almost every night of every week and that is not God's will for anyone. God instituted marriage and family before He instituted the Church, but please read the rest of the article. The family is very important to God and it is vital that husbands and wives protect their marriages and their families. This will include saying, "No" to many demands for your time, sometimes including even certain church events. The age of children will also play into this. With that said, it is important to realize that the Church is the Bride of Christ and that Jesus died for her. So our commitment to the Church is very important to Him. Each Christian should be sure to prioritize time for Worship, Spiritual Growth, Service to others, Prayer, Evangelism, and Fellowship. Each member should attend worship weekly as a bare minimum as well as some program or event that provides for their spiritual growth such as Sunday School and/or Bible Study. In addition, Love Feast and Communion should be holy events on every church member's calendar since Jesus has invited us to be present. Prayer meetings are also most important for us, our families, and our church. In addition, each member should attend the Congregational Business Meetings in order to help

participate in the business of the church. We all need to be involved in this. These should be bare minimums for each believer. Beyond these, other events like hymn sings and other special services are optional. While it is not required that members attend every night of Revival, attendance would be expected for at least some of these weeks. Each member should also be involved by using their spiritual gift in some way. Since that varies from person to person, the church event will vary. If it involves serving on a Commission, it is important to attend each of the meetings of the commissions of which we are a member. If it is singing in a choir or praise team, it means that we attend practices. If we have accepted a leadership role of teaching or leading, we should fulfill whatever duties that position requires. It is important to consider the expectations of such positions before accepting them to be careful not to overcommit and hinder family time or even times of worship and prayer. Sometimes churches have too many activities and events. It is important for churches to evaluate each activity regularly to determine if it glorifies God and is producing eternal fruit. Anything that isn't doing both should be immediately discarded. So we must determine which are important and which are not. The church board will soon be evaluating the activities at Antioch to determine the worth of each of our activities and events. Ultimately, it is up to each of us to determine God's priorities for us and then use our time accordingly. We do this through prayer and Bible study as well as in discussion with other believers. Listening to God and being obedient will provide the answers to this question week to week. God Bless, George

Sept. 2011 Dear George: Are "religion" and "the gospel" the same? Signed: Inquirer

Dear Inquirer: In short, no. "Religion," broadly speaking, includes every attempt by humankind to know God, please God, or earn God's favor. On the other hand, "the gospel" (literally, "the good news") is the message of what God has already done for us in Jesus Christ: in Jesus Christ, God has revealed himself to us and reconciled us to himself. This good news comes to us, and must come to us, from God; it is not something that we can ever comprehend or grasp on our own. Furthermore, the reconciliation that was achieved between us and God through Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection came about without any effort on our part; in fact, it was completely undeserved. It occurred while we were still God's enemies (Romans 5:10) The gospel, then, is fundamentally different from all of the other "religions" in the world. Every religion is based upon what people try to do for God, but the gospel is the good news about what God has already done for his people. However, we must never become too smug and self-assured in our relationships with persons of other faiths, for "Christianity" is also a religion. Oftentimes what passes for "Christianity" is in reality nothing more than pious self-righteousness or even thinly veiled works-righteousness. We might sometimes say that we are "saved" by Jesus Christ, but the majority of how we think and what we do reflects the deeply held notion that if we are "good" we will go to "heaven." Furthermore, we sometimes use the label of "Christian" (or "Brethren," or "evangelical," or "conservative," or "Bible believing," or any other religious label) as a means of touting our perceived superiority: the idea is that we are the ones who have "gotten it right," which makes us better than the rest of the world. There are two things in particular, then, that we must keep in mind when we speak of the gospel of Jesus Christ. First, because revelation and reconciliation come from God to us, and never the other way around, our entire walk as believers must be one of deep humility. After all, even our faith itself is a gift from God—it is not our own. We may never, ever boast (Romans 3:27). Second, if we ever happen to do "good things," it is not because we are "good people." It is only because God is good—he is the one who has transformed

us, and it is his love that inspires our obedience. There is, of course, a mystery here: if the gospel is truly comprehended, it will necessarily lead to a life of obedience; but, the gospel is not dependent upon our obedience in any way. The gospel rests only upon God's faithfulness, and that is what makes it "good news." In Christ, George

Aug. 2011 Dear George: I want to give my 10% but I'm not sure if this can be divided between the church and other Christian ministries or whether it should all be given to the church. Tither

Dear Tither: As with some other questions we have had, not all Christians agree on this. Malachi 3:10 tells us to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse which certainly tells us to be sure to include a full 10% of our income and increase, but it also tells us to bring it into the storehouse. In the Old Testament, the storehouse was at the temple and it was the storehouse for the Lord's goods. The New Testament equivalent would certainly be the church. While there are many beneficial parachurch organizations such as Christian radio, Pregnancy Centers, singing groups, missions, and many different teaching ministries, the local church is still God's primary organism appointed by Him to do His work in this world. At Antioch, we support several of these other Christian ministries through our Deacon and Missions Budgets and ideally, if each Christian tithed to their local church, and each church identified and gave to these ministries, all of them would be well funded. Since this is not always the case, many Christians choose to give to these ministries as a part of their offerings, which are over and above the tithe that they already give to their local church. If there is a specific ministry that you would like to see Antioch support that it currently does not, I would encourage you to suggest it to either the Deacons or the Missions Commission for possible inclusion in the budget. Thanks for committing to giving your tithe and for desiring to advance the Kingdom of God! In Jesus, George

Dear George: I have a question about tithing. Should Christians tithe on their gross or net income?
Curious Giver

Dear Curious: Your question is a very common one and it has come up many times. Let me try to answer it Biblically and in a larger context. The tithe was designated in the Old Testament to be 10% of any increase that a person received. If your field produced 100 bushels of corn, 10 were to be given to the Lord. If your cows had 10 calves, 1 was to be given to the Lord, and if your garden produced 1,000 cucumbers, 100 of them belonged to God. Since it was a mostly agricultural society, the increase was usually pretty easy to identify. (Even priests and the Levites who received the tithe were required to tithe of all that they received even as Pastors today are.) There was no pretax or after tax. Today, increase would include any income we receive including that from wages and salaries, stock dividends, sales, commissions, bonuses, interest, rentals, etc. Prizes and awards would also be considered increase and therefore "tithable." Not all Christians agree on this, but the Biblical model seems to show that a tithe is based on total income (after expenses) and would not be reduced by deductions such as withholding for taxes, insurance, retirement, Christmas club, or other items that benefit the individual. As such, the tithe would be based on gross rather than net income. Tax returns would not be tithable if the income was tithed on when it was first earned. That means that if you tithed on your gross income throughout the

year, you've already tithed on the tax return you get. If, however, you tithed on your net income throughout the year, then certainly you should tithe on the tax return. There is an important question we each need to ask ourselves on this point. Am I trying to calculate the least amount I can give to God or the most? When we begin to realize that it all belongs to God in the first place and that He has promised in Malachi to open the floodgates of heaven to bless us if we give to Him what is His, we begin to change our mindset on giving from "I have to give" to "I get to give!" Really and truly God can fund His Kingdom without us. He allows and invites us to join Him in order that we can demonstrate our dependence on and faith in Him, show our obedience, and receive His blessings in return. Beyond the tithe is the offering. An offering is anything that someone gives over and above 10%. Some give 12% of their gross income, some give 15%, and some give more. This is an offering over and above a tithe. Some who have tithed throughout the year on gross, give an offering from their tax refund as well. The question for them is, "How much can I possibly give?" and not, "How much do I have to give?" Some have said that there is nothing about tithing in the New Testament, but Jesus underscored this important practice in Matthew 23:23 where He said, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices — mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law — justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Here Jesus reinforced the tithe. In addition, virtually every New Testament reference to giving goes beyond a tithe. 2 Corinthians 9 is an excellent reference on giving in the New Testament church. I hope this explanation is helpful for you and answers your question and may God bless you as you give Him your tithes and offerings! In Jesus, George

June 2011 Dear George: Many people are addicted to "Facebook" and other social networks. How does a Christian discourage this behavior? Signed, Facebooker

Dear Facebooker: With so many people involved with social media these days, this is a very timely question! Let me see what I can do to try to address it. First of all, we must realize that social media is neither good nor evil. What makes it one or the other is the content it contains. Let me begin by discussing a few cautions in this regard. 1. Be careful what you post. Remember that anything that is posted on your page is open for everyone to see, including Jesus. Especially Jesus. If we have something on our page that dishonors Him in some way or the other, we should remove it immediately. 2. Be careful what you post. Didn't I just say that? Yes, but this is for another reason. We must not post any material that is inappropriate for anyone else to know. Some children and adults as well post information about themselves or their family that may be true, but should not be shared with others. If there are relationship issues, this is not the place to air them out. The Matthew 18 formula still applies even in a digital age. If we have an issue with someone, even in our family, we are to go to them personally as we discussed in last month's question. Children have been getting angry with parents ever since Cain and Abel, but now with Facebook, they can tell the whole world. This is neither appropriate nor beneficial and should not occur. Be careful what you post. 3. Be careful about how much time you spend on Facebook and/or other social media. Like any other event or activity in life, it can be addictive. We can end up spending what precious few hours God gives us in life interacting with a computer rather than our first priorities: He and our family members. Set a limit for yourself as to how much time you will spend on it and set limits for your children as well. If you can't do it in moderation, don't do it at all. Life is much too short to be

absorbed in this way. Be sure Facebook doesn't cause you to neglect to seek God's face in His Book. In addition, social media interaction creates a somewhat artificial relationship since it is not conducted face to face. Be careful not to hide behind the computer in a relationship or to withdraw from real relationships. People are multidimensional and many of these dimensions cannot be ascertained through a two dimensional computer. 4. Be careful not to use these media to gossip about others. Gossip is still gossip whether it's done on the phone, by email, on Facebook, or in person. If it's something that's not beneficial to another person, we must not say or type it, period. Finally, one suggestion that should apply to all social media as well as other forms of communication. We must use all of them to tell others about Jesus. We must. If you are on Facebook, use it as an opportunity (within the above guidelines) to tell others about our Savior. About His Love and His death on the cross. About His resurrection and about His Church. Invite others to personally commit their lives to Jesus. Use Facebook as an opportunity to share your testimony and what Jesus has done and is doing in your life. Use Facebook to invite others to worship with you, to attend VBS, baptisms, prayer meetings, Revivals, and other church events. Post pictures of Christian family activities. Put up Scripture verses on your wall that tell others about God. Ask others for their prayer concerns and then be sure to pray for them. Share answers to prayer as well. As you can see, there are many ways in which Social media can advance the Kingdom of God. Like all other technology, it is a tool that can be used to build up or tear down the Body of Christ. If we're involved with it, let's be sure to use it to build it up! Blessings, George PS: I asked Brother Brad Huddleston to review this answer for accuracy and I am grateful for his input. He also shared these important suggestions to also keep in mind: • When we were young, we were taught to choose our friends very carefully. I rarely encounter young people who are taught this anymore, especially when it comes to "friending" online. The person posing as a 12 or 13 year-old on the other end of the screen could be a pedophile. • Filtering software is a must but absolutely cannot be a substitute for parenting. As parents we must search out and secure software to filter the internet use in our home. We are responsible for this before God. But we must remain vigilant in supervising the internet usage of our children. • Facebook's rules state that a person must be age thirteen or above in order to join. There is a reason for that yet, there are millions of underage children on Facebook. • I would recommend that MySpace be completely off-limits for a Christian of any age. MySpace has become a haven for severely rebellious teenagers and pedophiles. Thanks to Brad for sharing these important guidelines. For more information, see his book and/or video, *The Dark Side of Technology*. You can also visit his website at www.bradhuddleston.com

April 2012 Dear George: I've heard about God's Judgment all my life and I'm wondering what we will be judged on if all of our sins are forgiven when we are saved by Jesus? Also, will anyone be with us when we are judged? Signed, Here Comes The Judge

Dear Here Comes: There are actually two "Judgment Days" described in the Bible. Revelation 20:11-15, describes God's judgment of all those who have rejected His Son, Jesus Christ. This is often referred to as the Great White Throne Judgment and describes how all the dead great and small will be resurrected and appear before God for a final verdict. If anyone's name is not found written in the book of life, he will be thrown into the lake of eternal fire. Such a reality should indeed frighten every man, woman, boy and girl into repentance from sin and seeking forgiveness and a holy new life in Jesus.

The passage tells us that these will be judged by what they have done, but we know from Isaiah 64:6 that all of our good works are nothing but filthy rags before God, so we need the good works of Jesus on our behalf. This is what happens when we are saved. We are claiming our own inability to do anything to save ourselves and trusting completely in Jesus' blood for forgiveness and His perfection in place of our own. This faith and dependence on Him gets our name in the "Lamb's Book of Life" which is mentioned in the very next chapter, Revelation 21:27. Those who are depending on their good works to save them are in for a very rude eternal awakening. Every secret evil action and even every evil thought will come to light on that day and those sins must somehow be paid for. Without Jesus, an eternity apart from God awaits them.

While theologians disagree, it seems to me that Christians are at best only spectators to this horrible event. It occurs after the tribulation and the thousand year reign of Christ and just before eternity begins. Even if we were to experience this event, if our names are written in the Book of Life, we have nothing to fear. Anyone that has refused or neglected Jesus' loving death, however, has very much to fear. It will be the worst day of their existence and will be the beginning of their eternal misery in everlasting Hell. If you know anyone in this category, please lovingly explain these truths so that they can avoid Hell and enjoy God's presence forever. Jesus died for this very reason.

In answer to your second question, all the unsaved will be together for this judgment so it will be a large multitude that will be present at the Great White Throne.

That's the bad news. Now for the good news. For those who have accepted Jesus, we have nothing to fear from the Great White Throne. The judgment for Christians takes place earlier in Heaven immediately after the Rapture. Romans 14:10 and 2 Corinthians 5:10 both tell us that, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ," which is what this event is sometimes called and is separate from the Great White Throne Judgment. It is not a judgment to determine eternal destiny since that issue is already settled in Jesus. This will be a judgment for the handing out of rewards.

The Greek word for this is the "bema" judgment. The Bema seat was where the judge of an athletic event would sit and hand out the trophies after races based on how individuals finished. In a similar matter, Christians will receive rewards based on our good works. These good works have not saved us, only Jesus could ever do that, but after we are saved, we should glorify our Father in Heaven by doing good works in His Name for which we will then be rewarded.

I Corinthians 3:9-15 describes this judgment and the sadness of some who will be saved, but without much, if any reward. They did nothing for the One who sacrificed His life for them. While some may respond by saying, "At least I made it," this demonstrates a very selfish attitude and should, in fact, even call into question one's own salvation. Are we still living only for selfish reasons and care nothing for Christ? If so, perhaps our hearts have not been transformed by Him at all. If we have been transformed, we will want to do all we can for our Blessed Savior. It's also important to realize that our good works are not to be motivated by obligation nor for the praise of men, but by love for Jesus and others.

It seems from the context of each of these Scriptures that this judgment too will be experienced with others. Paul uses the plural "we" in each place and the Bema Judgments of Paul's day were public

events, not private. Also, since it involves members of the Church, it seems logical that the whole Body would be there together. While we can't be completely sure on this, it seems to be a "community" event.

There are many other questions about these judgments that are not answered in the Bible, but from what we do know, may we each live in such a way as to hear Judge Jesus tell us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, come and share your Master's happiness." In Jesus, George

Dear George: I've been hearing a lot lately about Yoga. Is this something a Christian should be involved in or not? Meditating

Dear Meditating:

Yoga has been around for hundreds, if not thousands of years and has been promoted by everyone from physicians to coaches to popular entertainers. It is an ancient form of Eastern meditation associated mainly with either Hinduism or Buddhism. Both of these believe that humans are reincarnated many different times and that we can come back as anything from humans to cockroaches depending on how we have lived. The goal of yoga is to liberate oneself from this endless cycle of birth and death and all the worldly suffering that goes with it.

In Hinduism, a person practicing yoga uses physical, mental, and spiritual discipline to meditate on the Hindu concept of divinity (or Brahman) while trying to attain perfect spiritual insight and peace. Yoga is a spiritual quest for health, happiness, tranquility and knowledge.

Buddhists seek to achieve Nirvana, or Enlightenment, which is a state of non-existence and yoga is one way to achieve this. The most famous Buddhist is the Dalai Lama of Tibet.

So when we understand what yoga really is, it is certainly not Christian and is definitely a practice of false religion. For anyone who follows Christ, this would surely be a sin against God. Some claim to do the stretching and exercises associated with yoga without focusing on other gods or chanting. While that may be true, this is, by definition, not yoga and seems to be a dangerous flirtation with a blatantly evil practice.

Yoga represents a human-centered approach to God dependent on our good works, or good karma. If we do enough good works (good karma) we can earn ourselves a better reward. The Bible teaches that our good works are filthy rags before God and that right standing with Him totally depends on our trust in Jesus Christ who earned right standing for us. Yoga itself is a Sanskrit word which literally means "yoke." What a heavy yoke to try to earn God's favor through endless lifetimes. Thankfully, Jesus invited us to take His yoke and He said that it was easy and light. While it is true that mind, soul, and body are all connected, true and lasting peace can only be found through Jesus.

Meditation itself is not evil and is often encouraged in the Scriptures. It involves concentrating on some particular Bible passage, characteristic of Christ, or attribute of God. It requires discipline to keep the mind focused and to prevent it from wondering. Through meditation, God often reveals more of His truth, His will, and ultimately even Himself if we are open to Him. But we must not simply just open our

mind to whatever may come nor give control of our mind to anyone other than Christ. Satan will seize that opportunity every time if we give it to him.

As Christians, we are to avoid even the appearance of evil and I would encourage all followers of Jesus Christ not to participate in a Hindu or Buddhist practice. In Jesus, George

Dear George: You can't take the Bible literally can you? Literally Wondering

Dear Wondering: Your question is a short one and the short answer is yes, you can. But let me take a few more words to explain what I mean. The Bible is a collection of 66 books and includes several different types of literature so it is important to consider this as we read it. In some cases, signs and symbols are used in poetry or music to illustrate unseen spiritual truths, but for the most part, the Bible is very straightforward and down to earth.

Many parts of the Bible are actually written as literal history. This includes the books of Genesis through Esther in the Old Testament as well as Matthew through Acts in the New Testament. Many other books include historical content which has always been verified by archaeological discoveries.

This also means we must read it in its historical context. For example, the book of Leviticus was written as a part of the Jewish code of law which was intended for that specific people at that time. Although general principles can be applied to our lives today, some of it has been superseded by later revelations such as the case with Peter in Acts 10-11 which allowed the consumption of animals once forbidden. This is why we must consider the whole Bible together and be very careful about pulling out one or two verses to prove our point without looking at the surrounding scripture.

It would be interesting to see what passage prompted this question. Often people will hypothetically ask a question like this in order to dismiss something they don't want to obey. This question is very similar to the one that the serpent asked Eve in the Garden of Eden, "Did God really say...?" It implies that God certainly didn't mean what He said. Yes, in fact, He did really say it. And yes, He really did mean it. But we should still seek to answer the questions of: To whom did He say it, In what context did He say it and What does it mean to us today? If you're ever in doubt about something in the Bible, it's always better to obey it than dismiss it. Do not commit adultery really means what it says.

On the other hand, In Luke 9:23 Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Did Jesus really mean for us to pick up a literal wooden cross and walk around Jerusalem every day? No. He said this to symbolize that we will all face difficulties in life, and perhaps even death, because of Him. Consider, for example, Hans Bret a 21 year old Christian in Holland who was burned alive for Jesus in 1577 having his tongue fastened to a metal vice and burned with a hot iron. He didn't carry a literal cross, but he suffered greatly for Jesus. For us, it may mean being ridiculed for standing up for God or even losing a friend or a job because of Jesus. Careful study and prayerful research helps us to discover what Scripture truly means, but oftentimes the context makes it obvious.

Finally, one of the biggest problems folks have in regard to the Bible is not a failure to understand it, but a failure to know it. Because they assume it's too hard to understand or too long to conquer, or whatever

else, many people fail to read it at all. Please don't make that mistake. The more you read, study, and pray, the more God will reveal to you and the plainer it will become. It is a lifelong quest that will yield great blessings. I invite you to begin today! In Jesus, George

Dear George: I'm starting my Christmas shopping and I was wondering if there are any guidelines to help Christians with this. Signed, Early Shopper

Dear Early Shopper: What a great question! And very practical. Since the Bible tells us that we should do everything for God's glory, Christmas shopping certainly falls into that category. However, many people never stop to even consider what impact Jesus should have on this. Let me make some suggestions.

1. Select gifts that most glorify God. There are many God honoring items to choose from. Christian movies, music, and books along with modest clothing are all great selections. There are a large number of Christian toys available today as well to reinforce Bible lessons they have been taught.

On the other hand, some styles of clothing, many songs and movies, and lots of video games do not glorify God but actually promote lifestyles and actions that are totally opposed to God's Word. As Christians, we should neither patronize the producers by buying them nor provide them to someone else to use since they counteract the reason Christ died. It is foolish to buy toys or other items for someone for Christmas that contradict the very purpose Christ was born in the first place.

2. Start with a budget. If we fail to have a budget for our Christmas shopping we will inevitably end up spending too much and going into debt. This is certainly not Biblical and can negate any positive benefit of our charity.
3. Avoid the trap of commercialism and greed which reinforces the idea that more and bigger are always better and that more expensive is preferred. Small simple gifts let folks know they were remembered without overdoing it and do not promote covetousness which is never satisfied.
4. When possible, donate to some church or charity in the names of people on your gift list. Most of us have way too much "stuff" already and much of the rest of the world has way too little. This is a way to even it out a little and to glorify God. Most folks would be honored to receive a note from you letting them know what you have done. Perhaps even discuss it ahead of time since they may want to do the same for you. Many local and international charities are very responsible with the donations they receive.
5. Items you have made, written, composed, or recorded are true reflections of yourself and represent true giving from the heart. They often cost little and can bless someone greatly. Whether it's a short story, a song, a poem, a batch of cookies, a scarf or a wooden ornament, personal creativity and involvement are always the most special.
6. Shop responsibly. For those items that we do purchase, let's be careful to stay away from those produced in countries with substandard labor practices. Buy crafts and clothing from

developing countries at alternative gift markets (like 10,000 Villages) so that the artisans receive a fair price for their work. Not doing so continues to encourage unfair conditions.

These are only a few suggestions of how to shop responsibly as a Christian. I'm sure there are many more I missed and if anyone has others to add, please let me know and we'll try to get them in next month's letter! In the meantime and happy shopping! God Bless! George

Dear George: How can a good God allow suffering of so many people? Hurting

Dear Hurting: You have asked an excellent question that has been a difficult point for people down through the ages of time. To properly answer the question, we must go back to the first couple chapters of Genesis. After God created the heavens and the earth, He declares in Genesis 1:31 that all was very good indicating that at that time there was no suffering, pain or death. These were certainly not part of God's created design nor intent.

We see these things enter the universe in Genesis 3 as a result of Adam and Eve's sin. Death, pain, thorns, disease, and suffering are all consequences of sin that resulted from mankind's disobedience. God wanted to save us from these and tried to do so by setting boundaries that were disobeyed.

As a result, we live in a fallen world today that is no longer perfect and that is filled with suffering and death. The ripple effect of the original sin touches every life, family and culture. Indeed, everywhere we turn, people are hurting and we hurt ourselves. Death has a claim on every living human. And it was for this very reason that God sent His Only Begotten Son to live and die among us to save us from this hopeless condition. When we trust Jesus as our Savior, we are guaranteed an existence that will one day be free from all of the plagues of earth. Revelation 21-22 describe the new heaven and earth to be very much like the Garden of Eden with no sickness, suffering or death. I don't know about you, but I can't wait. I've had enough pain and heartache myself and seen enough of it in the lives of others. Evidently John, the author of Revelation had too which is why he proclaims, "Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

Thankfully, we don't have to endure eternal suffering. Thankfully, we can look forward to a pain free eternity if we are trusting in Jesus who came to suffer for us. If you have never asked Him to forgive your sins and secure your place in that new heaven and earth, do so without delay. Just knowing that day is coming can make earth's pains much more bearable. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.) And in the meantime, His promise to be with us through whatever pains and trials we experience here is a tremendous blessing also. Even if we don't have all the answers or if we don't like the answers we get, may we be faithful to Him trusting for all we do not yet know. Even so come, Lord Jesus!

In Jesus, George

Dear George: My spouse is not meeting my needs. Is it OK for me to go to someone else to meet these needs? Needy

Dear Needy: Your question is one that probably goes through the mind of every married person at some time or the other. The unmet need may be emotional, social, sexual, or even spiritual, but in every case the answer is a clear and resounding “No!” We must never go outside of our marriage covenants to meet needs that are to be met within the relationship.

Because even the best spouse is still human, there is no way he or she can always meet all the needs of his or her spouse. From time to time, selfishness, fatigue or other factors may cause us to fail to treat our spouse properly. That’s where repeated forgiveness and grace come into play. These are most needed in marriage.

In addition, most of us have unrealistic expectations of our spouses. We expect them to meet all of our needs and solve all of our problems. And while a godly husband or wife can be a tremendous blessing, God never intended for them to meet spiritual needs that only He can provide. Expecting our spouse to “make us happy” or to “meet all of our needs” is a recipe for disappointment, depression, divorce, and even disaster.

One of the biggest temptations of Satan is to encourage us to look outside the marriage for someone else to complete what is lacking in our spouse. We must not. Such action will undermine and destroy the relationship that God has designed. Because someone else does us wrong is never an acceptable excuse for us to sin in response. Regardless of what may happen to us, we are each to avoid sin ourselves. We do not have to answer for our spouse’s sins or shortcomings, but we do have to answer for our own regardless of who we may try to blame them on.

For women it’s often unmet emotional needs and for men it’s often sexual although it could be the other way around or all the way around. Whatever the case, none of this is appropriate. If your spouse is not meeting your needs, the first question to ask is whether this is a need they are supposed to meet. If so, discuss your needs with your spouse. No one can read their partner’s mind so clear, open, and honest communication is essential. We must communicate our needs and wants to our spouse.

In addition, a trusted Christian friend of your same gender who is married can be a good marriage mentor. I dream of the day when solid older married couples in the church can be teamed with and mentor younger couples in the adventure, challenge and blessing of marriage.

If communication attempts with your spouse are unsuccessful or if they simply refuse to address the issues, professional counseling may be needed. Like mentors, counselors can also help us understand what is and is not reasonable for us to expect. If both partners will not go for counseling, at least go on your own. Counselors can often suggest strategies to either approach the other person or to process the situation at hand and deal with it. But again, going outside the relationship is sinful and is never acceptable and will ultimately lead to even greater heartache and pain.

Please take one of the other positive steps today to begin to deal with whatever issues might be present and may God help each of us in the most basic of all human relationships, marriage. In Jesus, George

June 2012 Dear George: A question has come up in our Sunday School class. Should we only pray once for someone who is sick or lost or should we continue to pray for them without ceasing? Prayer Warrior

Dear Warrior: You raise a great question. Although I'm not certain, my guess is that Jesus' words in Matthew 6:7-8 prompted this question. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

What Jesus is referring to here is not praying for the same thing more than once, for He Himself did this in the Garden of Gethsemane when He prayed twice for the cup to be removed and for the Father's will to be done. Paul also prayed repeatedly for his friends and his churches as we see in 2 Timothy 1:3 and Ephesians 1:16. In Acts 12:5, we read where the early church was earnestly praying for Peter's release from prison. It's hard to imagine from reading this verse that they said it one time and went to bed. (Since I am using many Scriptures in this answer, there is not room to write them all out so please look them up—they are each important!)

What Jesus is referring to is insincere prayer that comes from the mouth or the head and not the heart. If we merely recite memorized prayers without any heart, this would certainly fit in this category. It was not uncommon for Gentiles to include such prayers in their pagan ceremonies and today, anytime we pray without truly meaning it, we are guilty of this. Even reciting the prayer that Jesus taught us in the next several verses there in Matthew (the Lord's Prayer) without thinking about and meaning what we say is "vain repetition" (Matthew 6:7 KJV).

Since Jesus often quoted from the Old Testament, it's also likely that He was thinking of Ecclesiastes 5:2 even if He didn't directly quote it. The Pharisees of Jesus' day often made long public prayers to be seen and heard not by God, but by men. This is what Jesus was speaking to.

On the other hand, Paul not only sets the example of repeatedly praying for others, he commands that we do so with such verses as Ephesians 6:18 (Always keep on praying for all the saints) and 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (Pray continually (KJV=without ceasing)). Jesus Himself told a parable in Luke 18:1-8 that indicates we should continue to pray and not give up.

One other Scripture that is helpful on this is Philippians 4:6-7 where Paul tells us not to worry about anything but to pray about everything that God's peace might guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. It seems obvious that every time we are tempted to worry about our loved ones, or our jobs, or our problems, that we should pray, regardless of whether we've already prayed for them or not.

Based on all of these Scriptures, it seems clear that whenever we are burdened for or about someone, we should pray for them and that prayer is not a "one and done" type of thing. God does know what we need, but He also wants us to pray, recognizing that we depend on Him, as well as the joy He gets from our continuing conversation with Him. So, in the words of Paul, "Always keep on praying for all the saints" (including your pastor J). In Jesus, George

July 2012 Dear George: Will you explain why the Lord's Prayer was changed from trespasses to debts? Where in the Bible is this found and which way is it stated? Does it mean the same thing? Thanks, A Trespasser.

Dear Trespasser: Thanks for raising this question! I've had other questions along that same line so this a good opportunity to clear the air on it. The Lord's Prayer is found twice in the New Testament recorded by both Matthew and Luke in slightly different settings. Each version is also slightly different but not significantly so. The exact references are Matthew 6:9-13 in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and Luke 11:1-4 after His disciples ask Him to teach them to pray. Almost all English translations of Matthew 6:12 use the words "debts" and "debtors" and almost all English translations of Luke 11:4 use the word "sins."

Where the word "trespasses" originated in relation to this is unclear, but it may have come from the verse immediately following the Lord's Prayer, in Matthew 6:14 where Jesus refers to trespasses. The word "trespasses" has been around for many years and is deeply entrenched in many churches and was most likely a part of your particular church background. In addition, some denominations and some congregations say "sins" instead of "debts" or "trespasses" because of the Luke 11:4 passage.

Really, the difference between any of these three words is very small. To sin against someone, or against God, is to incur a debt against them that must somehow be paid unless it is forgiven. Likewise, whenever we sin against someone or against God, we trespass against them by violating their boundaries in some way. The words are fairly interchangeable. Which of these three words we use is unimportant as long as we realize and mean what we are praying. Obeying this verse is much more important (and difficult) than the word we use.

Because many Brethren congregations have sought to be as true as possible to the Bible, they use "debts" since that is the translation of Matthew 6:12, but it does not mean others are not true to the Scripture if they use "trespasses" or "sins." Each congregation has their own tradition concerning this and generally uses one or the other consistently to keep from getting confused. Because of this, Antioch has grown accustomed to using "debts" and "debtors" instead of "trespasses" or "sins."

According to Easton's Bible Dictionary, all Christian prayer is based on the Lord's Prayer and it is the simplest and most universal prayer. While we do pray it together in worship, it can also be a model for our private prayers when we may use its outline for our own personal conversation with the Father. For example, "our daily bread" can be a broad category for all of our daily needs.

On [Easter Day 2007](#), it was estimated that two billion [Catholic](#), [Anglican](#), [Protestant](#) and [Eastern Orthodox](#) Christians read, recited, or sang the Lord's Prayer in hundreds of languages. Although theological differences and various styles of worship divide Christians, according to professor Clayton Schmit, "there is a sense of solidarity in knowing that Christians around the globe are praying together..., and these words always unite us."

May we continue to pray Jesus' model prayer and may we constantly strive to forgive our debtors and those who trespass or sin against us that our Father in Heaven can likewise forgive us. Another Trespasser, Debtor, and Sinner, George

