

Questioning Things

Commentary for March 1, 2010 — Do You? Can You?

The articles this month have a theme of questioning things. Do you have the courage to question things? Should a person be able to question the teachings of religious leaders in an open or even a public forum? And, even, can you question the text of Scripture?

This month's articles are "Conscience and Responsibility" and "The Tomb of Rachel," both by Dr. Ernest L. Martin. (But read first the "[March 2010 Newsletter](#).") The first article deals with the wisdom of belonging (or continuing to belong) to groups and organizations where you cannot question the religious teachings you are being taught. Another aspect of this article is whether you have the courage to question teachings you suspect may be wrong. If there is no forum for discussion, then there is a problem. If you cannot ask questions or you are unwilling to do so, you have a problem.

The second article considers a seeming contradiction and error in the Gospel of Matthew. Yes, we should have the courage even to question Scripture. However, we have the responsibility to first look for the answers ourselves from Scripture. If we work and study and still need help, then should we go to another person, group, or organization to seek answers. In the end you will find that the Bible is reliable — human beings and institutions will be far less reliable.

Study is not easy. It takes work, as do many things in life. Your study of Scripture will be rewarding, but your studies will never end. Unfortunately many people seek quick and easy answers to important questions, such as the reliability of the biblical text, and if they do not get answers immediately they are too willing to think the Bible is in error. That is mistaken thinking.

You were not called by God to be a religious hobbyist (Ephesians 4:1–4). Life is not a game, but it is a learning experience. The apostle Paul prayed earnestly for those to whom he wrote the epistle of Ephesians. That epistle was written for a purpose:

"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may be giving you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the realization of Him, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, for you to perceive what is the expectation [hope] of His calling, and what [are] the riches of the glory of the enjoyment of His allotment among the saints."

• Ephesians 1:17–18, Concordant Version

Every day you take 17,000 to 21,800 breaths.¹ Why does God allow you to take your next breath? He could stop that next breath and you would quickly die. You are alive to learn and to experience. You are learning the meaning of your life, the meaning of your **"expectation of His calling,"** is a very serious endeavor. Therefore, do as Dr. Laura Schlessinger encourages her radio audience to do every day: **"Go do the right thing."**

A Personal Experience

Decades ago when I first became serious about religion and biblical studies, I joined an organization that considered itself to be the "true church" on earth. My motives for joining that organization were self-serving. They claimed to have unique insight regarding prophecy. While

1. The website "[Beats and Breaths](#)" allows you to calculate the number of breaths and heartbeats over your lifetime. Rather interesting.

I did not expect them to have all knowledge, I did expect them to have a basic biblical understanding of prophecy.

My goal was to learn things that would protect me, my family, and my friends from future evil events of judgment. I wanted the knowledge and understanding to tell and help others escape what would happen in the future as prophesied in the Bible. I was wrong about the depth of the organization's knowledge. Some insights and some teachings were biblically correct, but they did not have anywhere near the detailed doctrinal and prophetic biblical knowledge they claimed to have. A great deal of time passed before I realized that fact. The result was that "prophecy brought me in, and prophecy took me out" of that organization. If the organization was more open to questioning, I would have left sooner because their lack of knowledge would have been revealed earlier.

Your Experience

You must be able to ask questions now, and expect answers from whatever religious group you are in fellowship with. How your questions are answered in an open forum will give you a great deal of information about that organization. If there is no forum for you to ask questions, respectfully request one, whether it is a Bible study or a question and answer session after the sermon or lecture.

In the early church all *ekklesias* were house churches. Questions and answers, give and take, were part of the social structure of the early New Testament *ekklesias*, all derived from the Jewish synagogue system.² You must ask questions and challenge those teaching you, instructing you. Heed the apostle Paul's admonition to test (1 John 4:1):

"Let no one be seducing you with empty words, for because of these things [empty words] the indignation of God is coming on the sons of stubbornness. Do not, then, become joint partakers with them, for you were once darkness, yet now you are light in the Lord. As children of light be walking (for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth), testing [proving, KJV] what is well pleasing to the Lord.

• *Ephesians 5:6–10, Concordant Version*

"Awake you that sleep, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light. See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be you not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."

• *Ephesians 5:14–17*

Scripture tells us everything we need to know about rules to live by.³ Read, study, question, and test **"what is well pleasing to the Lord"** (Ephesians 5:10 above) and **"Prove all things; hold fast that which is good"** (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

David Sielaff
david@askelm.com

-
2. See my Commentary "[The Cradle of the Ekklesia](#)" and Dr. Martin's articles "[Synagogues and Ekklesias](#)," "[Anatomy of a Church, Part 1](#)" and "[Anatomy of a Church, Part 2](#)."
 3. Henry Clay Trumbull made some interesting comments about conscience and its relation to Scripture in *Shoes and Rations for a Long March* (New York: Scribners, 1903):

"Conscience tells us that we ought to do right, but conscience does not tell us what is right. Conscience ... reminds us faithfully to observe the law as it has been laid down before us [page 219]. The revelation of God in his Son and in his word gives to our consciences their only safe standard and guide [page 230]. Your conscience must be conformed to what you find to be the Bible standard — not to the standard which some one else says is set up in the Bible [page 234]. ... so in the case of every Bible teacher; what he says to you may seem like Bible truth, and yet not be Bible truth; it may be approved by your conscience as Bible truth, and yet not be Bible truth" [page 235].