

Six Complicated Questions

Written by Perry Stone

Tuesday, 15 June 2010 10:13 AM EDT

During my years of ministry, I have been asked many questions about heaven and hell—and about who will be going to each place. Some of the questions asked most often relate to people who have died without ever hearing the gospel story about Christ. This section includes six of these questions, each of which is complicated and must be answered from a scriptural point of view.



Question 1

"I lost a child whom I love dearly at an early age. She was like an angel to me. I am hoping that in heaven she will be the same age (age five) that she was on Earth. Is this possible, or will she be a grown woman when I see her? Will she know I was her mother? It greatly burdens me that she will not know who I am!"

Answer: First, consider that we are all a tripartite creation—a body, soul, and spirit. It is the spirit of a person that, if it stepped out of the body where you could see it, you would recognize as that person. This was the case with the rich man who recognized Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) and with Moses and Elijah, who were recognized by Christ and by Peter at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:3-4). Thus, the spirit and soul have the same appearance as the physical body. This is why we will be known in heaven as we were known on Earth (1 Cor. 13:12).

On one occasion, the disciples rebuked parents for bringing their children to Christ. The Lord rebuked His disciples and reminded them to allow the little children to come to Him, for "such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14). Some have pointed out that in the English translation we read where Christ used the word "children" to describe adults; for example, "children of the kingdom" (Matt. 8:12, kjv), the "children of the bride chamber" (Matt. 9:15, kjv), and the "children of the wicked one" (Matt. 13:38,

kjv

). However, when speaking of adults being "children," the Bible uses a different Greek word than the word for small children. The word used for "children" when speaking of a person of adult age is

teknon

, which is the "offspring or one that is begotten." This is why we are "children of God," as we are God's spiritual offspring through Christ (Acts 17:29). The little children mentioned by Christ uses the Greek word

Six Complicated Questions

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paidion

, which alludes to "an infant or a half-grown boy and girl" (Matt. 14:21; 18:3; 19:13). The word *paidion*

is the word used to describe those little ones who were brought to Christ, and He laid hands upon them and blessed them (Matt. 19:13-15). The word

paidion

is used in the New Testament of an infant just born (John 16:21), of a male child recently born (Matt. 2:8), and of a more advanced child (Matt. 14:21).

The soul and spirit must grow within a person as the physical body grows. A child at ages five to twelve does not have the same physical structure in height or weight as that child will at twenty years of age. When at death their spirit departs from their body at a young age, it does appear they will remain in the same form as they were when they were a child. Those who have seen their departed children in a vision or in a near-death experience see them in their young form.

Question 2

"Prior to her being born, I lost a child who was a little girl. When people were trying to comfort me, they would say, 'Your little girl is with the Lord.' I want to believe this, but I struggle with this, because she would not have been totally developed. However, if life begins at conception, then have her soul and spirit departed from her body? Could her soul and spirit enter another infant, and then I would never know her? I am very confused.

"

Answer: The *life force* that begins human life starts at the time of conception. This is when there is fertilization of the male sperm and female ovum, thus beginning an embryo. If this unexplainable life force were absent, then the process would be stopped at that moment and conception would not occur.

From a Christian perspective, the soul and spirit enter the body at the moment of conception in the same manner that God breathed into Adam's nostrils the "breath of life" and Adam "became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7, kjv). Notice it did not say a "human being" but a "living soul." Adam was created from the dust (v. 7), and this *dust body* became his flesh and bone. We know this because when God formed Eve from one of Adam's ribs, Adam said, "She is flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone." (See Genesis 2:23.)

Six Complicated Questions

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Tuesday, 15 June 2010 10:13 AM EDT

However, he would have remained in the dust without the breath of life.

As the fetus begins to grow in the womb, so does the eternal soul and spirit. If the infant passes in the womb, the soul and spirit will depart the body. Job pointed this out when he was very depressed and had lost all that was dear to him. He said, "Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?" (Job 3:11). He repeats the same thought in Job 10:18. When David's young son had just been born, he said he could not bring him back from the dead, but he would go where he was (2 Sam. 12:23).

There is no indication in Scripture that the soul and spirit depart from an infant and enter into another infant who has been conceived. According to the Bible, there is a foreknowledge of all living people, long before they are ever born upon the earth. Jeremiah said that God knew him before he was formed in the womb (Jer. 1:5). If an infant passes, then the soul and spirit will return to God: "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Eccles. 12:7).

It is true that the infant spirit would be very small, and if the body was underdeveloped, then the mystery is, how could such a tiny spirit know the mother? This is one of the biblical mysteries that cannot be answered. I recall reading many years ago a story that was reported by Gordon Lindsay, the founder of the Voice of Healing out of Dallas, Texas. He related the account of a Miss Marietta Davis who experienced nine days of being in a trance-like condition. She lived in Berlin, New York, and in 1848, at twenty-five years of age experienced visions while being in this trance-like condition for nine days.

According to Miss Davis's experience, there is a special infant paradise; infants who die from around the globe are carried by a guardian angel to this special place. She described this place as a type of a heavenly nursery, where the spirits of the infants are taught, and remain, until they receive a higher degree of understanding and eventually enter a more youthful paradise. Seven angelic guardians supervise each large edifice. As the angel guardian breathes on the little spirit, it causes the life to expand. As the infant spirit expands and knowledge is taught to each spirit, it will move to a higher level in paradise.

There is no doubt that the spirit comes from God, and He cares for each living spirit that returns to Him. There is much mystery that surrounds the death of an infant. This may be why Paul wrote that he saw things in paradise that it is not "lawful to utter" (2 Cor. 12:4). Perhaps there is more than one meaning to the psalm, and to the words of Jesus, which state: "Out of the

Six Complicated Questions

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mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength" (Ps. 8:2).

Question 3

"I have read a lot of stories of individuals who have claimed a life-after-death experience, or a near-death experience. In almost all cases, if the people saw heaven (or paradise), when they saw their grandparents or parents they described them as being very young; perhaps in their twenties, or no older in appearance than when they were in their thirties. Is there any Bible reference to indicate how old a person will appear when they are in heaven?"

Answer: There is not a specific scripture on how old we will look in heaven. Some point out that when King Saul had the visitation from what appeared to be Samuel, that Samuel was covered in a mantle and looked like an old man, suggesting that since Samuel died old he appeared old before Saul (1 Sam. 28:14). However, Saul never visibly saw the apparition that appeared, but the witch claimed she did. This was a familiar spirit and not actually Samuel, according to many scholars.

In heaven, there are twenty-four elders sitting upon thrones. These are believed to be the twelve sons of Jacob from the Old Testament and the twelve apostles of Christ (Luke 22:30). The Scripture calls them *elders*, which is a Greek word (*presbuteros*) translated sixty times throughout the New Testament meaning "an older senior person." In the New Testament, the word was used when describing an elder in age, the elder of two persons (Luke 15:25), a person who is advanced in life (Acts 2:17), and the elders who are the forefathers of Israel (Matt. 15:2). It does not allude to respect of position but seniority in age, rank, and position of responsibility. When Paul was giving advice concerning elders in the church, he mentioned elders being married, and mentions the elder's children (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6-7). Young men could only enter the common priesthood at the tabernacle and temple at age thirty up to the age of fifty (Num. 4:3, 23, 30, 35). It can be suggested

that the ages of thirty to fifty is the time frame in which a person could mature into the position of an elder. If the twenty-four elders around the throne are the sons of Jacob, they all passed away at a very old age. The same is true with the majority of the apostles. It is believed that the apostle John passed shortly after penning the Book of Revelation, in his nineties!

Now back to the original question, which is how old a person is in heaven. While the spirit and soul may grow as the physical body grows, the spirit reaches a certain maturity or dimension as

Six Complicated Questions

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Tuesday, 15 June 2010 10:13 AM EDT

the person reaches full statute, and the soul and spirit cease to grow because the body has reached physical maturity. From that moment, the spirit-soul ceases to age as the body ages. We read, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). The inward man is the spiritual man or the spirit of a redeemed person. It is "renewed" each day—a word in Greek (*anakainoo*) alluding to "make new back again and again." Thus, as we become feeble with age and our skin wrinkled with time, the inner spirit is continually made new. It will be this eternal spirit that will join a new body at the resurrection.

I have also noticed individuals who have allegedly experienced a near-death encounter describe how youthful their departed loved ones appear. When asked what age they appeared, the common answer is, "They looked about the same as when they were thirty years old." When Christ began His public ministry, He was about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23). The four Gospels record several Passovers that Christ attended before His death. Scholars believe Christ was between thirty-two and thirty-three years of age at His death. Since the age of thirty was the age of entering the spiritual ministry as a priest, the age of thirty could be the age a person *appears* once they enter the heavenly paradise. Others point out that Adam was created a full-grown man at the time of his creation. When he opened his eyes, he was one day old on the first day, but his body was that of an adult man.

It is unclear how old a person will appear when we arrive in heaven. Will they maintain their same appearance if they pass at age ninety? I suggest not. Women especially would never be happy in eternity with any form of wrinkles on their faces—much less the men! However, we will know them as we knew them on Earth. That is the most important fact.

Question 4

"I once heard you teach about 'Four Seconds From Eternity,' in which you related a story of a man in a plane accident who had four seconds before the plane crashed. He survived and later told you what went through his mind before the accident. I have numerous unsaved brothers and sisters who were raised in church. This story gave me hope that the seed of God's Word planted in their spirits would not return void at the end of their lives. Even in the event of an accident they could have time to repent. Please relate this story again."

Answer: Many years ago I preached each year in Deland, Florida, for a dear friend. One afternoon he was invited to fly with a friend who owned a two-seater show plane. As they took

Six Complicated Questions

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Tuesday, 15 June 2010 10:13 AM EDT

off from the runway and were several hundred feet in the air, the rudder became stuck, and the plane began to turn to one side. He had a headset on, and the pilot yelled, "We're going down." My friend said he had about four seconds before the plane hit the ground and everything went black.

I asked him, "What went through your mind during those four seconds?"

He said, "It was the most amazing thing I have ever experienced. It was like a computer hard drive filled with information was turned on. My mind went back to the time I was a child and called my dad a name. My thoughts recalled sermons I heard as a child. I instantly began to think about missing my daughter's graduation, the insurance I left my family, and a check on my desk in my office that I should have signed."

I was amazed to hear this.

He said, "I literally remembered things that I had long forgotten, including my many mistakes, words I had spoken, church services I had sat in—and it all hit in my mind and spirit within those four seconds!"

I asked him a very important question that I knew many family members would have asked him had they had the opportunity. I said, "Mike, in those four seconds would you have had time to repent and ask for God's forgiveness?"

He immediately replied, "There is no doubt. In fact with all of that information flooding my mind and spirit, I was actually asking God to forgive me of anything in my life that may have been wrong!"

This brought me great comfort in knowing that if a person has the seed of the Word of God planted in them and is about to pass into eternity and has only a few seconds of breath or life remaining in his or her body, that person is able to recall the loving warnings and messages and to call on the name of the Lord for forgiveness or mercy.

Six Complicated Questions

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Some would say that a person needs to say a long sinner's prayer in order to have true redemption. Well, this *long prayer* was not what the thief on the cross prayed. The fellow was bleeding to death and said to Christ, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

Christ replied, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise" (v. 43).

The poor dying thief did not say, "Lord, I am a thief, and I have stolen from many people, and that's why I'm here. Let me confess all my sins." By the time he was finished *confessing*, Jesus could have passed and he could have missed his opportunity for forgiveness. Perhaps this is why it is written, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Joel 2:32). Receiving salvation and forgiveness is not a complicated event that takes hours of travail. Christ has already provided the suffering, the travail, and the pain of purchasing our redemption. He is looking for FAITH in the heart of that person.

I have taught my children and my closest friends the importance of keeping a repentant spirit, and I know that in the event of a sudden tragedy, they have made their peace with God before they leave this life. Men and women should never take the risk of living their lives without Christ and hoping that in the end they will have time to repent. There are many who pass in their sleep or depart with a sudden and unexpected heart attack. There may be a small split second of time between the death and the departure of the soul and spirit in which a person could call on the name of Christ. However, it is far better to know each day that you have a covenant redemptive relationship with the Savior.

Question 5

"I have a family member who was a strong Christian throughout his life. He went through a terrible time of losing almost everything he had and committed suicide. This was a shock to the entire family and the church. It caused a great cloud of darkness and depression to come over the entire family. The biggest concern was if a person killed another person without cause (such as in self-defense or war), the killer would be classified a murderer. Would the suicide be self-murder, and did this person make it to heaven?"

Six Complicated Questions

Written by Perry Stone

Tuesday, 15 June 2010 10:13 AM EDT

Answer: Without a doubt you have just asked me the most difficult question that anyone could attempt to answer. First of all, let me discuss *why* a person who is a devout believer would do such a thing. The Bible says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). Hope is the positive expectation that something good will occur. When a person begins to feel his faith waver and become weak, then it is

hope

that undergirds him, and the belief that the bad things will not always be as they are but are subject to a positive. For example, Job lost his ten children, their homes, and all of his livestock. His health also began to deteriorate before his eyes (Job 1-3). Job became so despondent that he said he cursed the day he was born and wished he had never been born (Job 3:1-11). However, Job also looked forward knowing that the Lord was still with him and that he would one day stand before his Redeemer (Job 19:25). Job held on to his trust in God, and eventually the Lord reversed the captivity and blessed Job with twice as much in the end as in the beginning (Job 42:10).

The power of hope is seen when a cancer patient is told, "You have cancer, but it can be treated," or in the life of a prisoner when they are told, "You have been given thirty years, but I believe you will only serve a few." It is hope that keeps a person wanting to live longer. Once a patient believes a disease is hopeless, that person will pass much faster than a person who fights, believing there is hope.

A person can experience weak faith, as did the disciples on occasions (Matt. 8:26). However, when hope is delayed, then the heart begins to feel sick. There is an uncomfortable sense of doom and despair that will take root. It is sad, but some see taking their life as a form of escape from the pressure they are feeling. As believers, we must never lose hope and must surround ourselves with praying individuals during our weak moments, knowing that our trials will bring patience and bring us forth as gold (1 Pet. 1:7).

In the Bible there are three examples of people who took their own life. The Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul because of his jealousy against David. Saul was wounded in battle and requested that a young man pierce him through with a sword. When his armor bearer refused, Saul took his own life by falling on his sword (1 Sam. 31:4).

The second incident was Ahithophel, a counselor to David. This leader went behind David's back to attempt a coup against the king. Ahithophel made plans to set up David's son as the next king and to assassinate David. The plan backfired. We read, "Now when Ahithophel saw

Six Complicated Questions

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Tuesday, 15 June 2010 10:13 AM EDT

that his advice was not followed, he...went home to his house...put his household in order, and hanged himself" (2 Sam. 17:23).

The third person was Judas, the man who betrayed Christ. After he sold Christ for money, he realized his sin and was regretful. Judas went out and hung himself (Matt. 27:5).

In all three instances the men were not believers but were in complete rebellion. Saul had slain eighty-six priests (1 Sam. 22), made twenty-one attempts to kill David, and sought a witch for advice (1 Sam. 28). We are not told where Saul's spirit went after his death, although the familiar spirit prior to the battle said to Saul, "Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me" (v. 19). This would have been the *Sheol* compartment under the earth at that time. With Ahithopel, it simply tells us he took his life. Judas is an entirely different subject. He was an apostle, but Christ also said he was a "devil" (John 6:70). He was also called a "thief" while he was the treasurer of Christ's ministry (John 12:6). Prior to Judas's betraying Christ, we read where Satan entered his heart (Luke 22:3). Christ said it would have been better for the man who would betray Him to have never been born (Matt. 26:24). After Judas took his life, we read that he went "to his own place" (Acts 1:25). This phrase "own place" indicated that his spirit did not go to the same place where the spirits of just and righteous men are, but to a special compartment in the underworld of his own. These are the three examples of men who in some form of another took their own life. However, in all three cases these men were in complete rebellion against God and spiritual leadership.

These examples are not the same as a person who loves the Lord yet has fought a hopeless spirit. In some instances there have been Christian people who were on a very high level of medication that actually caused severe confusion and depression in their minds. I believe that when God judges a person, He will judge them by the knowledge they had and by the condition of their mind and spirit when the events occurred. If a person had no clue what he or she was doing because of legal medication that somehow clashed with their thinking, then God will judge according to each particular circumstance.

In Christ's time there was a man from Gadara who was being tormented by many spirits. We are informed that he was "cutting himself with stones" and was crying night and day (Mark 5:5). After Christ's prayer, these spirits departed from the man and entered a herd of wild pigs. The pigs ran off a cliff into the Sea of Galilee, where they perished (v. 13). It is clear that this strong spirit was pressing the man to take his own life, but the limestone rocks that he used in an attempt to "cut himself" were not sufficient to take his own life. After he was cured, the Bible says, "He was in his right mind" (v. 15). The phrase "right mind" is from a Greek word (*sophron*)

Six Complicated Questions

Written by Perry Stone

Tuesday, 15 June 2010 10:13 AM EDT

meaning "a

sober and sound mind

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sound mind

when these spirits were tormenting him. In fact, he had little control over his own actions because of the tormented condition he was experiencing. The adversary may not be able to possess a believer, but he does attempt to oppress believers and make them think God has forsaken them.

I have known of older believers who lived a spotless and holy life. However, in their latter years they suffered certain illnesses and would begin to use profanity, become angry, and even curse their own family members. They are not accountable for a physical disease or illness that has affected their blood vessels or their neurological systems, which they cannot control or alter. When a believer takes his life and does not fulfill his earthly assignment, he can hinder himself from receiving a reward for his works in life. This may seem insignificant, but it should be an important part of a believer's expected future.

It is very important for all who are living to never take the risk of what lies beyond this life if we take our own life. It is the unknown that often forms a restraint in the hearts of those who battle depression and anxiety. The thought of the judgment, losing rewards, or perhaps not being a part of the eternal kingdom restrains a believer from giving up or saying, "I am finished with life." Hold on to your hope. Bad things today are changeable tomorrow, and the Lord said He would go with you even to the end of the world!

Question 6

"I have served in the military, and it was necessary to take the lives of those we were fighting against. Years have passed, and I am often bothered about standing before God and answering Him for taking those lives. I wonder whether I will have to meet these people in heaven one day, and what if they died lost?"

Answer: It would be a wonderful world if we could prevent all future wars and live together in harmony. However, wars and rumors of war will continue until the time of the end and are indicators of the *birth pains* that precede the return of Christ (Matt. 24:6-8). As Americans, our nation has never gone to war just for the purpose of going to war. In every war America and her allies were assigned to prevent an evil dictator or an evil regime from taking

Six Complicated Questions

Written by Perry Stone

Tuesday, 15 June 2010 10:13 AM EDT

control of an entire nation or region that would cost the lives of thousands or millions of innocent people. Whether it was Hitler or Saddam Hussein, America is not an aggressive nation but a nation that seeks freedom for peace-seeking people.

Some people will quote the commandment "Thou shall not kill" and condemn a soldier who took the life of an enemy. First of all, there are two distinct Hebrew words translated in the English Bible for "kill." The word used in the commandment "Thou shall not kill" is the Hebrew word *ratsach*, meaning, "to dash in pieces or *commit murder*." It is dealing with the premeditated slaying of an innocent person. A man who would rob a home and kill the owner, kill a woman by raping her or a child by abusing him then taking his life is a manslayer and a murderer.

There is a difference between this immoral action and the action required to protect innocent people from a demonically controlled dictator. Saddam Hussein used chemical and biological weapons against the Kurds in northern Iraq, killing thousands and maiming thousands of others. He also prepared mass graves as he and his henchmen slew thousands of Shiite Muslims in the south of Iraq. To remove this wicked man was a moral obligation to the people of Iraq and the world. Had the Allies not entered Europe and fought against the Nazis during World War II, can you imagine the destructive power that Adolf Hitler would have in his hands? Few Jews would have existed in the world if this criminal mind had fulfilled his total vision of Jewish annihilation. War is not the best choice, but at times war becomes necessary for the greater cause of humanity and for preserving the moral and social societies that have emerged.

In times of war, there is an enemy. The enemy is instructed to take out the opposition by whatever method is possible-either with bombs, hand-to-hand combat, guerrilla warfare, or torture. In war a soldier understands that when he is confronted with an armed enemy, it will be either his life or the life of the armed enemy. It is a matter of survival.

Because many United States troops have family and friends who continually pray for their safe return, and since America was founded on high spiritual and moral principles, men enter war with certain convictions, mixed with their determination to defeat the enemy. At times these convictions, especially spiritual convictions, can clash with the necessity of taking the life of an enemy geared toward the destruction of our troops and the very people of their own nation.

Also there is nothing wrong with a man defending himself. During Christ's ministry, He told his

Six Complicated Questions

Written by Perry Stone

Tuesday, 15 June 2010 10:13 AM EDT

disciples not to take money on their journey. This was because Christ was the director of this evangelistic team, and He would provide what was needed for them (Luke 22:35). Near His death, Christ told them that if possible, the one who had no sword should sell his garment and purchase a sword (v. 36). The apostle Paul mentioned that during his missionary journeys he was in danger of "robbers" (2 Cor. 11:26). The only need for a sword would be for personal protection.

In the case of a soldier who took the life of an enemy, it would have been in the realm of self-defense and for the reason of freedom for the innocent people who were suffering in that nation. Let me use this example. If you were to come across a small armed gang, and they stopped your car, putting your entire family in danger, approaching with clubs, knives, and other dangerous instruments, if you had a method to protect your family, would you allow the gang to destroy your car, beat your family with clubs, and leave you in the road while they drove off in your car? There are times when a person must protect himself, which is both a natural instinct and permitted in Scripture.

When another life is taken in war, in many instances the enemy comes from either a pagan background or is a follower of a false religion or an idol worshiper. If this person died in a natural condition, he would enter eternity lost. If his life is taken in a battle, he will enter the next life in the same condition and to the same place as he would have if he had lived and eventually passed. This is why there is such a need for the gospel message, even following a time of war. America often rebuilds the nation, assists the poor and needy, and, in some instances, helps the people to find religious freedom, including allowing the Christian faith to be practiced without oppression.

Perry Stone directs the global outreach *Voice of Evangelism*, based in Cleveland, Tenn., where he also serves as a bishop with the Church of God. He is the author of more than 40 books and booklets. You'll find more on these questions and many others in his new book, *Secrets From Beyond the Grave*, which releases in September.