

# Answering Hard Questions: The Devil's Advocate

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You ask hard questions...and that's not a complaint! (Well, not a *serious* one, at least...) How do we answer questions like...

- Who is the “man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4?
- Why are people “baptized on behalf of the dead” in 1 Corinthians 15:29-30?
- Should we be washing feet per Jesus' example in John 13?
- What role should women have in church leadership? Must they wear head coverings? (1 Corinthians 11, 14:34, 1 Timothy 2:12)

## Background to these Questions

Did you notice that these questions didn't appear until we hit the New Testament epistles? Why now?

## Matthew's Framework for Bible Study

These questions are significant, but not ultimate. They are worthy of study as is any portion of scripture...but sometimes, we can become obsessed with *trivia* in Scripture and ignore the things that are plain. I suspect that God understands the clarity with which he revealed himself—and will judge accordingly. (But, that's just me...)

I approach difficulties like these with a series of questions.

1. What does the verse actually say? Open the passage in as many translations as you can find. Get a grasp for the vocabulary of the Scripture. Challenge your assumptions about word meanings. When there are differences, note what that might be teaching you. Learn the differences between translations to help you judge what you are reading. (Try this on 1 Corinthians 7:36-38 or 1 John 5:6-12)
2. What is being said in this “section” of scripture?
  - Expand your reading to the entire paragraph of scripture, at the least. Remember that chapter breaks and verse breaks are artificial interruptions.
  - Look for clues that govern the change of topics or the flow of arguments. In 1 Corinthians, look and see which “question” is currently being “answered” by using the “now concerning” formula. (7:1, 7:25, 8:1, 12:1, 16:1)
  - Look for clues outside of this passage that may give insights to the author's intent (especially in the letters). Look to see what Acts has to say about the church being written to.
3. What kind of literature is this?
  - Letter: try to investigate its background, first, biblically, then extra-biblically. Letters are written for a purpose. Try to understand why this letter was written.
  - History: biblical history is not written like a history book today. Figure out what the author is trying to emphasize.
  - Prophecy: who is speaking? Under what circumstances? To whom is he speaking? Do any other passages interpret this passage? (See Hosea 11:1-2 and Matthew 2:15)
4. What literary devices are used? We want to understand the text literally—but sometimes literally isn't exactly what we mean. Have you ever heard a foreign translator try to give the equivalents to American idioms? If I say “cut to the chase”, he might say “chop to the pursuit.” The words are all synonymous, but the end result is entirely different. Watch for comparisons, hyperbole, parables, parallelism that might help you understand what's going on.
5. What bias do I have? Try to work around it. Read the Bible as if it were your very first time, sort of...

- If I'm a traditionalist, I'm going to assume this passage means what I've always heard.
  - If I'm more progressive, I'm going to assume this passage *does not mean* what I thought.
6. What would the recipients have understood this verse to teach?
- This may be the most important point. Use the previous four questions to try to understand how the original hearers *should* have understood this scripture.
  - Use outside references at this point: Bible dictionaries, atlases, history books, etc to understand the way of life of the ancient church.
7. What principle would this passage teach? In the example of Jesus washing feet, it's clear that Jesus is teaching humble servitude in mundane things. The principle is clear: as Jesus was a servant, so also we should serve. This principle is reinforced by several other passages and does not appear to be in tension with any others. (Isaiah 42:1-4, Mark 10:45, Matthew 20:28, Philippians 2:7)
8. How can I live that principle?
- What role does culture play in a biblical command?
    - i. If changes in culture have detached principle from practice, the practice likely must change.
      1. Foot washing today isn't a display of a servant attitude. The only place it is ever done is in a church service, advertised. It has become a display of a display of servant attitude. (Look at us! We're servants!) If it really were culturally relevant, you would see foot-washing stands in the mall and on TV. I believe that in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, washing feet on a regular basis (in most cases) would actually be in violation of Jesus' intent—because it would be calling undue attention to an archaic practice rather than being the type of service Jesus offered.
      2. Other evidence: foot washing itself is not repeated or proclaimed as a necessity. There is no other NT example of it occurring, but the PRINCIPLE of humble service is constant.
    - ii. We must never throw away the principle, even if the practice changes. Just because we don't wash feet does not mean that we are not serving. We must be doing service! If our women do not wear veils, they must be wearing an attitude of submission. The men must be wearing an attitude of sacrificial love and servant leadership. Or else.
    - iii. We must never throw away the practice when it is integral to the principle. (Baptism!) There are instances where the practice and the principle are tied together inextricably. We also must be careful not to let cultural shifts sway us away from principles. Just because bad language doesn't mean to the culture what it used to does not mean that the principle of wholesome talk has changed.
  - Ask these questions:
    - i. What commands are in this passage? (To whom do they apply? Under what circumstances?)
    - ii. What examples are in this passage? (Are they positive or negative? Are they regulative?)
    - iii. Based on 1, 2, and the rest of scripture, what "jumps" can you make?
  - Watch for pitfalls:
    - i. One of the biggest problems we have is the "Scripture Dart War." That is, we find two scriptures that *seemingly* disagree.
      1. Example: "All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13) "Baptism doth now save us." (1 Peter 3:21) Which one is right?
      2. I know of no scriptural "Trump Card Passages." We need to understand how these two passages fit together as pieces of a puzzle that give a complete picture of God's will.

*Caveat: any of these methods can be abused. Some folks use question #1 to redefine all words until they're happy with the answer. Obviously this is no good!*

**Caveat!** This material is designed to help YOU work through the scripture. I don't want to give you my answers. I want you to struggle with the text to see what it really says. Please ask me or the elders if you want to discuss further.

**The Man of Lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:1-10)** Didn't I already show that this is Keith?

- He's a result of falling away (2:3) – so he had to have some Christian origin.
- He wasn't yet revealed at the time of writing (2:3) – so he's not someone/something that existed in 1<sup>st</sup> Century.
- He has no regard for God's laws, at all (2:8)
- He feigns religiosity, but he's really diabolic. (2:4, 2:9)
- His foundation was already beginning... (2:7) Maybe the baby of lawlessness existed before the Man.
- He would endure in some form until the Second Coming (2:8)

To Matthew, this rules out individuals. The two most popular answers within our fellowship are...

1. The Catholic Church. A slow falling away from the origins of Christianity, early focus on man's authority over God's, continues to exist, and has done many good things (and many horrible things) in the name of religion.
2. Evil, personified. See criteria for #1. It's fitting with the way "antichrist" is used in Paul's literature as well. Anyone who doesn't believe, effectively, is antichrist. Some had already come, and even more were coming. Perhaps there will be a "worst of the worse" Antichrist...but it's nothing to get excited about.

For more reading: <http://www.christiancourier.com/articles/677-a-study-of-pauls-man-of-sin>

**Baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:29-30)**

Background info: currently only practiced by the Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) – and it is only allowed to be performed in certain temples. It began in 1840 in the LDS church. The Orthodox Church forbade the practice in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century calling it heresy.

Tertullian believed that Paul was teaching vicarious baptism via this passage. Epiphanius and Chrysostom mentioned that Cerinthians and Marcionites continued the practice. (Interesting – Marcion was one of the first great heretics!)

- Discussion is entirely about resurrection and the absurdity of not believing in it.
- Baptism could be ambiguous: baptism or a washing?
- Early *heretical* groups were known for doing this – ultimately banned. No other mentions in scripture.
- Every example and command of baptism is directed towards living people who could make informed decisions.

Matthew's theory:

Paul may have been making a point using the (misguided) example of some fringe groups (thus, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person reference). "Of course there's a resurrection! What sense does it make if there's not? Your faith would be worthless. Shucks, what about those folks baptizing for the dead?" There was a pagan city just north of Corinth named Eleusis, where this practice was exceptionally common. Maybe Paul is saying "Even the pagans have it figured out that there is a resurrection. Why is this so hard for you?"

Other theories:

- Perhaps it's because of the example of those that have died, the motivation of seeing them again beyond the grave. "For" in this passage can mean "on behalf of" or "beyond, more, over."
- Perhaps it is because we know that we will die one day, and that baptism is a union with Christ's death that is meaningful only because of the resurrection.

**Women's Veils (1 Corinthians 11:2-16)** It probably wasn't because the Corinthian women had really ugly hair. *Probably.*

- In the “Now Concerning” section about giving up your rights to help others (8:1ff) just before the section about spiritual gifts (12:1ff).
- Three issues are discussed that have led to division in worship: Head Coverings (11:2-16), Arrogance at the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34), Over-emphasizing some gifts of the spirit (12:1-14:40—includes famous ch 13)
- Paul offers praise (you remember and maintain v2) and instruction (understand headship v3).
- Culture: Ancient temple prostitute women may have shaved their heads; their clients may have had long hair.
- Permanence: Reference is made to creation (vv8-9), the angels (!) (v10), and nature\* (v v14-15)
- Does nature mean something inherent to our creation or to our “sense” of what is appropriate.
- Paul invites his reader to make his own judgment based on the above evidence (v 13)
- Head “covered” means “down from the head” (v4) – describes long, loose hair, or a shawl/scarf-covering.
- Culture: Roman pagan prayer was frequently done with the head covered. Given the questions surrounding idolatry discussed already—would Christian men even entertain the possibility?

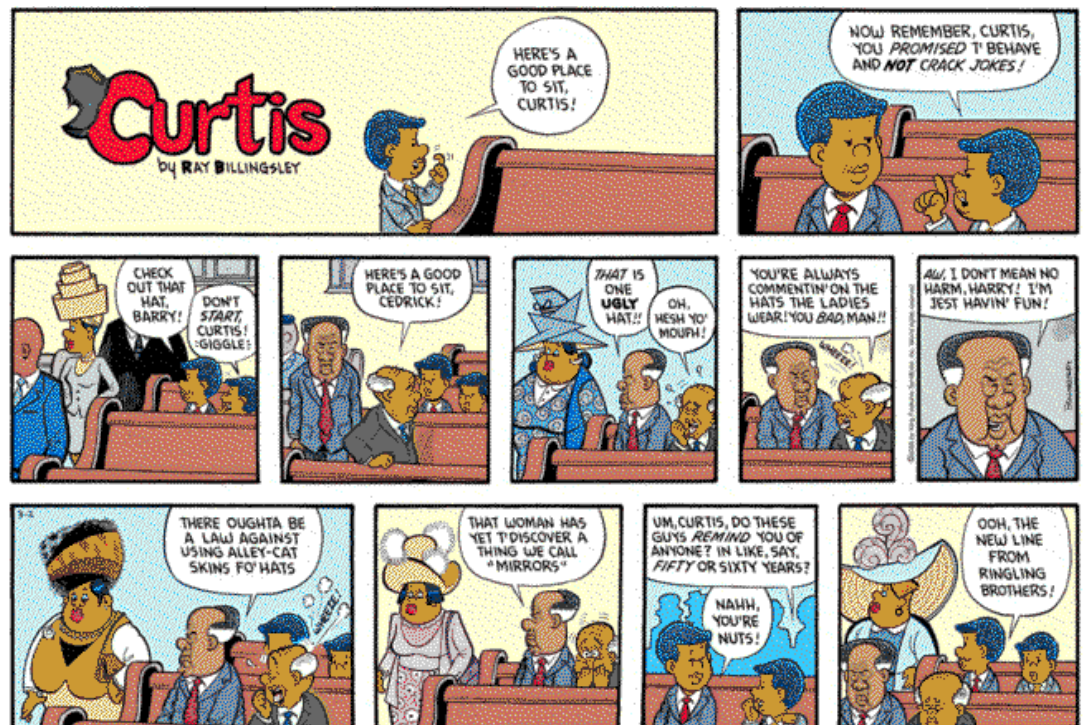
Given principles from the above thoughts:

1. A woman’s submissive spirit should be clearly visible.
2. Our worship attire should be decent, not anything remotely resembling idolatry clothing, should allow clear demarcation between genders, and should not be culturally or morally distracting.

*So, does this text require a woman to wear a veil or not?*

Personally, I do not think so. The emphasis on headship seems to be the principle, and I believe the words used allow for the cultural description of the principle to change. I think the wearing of a wedding ring, modest clothing, and an observable spirit of willful submission is the best application of this command—inside or outside of the church. The text emphasizes the principles very heavily—and not so much the exact nuances of its implementation. If a kerchief or cap (that’s not distractingly ... huge) is helpful to a woman, by all means, wear it. In some cases, the wearing of head coverings has been abused to call attention to self (and wealth)—and this would violate and nullify this text.

Others disagree, and I can understand their points of view. An interesting point is that if a head covering is required, the Greek phrase used indicates something that comes down over and around the head – something that long hair fulfills. If something is required in addition to hair, it seems that a scarf would not fulfill the requirement of the text. If these folks are correct – in general, women should not ever have short hair. (Exception for the sick, I assume?)



## Women's Role in the Church

### 1 Corinthians 14:26

- Women (wives?) should be (totally) silent in the church (assembly): no speaking (34), no questions (35)
- Context: orderly assembly. Three uses of "silent" in the chapter (28, 30, 34)
- Paragraph claims full apostolic authority (37): something is supposed to "stick"
- Verses 26-32 use the ambiguous masculine plural pronouns; avoids noun for "males"
- Submission is contrasted with speaking
- "It is shameful" – identical verbiage to 1 Corinthians 11.
  - Is Ch 11 dealing with assemblies? Women are praying in prophesying (as in Acts 2:17, 21:8-9)
  - If not – what is being described?
- Use of silence in scripture: (Exodus 14:14, Habakkuk 2:20, Titus 1:11, 1 Peter 2:15)

### 1 Timothy 2:6-15

- Directions to men: don't be angry and fight; To women: dress respectably, inside and out
  - Clarification of woman's directive: No braided hair, gold, pearls, costly attire (v8)
- DO: learn quietly in submission
- DO NOT: Teaching or exercising authority over man. (Does "over man" apply to teaching, authority, or both?)
- Permanence from Creation/Fall. She is "deceived"????
- KJV: "Usurp authority" Best translation? This is a *hapax legomenon* – a one-use verb.
  - Word range: be authoritative, dictate, murder, author, perpetrate, master, reign sovereign

### Questions for your study:

When multiple passages are in tension with each other, how do we resolve them? For example: if 1 Cor. 14 says "be silent" – and we understand Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16 to direct congregational singing, we have two choices: 1) Teach that women cannot sing or 2) Teach that silence isn't 100%. Which passage gets priority and why?

Was Phoebe a deaconess? (Romans 16:1) Was Junia an apostle? (Romans 16:7)

Can the principles taught in these passages be separated from their practices? How or why not?

Based on the above thoughts and the rest of scripture—consider these questions:

- Can a woman ask a question in a question-and-answer sermon? What about Sunday School? Why?
- Can she ask a leading question? Can she teach at all? Can she teach men? Can she teach men in a team with her husband if he's clearly the leader? Can she teach baptized young boys?
- Can she sing? Can she read scripture aloud? Can she read scripture aloud from the front? Can we sing songs *written* by women?
- Can she pass trays horizontally? Can she pass trays vertically?
- Can she edit the church bulletin? Can she make an announcement?
- Can she serve as a sign language interpreter? What about a foreign language interpreter? Can we use a Bible edited or translated, even in part, by a woman?
- Can a mother lead a prayer in a family devotional? Can she help direct the singing? Can she be the song leader?
- Can a woman preach? Can a woman serve as an elder? Can she be a deacon?
- Can she write an article for the *Gospel Advocate* or for a church bulletin?
- What happens if a woman is teaching a ladies' class, and a man walks in? What if he listens to the CD recording of the class—is he making her sin retroactively?

# The Book of Romans

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*"If you get Romans, God gets you!" R.C. Bell*

## **Outline**

1. The Gospel as the Revelation of the Righteousness of God (1:1–17)
  - a. Salutation: the gospel concerning God's Son (1:1–7)
  - b. Thanksgiving: prayer for an apostolic visit (1:8–15)
  - c. Theme: the gospel of the righteousness of God (1:16–17)
2. God's Righteousness in His Wrath against Sinners (1:18–3:20)
  - a. The unrighteousness of the Gentiles (1:18–32)
  - b. The unrighteousness of the Jews (2:1–3:8)
  - c. The unrighteousness of all people (3:9–20)
3. The Saving Righteousness of God (3:21–4:25)
  - a. God's righteousness in the death of Jesus (3:21–26)
  - b. Righteousness by faith for Jews and Gentiles (3:27–31)
  - c. Abraham as the father of Jews and Gentiles (4:1–25)
4. Hope as a Result of Righteousness by Faith (5:1–8:39)
  - a. Assurance of hope (5:1–11)
  - b. Hope in Christ's triumph over Adam's sin (5:12–21)
  - c. The triumph of grace over the power of sin (6:1–23)
  - d. The triumph of grace over the power of the law (7:1–6)
  - e. The law and sin (7:7–25)
  - f. Life in the Spirit (8:1–17)
  - g. Assurance of hope (8:18–39)
5. God's Righteousness to Israel and to the Gentiles (9:1–11:36)
  - a. God's saving promises to Israel (9:1–29)
  - b. Israel's rejection of God's saving promises (9:30–11:10)
  - c. God's righteousness in his plan for Jews and Gentiles (11:11–32)
  - d. Concluding doxology (11:33–36)
6. God's Righteousness in Everyday Life (12:1–15:13)
  - a. Paradigm for exhortations: total dedication to God (12:1–2)
  - b. Marks of the Christian community (12:3–13:14)
  - c. A call for mutual acceptance between the strong and the weak (14:1–15:13)
7. The Extension of God's Righteousness through the Pauline Mission (15:14–16:23)
  - a. The establishment of churches among the Gentiles (15:14–33)
  - b. Appreciation and greetings to coworkers in the gospel (16:1–23)
8. Final Summary of the Gospel of the Righteousness of God (16:25–27)

Want to know more about predestination, election, grace, law, grace, sin, baptism, God's nature, the Holy Spirit, our purpose on earth...or pretty much anything else? Romans is as close to a systematic theology as we get in the Bible. It is RICH!

Some thoughts on Romans:

- Romans is one of the most ordered, logical books of the Bible. It really helps to read it in one sitting to listen to the flow of the argument.
- Listen to how Paul anticipates his readers' questions. He might just answer yours, if you're right there with him.
- Romans was a catalyst of the Great Reformation of Martin Luther.

## Survey of Paul's Epistles

Book	# Chp	Theme	Place Written	Date Written	Recipients
Romans	16	The Righteousness of God	Corinth	Winter 57	Beloved of God in Rome, called to be saints (1:1)
1 Corinthians	16	Solving Divisions and Disorders	Ephesus	56-57	Church of God at Corinth, those sanctified in Christ Jesus (1:2)
2 Corinthians	13	The Ministry of Reconciliation	Macedonia	56-57	Church of God at Corinth with all the saints in Achaia (1:1)
Galatians	6	Freedom in Christ	Antioch(?)	48-49 or 55-57	Churches of Galatia (1:2)
Ephesians	6	The Church: The Body of Christ	Rome	60-63	Saints of Ephesus, faithful in Christ Jesus (1:1)
Philippians	4	Joyful Christian Living	Rome	60-63	Saints in Christ Jesus in Philippi with the bishops and deacons (1:1)
Colossians	4	The Cosmic Christ	Rome	60-63	Saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse (1:2)
1 Thessalonians	5	The Coming of Christ	Corinth	51-52	Church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1)
2 Thessalonians	3	The Day of the Lord	Corinth	51-52	Church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (1:1)
1 Timothy	6	Pastoral Advice	Macedonia(?)	62-66	Timothy, a true son in the faith (1:2)
2 Timothy	4	A Farewell Word of Encouragement	Rome	66-67	Timothy, a beloved son (1:2)
Titus	3	A Christian Conduct Manual	Macedonia(?)	63-66	Titus, a true son in our common faith (1:4)
Philemon	1	Receiving a Slave as a Brother	Rome	60-63	Philemon, our beloved friend and fellow laborer (1:1)

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Nelson Publishers, *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts : Old and New Testaments.*, Rev. and updated ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1996).