

mind. Everyone has honest doubts and questions about the



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(Following is the message, somewhat revised, that I preached in our Vineyard church on May 23-24. Next month I will continue on the subject of overcoming fear.)

OVERCOMING FEAR

Many people desire to have a deeper relationship with God. But they have a big hang-up with the Bible. With good reason! They have been conditioned all their lives by public education, university, media, and entertainment, to believe that everything is explainable by the intellect and science and that nothing real exists beyond energy and matter.

Besides that, the Bible is strange, even weird, to our minds. It was written in a different age, in a different idiom, and is full of impossibilities: miracles, Jesus walking on the water, a snake talking to a woman in a garden, Jonah swallowed by a whale, Noah and the ark. When I think of the ark, I think of the cartoons showing a boat with two giraffes poking out the top. It seems like a quaint myth and is hard to take seriously.

Many things in the Bible are symbolic, figurative, allegorical: "Our God is a rock." Well, not really. "God will cover you with His feathers." God is not a big chicken. Obviously, these are analogies. Revelation speaks of a dragon rising out of the sea. We understand this is symbolic, it means something, but is not to be taken literally. Then how about angels and demons? How about Jonah and the whale, Noah and the ark? Christians disagree, even Bible experts disagree, about whether some of the stories in the Bible are meant to be taken literally or figuratively.

I recommend that you read Evidence that Demands a Verdict, by Josh McDowell, and the classic, Mere Christianity, by C. S. Lewis. And I strongly recommend that you use a study Bible. I used the NIV Study Bible for years, but my favorite is the New King James Study Bible. Jack Hayford is the editor. Both of these Bibles are very balanced and brings much understanding on difficult passages.

Let me stop and say that many of our questions about the Bible would be resolved if we really believed the first sentence in the Bible, Genesis 1:1. Someone observed that there are only two ways to look at the beginning of the cosmos: (1) In the beginning, God, or (2) Once upon a time. The Bible says, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" It requires faith to believe that. Secularists say, "Once upon a time there was nothing, then it exploded, and everything just happened!" It also takes faith to believe that, although they would vehemently deny that. As Professor Fudd would say, "Ith a thientific fact!" Right.

But you don't get an "A" from God for saying you believe something that you don't really believe. And Christianity doesn't require that you check your brains at the door. The Great Commandment tells you to love God with all of your

Bible. How could we not? We don't have all the answers, but we will be glad to share what we believe and, together, we can dig for the truth.

But please hear me: **if you reject the Bible as the Word of God, there is no way for you to grow in your relationship with God**, because the Bible says clearly that *Faith comes by hearing (reading, meditating) the Word of God*. Without the Bible everyone's opinion about God is equally valid. My opinion, your opinion, Oprah's opinion, the Dalai Lama's opinion - they are all equal - - - which is exactly what public education tells you. You're okay in our society if you agree that all beliefs about God are just opinions, but if you say that the Bible reveals the truth about God, and that Jesus is the only way to God, then you are in big trouble. You are labeled a "fundamentalist" and scorned as contemptible. Not that we should trumpet our faith as if we are superior. Peter said, *Always be ready to give a logical defense to anyone who asks about your faith and hope, but do it courteously and respectfully*. (Probably one of the reasons that "fundamentalists" are so despised by society is that some of them are narrow-minded bigots who don't act very much like Jesus. But another reason may be that people in the world don't want to obey God.)

You have seen those pictures that seem to be three-dimensional. The picture is just a mass of squiggly lines. So you turn it this way and that, and suddenly you "see" a face or an animal. In the case of the Bible, you read all these strange stories, you turn them this way and that in your mind, and suddenly you "see" God! He reveals Himself to you. Psalm 42:7 says that, Deep calls unto deep. This is the way God speaks to us through the Bible (or in other ways): deep to deep, which means Spirit to spirit or heart to heart. God bypasses our intellect and speaks directly to our spirit or heart.

Sometimes, a life experience will throw light on the Bible. Many have had a "born-again" experience. I have met people who had that experience who were not raised in church, and they didn't understand what had happened to them. They only knew that a light had been turned on: they "saw" God in an entirely different way, they saw themselves and everyone differently, they were filled with joy and excitement. Then someone pointed out to them what Jesus said about being born-again, and they understood. Receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit or the gifts of the Spirit may also happen that way. I received the gift of tongues about 35 years ago when it was explained to me and I asked God for it. But I know people who awoke from a sound sleep speaking in tongues, and they had no idea what was going on. They were frightened and thought they were losing their minds. Then someone pointed out to them what the Bible says about this gift in Acts 1 and 2, and in 1 Corinthians, chapters 12 through

14, and they were relieved and thrilled. Why does God do such strange things? I believe one reason is to by-pass our minds. We are so intellectual and think we need to understand everything with our giant brains, but Jesus said you have to come to God as a little child. The "tongues" people receive are not nonsense or gibberish. If a gift is from God, it is, by definition, something good, and it has a purpose - as explained in 1 Corinthians.

For me, a bizarre experience proved to me that the devil and demons were literal, not figurative. You don't have to believe that. And I don't think you can believe it until it is revealed to you. You can't just read things in the Bible and "learn" that they are true, like you learn history or math. Everything in the Bible must be revealed to you. When I was born-again, I didn't even believe in the resurrection of Christ! I just "knew" that He had died for me. I was so deeply touched that I wept almost continually for three days and nights. And my life started changing. It was only later, as I started reading the Bible voraciously that I came to believe, deep in my heart, that Jesus was physically resurrected. It had been revealed to me by God. I must say that I cannot comprehend that anyone who claims to be "born-again" has no interest in the Bible. It is like a starving person saying he has no interest in food. No wonder so many "Christians" are as weak as kittens and as dumb as dirt about their faith. (If I can overcome my shyness, I will tell you what I really think.)

The name of this message is "Overcoming Fear." So why am I talking about the Bible? A few weeks ago, on a Saturday night, a lady came to the altar for prayer. She told me that her husband's job had just been terminated, they have children, and they don't know what to do. She was literally trembling. What am I going to say to her? I could say, "I'm very sorry, and I hope things work out for you. God bless you." She would appreciate my sympathy, but is that all I have? I could say, "Don't be afraid, you can trust Wall Street, and the big bankers, and the politicians. They all have MBA's, they have your best interest at heart, and they will take care of us." But that would take a lot more faith than I have. Among our leaders there are some good people who mean well. Some. But I don't believe that men are going to be able to fix the economy or terrorism or the other mind-boggling problems that are coming down the road toward us.

What I say to that woman depends on what I believe about God. What she and her husband are able to receive depends on what they believe about God. Everything depends on what you and I believe about God. Not wishful thinking, not religious clichés, not somebody's opinion.

This is the question: Is there really a God that cares for us and that can help us in practical ways in the face of the horrifying things going on in the world? Remember that the goal of terrorists is to terrorize, to instill fear, because fear makes you weak, it paralyzes you, it makes you helpless. That is their design.

Listen to me: **there is a God, the God revealed in the Bible. He is the Living God, the true God. We come into a relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ, the central character in the Bible. All the books in the Old Testament point forward to Him, and all of the New Testament points back to Him. He divides the Bible, and**

His birth divides our calendar into B.C. and A.D. And in John 14:9, Jesus said to Phillip in the upper room, "When you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." When you have seen Me, you have seen God! How grandiose! How preposterous for a man to say those words. Jesus was either delusional, or He spoke the truth. You wonder what God is really like? Look at Jesus, study His life in the Bible: His kindness, compassion, humility. Jesus says, "I didn't come to condemn you, I came to save you." I love that bumper sticker from years back that said, "Jesus said, 'I love you this much,' and He stretched our His arms and died."

Mr. Skeptic might say, "OK, Glenn, enough Bible talk, religious talk. What can your God do about my job? I don't have any income to take care of my family." Some of you folks might have the same question.

- Don't you remember? God fed two million Israelites in the desert for 40 years with Manna, a mysterious bread that fell from the sky every night. And 1,400 years later, Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem (which in the Hebrew language means House of Bread) said, "That Manna was a symbol pointing to Me. I am the true bread from heaven that came to give life to the world!"
- Don't you remember when Jesus multiplied a little boy's lunch and fed over 15,000 people on the hillside?
- Don't you remember that Jesus said "Don't worry about food and clothing. If you will put God first and trust in Him, then all your needs will be taken care of?" (Not your luxuries, but your needs.)

Mr. Skeptic might say, "That's just religious stuff. I don't believe any of it is literally true. My intellect will not permit me to believe that mythology."

You mean you are too smart to believe in God? The Bible says that is not intelligence, it's arrogance and spiritual blindness. The Bible says, *The pride of your heart has deceived you.* (Obad 1:3) Unbelief is not something to be proud about. Honest doubts are OK, they go along with faith. But there is a fine line from that to the kind of unbelief that is really rebellion against God. The Bible says that kind of unbelief is evil and wicked, and you will be judged for it. It will separate you from God forever, here and hereafter. Because you can only come to God through the humble path of faith. Do you realize the Bible says that every person on earth knows in his heart that there is a God, that He is the Creator, and that there will be a judgment after this life? (Romans 1:19 and following) Mr. Skeptic might say, "I don't believe that at all." Whether you believe it or not is irrelevant. God says in His Word that every person does know that, and that when you stand before God, you will be without excuse. Then there are the many times God tried in various ways to reach you, to speak to you, to warn you, to call you to Himself. And you said No, no, no, no, no! God will not violate your free will. Sometimes people will say: "I believe in god, just not the God of the Bible." Or they will say, "My god would never....." "My god would never judge anyone," or "My god would never send anyone to hell," or whatever. Do you think that an imaginary god you dream up in your mind that suits your preference carries any weight? The Bible calls that idolatry.

Rolland and Heidi Baker are serving in Mozambique, the poorest nation on earth. A few years ago a massive flood came that drowned whole regions of the country. They rented a small helicopter to take food to the hungry. They found a hill rising out of the flood with maybe ten thousand starving people. They only had food for 200. They said what will we do? They decided to just feed the people until the food ran out and try to return in a few days with more food. But it didn't run out. They fed every one of those 10,000 people, just like Jesus did by the Sea of Galilee!

Joe and Jeanne Gollhofer, the parents of Clayton who leads Home for Homeless Youth, lived in Palisade and had a large peach orchard. Every spring, during the time when frost comes and nips the buds, Jeanne would walk around and around the orchard, pleading with God to protect their trees. For 25 consecutive years, even in years when hard freezes came and destroyed the harvest of orchards all around them, they never froze out one time.

In my church in Loveland there was a couple that had six kids, and they were very poor. (Six kids will make you poor.) They had a big vegetable garden to help feed their family. The area north and east of Denver is known as Hail Alley because of the hail storms that come regularly in the spring and devastate crops and tear up roofs. One spring a big storm was bearing down on the area and that mother heard it in on the news. She ran out in the wind and rain and threw herself prostrate on the ground and lay there crying out to God to spare the garden. The hail storm came, separated and went around her garden like Moses parting the Red Sea. That's the God we serve.

And I have talked to scores of missionaries who testified that God provided for their needs, many times in miraculous ways, for 20, 30, 40 years or more.

As a pastor and counselor, what am I going to say to the person who comes for prayer and has just received a doctor's report that they have inoperable cancer? Or that their child has lymphoma? Or the couple with a new baby that has just learned that their infant has a severe physical or mental disability? And I have had each of these situations during my ministry. Am I going to tell them that we will pray and God will definitely heal them? I can't promise that, although I have seen God heal many hundreds of people over the years. I will say, God told us to pray for the sick, so we will lay hands on you and pray. God loves you, God loves your child, and we can trust Him." If God told us to pray for the sick, why isn't everyone healed that we pray for? I don't know. But even for people that are healed, it's only temporary. We are all going to die. "It is given unto man once to die, and then the judgment." But if we know Him, then we are in His hands, so we don't have to be afraid.

Jesus said to His disciples, if you follow Me, there are people who will hate you, just like they do Me. They will kill you, and think they are serving God. But don't let it bother you. I have overcome the world!" Jesus was saying that **THIS WORLD IS A PERFECTLY SAFE PLACE TO BE**. The bible says that *God is light and in Him is no darkness at all*, which means that God is good in every way without any darkness or evil. If we are in His hands, we don't have to be afraid of anything for ourselves or for our children. Are you

afraid to die? Hebrews 2:14 says, *Christ came to destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who were in bondage all their lives because of their fear of death*. Did you ever hear of the resurrection of Christ? It really, literally happened. I have been to the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem where they took Jesus' body. I have been inside the tomb. I have an eyewitness report for you: His body is not there. He is risen! He conquered death so that we don't have to be afraid.

Many people have been calling the church for prayer recently, telling us that their marriages are crumbling. In the face of losing jobs, losing homes, and all the other pressures, marriages are coming apart. My guess is that a lot of marriages don't have a good foundation, even though husband and wife are Christians.

Let me give you an imaginary example: Bill and Sally have been members of Vineyard for 8 or 10 years. The primary focus of Bill's life is his job, as is true for most men. But Bill is a workaholic, which indicates that there is a drivenness, an anxiety, a fear behind the unending hours he spends at work. Bill also has a serious problem with anger. His father was a rageaholic, and so is Bill. This has been devastating to his wife and children, and he knows that this is incompatible with his faith, but he never does anything about it. Bill also has a problem with pornography. It has been a lifetime habit. When he started attending church, he stopped the porn for awhile, but the pull was too strong, and he fell back into it. This addiction is also wounding to his wife, but she dare not bring it up for fear he will explode in anger.

Sally is very insecure because of the fragile condition of her marriage, and also because she came out of a broken home and is fearful that the same thing will happen to her and her children. Sally was also molested when she was a little girl, and she is filled with anxiety and unresolved guilt. It is false guilt, but it is real to her. Then Bill loses his job. It's the last straw. He abandons his family. Chaos, fear! And both Bill and Sally say to their family and friends, "We tried Christianity, but it doesn't work!"

Actually, they never really tried it. They became church members. They may have made a profession of faith. They may have raised their hands or come to the altar and said, I accept Christ as my Savior. But they never changed. They just came and sat in church. They didn't surrender their lives to Christ wholeheartedly and learn to know Him, to follow Him, and to obey Him. How can a man (or woman) be a "public Christian" for ten years, sitting in church regularly, and go home and control his wife and children with his anger, at times brutalizing them with rage, cursing, hitting? If the measure of our Christian life is love, and he is not even loving his own family, how in the world can he consider himself "saved. When you "accept Christ," it is not a magic phrase. It means you have a new master, and you commit to following Him, obeying Him, so that He can start transforming your life.

When I think of a new boss, I think of Clint Eastwood in High Plains Drifter. Those people are up on ladders framing a new house, and this cowboy rides into town. His hat is pulled down low, he has a thin, black cigar in his mouth, and he has those eyes. If anyone so much as sneezes the wrong way, he shoots him five or six times. What a guy! I'm not sure Clint is

a good model of Christ. But I wish people could understand that when you accept Christ, there's a new Boss in town. I wish that all of us, including me, could be as careful about our lives as the people in that little town. The Bible says, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." It doesn't say to be blasé about it and go on about your life as if nothing had changed. You have a new Boss. He's dangerous! Don't mess with Him! He wants you to get to work getting your life in order. God accepts you "Just as you are." But He doesn't leave you just as you are. You're a mess! He wants to change your character so that you regain the "image of God" in which He created man. There are things you can do about your anger, insecurity, greed, love of money, pornography, other addictions, anxiety, and fear. "Fear has torment!" But you have to get to work. "Work out your salvation" (you don't work for it, you received it as a gift through faith) but you have to "work it out." You have to do it, God is not going to do it for you, nor is the church. "Faith without works is dead!" But Philippians 2:13 says, *For God is at work in you, to will and to do for His good purpose.* God doesn't leave you alone as you work out your salvation. It's a partnership, and He is working in you and for you to fulfill His marvelous purpose. Hallelujah!

Invitation

I want to make an unconditional, unequivocal promise: If you will start searching for a deeper relationship with God, you will get what you ask for. I can make that promise because it is not mine but God's. God says in His Word: *If you will seek Me with your whole heart, then you will find Me.* Since we only come to God by faith, that means we are not really sure He is there or that He will respond to us. (John Wimber says faith is spelled R-I-S-K.) After all, I'm nothing, and I have sinned in some shameful ways. But if you will reach out to Him, He will respond. He will manifest Himself to you in some way to prove to you that He is there and that He hears you. Then your faith jumps to an altogether different level. Now you "know" in your heart.

Secondly, I challenge you to start reading, studying, the New Testament as part of your search for God. Ask God to help you read and understand His word, to give you light. Eat the fish and set the bones (the things you don't understand) on the side of the plate. I still do that all the time, for the Bible is very deep and obscure.

Finally, I realize that my style is at times confrontational. If I have presented the faith as being like taking medicine, then I have misrepresented the Lord, and I ask you to forgive me. He is the most exciting, wonderful Person I have ever known. He has been so kind, gentle, and patient with me. He is the Pearl of Great Price. To know and love Him is worth anything, anything. Let us resolve to seek Him.

THINKING ABOUT THE AMAZON

The Amazon is vast, almost 4,000 miles long. At places it is two miles wide and a mile deep. Looking down from a jet five miles in the sky, the rainforest is dark blue-green, and the Amazon is a ribbon winding back and forth from horizon to horizon. The river itself is always in flood stage, a chocolate

brown color. The river and surrounding country is beautiful. The trees, flowers, birds, and sunsets are spectacular. But it is a dangerous place because of the river currents, wild storms, floating logs and debris, snakes and piranha, tropical diseases and parasites. When you go out onto the river in a boat, it seems to go on forever. But if you could look at it from a satellite, you would see that it has a beginning in the Andes, near the Pacific Ocean, and an ending at the Atlantic Ocean in north-east Brazil.

We are born into a "river of life" that is very beautiful but also very dangerous. The river of mankind seems to be eternal, but the Bible reveals that it has a beginning and will have an end. God sits on a high mountain and sees it all: the beginning and the end, the past, present, and future. Wow! What a God! So when the Bible talks about the "end times," the tribulation, and so forth, it is all there before God's eyes just as it will happen. How can we know if these reports are true and not fiction?

Think about the prophecies in the Bible. You know of the prophecies concerning Israel, that it would be destroyed and the people scattered throughout the world (which occurred in 70 AD), and that in the end times they would be gathered back to the land (which occurred in 1948, almost 2,000 years in the future). How did God know that? And you know of the prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah: that He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2), that He would be crucified (Psalm 22:16-18), over 300 prophecies given from 500 to 1,400 years BC, and everyone of them fits Jesus. I'm demonstrating the reliability and credibility of the Bible.

Now, imagine that a lot of people are floating down that river of life on rafts. The Man up on the mountain can see the future, He can see around the bend in the river, where there is a huge waterfall. He sends a message down to the people. "There's a waterfall ahead, get off your raft and climb up here to Me, and you will be safe." Most of the people say, "What? A waterfall! There isn't any waterfall". And on they go. Some of the people believe that Man, and they start climbing the mountain. God says, "There is a waterfall ahead for all of mankind: the tribulation and the end of the present world. And if you don't live in that time, there is still a waterfall ahead for each of you personally: your death and the judgment that follows. I have provided a way for you to escape that waterfall. Come to Me!"

God Bless,

Glenn

Web-site: www.glennbrownministries.com

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