

It Is Written

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Are We Trusting God or Testing God?

By Doy Moyer

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" (Matt. 4:5-7)

Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16, where Moses is recounting the struggles of the children of Israel as they came out of Egypt and began to murmur and complain about not having water. They were not trusting God to take care of them, but instead tested God to try to force His hand. These two ideas tend to run counter to each other: if we are not trusting God, we will likely be testing Him. If we are not submitting to God, we may indeed be trying to manipulate Him to do what we want.

Jesus applied this principle to the situation He was facing. In the case of the devil tempting Him, it was not about wanting water and thinking to go back to Egypt; it was about whether or not God would keep Jesus from harm if He jumped off the pinnacle of the temple. The principle was the same, and it had to do with how He would handle a test of His own. The devil even quoted Scripture to make his case (just because Scripture is used is no guarantee it is being applied correctly).

Testing God can happen in a number of ways. We might be testing whether or not God will keep us safe in a certain circumstance, so we put ourselves in unnecessary danger. We might wonder if God will provide for us in some way, so we purposefully refuse to make reasonable provisions. We can even be testing God through our constant worries about daily provisions (see Matt. 6:24-33).

The open door for testing God appears to be when we ourselves are tested, tempted, and perhaps frustrated. If we get sick, for example, and are tempted to give up, how will we handle that? Will we shake a fist at God and think that if He really loves us, He will make it go away? Will we put ourselves in His hands and rest on the notion that this situation may be a way to glorify God and influence others for good?

Trusting God does not mean that we do not need to plan, make provisions for the future, or take precautions in dangerous situations. It does mean that we do the best we can with what we have in line with what we know to be His will, make appropriate provisions, then not worry about it. We know that in whatever happens, He will take care of us (cf. 1 Pet. 5:5-6; Phil. 4:4-7).

There were times when God's people were at serious risk. Daniel trusted God when threatened concerning his prayer life. Daniel's friends trusted God under threat of being cast into a furnace. Paul trusted God under threat of imprisonment and death. There are multiple examples. They were not throwing caution to the wind, but they were ready to suffer for the Lord.

Motivation is a key. Am I just trying to make some point, or am I truly trying to glorify God and show my love for others? Am I trying to bring attention to myself, or am I really pointing others to the Lord because I care about them? Am I testing whether God will do something for me in the time-frame I desire, or am I trusting that God will work things out in His own time and in His own way? Am I demanding some kind of sign to appear just as I say, or am I content to know that God is able to do far more abundantly beyond anything I can ask or think (Eph. 3:20)?

My faith must not be conditioned so that it is strong only when things go the way that I think they ought to go. Instead, I must trust God no matter what the circumstances of life may bring. In the end, if I trust Him, I know that He will make it work out in the best possible way. For those who love Him and seek His will, He makes things work for the good, even when what is happening is not what we might prefer (cf. Rom. 8:28). Suffering for the cause of Christ is included (cf. 1 Pet. 4:1; Phil. 3:10).

When Paul faced particularly dangerous circumstances, he considered himself delivered by God "from the lion's mouth." Yet he also saw that there was ultimate deliverance coming: "The Lord will rescue me from

every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen." (2 Tim. 4:18)

Commit to trusting God and reject the testing mentality. "And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you..." (Deut. 6:18).

IS HEAVEN A "MALIGNANT DELUSION"?

By David Dann

Jesus Christ taught His followers to look forward to a home in heaven. The Lord said, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21, NKJV).

In contrast to what Jesus said, a recent news article reports the following:

"A Harvard University professor sparked an online debate Thursday after suggesting belief in heaven has harmed the coronavirus response by devaluing human life.

Steven Pinker, a professor of psychology at the school, made the comments on Twitter while referencing a Washington Post article that blamed evangelicals for the movement to a quick reopening of America.

'Belief in an afterlife is a malignant delusion, since it devalues actual lives and discourages action that would make them longer, safer, and happier,' Pinker wrote on Twitter" (Michael Foust, ChristianHeadlines.com).

Does the professor have a point? Is the Christian's view of spending the afterlife in heaven just a "malignant delusion"? Please consider what the Bible teaches about heaven.

1. Heaven is a promised reward. Rather than being a simple delusion devised in the mind of man, an afterlife in the dwelling place of God has been promised to the faithful by the Lord. Jesus reassured His apostles on the night of His betrayal, saying, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (Jn. 14:1-3). The One who left heaven, came to earth and died to take away man's sins, rose from the dead, and ascended back to heaven has also promised that His faithful followers will eventually be with Him in heaven.

2. Heaven is a profitable motivation. While Professor Pinker portrays heaven as a belief which results in people making life miserable in this world, the opposite is actually true. Jesus teaches that, in order for a sinner to go to heaven, he must be one who "does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). The one who is going to heaven loves his neighbor as himself (22:39) and treats others how he wants to be treated (7:12). Far from being "malignant," belief in heaven serves as a motivation to treat others properly in light of what the Lord requires of those who will be with Him in heaven.

3. Heaven is a permanent solution. Professor Pinker is afraid people will focus so much on the afterlife that they will "devalue actual lives" instead of working to "make them longer, safer, and happier." But earthly life is actually brief (James 4:13-14), temporary (2 Cor. 4:17-18), and filled with vanity (Eccl. 1:2-3). Rather than place all the emphasis on trying helplessly to extend our brief earthly lives, we should direct our attention toward a permanent solution this problem. Peter exhorts his fellow Christians to focus on "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4). The solution for those who seek a longer, safer, and happier life is ultimately found in the permanent inheritance of heaven.

Conclusion

Unbelievers will continue to scoff at the concept of eternal life and will seek to belittle those who focus on a heavenly reward. None of that changes the reality that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23) and "it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). In the absence of the salvation and hope of heaven found in Jesus Christ, earthly life is hopeless, pointless, and dismal. To believe otherwise is to succumb to a malignant delusion.