

You Wanted to Know

DAVE BAST

Our culture often encourages inquiry by using reassuring phrases like: There is no such thing as a stupid question; or: Don't be afraid to ask because if you are wondering someone else is wondering too. Well, on *Groundwork*, we believe that biblical inquiry can strengthen our faith, and we are glad that you have joined our conversation. So, on this week's program, a very special approach will dig into scripture to answer some of the questions you have asked *Groundwork* this year.

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast, and today joining me in the studio for this special program is our *Groundwork* producer, Courtney Jacob. Welcome, Courtney.

COURTNEY JACOB

Thanks, Dave; good to be here. Throughout the year I always have the privilege of interacting with listeners who contact us. Some write to just share how our programs have touched their lives; others write to ask us questions about a particular program; and others just look to us for that biblical expertise that you and our guests often bring to the program.

DAVE BAST

We are happy to be able to respond from time to time to some of these questions because we think, as I said in the open, that if one person is asking, probably there are many others who are wondering. Actually, years ago in our old Words of Hope Bible teaching program we had a question-and-answer segment, and I always enjoyed that; so, we are going to take that approach today and take the questions now that mostly come in by e-mail, and see where it leads. Courtney?

COURTNEY JACOB

Excellent. The first question we will look at now came from Bob, and he wrote in response to a particular program – or maybe a few because we often reference particular people. His question is: What or who are the Church Fathers?

DAVE BAST

All right, I will plead guilty to that because I am the guy who is often quoting from people like St. Augustine and Athanasius and the like; but the Church Fathers really refers to a fairly specific group of men – they were all men, in this case – who wrote as Christian teachers and leaders of the Church, basically during the first six centuries of the Church's history. So, we kind of refer to that period of time from the New Testament through about the year 600 A.D.

COURTNEY JACOB

Now, do we generally start the Church Fathers with the Apostles, and then it is the men after, or is the men right after the Apostles?

Dave Bast:

No, it would be those following the Apostles. It would be those who came in their footsteps. There is actually an interesting scripture reference that points in this direction from 2 Timothy Chapter 2. Paul begins in verse 1:

You then, my son, (addressing Timothy) be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; ²and the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses, and trust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. So there is the beginning of this chain that goes down through the centuries of the Apostles and their disciples – Timothy was not an apostle himself, but he was a disciple of Paul – and Paul was saying to him: All right; what I have now taught to you I want you to, in turn, teach to others so that they can teach... And so it goes down through the ages.

COURTNEY JACOB

Continuing on the legacy...

DAVE BAST

Absolutely. The Apostles themselves, as they began to die out, wrote down, many of them, the substance of their teaching. That is why the Gospels all kind of stem from the middle 60s or maybe 70s of the First Century. As that generation was dying who had seen and heard Jesus, they made sure that they would write down their witness – their testimony to him. But then it is also a question of what does it mean? It is one thing to tell the story of Jesus: Jesus died on the cross. But, what is the significance of that? And Paul says in Corinthians: He died for our sins, according to the scriptures. So then come the letters as well.

COURTNEY JACOB

Well, and as culture changes and life changes, I would think each of these Church Fathers were then taking the “what does this mean?” to their people...

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; right; exactly. They were applying the teaching to their circumstances – to their situation. So we know, unfortunately, many of their writings have been lost. It is very interesting; we have a really reliable copy of the New Testament because there were thousands and thousands of manuscripts that were copied down by hand because it is the word of God. There is this clear difference. Of the Church Fathers, it is much more spotty; maybe only one or two manuscripts survived, and most were lost, but those that survived are very valuable. So, immediately the very first of them were people like Clement of Rome, who is actually named in the book of Philippians, and he...

COURTNEY JACOB

Oh, I didn't know that.

DAVE BAST

That is right; so, there is a connection...

COURTNEY JACOB

Interesting...

DAVE BAST

Between the first of the Church Fathers. He is also considered to be one of the popes – one of the first popes or bishops of Rome. And then people like Ignatius and Irenaeus and Polycarp – all in the Second Century; and then in the Third Century it gets a little further afield; so, there is Tertullian, and Cyprian in Africa, and then the Fourth Century has the really famous names like Athanasius and Augustine.

COURTNEY JACOB

The Fourth Century; and we often will see references to, say, the Apostolic Fathers, the Desert Fathers, and this is... they are kind of grouped by era.

DAVE BAST

Right. Those are subgroupings; so the Apostolic Fathers are the very early ones – the Second Century – who are just... Many of them would have known the Apostles, or perhaps known people who knew the Apostles.

COURTNEY JACOB

Okay; so they were the next generation.

DAVE BAST

Yes; there really is this living bridge, and this living link; and I just love to think of that chain of witnesses. That still happens in our day. How do most people learn about the Christian faith and become Christians? They learn from their parents or from an older generation of teachers who pass on that living message.

COURTNEY JACOB

Right. Let me bring us to the next question. It can follow from the Apostolic Fathers. Nwosu sent us a Gospel question, and he asks on Facebook. He said: Can you tell me one good, clear way Christ's death on the cross pays for our sins?

DAVE BAST

Wow, yes. There is so much about it; that is the heart of the Gospel – and so many passages in the New Testament – but let me try to make it clear and fairly simple. I think the whole Bible gives an indication of the seriousness of the problem of sin. Sin is not just doing this or that wrong thing. Sin is really turning against God, and it has caused our whole nature to become warped and twisted. It incurs guilt – we have this load of guilt.

COURTNEY JACOB

I have sometimes phrased it as it is our desire to serve ourselves instead of God; it is a desire for a relationship with ourselves and our things instead of that relationship with God.

DAVE BAST

Yes; if I can quote one of the Church Fathers, St. Augustine said that we are curved inward – back in upon ourselves. We sort of turn... we have turned away from God and sort of curved in to worship ourselves; and this is not only a problem that has to be broken. It takes more than repentance. I mean, repentance means turning back to God; but it actually has given us... put us in the position of those who are guilty, and I think we all deep down understand the concept of guilt. Guilt has to be paid for somehow. The Bible teaches that the only payment for the guilt of sin is death.

COURTNEY JACOB

Scary thought.

DAVE BAST

It is a scary thought.

COURTNEY JACOB

The verse I had found for that – Romans 6:23 says that very specifically: For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

DAVE BAST

And that last phrase is the supremely significant one, because it is not just that God can wave a magic wand and say: Okay, you are deserving of death...

COURTNEY JACOB

It is all taken care of.

DAVE BAST

But I sprinkle pixie dust and I give you eternal life. He himself has taken it upon himself in the person of Jesus to pay the penalty – to pay the price; and again, the whole sweep of scripture points to that. It begins way back in the Old Testament with those sacrifices in the tabernacle and in the temple, and how they would have to sprinkle blood on the altar, and even once a year on the Day of Atonement the High Priest would go in to the Holy of Holies and he would put blood on the ark of the covenant – on the lid, which was called the Mercy Seat. Paul in Romans Chapter 3 says that Jesus Christ is the Mercy Seat, where the blood is sprinkled. It is his blood. The message of the Old Testament sacrifices is two-fold: Number one: The wages of sin is death. There has to be a death. The blood has to be shed.

COURTNEY JACOB

It needs to be paid for.

DAVE BAST

To pay for the guilt. The second message is: God provides a substitute so that we do not have to pay ourselves. So, the Passover lamb is a substitute; the sacrifices in the Temple are the substitute; but they are only provisional – they are only pointing to the true substitute, Jesus. So, such a basic question: One good, clear way Christ's death on the cross pays for our sins is that God accepts that death in our place so that we can live; and if we are joined to Christ by faith, we are joined to all of his benefits too, including the benefit of his death and the righteousness that he provides us. That is the Gospel – in my mind, that is it in a nutshell.

COURTNEY JACOB

Amen! Bob and Nwosu, thanks for sharing your questions and digging into scripture with us on *Groundwork*. If you would like to share your thoughts and questions about the Bible or what you have heard on *Groundwork*, visit our website, groundworkonline.com. There you can comment on today's program, send us an e-mail using our contact page, or leave us a prayer request. Join our conversation at groundworkonline.com.

When we try to live life according to the Bible, we find the Bible does not always specifically address everything we encounter in life, so in just a moment we will look at some real-life questions you have sent to us.

Segment 2

COURTNEY JACOB

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Courtney Jacob.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and welcome again, Courtney. Courtney is our *Groundwork* producer, and she is on the other side of the glass studio wall; now in the studio today with me at the microphone because we are doing some listener questions.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes; I wanted to bring in this third voice. We know there is always someone else at the table in our *Groundwork* conversations, participating with us, and this is our opportunity to share that voice.

The next two questions we are going to look at are similar in theme, and they come up when we end up encountering important decisions in life. McCoy wrote to us and he brought up a question that I have encountered talking to family and friends that are caring for aging parents. McCoy asks: Biblically, is cremation wrong or is it accepted?

DAVE BAST

Biblically, I think, the short answer is it does not address that particular issue; but people do wonder, and they have a lot of thought about end-of-life kinds of questions, and life-after-death kinds of questions, too.

COURTNEY JACOB

Right; and the wondering comes from a history of tradition. The Christian tradition is burial as opposed to cremation.

DAVE BAST

It is clearly; now today, issues of ecology and space often impinge on that and make people wonder; issues of expense as funeral costs go up and up. I would say this: The reason that Christians began to bury their dead almost immediately – we see evidence of it in the New Testament – was as a kind of counter to the common pagan practice of cremation, which in a sense implied no hope for the future – no hope of life after death, and Christians very clearly wanted to bear witness to their belief in the resurrection – that this is our hope – this is our future; because Jesus died and rose again, we have a future. So Paul, in the great chapter on the resurrection, speaks about how our bodies are sown like seeds – he uses the analogy of planting seeds – and that, I think, is a pointer to the fact that Christians buried their dead as a testimony.

COURTNEY JACOB

Okay; now, what passage is that?

DAVE BAST

Well, it is in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, verse 35 for example. ³⁵Someone will ask, how are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come? ³⁶“How foolish,” Paul says, “What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just the seed. (Perhaps wheat or something else.) And then he goes on a little bit later: ⁴²So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable; it is raised imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. ⁴⁴It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body. So, the idea... I love this thought that at every funeral we are planting a seed that will come to life in a new and glorious way.

COURTNEY JACOB

It is not an end; it is a beginning.

DAVE BAST

No; but now, that does not imply, then, that cremation is wrong because dust to dust, ashes to ashes, as we say in the traditional funeral service.

COURTNEY JACOB

From the beginning, yes.

Dave Bast: Right. We are going to return to the dust, but God will gather that dust up. So, I would say if you are going to choose cremation, still bury. Have a place of burial – have a place of sowing. It may be a niche in a columbarium, you know, or a place in a church; but I like that testimony of having a grave. The one thing I do not like about cremation is sort of the pagan: I am going to scatter the ashes in the forest or dump them in the ocean, as if it is just sort of ending in nothingness; but even there, God can gather.

COURTNEY JACOB

Well, and that is the comment I often hear against it is that you are making it harder for God, but God is bigger than anything...

DAVE BAST

Absolutely...

COURTNEY JACOB

And he will bring our bodies back.

DAVE BAST

Don't start thinking about the physics of it – what happens to those atoms – because then you end up in a conundrum – in a riddle. All we know is that God has the omnipotent power to reconstitute even our bodies in some way beyond our imagining. So, I do not think that is either here nor there on the question of cremation.

COURTNEY JACOB

Okay; our next question came from a man who posted it on our website, and he gave his initials, but he says: Please enlighten me on this. What happens to unbelievers in hell after the white throne of judgment of Christ Jesus? Will they be tormented eternally forever? Is it the second death, meaning they will be gone forever after having been consumed by fire – destroyed – annihilated? Thanks so much, I am confused.

DAVE BAST

Confused, or perhaps we just need to say left without a clear and firm understanding.

COURTNEY JACOB

I definitely do not think he is alone, because how many movies, books, do we have about what is going to happen in the end times?

DAVE BAST

Basically, I would say that for those who still believe in the reality of a final judgment, which means people who still take the Bible seriously on this, because the Bible clearly does point to the terrible reality that it is possible to miss out and to spend eternity apart from God – that is really what hell means. It is to be apart from God.

COURTNEY JACOB

Apart from God.

DAVE BAST

And everything in the Bible that tries to describe that in some way or other uses picture language. It talks about flames or fire or outer darkness. What it is trying to do... That is not, I don't think, to be meant literally...

COURTNEY JACOB

So, it is figurative.

DAVE BAST

It is figurative because it is trying to convey what is impossible... just as it is impossible, really, to conceive of what heaven is going to actually be like, it is impossible to conceive how horrible it is to miss out on the life that is found only in God – to be somehow cut off from life itself; and the question specifically our listener raises is: Could it be that that goes on for all eternity – that conscious torment or suffering? Some Christians feel that they are obliged to say yes on the basis of the New Testament. Others, equally... I would say who equally are committed to scripture see some indication that perhaps that existence will be terminated by God at the last judgment; that people will simply cease to be. Now, that is traditionally called *annihilationism*, and it has usually been associated in the history of the Church with cults or sects that have kind of gone against the orthodox Christian teaching the majority of Christians through the ages have taught. I kind of like where John Stott comes down on this – the great Evangelical leader who died a couple of years ago...

COURTNEY JACOB

What did he say?

DAVE BAST

Who said: After very carefully studying the evidence and going through it all, I prefer to remain agnostic on this question. I am not going to commit myself. I am going to say, 'I don't know,' and I think there is a lot of wisdom in that, frankly.

COURTNEY JACOB

Sometimes we are not willing to say, 'I don't know,' because people are looking to us for the answers.

Dave Bast: Exactly. You know, when it comes to the eternal destiny of people, on the one hand, I do not think we should whitewash and say: Oh, everything is okay. Don't worry, it is not so bad.

COURTNEY JACOB

Absolutely not, right.

DAVE BAST

You do not have to really come to Christ or believe in Christ. There is that tendency that I really believe we have to resist, and say: No; everything depends on this. In this life, you need to believe in Jesus. Without, though, committing ourselves to saying, "I know it all. I know exactly what is going to happen." We leave some things in the mystery of God and just have to say we leave it in his hands; but meanwhile, what we know is, it is important to share the Gospel and to believe the Gospel.

COURTNEY JACOB

Yes, absolutely; and that is hard to do. I wanted to bring up that a lot of the language he was using comes from Revelation, which is a prophetic book and can be very hard to understand, but on *Groundwork* a few months ago, we had done a series with Meg Jenista, looking specifically at the book of Revelation and the end times; so, I would recommend listening to that series because I found it very informative. The one program we called "Understanding Hell and Judgment" was based specifically on Revelation 20.

DAVE BAST

Which is what he is asking about; so, go to the archives – go to the website, groundworkonline.com.

COURTNEY JACOB

Okay, I want to take our last time here to look at the heart of a woman who wrote to us, and she was just looking for advice or wisdom. She notes: The emotions I have right now are sadness and a slight case of hopelessness – and she was responding to a question we had asked about a program and how it made people feel. So, she says: It feels as though I am going through a storm. The majority of things I attempt do not work out. I have no peace. And then she tells us a little more about her situation, but then she says: I am only trying to live a productive lifestyle. Can anyone share a bit of advice or words of wisdom?

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, this shows to me the limitations of our *Groundwork* program, because we are sharing the truths of scripture, but that is no substitute for a real, live, living, breathing congregation of God's people. We just not meant to go it alone; and as much as it may be helpful to listen or read or watch Christian materials, it is no substitute for being part of the body of Christ and looking to others for help. We cannot go it alone; and I would just encourage this person, and anyone like her, to find a church where you can have people come alongside you and encourage you in your walk with Christ.

COURTNEY JACOB

I would also agree with that, but I am thankful she wrote to us because it gave us the opportunity to pray for her; and we have prayer partners that specifically take time aside every day to pray for people, and the people who have written to us and asked for prayer.

So if you would like us to pray with you, contact us, quite easily at groundworkonline.com, and join our conversation. It is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what you are hearing, and suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs.

COURTNEY JACOB

It is possible you are already hearing Christmas music in the stores or you have noticed holiday specials on TV, but as this wonderful season begins, prepare your heart to focus on the real reason we celebrate by joining your *Groundwork* hosts, Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, as they begin a very special Advent series. Here is a taste of what is coming up on *Groundwork*:

SCOTT HOEZEE

Advent is not as well known a word as Christmas, but in the Church, these are the four Sundays that come right before December 25; Advent means arrival, and it is a season of expectation – a season of waiting for the birth of Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes, for Christians, at least if we are getting our heads on straight, this is not the Christmas season – it is not all about holiday shopping and preparations. Our preparation is of a different sort, and the wisdom of the ages has dictated that Christians should hold off a little bit on all of the hoopla of celebrating Christmas and have this kind of preparatory season of four weeks where we meditate and think about why Jesus had to come into the world; and we remember that he is planning to come back again as well.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Advent in the Church is a way to make sure that by the time we get to Christmas, we know who we are celebrating, we know why we are celebrating, and we have prepared ourselves by getting our hearts ready and repenting of our own sins and thinking very clearly about why God's Son had to become a human being. So, that is what Advent is about, and here on *Groundwork* we are going to spend four programs looking at how each of the four Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – begin the story of Jesus.

COURTNEY JACOB

Make plans to be with us next time as we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives right here on *Groundwork*.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/you-wanted-to-know>

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