

Questions from the Audience

Answers from the St. Michael’s Discipleship Task Force, The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.,
The Rev. Randy Shirley and The Rev. Dr. Peter Moore

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1. Why did we not have this discussion five years ago?

We should have!

2. Who prepared the talks that Al gave tonight on Modules 1 and 2?

The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.

3. How can the church address secularism?

The church first needs to understand secularism. But then it needs to say that secularism and Christianity have different starting points. Einstein said that sometimes when he looks at the universe, it appears to him to be a great machine. But then there are other times when he looks at the universe and it appears to him to be a great thought. These are different starting points. They are different ways at looking at the same thing. Secularism comes to the wrong conclusion (“matter is all that matters”) because it insists we start at the wrong place. Christianity is the most “worldly” of all religions – because it says that god created all that is. (“matter therefore matters”). However, it goes on to say that God instead of dwelling in all things, transcends all things, and therefore Christianity is the most spiritual of all religions.

(Secularism defined: a worldview that rejects religion.)

4. Catch phrase to use—How do you get our message out?

It seems right and effective to speak of our chasm in the over-under language (seeing two churches, one that is over scripture, and the other under scripture). Getting the word out means each of us reframing the conversation from the issues of the day into biblical language of obedience.

5. What will hell be like for “good” heathens?

Getting to heaven or hell has nothing to do with how good or bad we are, and everything to do with have we repented of our sins and believed in the good news. Beyond that there will be no shades of hell based on our works.

6. How to have a conversation with a member of the Episcopal Church—I don’t understand what all the fuss is about.

In addition to this over-under analogy, the Episcopal Church has adopted a “gospel” of indiscriminate inclusivity. The Anglican Church believes in a gospel that is “the power of salvation to all that believe.” (Romans 1:16)

7. How do we help our children—the next generation—understand what is happening?

You tell them that there is a big difference between acceptance of the person and affirmation of the lifestyle. We are called to love and accept all people, because we all do wrong things. But we are called to affirm only those behaviors that God approves of. The Bible makes clear that God does not approve of same sex activity. (Hint: you can’t help the next generation unless you are prepared to talk about the tough subject of sexuality with them)

8. How did we get here (to this point) so quickly?

It wasn't quick. It has taken 50 years or more to get to this point. Bit by bit, step by step, the Episcopal Church has given way to the so-called "progressive wing" of our culture, and it is now paying the price: huge departures, failing budgets, empty church buildings. It was 3 million people 50 years ago. In 2016, 37 Episcopal churches closed around the country.

9. How does a person maintain a strong faith if they are a Christian married to an atheist?

St. Paul has a lot to say about that. Read what he says in 2 Corinthians about not marrying unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14) and then what you are to do if you find yourself married to an unbeliever. (1 Cor. 7:7:14)

10. What happens to the people who do not accept Jesus before they die including our friends and family?

We know that apart from Christ, we can't go to heaven. Jesus said, "No one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6). We have an awesome God, and nothing will stop him from getting the good news to even the most remote parts of the world, (Acts 1:8), and the most remote hearts. Although there is a popular view of many people who hope that those who did not accept Christ in this life will somehow have a "second chance" after death, there is no biblical support for this belief. Therefore what is most important for us, is to share the good news with our friends and family. God calls us to this purpose for their benefit. That's why Jesus' last words to us were instructions to tell everyone, everywhere, the good news of God's love (Matthew 28:19-20).

11. What about those who have never heard the word of God preached?

If they've never had an opportunity to hear about Jesus then his parable of the two men who went into the temple to pray is relevant. One stood and prayed "I thank you God that I am not like other men. I fast, I tithe, and I am not like that sinner over there." The other man beat his breast and said "God be merciful to me a sinner." Jesus said that the second man left the temple justified – that is in a right relationship with God. These two men represent two kinds of people: those who trust in their own morality and goodness, and those who throw themselves upon God's mercy – even if they have not yet heard that God is so merciful that he sent his son to die for our sins.

12. When is a non-believer's last chance to accept Christ as their Savior?

There is no last chance to accept Christ as Savior. There is no sin, no time, no place that a non-believer cannot accept Christ as Lord and Savior. Repenting in sincere resolve to turn away from sin and turning towards God, to accept his gift of forgiveness is open to all humanity always. True repentance involves sorrow for acts of sin and leads to a fundamental change in attitude and life. We are all sinners in our own ways (Romans 3:23, 1 John 1:8), and we may fail time and again in our attempt to avoid sin. However, God is always willing for us to start over and make another true attempt.

13. How would you want me to include those of different faiths and/or lifestyles that our gospel doesn't condone?

Jesus included all people: saints and sinners. The only people he couldn't include are those who wanted nothing to do with him. Hence, evangelism and mission are critical for the church today.

14. Jesus' words on divorce are quite explicit: Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. The church seems to have conceded to divorce even though Jesus' words are quite plain. Jesus never says a word about homosexuality, so why do we concede the dissolution of marriage due to justifiable plights yet remain rigid on homosexuality?

There are three allowances for divorce in the Bible:

1. The marriage has not been consummated
2. Adultery
3. Abandonment. (see 1 Corinthians 7:15...)

There are no cases in the Bible where homosexuality is condoned. Regarding the words of Jesus on homosexuality...Jesus did have something to say. Jesus insisted that to understand marriage and the sexual union, we must go back to the beginning and see how God created humanity (Matthew 19, Mark 10). Jesus holds up the creation story in Genesis as authoritative, reminding us that God created male and female, each for the other - and that the sexual union God created and ordains is for husband and wife to come together in physical union, one flesh.

15. Given the many Old Testament laws we no longer observe, how are we not placing ourselves above scripture?

Check the 39 Articles on page 867 of the Book of Common Prayer (The Thirty-nine Articles are the historic and defining statements of doctrines and practices of the Church of England). Since we read the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus Christ, there is no more need for the ceremonial laws, or the civil laws. That is, we no longer have temple sacrifices – He is the one sacrifice for all time. We no longer have a theocracy – the church is universal. Therefore, it is the moral law that we keep. We do not place ourselves over scripture. We place ourselves under Jesus Christ.

16. May I have a definition of Lord? Mine is rooted in O.T. and pain and fear.

Before his arrest, Jesus used his power and authority to teach us humility: “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). The last will be first, according to our Lord (Matthew 19:30). In saying, “Jesus is Lord,” we commit ourselves to obey him. Jesus asked, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). An acknowledgement of Jesus’ lordship is logically accompanied by a submission to Jesus’ authority. Yet, our submission to him is not given out of pain and fear. Our submission is given out of love for releasing us from sin, setting the example for us that brings true happiness, and for the free gift of eternal life that is only possible because of him. When we say, “Jesus is Lord,” it is also with a full understanding of what that means (Jesus is God and has supreme authority over all things). “No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3).

17. Can a parish follow Christ without embracing the most extreme fringe of their umbrella religion? TEC or ACNA?

The biggest problem in this church divide is that we will have friends on both sides of the issue. We do not need to demonize the other side by calling them extremists, even if they use the word “extreme” about us. There is nothing extreme about total loyalty to Jesus Christ, otherwise the millions of martyrs through the centuries would have died in vain. What is an extreme Christian? The Rev. Tim Keller defines one this way: an extreme Christian is the most loving, and most lovable, most forgiving and forgivable person you ever met.

18. If TEC authorities believe in universalism, how can it identify itself as a Christian church, or does it not?

Bishop James Pike said that when he said the Nicene Creed he crossed his fingers behind his back.

19. Where does ACNA stand in relationship to Canterbury and what does Canterbury have to say about TEC’s universalism? What is the timeline for our future *Under the Authority of Scripture* so we can move forward?

At the last world gathering of Anglican bishops in England in 2016, TEC was demoted to observer status within the Anglican Communion. That demotion was a consequence for TEC’s decisions regarding marriage and sexuality. At that world gathering, Archbishop Foley Beach of the ACNA was not only invited by the Archbishop of Canterbury, but given full participation. Until the disagreements are settled, TEC is demoted and the ACNA is a full ecumenical partner of the Anglican Communion. Regarding our timeline: we will hear by June 22 whether or not the United States Supreme Court will hear our case.

20. Does the Anglican Church have a definitive stance of Origen's (or Gregory of Nyssa's) formulation of apokatastasis?

Apokatastasis says that eventually all things return to God. This goes against the idea of condemnation that is found in several places in the 39 Articles of Religion. For example, Article IX of the 39 Articles says: "Whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation."

21. Most of us sitting here are Christian because of the accident of birth—aren't we lucky to have heard the word!

We are not lucky, we are hugely fortunate. No one is a Christian by accident of birth. Every person has to decide for themselves: am I a follower of Jesus Christ? Do I believe he is my Savior and the Savior of the world?