

I. Introduction

- A. I'm preaching today's message on the Sunday after Easter, and I need to add my thank you. It was a huge project to move our whole church to the Redding Convention Center and then offer three services there.
- B. If you helped in any way, thank you. If you prayed, gave, worked with kids, sang, or played an instrument, thank you. Some of you did hazardous duty in the parking lot, thank you. Other's ushered and greeted and fed the crew and took care of security and technology. It was huge, and if you helped, we're really grateful. And I want to say thank you.
- C. At our Easter services, I invited you to receive Jesus as your Savior, if you've never done that before.
- D. We also handed out 214 Bibles with Starbucks cards, and of that we know of over 65 people who said they had made the choice to receive Jesus. They're represented by those blue sticky notes.
- E. It is to that group that I want to speak today. For today and the next two weeks, I'm answering your questions. When it comes to faith, some people are veterans, and some people are rookies, and today I'm talking to rookies. We've been receiving your questions, and they're great. Unfortunately, I'm not going to be able to answer every question, but I've looked for patterns in the questions, and I've tried to group them by theme, so here goes.
- F. Today, I'd like to tackle the questions about FAITH. I'm not saying I have all the answers; but what I can do is engage with you and with the Bible and see what God's Word says about these things.

II. Questions

- A. QUESTION: Bill, since we just had Easter I want to know why the date of Easter changes every year? If Jesus rose again on a certain Sunday (say for instance the first Sunday of April) then why isn't Easter always the 1st Sunday in April? It always changes and it is confusing.
 1. Great question, and since it's so close to Easter, I wanted to tackle this one first.
 2. The last week of Jesus' life is called Holy Week.
 3. On Thursday, Jesus shared a special meal with his followers. This special meal was called the Passover Meal. It was a special feast that Jews celebrated every year. You might have heard that event called "The Last Supper." That happened on Thursday.
 4. On Friday, Jesus was crucified.
 5. On Sunday, He arose, the First Easter.
 6. We celebrate Easter every year on the Sunday after the Jews traditionally celebrate Passover. The Jewish calendar was changed a few hundred years ago, but if you go back to the ancient standards, Passover happened on the first full moon after spring (the vernal equinox).
 7. So every year, on the First Sunday, after the first full moon of spring, we celebrate Easter and we remember how Jesus broke down the Barrier that kept us from God.
- B. QUESTION: What is sin?
 1. I love this question, because sin is not a huge topic of conversation these days, but sin pretty much runs our culture.
 2. What is sin?
 3. If you boil it all down, SIN IS OPPOSITION TO GOD. That's it. Here's God—perfect, clean, loving, pure, honest, true, giving, holy, honorable. He has a plan. He has a will. He has commands.
 4. Then, here are people like us—opposing God's commands, opposing God's will, and opposing God's character. Sin is opposition to God.
 5. Now, it's not always BLATANT. It's not always CONSCIOUS or DELIBERATE opposition to God. Sin basically says that God doesn't get to sit on the throne of my universe, I DO.
 6. I like these three descriptions:
 - a) Sin is breaking God's laws: (trespasses)
 - (1) *And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,* (Ephesians 2:1, NKJV).
 - b) Sin is doing, saying, or thinking bad stuff. This is where your "Me First" instinct rears its ugly head.
 - (1) Jesus told a parable about a nobleman who claims his rights to rule over his kingdom. This is what the people say:
 - (2) *"But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'"* (Luke 19:14, NKJV).
 - (3) Sin is going your own way instead of God's way.
 - c) Sin is what you are on the inside. It's not just actions and thoughts and failure; sin has polluted our nature. We are fallen members of a fallen race. It goes beyond our actions to our very being.
 - (1) *"Among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others"* (Ephesians 2:3, NKJV).
 - (a) There's a big twist in human nature called sin.
 7. So there's my answer: sin is opposition to God.
 8. And another question and I don't know if it's the same person who sent it, but it's a logical follow up:
 - C. QUESTION: How do you atone for sins?
 - D. QUESTION: Why did Christ have to die?
 1. This is very simple. I want to define terms here. To atone means to make amends, it means to fix what you've broken; it means to make reparations, or to repair the damage of evil.

2. I'd like to say that to atone means to balance the scales of justice. A person's sin or evil adds weight to one side of the balance, now in order for goodness to prevail; you've got to add justice to the other side of the scale.
3. So, how do you do that? How do you atone for sins?
4. It's very simple, and there are two ways.
5. WAY NUMBER ONE: Pay the full penalty for your sins yourself. In a good legal system, when criminals serve their time, the scales are balanced. So, you've got to serve your time for sin, that's one way to atone for them.
6. So we have to ask, what penalty does the law of heaven mandate for this thing we call sins? I'll let the Bible speak for itself:
 - a) *"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Genesis 2:17, NKJV).
 - b) *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear* (Isaiah 59:2, NKJV).
 - c) *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23, NKJV).
7. There's a death penalty for sin. Now, I want to explain this, because it's not just a reference to physical death. It's deeper than that. What dies is your relationship to God. You suffer SPIRITUAL DEATH and SPIRITUAL DEATH IS ALIENATION FROM GOD.
 - a) *And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled* (Colossians 1:21, NKJV).
8. So, if you want to atone for your sins, you have to suffer alienation from God until your sins are fully paid for. How long will that take? Remember this principle: INFINITE OFFENSE REQUIRES INFINITE PENALTY. So the Bible says:
 - a) *"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* (Matthew 25:46, NKJV).
9. It's a bitter pill to swallow, I know. But I'm trying to be logical, and to lay out the case from the Bible. The way to atone for your sins is to suffer alienation from God forever and that's how God balances the scales of justice in the universe, and keeps evil from winning in the end.
10. Thank God He made another way.
11. WAY NUMBER TWO: Receive Jesus, Who paid the full penalty of your sins so you don't half to.
12. The whole Bible teaches this second way in hundreds of illustrations, parables, living parables, symbols, and straight up teaching.
13. So, go back 1,450 years before Jesus, and you have the beginning of a special holiday called the Day of Atonement:
 - a) *"This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year." And he did as the LORD commanded Moses* (Leviticus 16:34, NKJV).
14. On that day, the whole nation gathered to witness a living atonement object lesson. The High Priest took two goats. One he killed, as a symbol that God would accept a substitute death for a sinner.
15. The other goat was led to the wilderness, and released as a symbol that God had a way to get rid of our sins once for all.
16. Together, the two goats represented Jesus, Who atoned for your sins. When He died, God punished Him with the death penalty, an infinite penalty on His infinite person.
17. And now, your sins are gone forever. So now, the Bible says:
 - a) *And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God,* (Hebrews 10:11, 12, NKJV).
18. The question is how do I atone for sins? The answer is the hard way or the easy way, through Christ.
19. The question is why did Christ have to die? The answer is to atone for our sins so through simple faith we could be His child forever and qualify for heaven.
- E. QUESTION: I've never been baptized or dedicated, but I believe in Jesus. If I died tomorrow, would I go to heaven?
 1. Yes, you would go to heaven.
 2. When Jesus died, there were two thieves crucified on either side of Him. One thief made fun of Jesus. The other thief asked Jesus to save him.
 - a) *And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise"* (Luke 23:43, NKJV).
 3. Was he baptized? No. Was he dedicated? No.
 4. The only issue is what have you done with Jesus. That's it. There's no ritual or formula or efforts or improvements to Jesus and what He did.
 5. Jesus is enough. Don't try to add to it.
- F. QUESTION: Is the world really gonna come to end in 2012?
 1. Maybe.
 2. Maybe not.
 3. The truth is that nobody knows. Jesus said:
 - a) *"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming"* (Matthew 25:13, NKJV).

- b) *“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect (Matthew 24:44, NKJV).*
- c) *“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming” (Matthew 24:42, NKJV).*
4. When I was a kid growing up in Chicago, in my sophomore year of high school, an evangelist came to town. He preached that the world would end in my senior year. So, I checked out emotionally, and he was wrong.
 5. Nobody knows. There are no formulas. There are no ancient codes. There are no secret societies that know when Jesus is coming to end history as we know it.
 6. So over and over, the Bible encourages us to be ready. Live like you’re going to live a hundred years, but be ready to die tomorrow. And don’t get caught up in the end of the world hype.
- G. No one has ever answered my question. What about someone who is agnostic but searching, who doesn't know if God is real but has come to church for eight years, waiting and praying for some sort of sign, wanting to believe but being unwilling to believe based on other people's experience. If God is real, why hasn't He shown up and made Himself known to me? I have read in the Bible that His sheep know His voice. I have heard friends talk about having a "witness" in their heart. I have friends who talk about a dramatic conversion experience. Is it predestination? Am I just not one of the "chosen ones"? Why isn't God answering my prayer? Why isn't He giving me "proof"? I have tried throwing out what one friend calls "fleeces" like Gideon did. No dice. Silence. Cold, still silence. I hear all the time at church the call for people to surrender to God, but this assumes one believes He exists. What about the person who wants to believe and keeps on praying, but can't believe just so I can feel comfortable and call myself a "believer". I want to know that He is real. I am ready to put my faith in Him and give my life to Him. All I am asking from Him is to show me personally that He is real. He's done it for others. Why not me? Please don't tackle this question with some pat answer. If you are going to tackle it, tackle it for real. I know I can't be the only one who feels this way.
1. Wow, what a great question. There's a lot in there, but I think you really boiled down your question when you write, "All I am asking from Him is to show me personally that He is real."
 2. FIRST, I want to say that I resonate with you, and let me say why. There's a famous personality test that puts thinking and feeling on the same spectrum. Some people are way on the thinking side. Some people are way on the feeling side. Some people are in the middle. This doesn't mean that thinkers don't feel or feelers don't think, it just means that most people prefer to lead with one or the other.
 3. I have a hunch that you are more of a thinker, and so am I. I can still hear your feeling in this question; it's not that you're a robot. But you are approaching God from a very analytical perspective. I get that. I appreciate that. And now I want to lovingly and respectfully toss out an analytical challenge to you.
 4. SECOND, so, in honor of our Grill Bill series, we grilled up some RIBS and I have some with me. So, track with me through this imaginary conversation.
 5. You bring me some RIBS straight off the grill. And you say, Bill, these RIBS are delicious. I make the best RIBS in the world.
 6. And I say, well, how do I know they're good?
 7. You say, well, I made them, and everybody who's tried them thinks they're good.
 8. And I say, but I don't think they're good. Prove it. Prove they're good.
 9. You say, well, I use the best meat, and I have my own secret rub and barbecue sauce, and I slow cook them, and they fall off the bone.
 10. And I say, yeah, but that's just your word. How do I really know they your ribs are good?
 11. What will you say to me?
 - a) You have to try them. You have to eat them. You can't know for sure until after you try them.
 12. So the Bible says:
 - a) *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! (Psalms 34:8, NKJV).*
 13. This is the way God usually works: when you take a step of faith, He offers a hint of proof.
 14. But He requires faith first.
 - a) *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6, NKJV).*
 15. And I so appreciate that you wrote this question, but you've been in an eight year standoff with God. And you say, God you go first, and God says I have gone first:
 - a) I created a universe that shows my glory in every direction you look.
 - b) I created a life for you, and make your eyes see, your ears hear, and your mind functions every single day.
 - c) I sent my Son to die on the Cross and Rise again because I love you and want to end the alienation. I want you to be reconciled to Me through the death of My Son, Jesus.
 - d) And, I've given you a Bible that says all these things, and through it, and through the people in your life, I have invited you to a step of faith.
 - e) That's what God says: "I have gone first; now it's your turn."
 16. God has given enough evidence for you to believe in Him. The ball is now in your court. It's your turn, end your standoff.
 17. THIRD, you say you have friends who have God's witness in their hearts. That witness comes AFTER you receive Jesus, not before.
 - a) *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, (Romans 8:16, NKJV).*
 18. FOURTH and I'll say this: I've been a Christian for a long time, and most of the time, I don't have a big feeling of God. Most of the time, I'm just going by faith, not by sight. Nine days out of ten, I don't have any strong impressions from God—sometimes I go long stretches without feeling God.

19. But I'm good with that because I'm learning to go by God's word, and not by my feelings, and that's my prayer for you.
20. FIFTH, I'll also say that you don't need a dramatic conversion experience. I didn't have one. For some people, coming to Jesus is like flipping a light switch—it was dark, and suddenly it's light. It's dramatic.
21. But for other people, it's like the sunrise. It's gradual, slow, and imperceptible. That's how it was for me. I don't even remember the exact day I got saved. I do not have a dramatic story of how I came to Jesus, and that's okay.
22. SIXTH, you ask if you're not one of the chosen ones. God draws in everybody who's willing to be drawn in. If you want to be one of the chosen ones, then choose Him, and you'll be one. There's nothing keeping you from God but you.
23. SEVENTH, one last thing, and I hope you know I'm saying this as concisely and lovingly as I can—Jesus and His followers challenge us to NOT SEEK HIM THROUGH SIGNS.
- a) *21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:21-24, NKJV).*
24. EIGHTH, God loves you, and the angels of heaven are watching you to see if you will take a leap of raw faith. Will you come to Jesus? Will you cross the barrier? Will you lay down your agenda, and the way you think it should happen, and let God embrace you in His way? God loves you. Jesus died for you. There's your proof. It's your turn. Taste and see.
25. And I hope this doesn't come across as a "pat answer," because I worked really hard on it.
- H. QUESTION: Is your name really Bill?
1. Answer: Well, it's my nickname, and my given name is William.
- I. QUESTION: Are you going to visit San Antonio soon?
1. Answer: Ummm, I don't plan to. I've never been there and you're creeping me out.
2. Next week: some questions about the validity of the Bible and about reincarnation.
3. Still time to submit question:
- a) bit.ly/grillbill (exactly, no www, etc), or
- b) Text 99503, type grillbill and then your question (rates may apply), or
- c) Email to info@ncredning.com
- (1) And remember, it's for our friends who are new and still investigating Jesus.