

# Q&A: On faith-healing schools

**Anonymous** asks: *Thoughts on this? <http://bit.ly/lScR5M>*

The link goes to a news.com.au article about courses run by Bethel Church in California that “claim to teach people how to heal the sick and even raise the dead.” Apparently these courses are coming to Australia via Holyfire Ministry Training school and others.

Two points in one direction:

1. Given my experience of news.com.au, there is likely a little, um, exaggeration in the article. Perhaps you could make a headline about any ministry training college that “Faithful pay thousands to be able to make new Christians.” A cursory glance at Holyfire’s Prospectus shows a myriad of courses that are certainly not beyond the pale. Even a quick glance at Bethel Church’s website says of its Healing School Intensive that “Pastors and ministry leaders will learn ways to cultivate and maintain an atmosphere conducive to healing in their churches and ministries” which is different to “we’ll teach you how to heal.” Please note, these were quick, cursory scans of web pages. Let me know if I missed something.
2. I am not against training people for Christian ministry. We do spend a lot of money, for instance, training our gifted preachers to be better preachers. I see no problem with also training those that are gifted in other ways from receiving relevant training, particularly training towards maturity and wisdom.

One point in the opposite direction:

1. Yes, you can take it too far. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says of spiritual gifts, including healing, that “All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he

distributes them to each one, just as he determines.”

And while there does seem to be some precedent for the receiving of gifts through laying on of hands and praying for someone to receive that gift for the church, it is dangerous to think that impartation belongs to anyone but God the Spirit directly. Which is all to say that just because you take a course at a college (and pay its associated costs, perhaps making the same mistake as Simon in Acts 8:18) doesn't mean that you're going to be able to do miracles.

---

## Follow Friday

My friend Sally Oakley has started a blog at <http://oakleythoughtso.blogspot.com/>

She writes

*A bit of a working title. It's an idea James and I have had, to write (perhaps together?) about our experiences of depression. It sounds depressing, I know, but the idea would be to make it extremely practical and readable; something that anyone could pick up and get something out of. Anyone who would like to know more about depressive illness, parenting, marriage, and surviving all three. And all the bits in between.*

Looking forward to it.

---

# Q&A: How should we speak when confronted about Harold Camping?

**Anonymous** asks: *How do you think we should respond, when confronted about him [Harold Camping] and others? One 'whacky' minister, gets more media attention than a million faithful followers or a thousand faithful preachers(from my experience) and the faithful witness of neighbours is undone by the preaching of someone who seems to be seriously misguided, but offers the nightly news a dramatic sound bite.*

Thanks for the question. It's actually something I've been reflecting about the recent "big day" in hindsight.

One obvious form of response was mockery. Sometimes this was taken to extraordinary lengths. And it's not necessarily an invalid response. The prophecy and the underlying framework is worthy of derision and "Don't listen to this fool" is an appropriate pastoral message. Some people did seem to enjoy it a bit too much though and I don't think that's helpful.

I also suspect that there was a flurry of mockery in order to set up a clear demarcation to non-Christians – "Yes we're Christian, but we're not like those whacky Christians – haha, how foolish they are." Sometimes this came across as the wannabe-cool-guy in the playground laughing at his embarrassing younger brother to earn kudos. Not a good look.

And it was probably not very effective or needed. Those non-Christians who understood the demarcation would have continued to understand. Those non-Christians who didn't care would continue not to care. Indeed, some of the anti-Christians I follow simply didn't get it ("I'm not raptured yet."

Seriously, not even Harold Camping was suggesting you would be!) and continued to lump the serious Christians in with the

whacky ones.

The best response I heard was on the radio – I can't remember who it was now, if someone remembers, please remind me – and it was a simple response that clearly portrayed the mainstream Christian gospel and expressed genuine pastoral concern for those who would have their faith shaken when the prophecy failed.

So, to answer your question: I think the way to respond is with clarity about the truth – and the error being put forward – without mockery or derision, and something positive about how you live your life for Jesus.

---

## **Q&A: What do you think of Everyone draw Muhammad day?**

**Anonymous** asks: *What do you think of Everyone draw Muhammad day?*

I hadn't heard of it, and you made me go look it up. I suspect my thoughts are not particularly novel and are necessarily initial.

Mixed feelings.

I sympathise with the free speech sentiment. I am, of course, appalled that someone's cartoon should lead them to be afraid for their life. It leads me to give a consideration to those who are suffering persecution at the hands of militant islamic groups in a way that appears to be much more prevalent and immediate (if you can grade these things) than what a western cartoonist may face.

On the other hand: It is needlessly offensive to those within Islam who would also be appalled at the militant response. And for what gain? It amplifies the disrespect.

Perhaps above all, it is poor satire. A good cartoonist uncovers truth from the side, like the jester of old. It is a form of wisdom that confronts and challenges even as it amuses. As soon as it is self-referential it loses all that and is much more likely to be self-serving and purile.

---

## **Q&A: Should we stone Harold Camping as a false prophet on the 22nd?**

**Anonymous** asks: *So, shall we all do the Deuteronomical thing and stone Harold as a false prophet on the 22nd?*

Nope. Two reasons:

1) Assuming a strict application of the “deuteronomical thing” the stoning of a false prophet is found in Deuteronomy 13 where from my (quick) reading (and correct me if I’m wrong) the stoning only applies to a prophet who makes a prophecy (that is fulfilled!) and then calls people to worship other gods. For all his faults, Camping isn’t doing that.

Deuteronomy 18 talks about prophets whose prophecies don’t come to pass and the warning about them is to simply “not be alarmed” by them. I am not alarmed by Harold Camping.

2) That’s not how we, as Christians, apply the Old Testament. This is a huge topic in it’s own right – but suffice it to say that the casuistic strictures of the Law come to us via

the grace of God and the obedience of Christ and are applied in that light. I can't see how stoning Harold Camping would glorify Jesus. And, to preach to myself a bit too, ridiculing him probably doesn't do that much either.

---

## **Q&A: Can you give us your thoughts on Harold Camping's prophecies concerning May 21?**

**Anonymous** asks: *Can you give us your thoughts and reflection upon Harold Camping's prophecies regarding the nearing rapture on May 21? Is there anything I need to do in preparation? Do we assume that anyone who is still around after Sunday isn't a Christian?*

**Anonymous** asks: *Further to my earlier anonymous question: <http://www.familyradio.com/graphical/literature/judgment/judgment.html>*

To which I would add this from googling around: <http://www.ebiblefellowship.com/outreach/tracts/may21/>

The whole thing is about a supposed understanding of the Bible that indicates that Judgement Day occur on May 21, 2011 (two days away!) and that the world will end five months later on October 21, 2011.

As a twitter friend of mine wrote, "Was Matthew 24:36 removed from the bible or something?" Matthew 24:36 reads "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Proponents get around it by saying that new understanding has rendered this text

superfluous. It's a ridiculous argument really. **The simple fact that there is a prediction is evidence enough that the whole thing is wrong.**

There is further irony in that, having ignored Matthew 24:36, it seems that the whole prediction rests upon a misapplication of the very next verse: Matthew 24:37 – “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”

Which leads to a less-than-tenuous hermeneutic which applies details of the accounts of Noah in Genesis, improbably located in history, via some questionable numerological manipulations, to the span of history itself. The reason why May 21, 2011 is important, apparently, is because it's 7000 years after the beginning of the flood.

I'll end with a quote which I think is from Mark Driscoll: “On May 20th I'm planting a tree, on May 22nd I'm laughing at this false prophet.”

---

## **Q&A: A good reason for OBL catharsis?**

A follow-up from a previous Q&A post.

**Casper** comments:

*So those celebrating at Nuremburg when a guilty verdict was passed with the knowledge that the convicted was to be hanged were wrong?*

*And since we have the example of a separate theatre of war at the same time where no-one got justice and a few trials only took out low level war criminals and those who perpetrated massive crimes weren't held to account (by the same government*

*celebrating Osama's death). Japan has a huge issue in the region still because they did not repent for their actions and were never punished.*

*There is good reason for the catharsis.*

*I think you should have done a better job between defining between Gospel and Governance and at the end of the day the Gospel is a path of violence for Christ and all who follow him so that statement doesn't really stick well since Countries and the Church are separate institutions.*

Hi Casper,

I think the response I'm championing is a mixture of gladness and sadness: Gladness that justice can be done, some vindication is evident – a good foreshadowing of the eventual judgement on Christ's return. Sadness, because the judgement is not here in full and vindication can never be fully achieved in human hands, because the judgement itself is indicative of a broken world, and because I am not without sin myself.

Please note I am not advocating that the action against Osama was wrong. And I prefer the transparent justice of Nuremburg with the lesser forms elsewhere. My concern is about the triumphalism.

In terms of Gospel/Governance, the connection I'm grasping is eschatological: The non-violence of Christ is a demonstration of the post-judgement Kingdom of God made real and present by Christ through the violence of the cross and the vindication of the resurrection. It's application is found in forgiveness, and being a peace-maker insomuch as it depends on you etc. Romans 13 connects because the government authority is described as the agent of God and therefore prefigures the ultimate judgement of God by which the Kingdom of God is made manifest. It's application is in the right punishment of the evildoers in our midst. **The tension between**



these applications is exactly the now-and-not-yet tension that we have because we belong to the Kingdom of God inaugurated by Christ but not yet culminated at the judging of all things. The Kingdom of peace has begun, the need for punishment remains until the day when all things are made right.

So the right response when we see punishment, such as what OBL has received, is eschatological – “All things will be judged, including me, so thanks be to God for his grace that in Christ I, even I, may pass through that terrible day.” The right response is humility, and further dependence on Christ, not triumph.

W.

---

## Q&A: Might OBL end up in heaven?

A follow-up from a previous Q&A post.

**Anonymous** asks:

*I wanted to comment – of all the twitter nonsense and rhetoric about the killing of Osama Bin Laden I have read, two things have stood out: “So far no one has explained how this killing was an act of justice, even though this is what people are celebrating”. and a Quote from Ezekiel 18:23 “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?”*

*I’m not sure how to feel about the death of Osama – I think I would have preferred the justice of his capture and trial if*

*that were possible. But the 'celebration' of his death feels appalling.*

*I was once taught that even in suicide, at the last moment, a person may repent and find Jesus. If this is right, is it possible that even Hitler and Osama may end up in heaven?*

Hi Anonymous, a quick response.

1) Is this killing an act of justice? Yes, to the extent that it was punishment wielded against a guilty person. Did Osama deserve to die? The blunt answer eventually is : Undoubtedly.

2) Ezekiel 18. I think this verse strikes the balance I was alluding to in the original answer. God desires repentance above all. I don't think this prevents the authority of the Romans 13 sword from acting, however.

3) Would capture and trial be a better demonstration of justice? Perhaps. It certainly would have demonstrated a high road of measured justice that is not exactly evident on the other side of the coin. But I think this is a matter of degrees within the one category of "punishment."

4) Can Hitler or Osama end up in heaven? I severely, severely, severely doubt it. From all accounts their lives were shaped and defined by a rejection of all that is good and rebellion against the grace of God. Yes there is mystery here, and grace upon grace – and I'm sure we will be surprised when Christ returns as to who exactly rides with him. But hypotheticals like these are simply conjecture, ignoring the realities of life and the evidence of degenerate hearts. When considering the demise of obviously sin-ridden people, I think the best response is not to ask "Might they be in heaven?" but to declare "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

W.

---

# Q&A: Osama, a “biblical understanding”

Dave0 asks:



*Osama gets Obama – idiots dancing in the streets, singing, chanting and waving flags, celebrating their victory.*

*Obama gets Osama – idiots dancing in the streets, singing, chanting and waving flags, celebrating their victory.*

*There is a very real difficulty in bringing Osama to a court and having a trial. However, the current approach is anything but edifying. Can you tease out a biblical understanding/response.*

Thanks for the question. It came in just as a facebook/twitter conversation led me to this quote by Martin Luther King:

*“Are we seeking power for power’s sake? Or are we seeking to make the world and our nation better places to live. If we seek the latter, violence can never provide the answer. The ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral, begetting the very thing it seeks to destroy. Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. Through violence you may murder the liar, but you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. Through violence you may murder the*

*hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes. Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that."* *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*

I think I've said it before somewhere that the response of the US to 9/11 was typical and therefore far from ideal. *Pax Americana* is not a wholesome aspiration. I see very little distinction from militant Islam in it – "Yes, we are a religion of peace, when we're in control."

But, you asked for a biblical teasing out, so here goes: Like all good theological questions there are two somewhat contrasting parts to the balanced truth.

**The first** is this: Violence is not the path of the gospel. This is Martin Luther King's position of course. Apparently even Bonhoeffer, who contributed to a (justifiable, it would seem) assassination attempt on Hitler, considered that act to be a taking of guilt upon himself. Jesus of course, eschewed violence at the time of his arrest –

*Matthew 26: 51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. 52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" 55 At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. 56 But all this has taken place that the Scriptures of the*

*prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left him and fled. ESV*

And then, of course, there is the familiar command for us to love our enemies – particularly in the light of the Kingdom of God in which, Christ asserts, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”

*Matthew 5:43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. ESV*

**The second** is this: Justice is good, and that involves punishment. Would it be right to ignore Osama bin Laden and not call him to account? I think Romans 13 portrays the governing authorities as God’s agents for this purpose

*Romans 13: 4b But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. ESV*

I think the framework perhaps is to consider Romans 13 punishment is an act of judgement. And to the extent that the human authority acts justly, it is an act of judgement that prefigures the judgement of all things at the end. If you like – a judging ahead of time to prevent harm, pain and further sin. Such an act is not done lightly for the judge presumes to represent and point to God, our judge.

**The balance** then is this:

Both things point to grace. The non-violence of the gospel is the nature of the eternal kingdom that we are passing into, by grace. Romans 13 points to the judgement that we are passing from/through, by grace.

In application, therefore: The use of violence against Osama is not necessarily wrong – a violent, evil man needed to be stopped. But it is a *dreadful* thing (as Bonhoeffer knew) and should be measured, and done with trembling and even regret – regret that it had to come to this, regret that this is a necessary act in a sinful world while we yet precede the day when all things are made right. In the light of an eternal gospel of peace and non-violence (lions laying down with the lamb) we need grace in all things, including this, to cover the guilt and brokenness of us all.

Therefore, the jubilation in the streets *must* be considered as “idiotic” (your words). It is simply presumptuous – are they all without sin that they should rejoice at the stones being cast? Triumph, gloating and celebration has no place here.

Some have compared the scenes with that of the end of World War 2. I reject the comparison. The jubilation at the end of World War 2 is not so much that Hitler was dead, but that the war was over. It was relief, a lifting of a burden, not the celebration of a “justice done.” As if war could bring justice! I’m reminded of the scene in a later episode of *Band of Brothers* where an American soldier screams at captured Germans about the pointlessness of it all.

My response to all this is not “God bless America”, but “Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus”

---

# Q&A: Can an atheist give a testimony?

Anonymous asks: Can an atheist give a testimony?

The short answer is: yes.

The long answer is:

“Testimony” has a wide semantic range. For instance, you could be asking, “Can an atheist give a true account of something, such as in court?” The answer is, of course: yes.

You could also be asking “Can an atheist give an account of some significant event, moment, or transition in their life?”

And again, of course, the answer is yes.

Christians often use “testimony” to mean something like “the account of how God has worked in my life, particularly towards my coming to faith.” This is similar to, but more subjective than, the Biblical sense of being a “witness” (being able to “testify”, having a “testimony”) of the objective truth of Christ’s resurrection.

In this particular sense, of course, an “atheist testimony” would be oxymoronic: an account of the work of someone they do not accept as reality.

Thanks for the question.