

QUESTIONS FROM CHRIST

Frank Chesser

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Spirit of Liberalism

Portrait of God

Voyage of Faith

Thinking Right about God

The Heart of Isaiah

The Man of Chebar

Life-Changing Questions

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FOREWORD

I first heard Frank Chesser speak at the Fort Worth lectures in 1994, and again at the Spring, Texas lectures in 1997. In 2004 I purchased a copy of his book, *Portrait of God*. That book is one of only a select few in my library that I read from cover to cover in one sitting. Other publications of his only increased my appreciation for him as a prolific writer. *Questions from Christ* will be a wonderful addition to the previous works of brother Frank Chesser.

Throughout biblical history God has probed the hearts of men by asking questions. When Adam and Eve sinned, God asked Adam, “Where art thou?” (Gen. 3:9). The question from God was not to gain information relative to Adam’s whereabouts. Rather, it was to probe Adam’s mind; to make him engage in some serious reflection upon what he had done when he joined Eve in sinning against God. Like His Father in heaven, our Lord often probed the minds of His hearers with questions—powerful, pointed, and plain.

The book you hold in your hand contains an array of questions from the lips of our Lord, beginning with the baptism of John and continuing until the last drop of blood flowed from His veins. The author takes his audience on a journey through the earthly ministry of Christ with particular attention on the questions that Jesus asked men from every walk of life. The reader is invited to meditate on questions of monumental significance. These are questions that deserve the utmost of attention on the part of every serious student of God’s word. Every question that brother Chesser examines probes the depths of the reader’s subconscious while challenging him to greater spiritual heights.

“What think ye?” was a question that frequently graced the lips of our Savior. On such occasions He was inviting His audience to think. “Who do men say that I, the Son of man am?” was designed to get His disciples to think. “Which is harder? To forgive or to heal?” was His challenge to His enemies to think. Throughout His thirty-three-year earthly sojourn, Jesus encouraged those with whom He came in contact to think! “What think ye?”—along with dozens of other challenging questions—challenged friend and foe alike. This is precisely what brother Chesser invites us to do. Think!

Tom Wacaster

PREFACE

This book is a sequel to *Life-Changing Questions*, a study of questions from God in the Old Testament. It began with God's first question to Adam, "Where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9) and closes with His final question to Israel, which He answered Himself, "Will a man rob God?" (Mal. 3:8). This present work commences with a question that God raised through John the Baptist when he inquired of the Pharisees and Sadducees, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" (Matt. 3:7). Beginning with that initial question, this book constitutes an analysis of the inquiries that Christ posed during the course of His earthy ministry to His final questions prior to His ascension into heaven.

The spiritual benefits of pondering the questions that Christ asked transcend human expression. Some of them possess a depth that surpasses the greatest minds of the ages. The questions that Christ propounded in the four accounts of the gospel are authoritative, exhaustive, and demanding. They are unique revelations of the mind of God. They reveal the folly of human wisdom and enable man to think like God thinks. They open the door to matters of spiritual contemplation that are not contained in direct statements. These questions impel the mind to enter new areas of meditation that enrich the soul. They are spiritually stimulative. They are powerful aids in Bible study, the effects of which linger long after a particular subject has been thoroughly analyzed.

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Finally, I am indebted to my wife, Cherry, for typing the book and for her continuing encouragement all along the road of this effort.

My association with this great team since the publishing of my first book, *The Spirit of Liberalism* in June of 2001, has been a blessing beyond measure in my life.

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PREJUDICE, POVERTY, AND MATERIALISM

John the Baptist was a mighty man of God. Of him Jesus said, “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist” (Matt. 11:11). John played a significant role in preparing the way for Christ to solve the problem that started in Genesis 3:6. Isaiah pointed to his unique work when he said, “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa. 40:3). The last two verses of the Old Testament describe that prophetic voice as Elijah the prophet, and four centuries later, Jesus identified that Elijah as John the Baptist (Matt. 11:14).

Following the birth of Christ, the family’s flight to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod and their return to Israel to make their home in Nazareth, inspiration focuses on the beginning of John’s work, declaring, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 3:2). The kingdom of heaven was the church that Jesus said “I will build,” and did build, the product of the gospel preached and obeyed. John said it was “at hand,” denoting its proximity in regard to time. Repentance was essential for one’s entrance into the kingdom. Three years later, following His resurrection and prior to His ascension, Jesus informed His apostles that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter and the apostles preached the first consummated gospel sermon on Pentecost of Acts 2. Impaled with godly grief, some three thousand inquired of them as to what they needed to do. They were commanded to “repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ

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for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Having submitted to the gospel in the obedience of faith, they were added to the kingdom or church (Acts 2:47) that John preached, that Jesus preached (Matt. 4:17), and that the apostles preached (Matt. 10:7).

The Pharisees and Sadducees hated Christ. They opposed Him throughout His earthly ministry. As they began to assemble at the Jordan River where John was baptizing, God, through John, raised His first question, “*O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*” (Matt. 3:7). The teaching of these two Jewish sects contained poison to the destruction of the soul. They were in danger of being consumed by the wrath of God when He destroyed Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70. When John pressed them with the need for repentance, he knew they were thinking, “We have Abraham to our father” (Matt. 3:9).

The problem of sin cannot be cured by who man is. The Jews refused to believe this. They viewed themselves as special and in covenant relationship with God because of their physical relationship to Abraham. Both testaments are permeated with the self-righteous national arrogance engendered by this perverted view of themselves. They refused to believe that their beloved Jerusalem and the temple could ever be destroyed. They viewed the preservation of this city and sanctuary as evidence of God’s presence and acceptance of the nation regardless of the spiritual decadence that afflicted them.

Ezekiel spent half of his book endeavoring to convince those of Judah already in Babylonian captivity that Jerusalem and the temple were going to be destroyed and that their present tragic state and the judgment soon to befall their brethren yet remaining in Jerusalem was the result of their own sin and rebellion. Micah described both the civil and spiritual leaders of Judah as covetous and wholly devoted to the pursuit of wealth. “Yet will they lean upon the LORD and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us” (Mic. 3:11). Theft, murder, adultery, lying, and idolatry were as common in Judah as the rising of the sun. Yet the nation would invoke a meaningless ritualistic formula regarding the presence of the temple, come and stand before it and God, and assert their right to engage in such sins with impunity (Jer. 7:4–10).

Jewish National Prejudice

God never accepted national Israel. God does not embrace people as nations, states, communities, congregations, or families. He receives people on an individual basis as they respond to His will in the obedience of faith. Regarding the small number of Jews who would obey the gospel, Paul quoted from Isaiah: “Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved” (Rom. 9:27). The three thousand who obeyed the gospel on Pentecost of Acts 2 was a remnant of the remnant. It is a powerful testimony of the stubborn, rebellious, self-will spirit of the very nation that God worked with and through for centuries to make Jesus in the flesh a reality in the world.

Consequently, when John the Baptist initiated his preparatory work for Christ, he was met with the same nationalistic Jewish prejudice typical of the nation from the time of their national infancy. This battle raged during the entirety of the ministry of Christ. When He asserted the necessity of the Jews’ acceptance of the truth in order to enjoy spiritual freedom, they responded, “We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man” (John 8:33). No nation has ever experienced more subjugation to some foreign power than the Jews, and even when this statement was made, they were under the Roman yoke. Their racial bias blinded them to reality and truth.

The apostles themselves were afflicted with a degree of this disposition. Just minutes before Jesus ascended into heaven, they were yet inquiring about the restoration of the old kingdom of Israel (Acts 1:6). Peter made two statements on Pentecost of Acts 2—the “all flesh” of Joel’s prophecy (v. 17) and those “afar off” (v. 39)—that affirmed God’s redemptive plan being inclusive of Gentiles, but he did not understand the import of his own inspired statements. It took a miracle to convince Cornelius, a Gentile, to send for Peter, a Jew (Acts 10:1–8). A second miracle and an imperative from the Holy Spirit were needed to persuade Peter to go to Cornelius (Acts 10:9–20). A third miracle was required to assure all involved that the gospel of redemption preached from Genesis 3:15 to its consummated form in Acts 2 embraced the whole of humanity (Acts 10:44–48).

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Paul set forth the gospel that centers in the cross as God's only means of salvation (Rom. 1:16). He proceeded to expound on the sinful state of every accountable person and his need of the gospel. As he neared to the close of his declaration, he raised and answered this question: "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; as it is written; There is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:9–10).

In Romans 9–11, Paul negated forever the concept of Jewish spiritual specialty. Abraham had eight sons, but God's redemptive plan was woven through Isaac and fulfilled in Christ, the gospel, and the church, not in fleshly Israel (Rom. 9:6–8). Racial ethnicity has no bearing on divine acceptance, for there is "no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom. 10:12), and that call in Paul's summary statement stresses the salvation through Christ the "Deliverer" (Rom. 11:26), redemption enjoyed by those who obey the gospel, "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). The remedy for sin is not to be found in who man is, nor in his fleshly relationships to others like unto himself.

Spiritual Poverty and the Dangers of Materialism

The sermon on the mount of Matthew 5–7 is a spiritual classic of divine truths and principles that is unsurpassed in the whole of the Bible. There is a sense in which it could be depicted as the background for the rest of the New Testament. Moreover, it could also be said that the beatitudes constitute the spiritual reservoir for the balance of the sermon on the mount, and the first beatitude as the pivot of the remainder of the beatitudes. These truths are constructed upon the foundation of the two greatest of all commandments in loving God and one's neighbor with the whole of his being (Matt. 22:36–40).

Who is the man that mourns over his sins in view of God's perfect holiness who cannot "look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13), who strives for meekness of spirit, who hungers and thirsts after the whole of righteousness, and who is merciful and pure in heart? Who is the man that labors to make peace among men, who is persecuted because he is righteous, and who rejoices when he is

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reviled and oppressed? It is the man that discerns and confesses his spiritual destitution before God (Matt. 5:3).

Who is the man that seeks to be the salt of the earth and light of the world, who is concerned about even the jots and tittles of the law of God, who is attentive to proper relationships with his brothers and his enemies, and who strives for purity in eyesight and marital bonds?

Who is the man that is determined to keep his word, who works toward conciliation, who expresses agape love toward his enemies, who demonstrates appropriate deportment in giving, prayer, and fasting, and who possesses the right attitude toward material things? Who is the man that suppresses unseemly judgment, who engages in self-examination, who perseveres in prayer and pursues the golden rule, who toils to enter in at the strait gate and shuns religious error, who exemplifies humble obedience, and who constructs his house on the bedrock of truth? Who is the man whose heart is fixed on redemption consummated in Matthew to John, redemption appropriated in Acts, redemption perpetuated in Romans to Jude, and victory at last in Revelation? It is the man who perceives and acknowledges the totality of his spiritual poverty before God (Matt. 5:3).

The term love is common in usage but rare in understanding. Love is not infatuation. It is not a bubbly fountain of emotions. It is not feeling apart from knowledge. Love is not vague sentimentality. It is not a sense of warmth moving across the pores of the skin. It is not a mystical, mysterious, fleshly sensation that transcends human expression. Agape love is an act of the mind. Jesus speaks of loving God “with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37). Agape love shares no kinship with superficial emotions. It is not dependent upon or affected by emotions. It is a commanded love that even embraces one’s enemies (Matt. 5:44). It relies upon divine revelation for its actions. It cannot move until it hears God speak: “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Agape love embraces the whole of humanity. It is not limited by race, society, economics, educational, or national boundaries. It is not dependent upon reciprocal action. It does not look to one’s ability to respond in kind. It does not give with the expectation of receiving something in return. There is no action of man that

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brings him closer to the heart of God than when he views both God and man through the eyes of agape love.

Matthew 6 closes with some cogent truths to aid in developing proper attitudes toward material things. There is no subject that the Bible addresses with greater insistence than money and things that money can buy. In Moses' final sermon to Israel prior to his death and their entrance into Canaan, he labors to prepare them to serve God in love and gratitude in their new home in the promised land. Deuteronomy 4–11 serves as the axis of the book. Chapter 8 is a good summary chapter that illustrates the intent of the book. Five times in twenty verses, Moses stresses the necessity of obeying the commandments of God, and two-thirds of the chapter points to the destructive power inherent in materialism.

Jesus raised five questions to regulate appropriate thinking about the corporeal things of life. To offset a spirit of anxiousness about eating, drinking, and clothing, He asked, *"Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"* (Matt. 6:25). He pointed to His Father's provisions for birds and asked, *"Are ye not much better than they?"* (v. 26). He accented the futility of anxiety over immutable things with the question, *"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"* (v. 27). He illustrated God's ability to aid man in providing for the necessity of clothing by His adornment of the lilies of the field that transcended the beauty of Solomon in all his glory that answered His question, *"And why take ye thought for raiment?"* (v. 28).

Jesus reinforced this truth regarding His Father's loving care for man with His fifth question: *"Shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"* (Matt. 6:30). He warned them about raising their own questions, such as, "What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (v. 31). Making spiritual things their priority would enable God to assist them in their need of physical necessities (v. 33). Jesus concludes this momentous section with a most profound truth, "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (v. 34). Each day contains ample trials and problems without attempting to overload today with those of tomorrow.