

TRUTH IN THE TEST TUBE 713

True and False Debt (Last in SERIES of 3)

VOICE: Professor, I've been reading New Age ideas again. And I would appreciate your help to understand "Nirvana" and "karmic debt."

PROF.: Gladly! Let's also discuss the musical group that *practiced* Nirvana.

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

VOICE: Professor, what is nirvana?

PROF.: The word "nirvana" originated in the Sanskrit language of India. It means "blowing out" or "quenching." It relates to reincarnation. In the Buddhist version, nirvana is the final state the soul reaches on its journey through different lifetimes. The catholic.com website says, "These lifetimes are pictured as a series of lamps, one being lit by another, until the final lamp goes out." ¹

Buddhists teach that our desires and cravings keep the process of reincarnation going. If we can eliminate all desires, we can escape the cycle of reincarnation and rebirth. When a person manages to extinguish all his desires, he reaches a state of nirvana. He loses his identity as a distinct individual. Someone asked the Buddha, "Does a saint survive his death?" He answered, "Where does a flame go when it is blown out?" That seems to imply that neither a dead human nor a blown-out flame have individual identities anymore.

VOICE: Some of my friends think the New Age idea of nirvana is very similar to the Christian idea of heaven.

PROF.: In reality, they are very different. Nirvana is a condition where all desire has been banished. In heaven, followers of Christ will have many desires fulfilled. I'm thinking of God's promise, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." ²

VOICE: That doesn't sound like "blowing out" or "quenching."

PROF.: That same website says, "Nirvana is a state of ultimate apathy and indifference, heaven of ultimate joy and fulfillment. Paradoxically, Buddhists regard nirvana, the state of desirelessness, as the most desirable state."

VOICE: Having a deep desire, to extinguish all desire. I see what you mean about New Age thought sometimes contradicting itself.

1 How Does Nirvana Compare with the Christian Understanding of Heaven?

<https://www.catholic.com/qa/how-does-nirvana-compare-with-the-christian-understanding-of-heaven>

2 I Corinthians 2:9.

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- PROF.: And here's a final difference between nirvana and heaven. Nirvana suggests one will eternally lose his body and his individual identity. Christians understand they will keep both of them forever.
- VOICE: Another website restates some of the things we've discussed, in different words: "Nirvana is the ultimate spiritual goal and marks the release from rebirths..." If I understand correctly, "release from rebirths" means the reincarnations stop, and the person achieves his "ultimate spiritual goal," to pass out of existence.
- PROF.: Yes. In 1987 rock musician Kurt Cobain [koh-BAIN] was so impressed with the nirvana concept, that he formed a musical group and called it "Nirvana." Michael Gallucci [guh-LOO-chee], senior editor of *Ultimate Classic Rock*, observed, "Cobain became a spokesman for a generation of disillusioned kids..." Gallucci added, "He equates any semblance of happiness with stupidity."³ In doing so, Cobain deepened and perpetuated the disillusionment and despair of his listeners.
- VOICE: Was that disillusionment and despair a temporary stage? Did Cobain and his followers find New Age concepts fulfilling the promise that "the subconscious will conquer all foes and resist all negativism"?
- PROF.: Quite the contrary! Cobain said, "If you *die*, you're completely happy and your soul somewhere lives on. I'm not afraid of dying. Total peace after death, *becoming someone else is the best hope I've got.*"
- VOICE: "...becoming someone else is the best hope I've got"? He didn't "resist negativism" very well.
- PROF.: With that outlook, it's not surprising that – even with a net worth of \$100 million – he took his own life in 1994, at age 27. Unfortunately, Cobain did not reach his goal of becoming "someone else." And his fate after death has not been "total peace." Believing a lie can be fatal.
- PROF.: The Bible describes a *genuine* perfect world to come. It says that time will be so peaceful that "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them."⁴
- Animals that are now carnivores, will peacefully follow a child. God promises this, and he is far more capable of producing peaceful results like this, than any human or group of humans will ever achieve.

³ 10 Best Nirvana Lyrics, <http://diffuser.fm/best-nirvana-lyrics/>

⁴ Isaiah 11:6.

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VOICE: During my reading, I discovered the psychicsource.com website, containing an article entitled “Clear Your Karmic Debt.” It claims, “Your karma is a debt that travels with you from one lifetime to the next. If you were greedy in a previous life, you will have to learn to make do with less in this one. If you were cruel to others, you must work to master kindness and sacrifice. Understanding your karmic debt will help you clear it to attain greater enlightenment and happiness in this incarnation.”

PROF.: Another site says something similar: “...your life experiences so far have been pre-determined mostly by your past lives.”

VOICE: Your past lives have pre-determined most of what you've experienced in this life? That kind of thinking sounds like an excuse for a person to avoid responsibility for his actions. The old excuses “My genes made me do it” or “The devil made me do it” are now joined by “My karma made me do it” or “My previous incarnation made me do it.”

Does the Bible give any insight about some kind of spiritual debt?

PROF.: Yes. The Bible says all of us owe a *genuine* debt to the *real God*. It's not a karmic debt – not a liability from a previous life. It's a moral and spiritual debt we have incurred in our present life. The Bible makes clear that all of us have sinned and “fall short of the glory of God.”⁵ That sinful behavior earns us “the wages of sin,”⁶ which is death.

VOICE: Doesn't the issue go deeper than merely sinful *actions*? Each of us has a *defect of character*. The Bible describes human nature realistically when it says, “The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?”⁷ Another translation says, “The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?”

PROF.: You're right. If we could live a thousand lifetimes, there is no way we could transform our selfish character without help.

But on one Friday in the first century, Jesus Christ *provided* the help. We usually translate his words, “It is finished.”⁸ But in the language in which that part of the Bible was originally written, “It is finished” is the expression accountants use when they are marking a debt “Paid in Full.”

VOICE: Are you saying Jesus Christ has already “paid in full” the debt for every person?

PROF.: Yes, but only for every person who *admits* that he has sinned and needs to have his sin-debt forgiven. “If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”⁹

5 Romans 3:23.

6 Romans 6:23.

7 Jeremiah 17:9.

8 John 19:30.

9 I John 1:9.

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PROF.: French physicist and philosopher Blaise Pascal wrote of a “God-shaped hole” inside every person. In his words, “What else does this craving...proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are,¹⁰ though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself.”¹¹

VOICE: I'm making a note of that: “...this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; ...by God himself.”

PROF.: The New Age idea that we are our own god, doesn't fill that canyon. It reminds me of a person approaching someone in a back alley, trying to sell something by saying, “I can get it for you wholesale.”¹² You know he is peddling an inferior product. The Bible warns, “Evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”¹³

VOICE: Larson points out, “Man's problem is not blindness to his innate goodness and potential for divine conduct... Any solution to the human condition that ignores the heart's depravity and God's transcendent wisdom will not usher in a New Age. It can only perpetuate an old lie.”

PROF.: An anonymous author wrote a prayer that we can use as a pattern for asking God for forgiveness and cleansing. It says, “Dear Father God, I know that I've done wrong through my thoughts, my actions and the things I've said, sometimes by mistake and sometimes on purpose. I have gone my own way and not put you at the center of my life. I am very sorry and ask that you please forgive me. I thank you that I can ask you this because I truly believe that your Son, Jesus, died in my place and, through Him, I have access to you. Please help me to follow you more closely every day and live a life which gives glory back to you. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.”

FORMAT: THEME AND ANNOUNCEMENT

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10 ...Seeking in things that do not exist, the help he cannot find in things that do exist...

11 Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, quoted in Kenneth Richard Samples, *A World of Difference* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), p. 180.

12 At a lower price, by buying the product directly from the factory or distributorship “middle man,” instead of through retail dealers.

13 2 Timothy 3:13.