

Ask The Elders

Here are dozens of questions that the elders of Valley Bible Church have been asked at different times, with their response. For a list of our most common questions, see our web page on Frequently Asked Questions at www.valleybible.net/faq.shtml. If you have a question, please e-mail us at questions@ValleyBible.net

Questions on doctrine

Why does Valley Bible celebrate Halloween when it is such an evil day?

We do not exactly celebrate Halloween, we hold a time of fellowship and outreach at the church where children can go safely from car to car to collect candy. Since the distribution of candy to children is not sinful and since dressing up in a costume is not sinful, we are free to hold this activity.

The premise of this question is that it is wrong to associate ourselves in any way with evil. One of the charges that the Pharisees made against Jesus was that he associated Himself with sinners (Mark 2:16). They failed to discern that participating in a non-sinful act, such as eating in Mark 2:16, does not cause a person to sin. In fact, Paul even noted that he sought to identify himself with sinners for the sake of reaching them for Christ (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).

Some will use the King James Version of 1 Thessalonians 5:22, "Abstain from all appearance of evil." To say that we must avoid doing what others may consider to be evil. However, a better translation found in the New King James Version, "Abstain from every form of evil." This is supported by other popular modern translations. Some behaviors may appear evil to people, such as the Pharisees, but what we are called to abstain from in 1 Thessalonians 5:22 is evil itself, not just what some people may wrongly consider to be evil.

Another approach used to call Christians to completely separate themselves from Halloween is its history. Yet 1 Corinthians 10:25-29 teaches that the history of something is irrelevant to its present status. What is only at issue is the present perception. Just as meat that had previously been used in idolatry could be eaten without question, we can collect candy on Halloween without question. However, if the perception of our society was that we are worshipping another god by collecting candy on Halloween we must not participate. It is our conviction that the world does not view Halloween in this way and does not misunderstand our Lord as a result.

We believe that all Christians are free to participate in Halloween, unless the flawed teaching of those who are improperly judging Christians in this area has persuaded them to feel a false sense of guilt. In that case, they should refrain until the time when they can understand the Scripture more clearly.

I am confused regarding so many denominations that exist. Some say that the existence of denominations within Christ's church is a tragedy caused by sin and immaturity; others claim that denominations are a blessing, since they produce diversity within the body of Christ. What do you think? I would appreciate if you could provide biblical as well as theological support.

You have a common and interesting question. There isn't a lot of biblical data to provide, since the church was united in the Bible.

Certainly having different denominations is not what God originally designed, since neither Christ nor His apostles established it. To say it is the result of sin and immaturity is much closer to the truth than to call it a blessing. Since denominations developed for the most part because of difference in doctrine, and since God has communicated truth (John 17:17; Titus 1:2), then in cases of doctrinal division, only one denomination can be correct (at the most). To consider denominations to be a blessing because of the diversity to say truth and error is more blessed than truth alone.

One could argue that since we don't know for certain the truth on every doctrine then it is better to have diversity than to have unity around possible error. This assumes that God has communicated to man in a vague way that cannot really be understood. We believe God's Word is clear enough for us to be united.

However, not all people respect God's Word and many elevate their opinions above God's Word. This is one reason for division. Another reason is religious traditions are elevated to be equal (at least in practice) with the Bible. Another reason for division is that people approach the Bible using wrong hermeneutics, that is with wrong principles of Bible interpretation. Suffice it to say that the Bible should be read as other literature, without seeking for hidden meanings.

We do not believe that denominations are either necessary or wrong. Our church is non-denomination because we believe that the Lord established the universal church and the local church and that how local churches choose to relate to each other is the responsibility of church elders.

I have been celebrating Christmas for a long time but now I have come to know that it is not necessary. Is this the same for Easter? Is there any evidence in Bible to celebrate Easter in the spring and fast on that day?

Neither Christmas nor Easter were established in the Bible as a day of observance. It was adopted as a celebration later. The New Testament writers knew nothing of a special annual celebration of Easter. In fact, they most likely celebrated Christ's resurrection every Sunday, which was one reason the church met on Sundays (see Acts 20:7).

We recognize these holidays as a time to remember Christ's birth and death, but do not view this as a biblical requirement.

If you would like more information, there is a sermon available on our web site on the subject of Christmas.

What happens to us if we die before Christ returns? Do we wait in heaven until the millennial kingdom? And if I am in heaven, why would I want to return to earth?

When the unsaved die, their immaterial nature goes to Sheol (the Old Testament term) or Hades (the Greek equivalent of Sheol, used in the New Testament) to wait for the resurrection of the body at the end of the millennium. The souls of the ungodly are outside the body in Hades and the body is resurrected at the great white throne of judgment and will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15). This final state is known by the Greek word Gehenna in the NT, the place of punishment assigned permanently at the last judgment, a place of eternal torment (Mark 9:43-48). The righteous dead do not descend to Hades (Matthew 16:18-19; Acts 2:31). Rather, the righteous are received into a place of paradise with the Lord (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43), very distinct from Hades. Paul equates being absent from the body with being present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Philippians 1:19-26). Since Christ was raised to be seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 1:20), believers can expect to enter His presence in heaven upon death. The bodies of NT believers will be resurrected at the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:16) while the bodies of OT believers will evidently be raised at the end of the great tribulation (Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:4), and all will return to earth with Christ at the second coming to enter the millennial kingdom. Believers will want to return to earth because it is God's will for them to receive their resurrected bodies. After all, the earth will be a far better place under the rule of Christ than it is presently.

What is the age of accountability?

The phrase "age of accountability" is foreign to the Scriptures and has been created by theologians in part to attempt to comfort those who have had little ones pass away and in part show that the more we know, the more we are responsible. In one sense, the age of accountability occurs at the moment of conception. This is because we all, by our very nature, were children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3) and born into sin (Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22).

The Word of God tells us that those who have had more understanding will be judged according to that understanding (Luke 12:47-48; Matthew 11:21-24). Yet it does not provide us with an age that we are not accountable for sin, be it our personal sin, the sin we inherit from Adam (Romans 5:12-21, or our sin nature (Ephesians 2:3).

The words of Jesus in Matthew 19:14 "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from

coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Who may provide hope that little children are part of God's eternal kingdom. Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish (Matthew 18:14) may indicate that Christ's blood covers little ones. This may explain why ministry in the New Testament ministry is primarily to adults. Yet there is no indication in the Scripture of an age of accountability.

How was Jesus crucified on Friday, in the tomb for three days and then raised on Sunday? There aren't three days between Friday and Sunday.

The Scripture explicitly states that is that Jesus' tomb was empty on Sunday (Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1-2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

The more complex question, is which day of the week did Christ die? There are three views, that He died on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. Here is a treatment of these views and why the traditional view that Christ died on Friday and was raised on Sunday is the best.

Should we fast as Jesus did for forty days?

Regarding your question of fasting, Jesus fasted for 40 days in Matthew 4:2 in the wilderness before he was tempted by the devil. There is no command or even suggestion that we do the same thing. In fulfilling His roles as the Messiah of Israel, Jesus fasted in the wilderness for forty days as Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years. He was to be their Redeemer.

Fasting is a result of prayer that is so focused that food is not important. We do not fast in order to obtain favor from God. We pray to God and fasting may result. When we see fasting in the New Testament (in a positive way) it is connected to prayer. No one is obligated according to the Bible to fast. The Bible commands prayer, not fasting.

Is the plan of salvation only for Christian people or can non Christian people enter in the heaven?

God's plan of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ is available for all. 1 John 2:2 says that He is the satisfaction for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. The sad reality, however, is that only a few will receive God's forgiveness (Matthew 7:13-14) through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Most will reject Christ.

The good news is that the Bible teaches that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ will be saved. Their sins will be forgiven and they will not face judgment. It is only those people who have sincerely placed their trust in Jesus Christ for their life who are really Christians. Many people may say they are Christians and only God ultimately knows their heart, but the true Christians

are following Christ by grace through faith. All true Christians are forgiven of their sins and will not be judged for their sin. Christ's death on the cross paid the penalty for their sin. Christ took their place in judgment for sin.

You can find more on this subject in our position paper on the Unreached.

Do I have to be baptized again if I was baptized after I believed in Christ but was not immersed?

Baptism is commanded in the New Testament (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38). The way that baptism was practiced was by immersion. This is why rivers were used (Matthew 3:6) and bodies of water that people could be placed into (Acts 8:36-38). Indeed, the Greek word for baptize means *to dip* and this pictures the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3-4).

Yet 1 Peter 3:21 makes it clear that it is not the outward act that is significant in baptism but it is the internal attitude of the one being baptized. The practice of the New Testament believers was immersion but we would not conclude that water being poured or sprinkled would invalidate the pure heart of the one seeking to follow Christ in baptism.

The real question that should be considered before being re-baptized is *Did I understand the meaning of Christ's gift of salvation and was I baptized from a desire on my part to follow Him in obedience?* If your baptism was motivated by other reasons, you should consider being baptized in a manner that pleases God. For more information, see our position paper on the Baptism.

Who appoints the elders?

The elders are appointed by the elders on the basis of biblical qualifications. While this may not seem very democratic, it follows the pattern of the ministry of the New Testament. We do not find the multitudes selecting their leadership in the New Testament. The apostles were appointed by Jesus and Paul left Titus in Crete to appoint elders. As a good contrast, read the life of King Saul in the Old Testament.

However, in our church elders are not appointed without the opportunity for the congregation to provide input concerning the selection. This ensures that qualified men are appointed as per 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

More information can be found in our paper on church leadership:
<http://valleybible.net/resources/PositionPapers/ChurchLeadership.shtml>

Is it okay to let a person die without taking every means available to save them?

This is a question concerning the morality of euthanasia, or the causing of death painlessly in order to end suffering. We do not believe it is righteous to cause the death of an innocent person. To bring about the demise of another, even for the noble purpose of eliminating suffering, is misguided since it violates the command to not murder.

Yet we see a distinction between taking an active role in causing death and allowing death to occur naturally. We believe people have the freedom to exercise wisdom regarding the degree to which heroic medical measures will be taken to prolong their life. If they are unable to make such a determination, others can be appointed to take this decision-making role.

Even when the process of dying appears irreversible, God remains able to bring about healing if He chooses, with or without heroic medical efforts. Yet short of such a work of God, we can allow death when life takes its natural course. However, we cannot induce death that would not have otherwise occurred.

Are there real pictures of Jesus? Why do churches put pictures and statues in their churches?

There are no real pictures or portraits of Jesus. All the artwork of His likeness are guesses about what He would have looked like. All we know from the Bible is that He was not greatly attractive in His appearance (Isaiah 53:2).

It is interesting that most pictures of Jesus have Him looking more European than Middle Eastern. He probably had darker hair and skin than most westerners. Many of the popular images of Christ underscore the problem with mankind: we want to make God look like we want Him to look.

These artistic renderings of Jesus may not only be misleading, but may also be harmful in a spiritual sense. If not carefully evaluated, these depictions of Christ may lead a person to commit idolatry, which is strictly prohibited in God's Word. This is not only clear in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament (1 John 5:21).

In the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5), God prohibits making any image or likeness of Him. This is clearly for the concern of idol worship in wording of that commandment. Some believe that this means no pictures of Jesus, even for art. Certainly pictures of God lead some to worship the picture, rather than the Creator (God). This is why we don't have pictures or statues at our church. However, we would not say that making a picture of Jesus violates this commandment. The problem is when it is in the context of worship. A picture of Jesus in an art museum is less likely to be worshipped than in a church. Our church does not have pictures of Jesus because we don't want it to become an idol for anyone and do not believe

pictures help our worship of God.

I was reading your position paper on Spiritual Warfare with regard to speculation of spiritual things. It would appear to me that you are speculating about spiritual things when you denounce what you determine to be other people's speculation about spiritual things. Is this another form of hypocrisy?

We are glad you found our web site and hope it can benefit your spiritual life. Thank you for your intriguing question.

The point about speculation is to caution people who make assumptions regarding the supposed work of spiritual warfare when it is not found in the Bible.

It is not speculation to call teaching that not is found in the Bible about spirit beings speculation. It is indeed a statement of fact that such teaching is not found in the Bible. Since it is not found in the Bible and since we cannot know for sure about spiritual truth outside of God's Word (and because we don't believe others can either at this time), we believe these teachings are speculative.

Since we do not know all the truth in the world, we allow for the possibility of such extra-biblical teaching about spiritual beings to be true. However, we don't believe that others can know these things outside of the Bible. This is very much related to our paper on prophecy.

If you are open to receiving spiritual truth from sources outside of God's Word, we would encourage you to reconsider because you are on very shaky ground.

Is it wrong to drink alcohol? I know Jesus turned water into wine but I have heard that the wine spoken of in the Bible was really greatly diluted.

There is no command in the Bible that forbids drinking alcohol. Ephesians 5:18 does instruct us to "Not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." The often suggested idea that the wine of the Bible was either unfermented (non-alcoholic grape juice) or greatly diluted cause us to wonder just how this type of wine posed a threat to the drinker to become drunk. The view that wine in the Bible is unfermented or greatly diluted makes the command of Ephesians 5:18 next to meaningless. Not only did Jesus turn water into wine in John 2:1-11, but Paul actually commanded Timothy to drink a little wine for the sake of his stomach (1 Timothy 5:23).

Those who forbid all alcoholic beverages may be seeking a noble goal of eliminating the problems that come from drinking in excess, but they are using the Bible as a proof-text for something it does not say. Drinking in excess is clearly spoken against in the Bible (Proverbs 20:1), but

drinking itself is not forbidden. It is simply wrong to declare a practice to be sinful if the Bible does not represent it as such. For more information, see our position paper on Moral and Non-Moral Issues.

However, while God's Word does not outlaw the consumption of alcohol, it does caution against leading those with a weaker conscience to stumble into sin. We must be careful not to cause another to do something that their own conscience may bring them to doubt whether what they have done is sinful (cf. Romans 14).

I have been studying predestination and I came across your website on Yahoo. Your website states that God knew from the foundation of the world who would be saved by his grace and I wanted to know that if God can know who is saved by his grace beforehand, must he equally know who is condemned beforehand regardless of their freewill choice?

Thanks for your question. We believe that God determines who will be saved by His grace, see our paper on election. This is beyond God simply knowing who would be saved, God is the one electing those who will be given the grace to believe. So to answer your question, God indeed knows who will be saved and who will not be saved beforehand. God actually selects who will be saved.

The logical deduction is that God is therefore also selecting those who will not be saved. While this is a logical deduction but it is not stated in the Scripture. We prefer to explain what is stated in the Bible and not go the next step on a deduction.

The best way to describe this is that all men are in rebellion against God and God intervenes on behalf of some to bring them to faith and salvation. Those who are not chosen are allowed to fulfill their own free choice in opposing God. Thus God does not actively determine their destiny, but passively allows them to choose the only desire of their heart, rebellion. Romans 1:24, 26 and 28 described this as God gave them over, meaning they make the choice and God validated their choice. Also, in the plagues of Exodus, Pharaoh hardened his heart in the first five and God hardened Pharaoh's heart in the next five, again demonstrating God's response to confirm the choice of man.

So, yes, God, in His omniscience, knows who will be condemned but He is not guilty of causing their rebellion. They are sinful in and of themselves.

This is probably a question for your pastor or one of your elders. I am not a member of your church, but I was reading on your website on your position on the authority of elders and have a question. You quoted or referred to Hebrews 13:17 several times, indicating that this passage clearly says that we are to be under the authority of elders or church

leaders and should submit to their authority. I looked these words up in Vine's Expository Bible Dictionary, and the word translated as 'obey' actually means to listen, to persuade, or to win over by persuasion, and the word translated as 'submit' means to fall back or yield, indicating here to yield to persuasion. It seems to me that what this verse is saying is that elders should teach from the Word and try to persuade people with the truth and people should listen and yield to the truth of that persuasion. Since this was Paul's example in using persuasion (1 Thess. 2:6), instead of indicating that elders have authority to rule over those in their care, it indicates that they have a responsibility to teach and convince people of the truth of God's Word.

Thank you for your thoughtful question. It actually has practical significance in the life of a church and deserves a good response.

Certainly the leaders must be persuasive so that truth of God's Word can be received and embraced. Also, elders must not lord it over those allotted to their charge (1 Peter 5:3). Elders must serve out of love and the tender care of a shepherd.

However, this does not preclude authority. Authority and tender care and persuasion are not mutually exclusive (e.g. Jesus). The authority of leaders is taught in 1 Thessalonians 5:12 and 1 Timothy 5:17, and is alluded to in Acts 20:28 and 1 Peter 5:2. Yet Hebrews 13:17 is the most direct passage concerning the authority of church leaders.

While root word for 'obey' in Hebrews 13:17 has a general, common meaning of 'persuade,' when it is used in the grammatical construction of Hebrews 13:17 it means something more necessary, with 'obey' being the best translation. It is important to observe that this passage is directed to the people of the church, not to the leaders. The words 'obey' and 'submit' are in the imperative mood and are thus a command. The people of the church are morally obligated to obey their church leaders, unless the leaders call them to sin (cf. Acts 5:29). This passage is not addressed to the leaders of the church telling them to be persuasive. Persuasion may be a helpful skill for the church leaders to possess and they do have a responsibility to seek to convince people to follow God's Word. Nevertheless, Hebrews 13:17 calls the people to follow their church leaders, so that they can lead with joy.

For a much more detailed treatment of Hebrews 13:17, including a comment about Vine's work, see our treatment of Hebrews 13:17 in the Bible Difficulties section of our web site.

Questions on Family

Is it wrong for women with children at home to work outside the home?

We realize that the shift in our society toward working women with children at home has produced certain negative results. In many cases, mothers are neglecting children. This situation

has caused many Christians to speak out and encourage women with children at home to consider putting off extra income for the sake of their kids.

Titus 2:4-5 teaches the older women to encourage the young women to love their children and be workers at home. There is no doubt that women have a biblical responsibility for the home. But does the phrase "workers at home" preclude working outside the home as well?

Unfortunately, some have become so dogmatic as to say or insinuate that it is wrong for mothers of children at home to ever work outside the home. While this may be personal application of Titus 2:4-5, it is not a necessary application for all women. It is certainly possible for some mothers to work outside the home and be a "worker at home" as well.

We believe women ought to make personal application of the broad command to be workers at home and yet stop short of judging others for not arriving at their same conclusion. We believe some churches have gone too far in their attempt to elevate motherhood and as a result have brought unintended division among Christians. For more on how to distinguish a moral issue from an area of biblical freedom, please see our paper on Moral and Non-Moral Issues.

At what age should my child be baptized?

Since the requirement is belief in Christ, younger children are able to follow Christ in baptism. However, determining the age when a child is too young can be subjective, varying with each child. Also, the younger the child is, the stronger the desire to be baptized simply to please a parent or other people. In order to balance the need for those who believe to be baptized with the desire to not lead people to do something that is not coming from a conviction of their heart, our children's ministry informs older grade school children about baptism and our youth ministry encourages baptism, in cooperation with the parents.

Should Christians remove their children from the California public schools?

We believe that it is the responsibility of a child's parents or guardians to determine the best educational environment for their child. Although different people may believe that some educational options are better than others and may express those opinions at times, this should never be understood to be Valley Bible's endorsement of any particular type of schooling.

We believe it is wrong to insinuate that parents are irresponsible for home-schooling their children, for sending their children to a private school or for enrolling their children in public school. We also believe that with each educational option come significant advantages and disadvantages. Each person may weigh the value of these advantages and the difficulties of these disadvantages differently. We ought to give parents the freedom to choose the best option for their child (Romans 14:12-13).

What do you think of the Harry Potter movies? Do you discourage kids from viewing it?

Not all of us have viewed the Harry Potter movies, nor are we very interested in doing movie reviews. Colossians 3:2 tells us to set our mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth and Philippians 4:8 teaches us to let our mind dwell on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, etc. This applies to far more than movies and each of us can improve in what we focus our mind upon.

We have heard that some Christians leaders have called people to not view these movies or read the books based on its subject matter of witchcraft. However, we need to recognize the difference between fantasy and reality. That which is real in life is worthy of serious and thoughtful consideration. These books are works of fiction and when we distinguish between what is fiction from what is non-fiction, we will be better able to serve God in reality without importing imagination and speculation into the Christian life.

More important is the troubling trend among Christian leaders to take a stand against some popular interest of the world. Somehow, the words of Jesus in Matthew 15:11 have been overlooked, **Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.** This principle suggests that our reading of a Harry Potter book is of little consequence to living a godly Christian life.

Does your church use Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo's materials on child-rearing (Babywise, Preparation for Parenting, Growing Kids God's Way?)

We do not use material from Growing Families International because it is our view that Gary Ezzo has elevated his personal preferences in the area of parenting to the level of biblical law. He has made many of his personal applications into the universal application.

Furthermore, since Ezzo's material does not carefully distinguish between human opinions and biblical commands, those who use the teaching of Ezzo can be easily tempted toward pride and dogmatically elevating their opinions. It appears to us that many people who complete these child-rearing classes overestimating what we as parents can produce in our child and underestimating our need for the grace of God. Also, the elevation of personal opinion has caused some division in our church as people begin to judge others by these opinions.

If people choose to use these materials, our suggestion is to view them as simply containing some good ideas for parenting. This would result in less divisiveness and judgment those who have chosen not to employ Ezzo's techniques. We would also recommend using other more balanced resources on parenting as well, rather than strictly Ezzo's material.

Questions on ministry

What outside Christian organizations does Valley Bible cooperate with? What requirements do you have before VBC will cooperate with another ministry?

There are many organizations that contact us to enlist our support for their mission, usually financially and recruitment of people from the church. Every church will need to decide their priorities in light of these requests.

There are several criteria that we apply in considering our involvement with organizations:

- * The organization must be consistent with our doctrine.
- * The organization must be consistent with our ministry philosophy.
- * The organization must be committed to Christ's purpose for the church.
- * The organization's activities must complement the ministries that we are committed to at Valley Bible Church.

In addition to the above essential criteria, the timing of our involvement must be profitable for Valley Bible Church. We recognize that many organizations are serving many good works. Yet because we take our involvement seriously, we do not wish to overextend ourselves and risk being unfaithful to our present commitments. We are selective about who we become involved with from outside our church since we feel a great responsibility for what we lead Valley Bible into.

While we are careful about our involvement we have undertaken partnerships with two local churches, Hamadera Bible Church of Osaka, Japan and Eternal Life Baptist Church of Tijuana, Mexico. We are most interested in working with local churches to expand the ministry of Christ to people who have less opportunity to know about Christ than we do.

Two ministries that have served our church well for many years are Awana and Evangelism Explosion. We are also involved in a partnership ministry with the Southern Baptist Convention with our Deaf Ministry. We also participate in Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree program each year.

There is a definite need for unity of mind and judgment as we seek God's desire for His church (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:10). Our foremost responsibility is to make disciples through the church that God has given us oversight (cf. Acts 20:28) and if cooperation with an organization will assist us in that task then we may participate.

Can anyone take communion at Valley Bible Church?

We believe that the Lord's Supper, or communion, is for all believers because all believers are instructed to participate in the ordinance. Indeed, it is called "the cup of the Lord" (1 Corinthians

11:27), which extends beyond our fellowship to all who are the Lord's people. Also, the limitations that are given for participation in the Lord's Supper are given for the person themselves (1 Corinthians 11:28). While each person is told to examine himself, the church is not given that same instruction to examine the individuals. It is important to note that each person is to take it seriously as directed in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30.

I play the guitar. How can I join the worship team?

As the need arises, there are opportunities for people to participate in one of our two worship teams. However, as with other VBC ministries, we are careful in who we add to lead this important service to the Lord. We look for a commitment to Christ, to our church, to spiritual growth, and the ability to play humbly within the context of our worship team. Those seeking to serve in this way can let our music ministry leader, Mark Clason, know of their interest. Also, remember that music ministry extends to our children's and youth ministries as well.

Why don't women ever serve communion?

While there are specific biblical limitations to the ministry of women (see our position paper on Women's Roles in the Church) but there is no moral prohibition to women serving communion.

In practice however, our greeters select men for the task of passing out the bread and juice because some may not understand that the role of those serving communion is no more than facilitating the distribution of the Lord's Supper. Because some may become wrongly concerned if a woman serves communion and because there is nothing wrong with selecting men for the task, we have limited this function to men.

In truth, we see the role of serving communion as one of the simplest and easy ministries in our entire church and do not see being selected for this task as taking a leadership role in our church.

What is a baby dedication and why do you practice it instead of baptism?

What is sometimes called baby dedication is really parent dedication. It is a time of prayer for the parents who bring their little ones before the church during one of our worship services. It has become a tradition at our church every Mother's Day. Yet this dedication provides another opportunity for prayer and support for parents, and should not be viewed as a special ordinance of the church, since it is not found in the Bible.

The closest biblical support for parent's dedicating their child comes from Luke 2 where the parents of the baby Jesus take Him to the temple to present Him to the Lord (Luke 2:22). The Gospels also tell us that little children and infants were brought to Jesus (Matthew 19:13-15;

Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). However, these were accounts of what people did, not exhortations for us to necessarily do the same.

We do practice baptism, but only for children who are old enough to meet the condition for baptism, which is belief (Act 16:31-33; Acts 2:38). We seek have children baptized when they can make a public profession of faith in front of their peers, typically at least at the junior high age.

How can I help my Christian friend who is dating a non-Christian?

The Word of God does not specifically address dating, since dating was not the cultural means that lead to marriage in those days. We do have clear instruction that Christian^s must marry a fellow believer (1 Corinthians 7:39). Since dating normally includes the idea of potential marriage, it is hard to see the profit in allowing a possible hope that cannot be fulfilled apart from God^{'s} saving grace.

However, your friend^{'s} problem is not so much dating a non-Christian as it is the value system that is attracted to a person who does not share a Christian mindset. Paul^{'s} exhortation to ^{us} not be bound together with unbelievers² (2 Corinthians 6:14) speaks to people who have become enticed by those who are without God.

We would suggest helping your friend deepen their faith in Christ through God^{'s} Word, through prayer, through the fellowship of believers and to pray that Christ would draw them both to himself. This will enable them to see that God^{'s} grace instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly (Titus 3:11-12).

Why doesn^{'t} Valley Bible participate with other churches in the Awana Games and in Bible Quizzing?

We do participate at the Varsity (High School) and Junior Varsity (Junior High School) level. For the younger clubs we found that due to the large number of kids, the competitive nature of Awana and the blessing of bringing much larger participation of our church, we have chosen to hold our own church games and Bible quizzing.

I have money I would like to give to the church, where should I give it?

If you give it to the church and it will be used for the general fund that supports our church budget. Any amount beyond \$2,000 moves to an account that is used for the most pressing needs of the church beyond the budget, according to the discretion of our elders. We have also established a special fund to save money for our new auditorium that many people contribute toward. We

leave the choice to the individual if they want money to be designated to the building fund instead of the general fund.

When does Valley Bible ever have an activity for the entire church?

We have had many all-church activities in the past but we have found it more difficult due to the current size of our congregation and the facilities available to us here in the Antelope Valley. The entire congregation is invited to some of our outdoor events, such as our church softball league and our Awana Olympics. Keep in mind that the unity of our church does not come from everyone being in the same place at the same time. It comes from being agreed, in the same mind and the same judgment, united in spirit and intent on one purpose (1 Corinthians 1:10; Philippians 2:2).

Why don't we bring in teachers from outside the church?

Our church has been blessed with many good Bible teachers and we believe that the best stewardship of our time and resources comes from utilizing what the Lord has provided for us. We do encourage outside reading, we do partner with other fellowships in ministry, we do encourage and support formal Bible training through certain seminaries, we do attend conferences from time to time, etc.

Questions on our resources

Are the outlines of the messages available?

Yes, the sermon outlines are available, at least for the sermons dating back to 1991. Before that there were no sermon notes.

You can find the sermon notes by going to the sermon page <http://valleybible.net/cgi-bin/sermons.pl/> and then clicking on the link that says "Notes" which is in the upper right of the table.

Our church is interested in developing position papers on various issues and doctrines. In viewing selected papers, I think you've done an excellent job stating many of the same positions we hold (e.g. women teaching, prayer of Jabez, election, counseling, etc. - possibly all the papers). This is a very helpful section of your web page. I also appreciate the music that has more substantive lyrics than you can find in many places. Are these position papers copyrighted, and if so, (or even if not) would you grant permission for us to use them (possibly with minor editing)? What conditions, if any, would you place on

this use?

Thank you for your encouraging words. We appreciate when people let us know these things.

The footer on each web page copyrights all that is on our web site. But we would be more than glad for you to use our papers to better serve your church. You can use them as is or you can edit them to your liking. Our goal is simply for God's Word to be taught and applied faithfully.

Questions on worship

Why doesn't Valley Bible have altar calls?

There are a few reasons that we don't have a special time during our service where we call people to come forward who want to receive Christ.

The biggest reason is our view of church. We view the church as being for believers and the vast majority of people in the services as already professing Christ. Another reason is that we do not want to manipulate people into making a profession of faith in Christ. While an altar call does not necessarily cause people to come forward for wrong reasons, it may bring an external pressure to come down the aisle apart from a pure heart. Also, it opens up the real possibility that people will think that becoming a Christian requires coming down an aisle.

Since the apostles did not employ an altar call, we see no precedent do so. We believe a non-Christian can respond to Christ as their Savior and Lord right in their seat. In fact, it is not uncommon for us to explain the gospel in the context of the sermon and tell people they can respond to Christ from the heart at that moment. We believe the best external response to this internal heart decision is to begin following Christ in baptism.

Is it okay if I raise my hands during the worship service?

We are not interested in getting people to raise their hands or preventing people from raising their hands. We do not see the raising of hands as a biblical issue one way or the other. The one desire we have is that each person should not distract others around them from focusing on the Lord during our services.

There has been a perception that raising hands in worship is from the Charismatic Movement and by raising hands we are looking like we are a Charismatic church. While we are quite open about our disagreement with Charismatic theology, we do not feel that our teaching is jeopardized by some that may raise their hands. Over time, the raising of hands in worship is becoming less associated with the Charismatic movement.

Miscellaneous questions

What is your view of the Millennium Computer Bug, also known as the Year 2000 computer problem (Y2K), when many computers are programmed with only the last two digits of the year and will malfunction at the beginning of next year? (Note: Although this question is obviously outdated, our answer at the time is useful for other similar issues that Christians may encounter in the future.)

Left unchecked, this problem has the potential for a significant disruption of businesses and government entities. A great deal of effort is currently underway to address this computer problem and the predictions of the effect on our society vary greatly.

Sadly, it appears that Christians are reacting with the greatest anxiety over this matter. Many Christian leaders are urging people to prepare for an economic crisis by stockpiling supplies and making alternative arrangements with their finances. Quite a few, subtly if not overtly, warn of a breakdown of our social infrastructure, encourage obtaining weapons for protection, fleeing cities for rural areas and even of endtime possibilities. While some of these teachers are more restrained than others, their call to action is troubling.

While no one is able to tell us exactly what may or may not occur as a result of this computer problem, there are some things that we do know from God's Word.

First and foremost, Jesus taught us to trust that God is in control, that He loves us, and that He will take care of us. We should not be anxious about what the future holds, even in regard to our food or water supply (Matthew 6:25-34). After all, God causes everything to work together for good to those who love him (Romans 8:28).

Also, as Christians we have a responsibility to use our possessions for the sake of others. Any thought of escaping society is inconsistent with our mandate to go into the world to make disciples (Matthew 28:19-20; John 17:15; 1 Corinthians 5:9). Any thought of hoarding goods for ourselves is inconsistent with laying down our lives for each other (1 John 3:16-17).

Certainly, prudent planning is a wise course of living according to Proverbs. For example, many have prepared for potential emergencies such as earthquakes by maintaining a certain amount of basic supplies on hand. A group of us have recently been meeting to examine the emergency preparedness of our church facilities. The water at our church comes from our well and at any time we have about 8,000 gallons of drinkable water in our storage tank. We have also been upgrading our earthquake preparedness and response plan in case such an event should occur while our buildings are in use.

Although information on such preparations is readily available from a wide variety of sources, for your convenience we have information from the United States Government available at the church office. You may request this from us through the perforated response form attached to

your bulletin or by calling the church office. We encourage each of you to prudently plan and follow through on your plans.

Regardless of the degree of preparation we choose to make, there is no substitute for trusting the One in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:17), including computers.