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# Challenges

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## KISSING AND THE GOSPEL

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

**CAUTION:** Due to sensually suggestive content, the following material may be inappropriate for young readers (and perhaps, older readers and, for that matter, single readers and, maybe even married readers).

The other night I was lost in wonder. My wife and I were kissing.

At 40 years of age (she doesn't mind me telling you) and after fifteen years of marriage and four children later, Lori's still got it! She can kiss! (She says I'm not all that bad myself!) With our lips locked, together we tasted something of God's love. And boy was it fun!

And then a thought came (after our time of kissing, of course).

Kisses are meant to be enjoyed, not explained; experienced, not analyzed. If I focus purely on the biological aspects of kissing (which would be nearly impossible with my kissing partner!)—two people pressing their moist, creased facial orifices together, cinching tight the sphincter muscles for the purpose of drawing the flesh around the orifice into a bulbous mound—something is lost. The joy and the excitement and the romance begin to diminish. If I start parsing a kiss into its various psycho-social-physical components like I would a Greek verb, I lose the wonder of it all. I am better off losing myself in the mystery and just enjoying the kiss.

The other day I was trying to help my students experience the wonder of a kiss. I was teaching on the doc-

trine of election. This is the doctrine that spells out how God sovereignly chooses to save some and bypass others. I read from Romans 9:11-13, 16: "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she (Rebekah) was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.' . . . It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Those are pretty hard words to hear for the first time (or the thousandth time), and you might well guess the kinds of reactions I got: "So are people's eternal destinies determined before they are ever born? Does God send

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some people to heaven and damn the rest regardless of any personal decision they make? What about human freedom? Are we in any way ‘response-able?’ Or are we merely chess pieces God moves wherever He wants?” Hardly seems like kissing material.

Then I informed my students that God is “not willing that any perish” and that “whosoever believes in Him” will inherit eternal life (2 Pet. 3:9; Jn. 3:16). In light of this, God calls us to repent of our sins and trust him alone for our salvation. Interestingly, in the very next chapter of Romans—chapter 10—Paul writes, “As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’ . . . (and) ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (vv. 11, 13).

Much better. God doesn’t want anyone to go to hell, and He makes a way for everyone to be saved. All we must do is simply reach out for His hand and receive His gift. The very fact that God calls us to “do” something would seem to suggest that we have a certain “power” or “response-ability” to decide positively or negatively to His appeal. How else are we to make sense of such statements if, in the final analysis, the only way we will choose favorably is if God *a priori* acts upon us? Why would God call us to “do” something which only He can do? Wouldn’t that be mockery?

After class, a student came up to me and the following exchange took place:

*Student:* “Which side of the ‘equation’ do you lean upon more heavily?”

*Me:* “Both. The choice is ours AND the choice is God’s.”

*Student:* “How can both be equally true?”

*Me:* “They just are. That’s the mystery.”

So, your question: “Where does the kissing come in?” Glad you asked.

The kiss comes in the wonder. It is lost when we treat these theological dilemmas (with which the Bible is replete) as puzzles to be solved rather than mysteries to be embraced. It is lost when we attempt to reduce the “riddle” to its simplest terms. God is too magnificent, too glorious, too holy to be contained in a box of our making. As St. Paul said, “The mystery of godliness is great” (1 Tim. 3:16).

This is not to say that fervent, dedicated reflection is unnecessary. We must study and ponder and “search for the Truth as for silver and look for it as for hidden treasure.” But we must do so in a way that humbly acknowledges that ultimately “the secret things belong to the Lord” (Deut. 29:29). Such a posture will always lead to worship. In fact, if our inquiry does not cause us to both love and fear God in ever-increasing measure, if it does not expose us to a more “wonder-full” God, we can be sure that we have missed the Person in the points.

We must be on guard. Pride lurks at our doorstep. Too often, we want to be in control. We want certainty. We want clarity. We don’t want to be vulnerable. We want a God we can figure out and manage. But such a God requires no faith. And such a God leaves us unaffected, unbothered, and unchanged.

I think buried within each of us is the longing to be wonderstruck. Why else do romance and mystery lead the pack among book publishing’s biggest sellers? Deep within the human heart is the desire to love someone and to live in some mystery. Doesn’t the gospel present such a reality?

## CONCLUSION:

Leonard Sweet shares a story about a man who was standing over his baby’s crib, intently staring. His wife entered the room and watched in silence. She saw in her husband’s face a wide range of emotions: wonder, doubt, admiration. Deeply touched, she put her arm around him and, with eyes glistening and voice trembling, said, “A penny for your thoughts.” Unhesitatingly, he blurted out: “For the life of me, I can’t see how anybody can make a crib like that for \$89.95.” Sweet comments, “Agog over the manger, amiss to the baby in the

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manger.”

Wonder is the foundation to worship; it is also the foundation to a good night’s kiss.

Now have some fun!

**For further thought:**

**“Mysticism keeps men sane. As long as you have the mystery you have health. When you destroy mystery you create morbidity. (G.K. Chesterton)**

“We see that it is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers to every question, but to make us progressively aware of a mystery. God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder.” (Leonard Sweet)



**—Testimony—**

Thias Steward

“My parents were divorced when I was 5 years old. My mother raised me and my five brothers. Before I was 10 years old I was raped by two uncles. One uncle told me that if I ever told anyone he would kill my brothers. The other told me he would kill my mother.

At the age of 11, I smoked my first joint of marijuana and started drinking. At the age of 13 I became pregnant and was a mother at age 14. By the age of 16 I dropped out of high school and moved into my first apartment. I was a single parent trying to work and complete my GED and just keep my head above water. I didn’t know how to be a mother and wrongly believed that as long as my daughter had food, shelter, and clothing, she didn’t need anything else.

I developed an intense hatred for men. I felt as though they had robbed and cheated me. To deal with the pain and shame of my existence, I took all kinds of drugs: mescaline, diet pills, acid and eventually crack-cocaine. I also drank alcohol.

In my 30 years of abusing drugs and alcohol, I never reached out for help. It never dawned on me that my life was going nowhere. But, when my father died in 2001, the light began to go on in my head. I took a hard look at

my life and realized that I was no better off than I had been 20 years prior. Of course, in my thinking, I figured simply getting off of drugs was the answer—not understanding, that my biggest problem was in trying to live life without God.

A friend told me about a place that had helped another friend to get off alcohol—that place was Life Challenge. I came in for an interview and within two weeks was walking through the doors. That was March 8, 2002.

When I entered the program and started attending chapel and classes, I didn’t know what to think. It had been so long since I had been in a church. However, I just knew I was in the right place and that my life would be different.

The big change came during a prayer-and-share meeting one evening at the women’s house. I began to see that the things I had done and the way I had been living my life were an affront to God. I started realizing how much of the life He had given me I had wasted. I repented and experienced His forgiveness! I could hardly contain myself! What’s more I discovered that God didn’t just renew my old heart, he gave me a brand new one!

I now know that because of Jesus, I am not the same person I once was. I am brand new! I don’t even think the same! I belong to him!

After graduating on March 26, 2004, I was invited to serve at FaHoLo Camp and Conference Center in a six month internship. I recently completed that internship and now serve as a full-time employee. I am so excited about what God has done!”



Please keep us in your prayers. With certain expenses skyrocketing, we are having to make some difficult decisions relative to our budget. Any financial contribution you can make would be greatly appreciated.

Together for souls,

*Jeff*

