“Was Jesus Actually a Pharisee?”

[I am] an Indian Christian, residing in southern India. I shall be grateful if you could help with a question. The other day I ran into the following quote from *“The Passion” From a Jewish Perspective*:

> ***“I would suggest that Jesus argued so much with the Pharisees because he was closest to them and it is not by chance that they are absent from the Gospel Passion narratives. Indeed, Jesus may even have been a Pharisee.”***

Could you please let me know if Jesus was indeed a Pharisee, as suggested? Also, could you please let me know the things I need to know pertaining to the [other] question at hand? I thank you beforehand for your patience in helping me with my request.

Thanks for your letter. No; I don’t think it likely that Jesus was a Pharisee. Consider the following:

> *1) Jesus is nowhere called a Pharisee in the New Testament. With as much talk of Pharisees as we find there, this would be a very strange omission indeed! There is simply no positive evidence to support this thesis.*
>
> *2) The Pharisees are mentioned quite often in the Gospels during Passion Week (the week before Jesus’ death).*
>
> *3) The Pharisees are mentioned in John 18:3 as part of the group that came to arrest Jesus. It seems to me that this could be considered as evidence that the Pharisees are indeed mentioned in the passion narratives.*
>
> *4) Consider how Jesus often speaks of the Pharisees. Read Matthew 23 and note how the Pharisees are spoken of by Jesus.*

> *He says to His disciples, do what they tell you but not what they do (Matt. 23:2-3). He repeatedly calls them "hypocrites," etc.*
>
> *5) Finally, in passages like Matt. 9:14 Jesus seems to be distinguished from the Pharisees. The passage says, "Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" If Jesus was a Pharisee, then why weren't His disciples fasting as well? Jesus seems to be distinguished from the Pharisees by the way the question is asked.*

In all these ways (and others I've not mentioned) the New Testament gives repeated indications that Jesus was not a Pharisee.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

See also the Probe resources on the historical Jesus listed under related posts.

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Augustine on Popular Culture: Ancient Take on a Modern Problem

In his recent book, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture*{1}, theologian Kelton Cobb observes that in our day, "a great number of people are finding solace in

popular culture, solace they find lacking in organized religion."{2} This is just one important reason why Christians must give careful thought and analysis (discernment) to the issue of popular culture. As members of the body of Christ, who desire to see others brought into loving fellowship with Him, it behooves us to understand why it is that many people claim to find greater consolation in popular culture than they do in the church of Jesus Christ.

But there's another reason why today's Christians must give some attention to popular culture, namely, for better or worse, we are all swimming in it. As Cobb reminds us, "whole generations in the West have had their basic conceptions of the world formed by popular culture."{3} Just think for a moment about how much we are daily influenced by various artifacts of popular culture—things like television, movies, music, magazines, comic books, video games, sports, and advertising (just to name a few). How should the believer relate to popular culture? Should he shun it, embrace it, seek to transform it? Or should he rather do all of the above, depending on what particular item of popular culture is in view? As one can see, these are difficult questions. Not surprisingly, therefore, thoughtful Christians have answered these questions rather differently. But instead of trying to review all their answers here,{4} I will briefly discuss just one view which, I believe, still merits our careful consideration.

Augustine is considered by many to be the greatest theologian of the early church. Born on November 13, 354 A.D., to a pagan father and a Christian mother, he pursued his studies for a time in Carthage, the North African capital. According to Cobb, "Carthage was an epicenter of popular entertainment in the [Roman] empire, famous for its circus, amphitheater and gladiatorial shows—a fourth-century Las Vegas."{5} Cast into this environment as a passionate young pagan, Augustine indulged both his appetite for sex and his love for the

theater. These early experiences led the later, Christian Augustine, to a unique appreciation for the almost irresistible draw that the artifacts of popular culture can have on us. In spite of this, however, he did not conclude (as the earlier church father Tertullian had largely done) that there is nothing of redeeming value in popular culture. Indeed even the pagan theater, which by his own admission had been partly responsible for stirring up his youthful lusts, is not entirely consigned to the garbage bin of useless "worldly" entertainment. Instead, Augustine took the intriguing position "that aspects of pagan culture ought to be preserved and put into the service of the church."{6}

In his monumental work, the *City of God*, Augustine postulated the existence of two cities—the city of man and the city of God. Although these two cities will eventually be separated at the last judgment, for the moment they are "mingled together" in the world, with the result that the inhabitants of both cities participate in many of the same social and cultural activities. So what differentiates the inhabitants of one city from those of another? According to Augustine it is the "quality of their love," along with the nature of their attachment to the things of this world. Cobb comments on Augustine's view as follows: "We are citizens of the earthly city to the extent that we love the earthly city as an end in itself; we are citizens of the heavenly city to the extent that we make use of the earthly city—including its astonishing arts and cultural attainments—as a way of loving God."{7}

In other words, Augustine is suggesting the following principle for evaluating various cultural activities from a Christian perspective: Does the activity (in some form or fashion) inspire a greater love of God or one's neighbor? If so, then there is something of genuine value to be had from participating in that activity. On the other hand, if the activity leads one to think *less* of God or one's neighbor, then it's probably suspect from a Christian perspective.

"Thus," writes Cobb, "Augustine offers a strategy for the appropriation of pagan religious symbols and all varieties of popular art. They may be appropriated if they can be pressed into the service of charity, into the journey of the soul to God, as a *means* of devotion rather than as *objects* of devotion . . . ."{8}

Of course, Augustine was aware that there are other principles which can (and should) be used in evaluating whether or not to participate in some cultural activity. For example, he taught that "Wherever we may find truth, it is the Lord's."{9} And truth is intrinsically valuable and good. So if a particular cultural activity helps you toward a greater understanding and appreciation of God, or the things which God has made—and if it's not contrary to some moral precept in the Bible—then this, too, is probably something valuable and appropriate for Christian participation.

As one considers Augustine's principles, one can't help but be impressed by their wisdom. Not only are these principles extremely practical, they are also thoroughly biblical. Indeed, they remind one of the way in which Paul interacted with the cultural artifacts of *his* day. You can scarcely study the life of this great missionary/theologian without being impressed by the way he took pains to genuinely understand something of the Gentile culture to which he had been called to minister. Thus, in Acts 17 we not only see him conversing with some of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (v. 18), but we also learn that he had taken time to familiarize himself with the religious beliefs of Athens (vv. 22-23). Moreover, when he describes the nature of God and man to the members of the Areopagus he cites, *with approval*, the statements of two pagan poets (vv. 28-29). Finally, as we study his letters we also see repeated references and allusions to the athletic games of his day (e.g. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians. 3:14; 2 Timothy 2:5; etc.). Clearly Paul was attuned to the cultural concerns and activities of the people he sought to

reach for Christ.

In light of all this, Paul's words to the Philippians are especially significant, particularly as we reflect on the ever-persistent question of how *we*, as believers, should relate to our *own* culture: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:8-9).

Notes

1. I am particularly indebted to the discussion of Augustine and popular culture found in Kelton Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide to Theology and Popular Culture* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 80-86.
2. Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide*, 6.
3. Ibid., 7.
4. The interested reader can find more information in texts like Cobb's (mentioned above) and H. Richard Niebuhr's classic, *Christ and Culture*.
5. Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide*, 80.
6. Ibid., 83.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 86.
9. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), II/18; cited in Cobb, *The Blackwell Guide*, 84.

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“Where in the Bible Does It Prove that Jesus Was 100% Man and 100% God?”

Thanks for your question! There are actually many biblical passages which teach both the deity and humanity of Christ. I’ve listed just a few for your consideration.

1. Isaiah 9:6-7

> *For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
> *Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

Note that the promised Messiah (or Christ) would be born as a son to Israel. He was thus a Man. At the same time, however, His name will be called Mighty God, etc. He is thus also God.

2. Micah 5:2-3 (quoted in Matt. 2:6)

> *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”*
> *3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.*

Again, Messiah is born of a woman (v. 3) to be ruler in Israel (v. 2). He is thus a Man. However, His goings forth are "from the days of eternity" (v. 2). He thus had no beginning and must therefore be God (Who alone is eternal).

3. John 1:1-3, 14

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
> *2 He was with God in the beginning.*
> *3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*
> *14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Notice that the Word is God (v. 1). Notice also that the Word became a human being (v. 14). Jesus is both God and Man.

4. Philippians 2:5-11

> *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*
> *6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*
> *7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*
> *8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*
> *9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,*
> *10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
> *11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This is a classic passage on both the deity and humanity of Christ.

5. Colossians 1:13-23

> *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,*
> *14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*
> *15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*
> *16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.*
> *17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*
> *18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.*
> *19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,*
> *20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*
> *21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*
> *22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—*
> *23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

Again, this passage strongly affirms both the deity (v. 19) and humanity (v. 22) of Jesus.

These are just a few passages which can be offered. Many passages, taken in isolation, affirm either the deity of Christ on the one hand, or His humanity on the other. When all

this evidence is taken into account, it becomes clear that the Bible repeatedly affirms that Jesus was indeed the unique God-Man.

God bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"What is the Purpose of God?"

Dear Probe,

I was having an interesting conversation with an atheist over at Wasteland Of Wonders [an Atheist/Agnostic Website and Message board] when the topic of ultimate purpose came up!

Now most believers in God, myself included, seem to say that if the universe just *is*, then it becomes a big pointless absurdity, almost like a sick joke!

However if God exists then the universe and everything in it has a purpose, but the fellow over at Wastelands of Wonder with whom I was chatting said the following :

"Okay then, what is the ultimate purpose of God's existence? Don't you just have the same problem with theism, but pushed back a level? If God "just is," what purpose then is there for your existence?"

I have to say this question reminds me very much of the infinite regression problem of "If God exists then who made God?!"

The best I could think of was that God contains an explanation

for himself and that was it! This question truly had me bedazzled and I was scratching my head looking for a decent, non-cop-out explanation! [Like God explains himself]

So may I ask, if you were asked this question by someone what would you say?

Thank you for the interesting question! Let me try to answer it this way:

First, there would seem to be an important difference between the two questions, “Why does the universe exist?”, and “Why does God exist?” Today, most scientists and philosophers believe that the universe had a beginning; it is not eternal. However, if God exists at all, He exists necessarily and is therefore eternal. Thus, even though each question is asking WHY something exists, they are each asking this about very different kinds of things.

Second, it’s important for us to remember that purposes can only exist within a mind. The dictionary on my desk defines “purpose” as follows: 1. something one has in mind to get or do; plan; aim; intention. 2. object or end for which a thing is made, done, used, etc. Clearly, nothing which lacks a mind can have purposes of this sort. Whatever purpose there is for the existence of impersonal things must come from intelligent, purposeful beings. As a general rule, such beings would also be personal. Here I am thinking primarily of man, but also of God and the angels if they exist. Of course, some higher animals may have what might be described as very limited sorts of purposes for some of the things which they do. But generally speaking, purposes are the products of intelligent, personal beings.

Thus, if the universe is simply a “brute fact,” and was not brought into existence by a purposeful, intelligent being, there can be no ultimate purpose for its existence. If nothing exists outside the universe then clearly, going back to the

previously given definition of purpose, there can be no object or end for which the universe came into existence. The universe can only have some ultimate purpose if it was created by an intelligent being who, in fact, had some purpose in making it.

However, when we come to the question which you were asked, “What is the ultimate purpose of God’s existence?”, we need to pause and consider exactly what we are being asked. I think you are correct in seeing this question as a variant of that other, often-asked question, “Who made God?” While such questions can be asked, I honestly doubt whether they are truly meaningful.

In the case of the question, “Who made God?”, the questioner seems to be assuming that whatever exists requires a cause of its existence. But this is not true. Actually, it is only what BEGINS to exist that requires a cause. The universe began to exist; therefore, the universe requires a cause of its existence. But God never began to exist; He is eternal. It is therefore meaningless to ask “Who made God?”, for what is really being asked is something like “Who made the Unmade Maker?”, or “Who created the Uncreated Creator?” Clearly such questions are meaningless.

I believe that the question, “What is the ultimate purpose of God’s existence?” or “Why does God exist?”, is probably a similar sort of question. If the Christian God exists, then He is eternal. It is therefore unnecessary to posit a cause of His existence. Furthermore, if the Christian God exists, then He is the Creator of everything (other than Himself, of course!).

But now go back to our definition of “purpose” mentioned earlier and remember that, since God is the eternal, Uncreated Creator of all that exists, there was clearly no one other than God who might have had a purpose for bringing Him into existence. Additionally, it would also be meaningless to ask

what purpose God had for bringing Himself into existence. The notion of a self-caused being is absurd. In order for a being to cause its own existence, it would first have to exist – which is obviously absurd. But if the purpose of God's existence cannot be explained by reference to an intelligent, purposeful being other than God, and if it can also not be explained by referring to a self-creative act of God Himself, I conclude that the question is probably meaningless.

Thus, while one can meaningfully ask about God's purpose(s) in creating the universe (and thus about the reason WHY the universe exists), one cannot meaningfully ask this question about God Himself. Probably, the question is simply meaningless. But if not, we could not possibly know "the ultimate purpose of God's existence" unless He tells us—and so far as I'm aware, He hasn't done so.

Hope this helps.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"How Does Pantheism View Good and Evil?"

I found your website very helpful in offering information on yoga and Christianity, especially Michael Gleghorn's article.

I came across a quote for a guru:

> ***Life has a bright side and a dark side, for the world of relativity is composed of light and shadows. If you permit***

> *your thoughts to dwell on evil, you yourself will become ugly. Look only for the good in everything so you absorb the quality of beauty.*

Can you comment on how pantheism views evil and good? If you can shed some light on this quote, it would be helpful for me to understand how to address this with someone with this belief system.

Hello _____,

Thanks for your letter. Pantheism ultimately makes no distinction between good and evil. If all is one, and all is "God" (or Brahman), then the distinction between good and evil must ultimately be illusory. If not, then evil infects the very being of "God" itself. Thus, pantheism has a real problem with evil.

Of course, there is much truth in the guru's quote (although it's not terribly consistent with pantheism). However, one can find preferable advice (in my opinion) in the Bible. As Paul told the Philippians, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirableif anything is excellent or praiseworthythink about such things" (Philippians 4:8).

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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“The JW Argument ‘There Is No Soul'”

One of the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ arguments is that if Lazarus was dead and his soul was in Heaven, why would Jesus resurrect him? They argue, why would Jesus take Lazarus away from what surely is a beautiful and wondrous place. Thus, there must not be a soul and when we die we just die. How do I answer this?

Thanks for your letter. The issue of personal survival after death (but before the resurrection) is best dealt with by an appeal to the authority of the Bible. If the Bible is a trustworthy revelation from God, and if the Bible teaches a conscious intermediate state between death and resurrection, then it logically follows that human beings do experience personal, conscious existence after death. So what does the Bible teach on this issue?

The Bible clearly speaks of personal conscious existence between death and resurrection. Indeed, even The New World Translation (1961), written by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, seems to imply this. In Revelation 6:9-10 we read:

“And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those slaughtered because of the word of God… And they cried with a loud voice saying: ‘Until when, Sovereign Lord holy and true, are you refraining from judging and avenging our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?'”

Here the author of the Revelation sees the SOULS of those killed on the earth. These SOULS are in the presence of God and clearly conscious because they ask God a question and even receive an answer (see v. 11). But how can this be if they do not really exist between death and resurrection?

Other verses which teach conscious existence between death and resurrection include Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; and of course Luke 16:19-31. There are many other which I will not take the time to list.

The JW's want to know why Jesus would raise Lazarus back to earthly life if he was already in a better place? First, although there may be a connection between Luke 16 and John 11, this is nowhere stated explicitly. Second, the Bible only hints at why Jesus raised Lazarus. It indicates that He raised Lazarus to inspire faith in His disciples (John 11:14), to reveal God's glory to the people (11:40), and to help the people believe that Jesus had come from God (11:42). But WHY Jesus raised Lazarus isn't even the issue. Jesus may have raised Lazarus for very good reasons that He didn't bother to tell us. The real issues are:

1. Is the Bible a trustworthy revelation from God? and
2. Does the Bible teach that we have a soul/spirit that continues to exist between
death and resurrection?

If the answer to both of these questions is "Yes," then it really doesn't matter if we can say why Jesus raised Lazarus. He did it, and regardless of the reason why, the story demonstrates that human beings experience personal, conscious existence between death and resurrection.

Hope this helps.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Is It Right for Churches to Require Formal Membership?”

Is it right for churches to require a formal membership, with membership vows? I don’t see this present in the N.T. I am committed to my local church but am not sure about coming into membership.

You are correct in observing that the New Testament does not mention this issue. For what it’s worth, my own opinion is that there’s nothing wrong (in the sense of sinful or immoral) with a local body requiring formal membership. Many churches do require a formal membership before allowing people to participate in voting on matters affecting the church, or serving in positions of church leadership, etc. Oftentimes, the reasoning here is that only people committed to this local body of believers and in agreement with the church’s doctrinal statement, etc., should be allowed to share in the leadership decisions of the church. Since most local churches have some unbelievers, or uncommitted attenders, membership requirements help prevent those who might not be qualified to share in church leadership decisions from helping to make such decisions. Thus, for many churches, membership requirements may serve a sort of safeguard for doctrinal purity and godly decision-making.

Of course, a church should never refuse to minister to those who decline becoming members. And there may be some (like yourself) who are deeply committed to the church, but do not wish to embrace formal membership. The NT does not require one to take formal membership vows to a local church, etc. All who put their faith in the person and work of Christ are members of the universal church, even if they don’t want to become formal members of a local church. And I don’t think there’s

anything wrong with such a decision.

Thus, as long as the motives for doing so are good and pure, I don't think it's wrong for a church to have a formal membership procedure. However, I also don't think it's wrong for a true believer in Christ to freely choose not to become a formal member of a particular local body.

This, at any rate, is my opinion. I hope it's a little helpful.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"Is Eating Pork a Sin?"

Is eating pork a sin? It was mentioned to me by a friend that eating pork is forbidden and he said that Bible says that you won't go to heaven if you eat pork. Didn't Jesus say that what makes the person dirty is what comes out from his mouth and not the food that he takes in? Please give me some supporting verses on your response.

It is true that under the terms of the Mosaic Law given to Israel, pork was forbidden. However, God is no longer relating to mankind under the terms of this covenant. Rather, we are under the terms of the New Covenant (see Hebrews 8, for instance). Under the New Covenant, pork is no longer forbidden. Indeed, in Mark 7:14-23, Jesus clearly declares that all foods are clean. The same thing is affirmed by the Apostle Paul in Romans 14.

Bottom line, you can eat as much sausage, bacon, and pork

chops as you like!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Is Cremation Against the Bible?”

I have become curious as to why certain Christian denominations claim cremation to be against the Bible. Is it?

Thanks for your e-mail. Although many Christian and Jewish groups DO permit the bodies of the deceased to be cremated, this is not the usual manner of disposing of the body. Furthermore, there are some groups who are strongly opposed to cremating a body. For instance, The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church states, “Cremation is normally forbidden in the Orthodox Church.” But WHY are some opposed to cremation? Is this practice unbiblical? These are good questions.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion states that some rabbis are persuaded, on the basis of Deuteronomy 21:23, that interment is a positive biblical command. This would make cremation an unbiblical practice. In addition, some rabbis argued that cremation was disrespectful to the deceased; others that it implied a denial of belief in the doctrine of physical resurrection. There is one clear biblical account of a cremation. In 1 Sam. 31:9-13, the men of Jabesh-gilead are said to have “burned” the bodies of Saul and his sons.

Afterward, they buried their bones. Thus, The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion states that "in spite of the general prohibition against cremation", most branches of Judaism permit it (even if somewhat reluctantly).

The situation today is similar for most (but not all) Christian denominations. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* states, "Belief in the resurrection of the body made cremation repugnant to the early Christians." The article goes on to point out that the practice was "revived in the 19th century, largely in free-thinking circles, though among some Christians it has now come into favour." The Roman Catholic Church permits, but does not recommend, cremation. The Orthodox Church typically forbids it. Others sanction it, though somewhat cautiously.

In my opinion, there is no clear biblical command prohibiting cremation of the deceased. Traditionally, however, both Jews and Christians have been a little wary of disposing of a body in this fashion. There seems to be at least a twinge of conscience about whether it's really acceptable, or properly respectful (whether to God or the deceased), to cremate the dead. I can certainly understand this feeling (and even share it to a degree), but I do NOT think the Bible forbids it.

Furthermore, I do not think it creates any problems for the doctrine of a physical resurrection. Many people throughout history have been burned at the stake, eaten by wild animals, etc. Many of those who have received a traditional burial have already completely decomposed. The doctrine of physical resurrection does not require that the same atoms which once composed a body also compose the resurrection body. Indeed, if those scientists are correct who tell us that the entire atomic content of the human body changes every seven years or so this would clearly be absurd anyway. Whatever the precise nature of the resurrection body, the God who can create an entire universe *ex nihilo* (i.e. out of nothing) will obviously not be hindered in resurrecting the bodies of all men and

women (cremated or otherwise) and assigning them to their eternal destination.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

"Is Acupuncture OK?"

What do you know about acupuncture? No one in my church knows much about it except that it works.

In a book on Alternative Medicine, written by Christian scholars at The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, the authors noted that a National Institutes of Health (NIH) review, while finding many of the claims for acupuncture to be lacking in firm medical and scientific evidence, nonetheless reported that "acupuncture reduced nausea and vomiting after chemotherapy or surgery and was effective at relieving dental pain" (Gary P. Stewart and others, *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What is Good and What is Not?*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998], 44).

But what is responsible for the limited success enjoyed by acupuncture? The above authors write:

> "Different explanations for the effectiveness of acupuncture have also been proposed. Acupuncture causes numerous biological changes, with the release of endorphins being the most significant. These compounds are part of the body's natural way to relieve pain. Also, pain in one area of the body can be reduced when another area is irritated, which may partially explain why the needles work" (p. 44).

Thus, there are some reasonable physical explanations for the limited success of acupuncture. But are there potential moral and spiritual dangers which one must be wary of in acupuncture? Yes. To quote again from the previous source, "Caution should be exercised in choosing a practitioner. Those who adhere to its roots in traditional Chinese medicine and religion may call on spiritual powers to assist in treatments, thus exposing people to occult influences" (p. 44).

This is a very good point and we would do well to be careful of such possibilities. But of course not everyone who practices acupuncture is involved with the occult. In fact, I'm aware of a local Chinese doctor who incorporates acupuncture (when appropriate) into his medical practice. But this man is a devout Christian and does not buy into the philosophical/religious ideas sometimes associated with traditional Chinese medicine.

So it appears that there is at least some evidence that acupuncture can be medically effective in treating pain and nausea. However, one should be careful in selecting a practitioner for the reasons stated previously.

Hope this helps. God bless you!

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

Addendum 3/17/2019: A friend of Probe, Dr. Caroline Crocker, provided us with this insightful article on the worldview aspect of acupuncture, adding, "Acupuncture is based on nonChristian prescientific ideas. Sorry." It states that there is no scientific support for any mechanism that would explain a way for acupuncture to work, and that clinical trials show that it doesn't work apart from a placebo effect.

https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/reference/acupuncture/