“Is it OK for a Christian to Practice Yoga?”

I read your email response to the question “Is it OK for a Christian to train in martial arts?” and have a question of my own on a related subject.

For several years I have had fairly severe back problems, and was advised by a physiotherapist friend (who is a Christian), to consider taking up Yoga as it might help. My father expressed concerns about this, as he felt that it was a direct path to eastern religions. For the same reason I was never allowed to train in martial arts when I was a teenager. Several other friends of mine also feel that Yoga is decidedly ‘non-kosher.’

My own view is the same as that expressed in your article—that martial arts and the like do contain dangerous elements for the Christian, as they are linked to eastern philosophies. However, I feel that it is possible to participate in such activities, as long as one uses them for physical training rather than for a spiritual purpose, and remains aware of the possible dangers.

With this in mind, I have been attending Yoga classes for the past few months, and my back has never been better! It is a blessed relief to me to be able to move painlessly for once!! (At 24, I’m a little young to consider putting up with back problems for long!). I have been attending Iyengar yoga classes, which, so far, have not involved any spiritual content. The ‘meditation’, consists of lying down at the end of the class and feeling relaxed. I often use it as quiet time to meditate on Jesus!!

Some of my friends at church appear to think that just getting into a position may lead directly to demon possession. I feel

that perhaps Yoga has been given a bad press, as it appears to me that the exercises themselves are rather separate from transcendental meditation and the like, which obviously go totally against what the bible teaches. Have I just been fortunate in finding a class that is not compromising my faith, or am I compromising myself without even realizing it? Obviously I don't wish to open myself to any spirits other than the Holy Spirit!

I would value any insight you might have on this topic.

Hi _____,

Thanks so much for writing! You ask a very important question about a very controversial subject. Indeed, you offer an interesting case study to which I want to reply rather carefully.

Let me first say that I am truly sorry to hear of your back problems. Since you have apparently found some genuine relief of these problems through the practice of yoga, what I have to say may be a little difficult to "digest." So if you're ready. . .

Until very recently, I would have entirely agreed with your own evaluation of yoga. I would have made precisely the same distinction which you made between the physical postures and breathing exercises of yoga (on the one hand) and the non-Christian philosophical and religious ideas (on the other). I still think this can often be a helpful and valid distinction in other areas (e.g. much of the martial arts), but I'm afraid I've become rather skeptical about its applicability to yoga. Please let me explain why.

The physical postures and breathing exercises in yoga are inseparably bound up with the philosophical and religious ideas. I realize this may initially sound absurd, but please hear me out. The discipline of yoga is, as a general rule, firmly grounded within a pantheistic worldview. Pantheism

teaches that everything which exists is part of a unitary, all-encompassing divine reality. In short, pantheism teaches that all is "God." But in pantheism, "God" is not a personal being distinct from the world; rather "God" IS the world and the world IS "God."

But why is this important? According to the pantheistic philosophy of yoga, each one of us is also part of this all-encompassing divine reality known as "God" or Brahman. As Brad Scott, a former practitioner of yoga, has written in a recent article,

> *"..all creation to the Yoga-Vedantin is comprised of the substance of Brahman. Hence, yogis are pantheists… Brahman created the universe out of Itself, as a spider spins out a web" ("Exercise or Religious Practice? Yoga: What the Teacher Never Taught You in That Hatha Yoga Class." The Watchman Expositor: Vol. 18, No. 2, 2001, p. 7).*

And since "God," or Brahman, is ultimately something non-physical, what we imagine to be our physical bodies are (according to yoga philosophy) merely just a crude layer of mind. The physical postures and breathing exercises of yoga are actually intended to help move the mind in the direction of altered states of consciousness. The ultimate goal of yoga is "union" with "God" or occult enlightenment. Please allow me to support these statements with some authoritative quotations.

On the Watchman Expositor website there is a brief overview of yoga at http://www.watchman.org/na/yoga.htm. The author of this piece quotes from Swami Vishnudevananda, well known authority of Yoga, in his book, *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*, as follows:

."..the aim of all yoga practice is to achieve truth wherein the individual soul identifies itself with the supreme soul of God."

He also quotes from Swami Sivananda Radha, in a book on Hatha Yoga, as follows:

> *When most people in the West think of yoga, they think of yoga as a form of exercise. Too often… there are yoga teachers who teach asanas without an understanding of their real nature and purpose. Asanas are a devotional practice which like all spiritual practices, bring us to an understanding of the truth…. Beyond this there also lies a mystical or spiritual meaning. Each asana creates a certain meditative state of mind, (p.xv; emphasis mine).*

And again, from the same source:

> *Hatha Yoga plays an important part in the development of the human being… the body working in harmony with the mind, to bring the seeker into closer contact with the Higher Self, (Ibid, p.xvii).*

Indeed, it is for this reason that the Yogi authority Gopi Krishna writes:

> *"All the systems of yoga…are designed to bring about those psychosomatic changes in the body which are essential for the metamorphosis of consciousness" (Quoted in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs, Harvest House Publishers, 1996, p. 596).*

And finally, John Ankerberg and John Weldon quote from Judith Lasater's article, "Yoga: An Ancient Technique for Restoring Health":

> *"One basic assumption of Yoga Sutras [a standard yoga text] is that the body and mind are part of one continuum of [divine] existence, the mind merely being more subtle than the body…It is believed that as the body and mind are brought into balance and health, the individual will be able to*

perceive his true [divine] nature" (597).

As you are probably already aware, the term "yoga" simply means "union." And, as previously stated, the ultimate goal of yoga is "union" with "God," one's Higher Self, or Brahman. All the different "limbs" or stages of yoga, including the physical postures (asana) and breathing exercises (pranayama), are specially designed to prepare the practitioner for union with "God" and occult enlightenment.

In this regard, Ankerberg and Weldon also cite Feuerstein and Miller, two authorities on yoga, who contend that the postures of yoga (asana), as well as the breathing exercises (pranayama), are more than just physical exercises—they are psychosomatic (mind/body) exercises:

."..the control of the vital energy (prana) by way of breathing, like also asana, is not merely a physical exercise, but is accompanied by certain psychomental phenomena. In other words, all techniques falling under the heading of asana and pranayama…are psychosomatic exercises. This point, unfortunately, is little understood by Western practitioners…" (600).

Interestingly, Brad Scott, the former yoga practitioner mentioned previously, who (by the way) studied yoga for seven years under Swami Shraddhananda of the Ramakrishna Order, provided me with a web address for The Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco which you may want to take a look at. The address is: http://www.iyisf.org/. The state-accredited two year certificate program one can earn at this institute requires not only studies in anatomy and physiology, but in yoga philosophy as well. You may be interested in reading the following course descriptions taken from the website:

Philosophy

Yoga Sutras

2 units (required)

A study of classical yoga philosophy based upon a reading of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. The aims, methods, and powers of yoga, as well as the nature of liberation, will be investigated.

Bhagavad Gita

2 units (required)

The Gita, as a practical handbook for yoga, will be studied and related to daily life. The different branches of yoga described in the Gita will be discussed and placed in context with other major Indian scriptures.

Physiology of Yoga

1 unit (Elective Course)

Yoga is a vitalistic science that views all of existence as supported by a force called prana. Yoga physiology describes how this vital force pervades and animates the physical body. This course will lay the groundwork to help one begin to view themselves and the world around them from this vitalistic perspective.

It's important to keep in mind that this force called "prana," which supports all of existence, is ultimately the same force as "God." Thus, one does not escape pantheism even in a class on yoga physiology! As Ankerberg and Weldon write, ."..prana, God, and occult energy are all one and the same. The one who practices yogic breathing (pranayama) is by definition attempting to manipulate occult ('divine') energy" (602).

Again, in another section on the website, concerning the Iyengar approach to Hatha Yoga, we read the following:

> *"Yoga as taught by B.K.S. Iyengar emphasizes the integration of body, mind and spirit. The Iyengar approach to yoga is firmly based on the traditional eight limbs of yoga as expounded by Patanjali in his classic treatise, The Yoga Sutras. Iyengar yoga emphasizes the development of strength, stamina, flexibility and balance, as well as concentration (Dharana) and meditation (Dhyana)."*

But what are these eight "limbs" on which the Iyengar approach is firmly based? John Ankerberg and John Weldon point out that the eight limbs of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras are "defined within the context of a basic Hindu worldview (reincarnation, karma, and moksha, or liberation) and intended to support and reinforce Hindu beliefs." (601). They go on to describe these eight limbs as follows:

• Yama (self-control, restraint, devotion to the gods [e.g., Krishna] or the final impersonal God [e.g., Brahman]

• Niyama (religious duties….)

• Asana (proper postures for yoga practices; these represent the first stage in the isolation of consciousness…)

• Pranayama (the control and directing of the breath and the alleged divine energy within the human body [prana] to promote health and spiritual [occult] consciousness and evolution)

• Pratyahara (sensory control or deprivation, i.e., withdrawal of the senses from attachment to external objects)

• Dharana (deeper concentration, or mind control)

• Dhyana (deep contemplation from occult meditation)

• Samadhi (occult enlightenment or "God [Brahman] realization" i.e., "union" of the "individual" with God).

In light of this, when we read on the IYISF website that

“students at IYISF [Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco] are encouraged to refine both their knowledge of asanas (poses) and pranayama (breathing)….The same precision of practice brings the serious student to the cutting edge of exploration in the field of mind-body interaction,” we now have a better idea of what’s being referred to.

Let me conclude this discussion with a brief word about “kundalini awakening.” This much-sought-after experience could potentially open the one who has it to occult influences. As you may already know, Kundalini is sometimes thought of as a Hindu goddess believed to lie coiled as a serpent at the base of the spine. Others, however, think of Kundalini simply as “coiled serpent power,” without necessarily identifying this power with a Hindu goddess (Brad Scott, personal e-mail). Either way, however, one of the primary purposes of yoga practice is to arouse Kundalini so that she/it travels up the spine toward her lover, Shiva, who is said to reside in the brain. Supposedly, as she/it travels up the spine she opens up the seven psychic centers (called chakras). Weldon and Ankerberg write:

> *“When the crown or top chakra is reached, the union of Shiva/Shakti occurs, supposedly leading the practitioner to divine enlightenment and union with Brahman” (606).*

This, of course, is identical with Patanjali’s eighth limb, samadhi (although Brad Scott informed me in a personal e-mail that “The Shiva-Shakti mythology…was superimposed on yoga after Patanjali’s time”). Since the yoga authority Hans Rieker claims that “Kundalini [is] the mainstay of ALL yoga practices,” (Ankerberg/Weldon, 606, emphasis added) it is very important to point out that such an experience MAY place the practitioner under occult influences of a spiritual nature. For the Christian, firsthand accounts of this experience sometimes sound as if some sort of demonic influence may be involved. Mind you, I’m not saying that this is ALWAYS the

case, but Weldon and Ankerberg write that many Hindu and Buddhist gurus, “when describing their spirit, or ‘energy,’ possession,” often link it directly to “kundalini activity” (606). They go on to cite a leading guru, Swami Muktananda, as confessing that he was violently shaken by a spirit during kundalini arousal:

> *“A great deity in the form of my guru has spread all through me as chiti [energy] and was shaking me….when I sat for meditation, my whole body shook violently, just as if I were possessed by a god or a bad spirit” (610).*

Weldon and Ankerberg conclude with this observation: “Because all yoga has the ability to arouse ‘kundalini,’ all yoga should be avoided” (610).

And for all of the reasons offered above, I cannot in good conscience recommend that a Christian practice yoga—even if they limit themselves only to the physical postures and breathing exercises. Having said this, I certainly hope you understand that I’m not trying to be insensitive to your particular situation. Indeed, I will grant that it’s at least POSSIBLE that you could continue practicing yoga for many years without experiencing any of the destructive spiritual effects which such a practice could potentially have. However, in the case of yoga, where it becomes quite difficult (if not impossible) to separate the non-Christian religious and philosophical ideas from the physical postures and breathing exercises, my own advice would be to very humbly recommend that you look for a different exercise program, one that would help relieve your back pain without potentially compromising your spiritual health as a Christian.

I hope this gives you some solid reasons for making an informed decision concerning ongoing yoga practice. I genuinely wish you all the best. If you would like more information, you may want to consider taking a look at Brad

Scott's book, *Embraced by the Darkness: Exposing New Age Theology from the Inside Out* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996). Although I have not yet personally read this book, I found his article on Yoga in the Watchman Expositor (Vol. 18, No. 2, 2001) to be extremely helpful in understanding the vast doctrinal differences between the philosophy of yoga and biblical Christianity. Another potentially valuable resource is John Weldon and John Ankerberg's, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996).

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

"Is It OK for a Christian to Train in Martial Arts?"

I want to ask a question about a Christian's involvement with martial arts and how it relates to a Christian who has a career in law enforcement.

Christians are warned not to be involved with martial arts because they lead people into conversion of eastern religions. But many who train as police or as a security guard etc. may find it handy or essential and may have to train in martial arts whether they want to or not.

What should a Christian do who may be in this situation?

Thanks so much for your question. Interestingly, Pat Zukeran,one of my colleagues here at Probe trains in martial arts! He has written an article on this topic entitled Martial Arts. We discussed this question together and came to a similar conclusion.

In our opinion, a distinction should be made between the physical training and exercise required in martial arts and the philosophical and religious ideas which may sometimes be associated with such training.

Paul does warn believers in Colossians 2:8, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. Thus, one must be wary of some of the eastern philosophical and religious concepts which might be promoted in the martial arts. It is not wrong to know and understand these concepts, but you do not want to be taken captive and led away from Christ by them.”

On the other hand, the sort of physical training required in the martial arts is doubtless a very good thing. It not only leads to such benefits as a stronger body, greater flexibility, faster reflexes, and greater dexterity, it also leads to increased confidence in one’s ability to handle potentially dangerous situations. And all of these benefits can be of enormous value to those involved in law enforcement and security work. Indeed, such training may help save lives—not only of those who receive it, but also of those they are attempting to apprehend.

Thus, my own view (and the view of my colleague) is this. There is nothing wrong with a Christian learning martial arts, especially for purposes of self-defense and increased effectiveness in law enforcement. As long as one is careful to separate the non-Christian philosophical and religious ideas from the actual physical training—rejecting the false ideas, but embracing the benefits of the physical training—there does not seem to be any harm in a Christian learning martial arts.

I hope this helps and I wish you all the best,

Michael Gleghorn

“Is It a Sin For a Christian to be a Soldier in the Military?”

Is it a sin for a Christian to be a soldier (i.e. someone training to be on the frontlines to kill) in the military?

I have been reading some arguments on both sides of this coin, and both have some weight to them. The main argument from the peaceful side of this coin is that Jesus said “those who live by the sword, will die by the sword” and that first century christians did not serve in the military, except for a few, but they weren’t in war at that time. The other side of the coin seperates personal responsibility from state responsibility and says that if you are serving in the military and kill, God holds the head of the state responsible. It also uses the Old Testament wars in many of its arguments.

It seems to me that there is power in not fighting, and that the Bible teaches that we should love our enemies, and not kill others just because a government tells you too. However, it would seem in such an evil world that if we didn’t stand up and fight for the protection of others, all Christians would be oppressed. It just keeps flipping back and forth.

Thank you for your question about Christians serving in the military. Probably the three best known books dealing with this subject are:

- *Robert Clouse, ed., War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981).*
- *Arthur Holmes, ed., War and Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1975).*
- *Keith Payne and Karl Payne, A Just Defense (Portland: Multnomah, 1987).*

I could go into the details of the various positions, but I think these books (especially the InterVarsity book) provide a good overview of the arguments on each side.

I might also mention that Tommy Nelson (the pastor of Denton Bible Church in Denton, TX) has put together a 90-minute video on the subject of Christians in the military. It is simply called "God and the Military: Is It Right to Bear Arms?" You can contact him at www.dentonbible.org. Thanks for writing.

Kerby Anderson

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"I Struggle with Doubts"

Hello there – I have a question that I hope you can help me with. I am 38 years old and I have recently lost my second parent to cancer – and I am going through a time where I guess you could say I am re-evaluating my belief system. I was raised in the Presbyterian Church and currently attend _____ here in Houston. What I struggle with is occasional doubts lately and I find it really scary. I believe in God without question but I have trouble sometimes comprehending the resurrection and life after death……I want to believe and have a stronger faith that's for sure!! The thing that bothers me is someone told me that doubts were blasphemy and that by

having doubts you are calling God a liar and that I might not have ever truly been saved. Needless to say that has petrified me, however others have mentioned that doubts are normal…… I went through confirmation with the Presbyterian Church when I was 12 and hope that I am saved. I would really appreciate your thoughts on this!!!! You honor me by sharing your heart with me. Thank you.

Let me cast my vote with those who have assured you that doubts are normal. God understands that as puny-minded humans who are trying to relate to a God we cannot see, touch, or hear, we're going to face areas we don't understand! Often, what we experience is confusion, but some people label it doubt.

I think doubt is more in-your-face unbelief. "I know You're there, God, but I question Your goodness to me so I'm going to do things my own way and pretend like You're not there." The way that Satan encouraged Eve to doubt God's goodness in the garden of Eden.

There is a difference between being overcome by doubts and struggling with comprehending really huge mysteries like the resurrection. God understands, especially at a time like this when you're grieving. (I am so very, very sorry, to hear about your parents' deaths. This is my first Mother's Day without my mother, who died a few months ago. It's hard, isn't it?)

Since you have internet access, you can get some very interesting information about the resurrection and life after death that will help strengthen and establish your faith in those areas. You can start reading at the Probe Ministries site (www.probe.org) and look in the "Apologetics: Reasons to Believe" section. Leadership University (Leaderu.com) also has some dynamite articles.

Concerning the statement that doubts are blasphemy. Well, no, they're not the same thing. People like you who are concerned

that it is, are never guilty of it! Blasphemy is hard-hearted insult against God. I'm sorry that someone has burdened you with the false guilt of "calling God a liar." Now that would be pretty blasphemous, but simply experiencing some questions is usually an issue of not being sure of something. And that's a far cry from saying "God, You're a blankety-blank liar."

Truly saved people have doubts all the time. That's the first step to wrestling with individual issues of faith, and studying them to come out with a stronger faith on the other end. God isn't threatened by our doubts and questions. When we go to Him in simple faith, asking Him to help us understand truth and help us see things as they really are, He truly does answer. It may take a while, but He takes those requests seriously.

You said you were confirmed when you were 12 and you hope that you are saved. I am so glad you put it so bluntly, because I am delighted to be able to give you some very clear direction on this!

Quick question: what were you confirmed IN? Were you confirmed that yes, indeed, you were a Presbyterian, the way we confirm flight reservations? Or were you confirmed in your faith because at some point before that, as you were growing up, you made a deliberate choice to put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?

He told Nicodemus that we must be born again. Just like when we were born the first time, that's a specific event at a specific point in time. In order to pass over from death to life, there must be a specific point at which we choose God over our own way, where we realize that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and we receive His gift of forgiveness and eternal life by saying "thank You!"

So my question to you is, was there a specific point at which you were born again? Being baptized as an infant doesn't do

it, because that’s not a decision that a disciple makes; it’s more of a statement of our parents’ intent to raise us in the ways of God. It’s possible to go along, learning the catechism questions and having a lot of religious head knowledge ABOUT God, without ever embracing Him as our personal Lord and Savior. Have you done that?

If you have, YOU ARE SAVED FOREVER. If you haven’t, then you aren’t saved but you can be as soon as you choose to. I know several people who just weren’t sure of a specific time and place when they chose to put their trust in Christ, so they chose right then and there and said to God, “God, I am a sinner and I need you. Thank You for sending Jesus to die on the cross in my place, and then raising Him from the dead three days later. I believe Jesus is Your Son, and I trust Him to save me from my sins and take me to heaven when I die.” Then they KNEW they had trusted Christ and had passed over from death to life.

1 John 5:11-13 says,

11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.
13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

I love the part in verse 13 that says, “you may KNOW that you have eternal life.” When someone showed that to me not long after I trusted Christ as a college sophomore, that was the point at which I knew for sure that I was saved—because the Bible said I could know! That was very cool for me, since I was raised just hoping that everything would be okay when I died but I couldn’t ever know. Now I KNOW!!!

Let me know what you think about all this, OK?

The Lord bless you and keep you.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"I Can't Forgive God for Taking All Those People in the WTC!"

I saw a distraught woman on the news asking, "Pray? Who do we pray to? God took all those people in the buildings !" It's obvious there is so much hurt and a sense of betrayal toward God for allowing such a horrific thing to happen. I'm having a rough time forgiving God for allowing such terrible evil in the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

I'm so glad you wrote.

A lot of people struggle with anger toward God when we experience pain or when bad things happen. (I completely understand, and carried anger toward Him for many years myself for allowing me to get polio, and not healing me when I begged Him to. That story is here.)

In his excellent book *I Should Forgive, But . . .* [1998, Nashville: Word Publishing, p. 143-157], Dr. Chuck Lynch addresses this issue. There are three problems with a perceived need to forgive God.

> *1. It implies **an offense**. But God does not and can not sin against us. He does not morally offend us and does not need to be forgiven.*
>
> *The number one complaint against God is that He failed to protect. We can be angry that He did not protect us, or He*

did not protect other innocent people. We believe a good God does not let bad things happen to good people. Bad things only happen to bad people. Therefore, if bad things happen to good people, God "did us dirty." But we live in a fallen world; bad things happen to people, period. Our longing for a perfect world where nothing bad happens is a perfectly legitimate longing for the Eden we were created for, and God will re-create that perfect world in the future. . . but we don't live there yet.

If God doesn't "perform" as we think He should, we think He has offended us. The real failure is not with God's performance, it's with our misperception of His character.

We are upset when we realize that God knew the bad thing was going to happen and He didn't stop it. Why not? Because He is graciously patient now, but His full wrath will be poured out on sin and unrighteousness at a later time.

Acts of nature such as weather tragedies, birth defects and diseases, as well as the consequences of things like terrorist attacks, are also perceived as offenses by God against man.

Many people believe it's God's job to keep their lives free from pain and loss, especially if they are faithful to Him. They fail to remember two things:

- *God does not suspend the natural laws of nature for believers. He also does not violate the gift of free will to humanity, even when a person's choice means others will be hurt.*

- *While we have the promise that all pain and tears will be wiped away in heaven, this is earth.*

*2. It implies **accountability.** We demand to know the "WHY???" We think God owes it to us to explain why He does what He*

> *does, and why He allows the things that He does. And if He doesn't explain it to us [and often, if not usually, He doesn't], then many cut off fellowship with Him. "I'll show You, God, I won't believe in You anymore/I will live in rebellion/I will ignore You!"*
>
> *God does not owe us an explanation. He is not accountable to us. He does as He pleases (Ps. 115:3), and He has the right to be the sovereign Lord without explaining to His creatures how his actions today, in time, fit into the big plan of eternity.*
>
> *3. It implies **payment**. Somebody has to pay for sin. Jesus paid for our sins—but who's going to pay for God's "sins" against us?*

Our anger against God is like a red light on a car's dashboard. It alerts us that something is wrong and we need to deal with what we're thinking and thus, what we're feeling. The red light tells us we need to grow into acceptance of our losses and adjust to them over time. When God allows bad things to happen, we get mad because of our loss and hurt. We don't need to forgive Him; we need to ask for grace to accept what He has allowed to happen.

God doesn't sin against us; He does things we don't like. He understands our anger the same way a parent understands a child's anger when the parent allows the doctor to give the child a shot. Just as a parent acts in the child's best interest, God is always acting in our best interests even in the midst of horrific evil and pain. He can do that because He is much bigger and more powerful than we can even begin to imagine.

God allows us to experience pain because His goal is our growth and maturity. He is in the process of developing a mature and solid Bride for His Son Jesus, and He knows that the best way for us to grow is often through pain. Even the

Lord Jesus, although the Son of God, “learned obedience from what He suffered” (Heb. 5:8). God has a bigger plan than keeping us comfortable.

The real issue is to put aside the misconception that God needs to be forgiven, and move through to trust and acceptance.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“How Do I Treat People After a Church Split?”

Over the past couple years at my church some people had left for various reasons and I found myself really wondering how you’re supposed to react to them after they’ve left and you see them out in town, on the street, etc. I had a close personal relationship with some of those people and on the other hand, I witnessed some ridiculous bouts by some of those people who left. Yet it seems that after they were asked to leave (or left themselves), some of the church members still invited them over and at the same time would invite the pastors, their families, or other members of the church body to the same outings as if nothing ever happened. How do I treat those people now when I see them and not disrespect the Lord in my actions and in my heart?

Bless your heart. This is an incredibly painful experience, isn’t it? I’m so glad you wrote, if for no other reason that to hear from someone outside the situation for whom known

personalities don’t complicate things.

I think it’s good to remember the big picture of what the Lord desires for us. The very biggest picture is the second commandment, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Love God, love people—that sums it all up. Secondly, to remember what the Lord Jesus said about our relationship with other believers in John 13:35—”By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Third, consider Philippians 2:1:

> *“Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.”*

So His desire for His body is that we love each other because that’s how we bring glory to God and validate our discipleship, that we puruse unity out of humility and service.

Even after a church split, even after people leave churches for fleshly reasons rather than God-ordained ones, even after people still retain unforgiveness and ungodly attitudes toward people with whom they used to worship, the message of the New Testament is that we are ONE BODY regardless of where we attend church.What God desires is that we love one another no matter what has happened.

If I were in your shoes (and I do have some experience with people in the above categories), when I encounter these people I would choose to remember that God wants us to love each other. That means choosing to be cordial and loving and kind even if the feelings aren’t there (because if God commands it,

He provides the way to obey). Yes, ugly things happened. God knows all about it, and it doesn't change His word that tells us to love one another.

I think it's a good idea to stay forward-focused, remembering that you will spend eternity being connected with these people as part of the Body of Christ, rather than continuing to see life through a rear-view mirror.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Is Hypnosis OK or a Problem?"

I was told by a man who is a new Christian that he quit smoking this past fall through hypnosis. I know that hypnosis is not a good thing, but could you tell me a little more about it so that I can know how to answer in the future?

Although hypnosis may be useful in some situations, there are a number of potential dangers as well. In what follows, I have simply cut and pasted from a teaching outline on hypnosis. The outline comes from a chapter on "Hypnosis and Hypnotic Regression" in John Weldon and John Ankerberg's book *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs.* It's important to realize that Weldon and Ankerberg are looking at hypnosis primarily as it relates to the occult and New Age Movement. It MAY be possible for a Christian therapist to make some beneficial use of hypnosis in treating patients. However, I am honestly not knowledgeable enough in this area to know for sure. At any

rate, one must certainly be careful, for as Weldon and Ankerberg point out, there are many potentially negative effects arising from the use and/or abuse of hypnosis. Here are a few sections from my outline:

Hypnosis and Hypnotic Regression

I. So what is hypnosis anyway?

A. It is a deliberately induced condition of deep mental relaxation, or trance (i.e. an ASC), in which a person becomes highly suggestible and potentially capable of being dramatically manipulated.

B. When the ASC has been achieved, "various therapeutic maneuvers in the form of suggestions or other psychological interventions are performed and are called the practice of 'hypnotherapy.'" (310) C. Its New Age and occult applications include: psychic development, spirit contact, automatic writing, astral travel, etc. For instance, Harpers Encyclopedia of Mystical and Paranormal Experience declares, "Self-hypnosis is used…by mediums and channelers to communicate with spirits." (311)

II. What about hypnotic regression? What is that all about?

A. This usually involves using hypnosis to take a person back in their past to uncover buried memories and resolve hidden conflicts.

B. In New Age and occult applications, such regression may go back into a person's alleged "past lives."

III. How does hypnosis claim to work?

A. No one really knows for sure! There is still no generally accepted scientific theory about it.

B. "Daniel Goleman, who has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Harvard University, observes, 'After 200 years of use, we still cannot say with certainty what hypnosis is nor exactly how it works. But somehow it does." (310)

IV. Does the Bible have anything at all to say about the practice of hypnosis?

A. "Hypnosis may be related to the biblically forbidden practice of 'charming' or 'enchanting'; to the extent this relationship holds true, the practice should be rejected." (310)

B. Christians are to be "filled" and controlled by the Holy Spirit. To the extent that the hypnotic trance opens one up to the influence of other spirits, it has the potential to be quite harmful.

V. What is the susceptibility to hypnosis in the general population?

A. About 10-20% of people cannot be hypnotized.

B. About 10-20% can be easily hypnotized.

C. The remainder fall somewhere in between.

VII. Granting that hypnosis MAY be helpful and useful under some circumstances, we might still ask whether it is a necessary part of the psychotherapeutic process?

A. One psychiatry textbook states, "Everything done in psychotherapy with hypnosis can also be done without hypnosis." (314).

B. But if this is really so, we may ask whether the potential risks are worth the potential benefits?

X. What are some of the documented potential dangers of hypnosis?

A. Perverse motivations to satisfy ulterior needs on the part of the therapist or patient.

B. It may increase a patients overdependence on the therapist.

C. Traumatic insight when repressed memories are uncovered.

D. Precipitation of a psychosis.

E. Sudden panic reactions occasioned by the experience of hypnosis.

F. Complications from miscommunication.

G. Unscrupulous use of hypnosis.

H. Difficulty in waking subject and unfortunate effects of incomplete waking.

XI. However, it must be admitted that in the Jan. 1987 *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, it was concluded that "other than in a few rare and isolated instances, hypnosis has proven to be one of the safest tools in the armamentarium of the healing professions." (317). The dangers of hypnosis are usually attributed more to the therapist than to hypnosis itself.

XII. W & A suggest five variables to be considered when evaluating the risks of hypnosis:

A. The religious, ethical, and philosophical orientation of the therapist.

B. The emotional history and condition of the client.

C. The degree of technical expertise and past experience of

the therapist.

D. The motive and purpose for engaging in hypnosis.

E. The hypnotic state itself.

XIII. Dr. Shafica Karagulla, M.D., a neuropsychiatrist and member of the prestigious Royal College of Physicians. . . warns against possession from hypnosis in her Breakthrough to Creativity. . . . She warns that hypnosis can open '. . .the door to your mind which can be influenced by other intelligences, some greater than your own. In such a passive state, an entity can get in and obtain control over you.' (328).

XV. Christian scholars are divided over whether the use of hypnosis is permissible for Christians. "One of the leading Christian authorities on the occult, the late Dr. Walter Martin, accepted the medical practice of hypnosis, while warning against its occult use. Noted psychiatrist Paul Tournier, on the other hand, is opposed to any use of hypnosis" (332).

XIX. Can you think of any biblical prohibitions against hypnosis?

A. It may be generally prohibited in a passage like Deut. 18:10-12 (e.g. divination, witchcraft, sorcery, casting spells, mediums, spiritists, etc.). But of course this is not entirely clear.

I hope this information helps you in your understanding of hypnosis. While it's not a clear-cut issue, Christians should probably be very careful (and prayerful) before either recommending or receiving hypnosis.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

“Help Me Understand Eating Clean and Unclean Meats”

I am a freshman college student. A New Testament class professor said that Paul, James and Peter disagreed with the eating of clean and unclean meats. Now I know of the vision with Peter, which he says some scholars say is only for the fact that they should preach to Gentiles as well as Greeks. Now, is there anywhere else that says they may have not been disagreeing or that one case won out over the other or if one had more information from God? Should we be wary of this subject as Christians? Because that would mean we were eating “wrong” all this time (for those of us who do eat pork and other things like that). Does this have any relevance to our spirituality as Christians? Am I just thinking too hard?

Thanks for writing. The dietary laws set forth in passages such as Leviticus 11:1-47 and Deuteronomy 14:1-21 were temporary laws given by God only to Israel. These laws are not applicable to Christians today under the terms of the New Covenant. This is not only made clear in Peter’s vision, recorded in Acts 10:9-16, but it is stated explicitly by Christ Himself in Mark 7:14-23. Notice in particular what Jesus says in vv. 18-19. In part, this text reads, “Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” Then notice the parenthetical statement which concludes this verse: “Thus He declared all foods clean.” In other words, the dietary restrictions given

by God to Israel have been nullified. Christians today are not bound by such laws. Today, the Old Covenant under which Israel operated is obsolete (Hebrews 8:13).

Hope this helps!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries

“Help! My Doubts Scare Me!”

Dear Sue Bohlin,

Hello. My name is _____. I e-mailed Ray earlier too. Anyways, I was reading an e-mail discussion you had with somebody, who didn’t believe in God. You said something in it about how it’s not an intellect issue, but a heart issue. This is hard for me to accept. I’m ashamed admitting this, but oh gosh its hard for me to admit. Maybe I won’t. I could say that I don’t believe in God, but that just sounds way too harsh. Have you heard of anybody who was a Christian, but then they began to have doubts and became agnostic? That’s how I feel. I asked Jesus into my heart when I was younger (I’m 18 now), but for a long time I’ve just been so skeptical. I guess I’m not a Christian, because a Christian knows that he or she is one, and I don’t. I don’t know how to express what I’ve been going through lately. Everyday I think about my doubt and it depresses me. I’m not sure if I’ll ever get rid of it and that scares me. I desire to believe in God so much, but it’s hard. I have so many questions. I wonder why God doesn’t show himself to me so I know for sure that He is there. I don’t know. Maybe He has but it’s just not enough. Maybe I don’t

have enough faith.

Another thing that really doesn't help me is some of the stuff that I have read on the internet. Different books that I've read about have caused me to have even more doubt. Have you heard of *The Bible Unearthed…*, or *The Jesus Puzzle…*? I haven't read any of them, but read reviews. Anyways, the second one I think denies that Jesus was a historical person. That really bothers me. Earlier today I was reading something on the web where this person was being critical of Lee Strobel (who wrote *The Case for Christ*). I really like that book (not done with it yet), but after what I read on the internet about it, I wonder if it really shows that Jesus was a historical person. I don't know. Maybe I just let other people's conflicting views on Christianity get to me too much, but after reading these things, I start to wonder if maybe they are correct on what they are arguing.

Anyways, to me, my problem doesn't seem to be a heart issue because I really would like to believe in God. I desire to believe in Him and live for Him, but it's hard. Is there something that I lack? Do I just not have enough faith? I don't know, maybe I don't. Well I think I've made this long enough. If there's any advice you could give me I would appreciate it. Maybe you could pray for me. Thanks a lot.

I know you don't know me, but I REALLY wish I could reach through this computer screen and put my arms around you and give you a big hug and tell you IT'S GOING TO BE OK!!!!! It is *so OK* to have doubts, to wonder about where you stand spiritually, because, at 18, you are at the point you need to be—deciding for yourself what you should keep and what you should jettison of what you have been taught. You are an adult now but you probably don't feel that you have enough information to make an informed, committed adult choice about something as important as eternal destiny and one's relationship with God!

Good news—lots of other people are also in your shoes. But they don't ask for help, and bless you, you did, and there IS help for you!! There are good answers, and you'll be stronger and more confident for having voiced your doubts and questions, once you're on the other side of this spiritual crisis. It's OK, _____. . . .God is walking through it with you.

> *I guess I'm not a Christian, because a Christian knows that he or she is one, and I don't.*

Well, no, actually that's not true. Many Christians have assurance that we are Christians, and many Christians fervently *hope* they are but they're not sure. That's an important issue all by itself: can we *know* we're saved and going to heaven? Can we lose our salvation? Our founder and first president, Jimmy Williams, addressed this issue in one of his e-mails.

> *I don't know how to express what I've been going through lately. Everyday I think about my doubt and it depresses me. I'm not sure if I'll ever get rid of it and that scares me.*

I wish you could see God's heart as He watches you wrestle with your doubts and fears. He loves you so much (man, I feel like Monica on *Touched by an Angel* here!) and is very tender toward you as you experience these strong and scary emotions. I understand your fear that you'll never get rid of the doubt. But doubt is like darkness—you don't overcome it by pushing it away, you make it go away by bringing in light. As you seek light and truth and to know what is really true and real, God will show you the light. I am so grateful that you came to us at Probe instead of some New Age "all religions are the same" website!

> *I desire to believe in God so much, but it's hard. I have so many questions. I wonder why God doesn't show himself to me so I know for sure that He is there. I don't know. Maybe He*

> *has but it's just not enough. Maybe I don't have enough faith.*

What's important isn't the amount or strength of our faith, but the *object* of our faith. God is strong enough to handle your doubts and to show you, in ways so intimate you will know it's HIM, that He is real and He loves you very much.

> *Another thing that really doesn't help me is some of the stuff that i have read on the internet. Different books that I've read about have caused me to have even more doubt. Have you heard of* The Bible Unearthed*…, or* The Jesus Puzzle*…? I haven't read any of them, but read reviews. Anyways, the second one I think denies that Jesus was a historical person. That really bothers me.*

With good reason. Some of the best Christian apologetics books started out with the author's intention to disprove Christianity, and the facts overwhelmed the skeptics into belief. The entire world was affected by the life of Jesus Christ, in one way or another, but He didn't exist? Now THAT takes a lot of faith!

> *Earlier today I was reading something on the web where this person was being critical of Lee Strobel (who wrote* The Case for Christ*). I really like that book (not done with it yet), but after what I read on the internet about it, I wonder if it really shows that Jesus was a historical person.*

Did you know Lee Strobel started out as an atheist? I'm glad you're reading it; it was a wise choice. So is his second book, *The Case for Faith*. I found this statement from him in an interview online: "I have found that the testimony of history points compellingly toward Jesus Christ having returned from the dead in the ultimate authentication of His claim to be God. To me faith in Jesus is not blind or irrational. I have so much independent evidence that the New Testament writings are reliable that I would be swimming

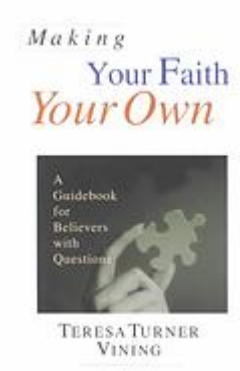
upstream against the evidence if I were to follow the teachings of the Koran or the Book of Mormon. The more I subject the New Testament to analysis, the more I pepper it with questions, the more I walk away utterly convinced of its trustworthiness."

> *I don't know. Maybe I just let other people's conflicting views on Christianity get to me too much, but after reading these things, I start to wonder if maybe they are correct on what they are arguing.*

Just about every truth, especially those of eternal importance, will be countered with something counterfeit, because we're in a very real battle for our minds and souls. It's unfortunate that the counter-arguments can *appear* so compelling, but the issue is ultimate truth. Right now, you're on the right track in seeking truth and desiring to sort through the clamoring voices that attack it.

> *Anyways, to me, my problem doesn't seem to be a heart issue because I really would like to believe in God. I desire to believe in Him and live for Him, but its hard. Is there something that I lack? Do I just not have enough faith? I don't know, maybe I don't.*

It's been said that the Christian life isn't hard, it's IMPOSSIBLE. You can't live for God in your own strength—not for any length of time, anyway, without burning out and getting majorly discouraged. The secret is to allow Jesus to live His life through you by yielding to Him. That, by the way, is one of the things that sets Christianity apart from every other religion: God inside us, offering to live His life through us, without any loss of our own individuality. But right now, the big issue is what to do with your head/heart conflict. Fortunately, there is a PERFECT book that I believe will make all the difference in the world to you.



It's called *Making Your Faith Your Own: A Guidebook for Believers With Questions* by Teresa Vining. I was privileged to read Teresa's manuscript and LOVED her book. One of its strengths is that she was in the exact place you are now, and she takes you through the questions AND the answers, and suggests you keep a journal as you work through the book so you can decide what you believe and commit to, and what you're not willing to. It is a terrific book on apologetics, and she is very respectful of the person with questions and doubts. I think you will love this book too.

> *Well I think I've made this long enough. If there's any advice you could give me I would appreciate it. Maybe you could pray for me.*

I'd like to pray for you right now!

Father, I lift up _____ to You and I thank You for her intellect and her honesty in facing her doubts and questions. Thank You that You are not in the least bit troubled by them because You know You are real and true and able to take her through this time to a point where she will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that YOU ARE. I ask You to send her little intimate glimpses of You and open her eyes so she'll know it's You saying "Hi." I ask that You give her a peace when she's pursuing truth and give her an uncomfortable restlessness when she's moving toward the darkness and deception that would seek to draw her away from You. Lord, I thank You for Your hand on _____'s life and on her heart and on her mind, and by faith I thank You for taking her to the place where she will joyfully serve You with all three. Lord, make her feel loved and protected and cherished by You.

In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Hope this helps, dear one!

Sue

“Are Pastors Bound to Marry Anyone Who Asks?”

As an ordained Baptist pastor, my question is this: Am I bound by the Bible to marry anyone who asks me to? If a couple comes to me to ask me to marry them, and they tell me they are not saved, but want to get married anyway, should I? If they are living together, am I supposed to marry them just the same? I am confused by what other pastors have told me, and have read scripture, but I still need some advice outside that of my denomination.

Thank you for your letter. As far as I’m aware, you are not biblically bound to marry anyone who asks you to. There are probably other pastors in your immediate area who would be willing to marry such people. If you really feel uncomfortable about it, you could probably refer such people to these other pastors.

However, another Probe staff member made some really good points about this issue. This person’s previous pastor, who had a genuine heart for God and for people, would usually marry unbelievers. His reasoning was as follows:

1. Once married, such people would no longer be living in sin.
2. When they had kids and looked for a church, they’d possibly come back to his.
3. It gave him a chance to share the gospel with them.

Also, if you require such couples to go through pre-marital

counseling, it would give you extensive time with them to impart biblical principles about marriage and family.

Finally, marriage is a God-ordained institution for all people, not just believers. We want people to understand that God takes marriage very seriously and that He will hold them accountable for violating their marriage vows. We also want to be available to those who are struggling with marriage difficulties and contemplating divorce. Ultimately, however, people must bear a personal responsibility before God for what they do (or don't do) with their marriages.

Thus, I personally do not believe that it would be morally wrong for you to marry such people (generally speaking, at least. I suppose there might always be exceptions). However, if you don't feel comfortable before God, I would simply refer the people to another local pastor. You're not morally obligated to marry them either.

Hope this helps a bit.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn
Probe Ministries