“Is Navel Piercing OK?”

Dear Sue,

Recently, I have been thinking about piercing my belly button. I am 13. And you have to be 14, which I will be turning in a couple of months. My mom strongly disagrees, for reasons which I don’t agree with. She thinks it is radical. I think piercing anything on your face is radical. Or your tongue. There are others. But I think your belly button is pretty normal. She was also worried about the health issues.

Some of my friends got theirs pierced, so I want to see how it goes with them. She also said to pray about it. Which I haven’t yet. But I went to Mind Games this weekend, and they mentioned going to Probe.org for questions. So here I am. And I would like to know your opinion on it. I read your article “What About Body Piercing?” but you had only mentioned the tongue piercing, that you disagreed with. But I’d like to know about the belly button.

I’m so glad you went to Mind Games this weekend!! I wish I’d been there to be able to talk to you in person.

I have a question. Why do you want to get your belly button pierced? What’s your motivation? Usually people do it to show it off, but there’s nothing modest about a lady displaying her stomach. Can you show off your body to the glory of God? I don’t believe so. (The place to show off one’s body is for one’s spouse, in private. Check out the Song of Solomon in the Bible.) You would be drawing attention to yourself, not TO Him or FOR Him. We are called to modesty (1 Tim. 2:9), and the whole navel-piercing fad is anti-modesty.

Secondly, lots of people have problems with infection. Body piercing is not healthy, and God wants us to be good stewards of the bodies He gave us.

Third, God's will is that you submit to your parents until you are on your own as an adult. Parents have a different perspective that comes from having lived longer, and that includes seeing the consequences of people's choices that are unseen at the time of their choice. If your mom says no, then I can definitely tell you that it is not God's will for you to pierce your navel and you will be sinning if you do.

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

"Is It Wrong for a Christian to Copy CDs?"

Is it wrong for a Christian to copy or burn CDs? I have heard conflicting views on the subject and I was hoping to get some help here.

If you're copying a CD so that another person doesn't have to buy it, then you are taking money from the artist/software writer that rightfully belongs to him or her. It's stealing. If you're burning a copy of something you bought for your own backup purposes, then you haven't hurt anyone because you paid for it.

The issue is, If I didn't have a CD burner, would I have to buy the CD to get what I want? If the answer is yes, and you're using the equipment to avoid paying for it, then it's wrong.

Dr. J. Budziszewski has a wonderful column in *Boundless* e-zine on this: http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0000783.cfm

Sue Bohlin
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 It OK for Christians to Drink in Moderation? Didn't Jesus Drink?"

Is all alcohol "bad," so to speak? I thought at a point in my studies that if someone imbibed alcohol at any point that it was a sin, but recently I've begun to read scripture that might be interpreted differently.

I know that any form of drunkenness is a sin. However, there are illusions to a possible use of alcohol as a healing agent

in “a little wine for thy stomach’s sake, and thine often infirmities” (1 Tim. 5:23). The question I have, is that the gospel of Matthew speaks about John, and how he ate sparingly and drank nothing (indicating alcohol, unless by divine favor he could exist without fluid whatsoever). Then it says that the Son of Man, which I have been told is how Jesus referred to himself, ate and drank, even going so far as to say that people called him a “winebibber” (Matt. 11:12-20). Does this mean that Jesus drank wine, meaning that it is not a sin to drink wine? For we know that Jesus did not commit sin while here on earth, therefore if he did drink wine, it is not a sin to do so, unless you cross the boundaries of gluttony or alcoholism. Or is Jesus repeating one of those slanderous terms to refer to the way that people intended to demean his name?

Then we come to another verse that states that we as Christians should not do anything that could be perceived as wrong, that we may not lead another to do the same (1 Cor. 10). Would buying and drinking alcohol fall under this category of sin? Drinking beer or wine may appear sinful to those who believe it to be so, therefore would it not be a sin for me as a Christian to go purchasing a bottle of wine or brandy, even if for cooking or celebrating a special occasion?

Your reasoning appears quite sound from my perspective. I believe that Jesus did drink wine based on the accusation you mentioned and the fact that he turned water into “good” wine at Cana. Even if this wine was of a lesser alcohol content than our current choices, the fact remains he wouldn’t have made wine that he didn’t expect people to drink with his approval.

Your concern about choices we make that concern a weaker brother or sister are valid. This is also a personal choice. However, many Christians I know who do drink alcohol, only do so in the privacy of their home or at a restaurant where they do not expect to see someone who might be offended. This may

seem risky but it also has a lot to do with the church you fellowship at. If the vast majority of your fellowship believe any drinking of alcohol is sin, this would seem a large risk not worth taking. Other churches are more tolerant and there may be little risk at all. This does explain why many pastors choose not to drink alcohol and many seminaries and Bible colleges require students, faculty and staff to sign statements promising not to drink while associated with the institution. Many of their constituents would not understand.

Using alcohol in food preparation is a different issue. If there is to be cooking involved, the alcohol from the beer, brandy or wine is boiled off by the time it gets to the dinner table (alcohol boils at a lower temperature than water). It's the flavor you're after. Various kinds of alcohol, depending on the recipe, add just the right flavor and no alcohol is consumed.

I see nothing in Scripture which forbids the drinking of any alcohol. There are plenty of warnings for over-indulging. Sometimes the decision of whether to drink at all needs to be based on the ability to resist the temptation to drink too much. Some people never really learn to just enjoy a glass of wine or a beer without adding two or three more. Such an individual is better off not drinking at all. (If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off, Matt. 5:30.) And I do know of Christians who drink a little wine with certain meals because it actually does aid their digestion! This is not a myth. Some people have trouble digesting beef (a real uncomfortable feeling results) without some red wine. But the decision regarding a weaker brother or sister is one of individual conscience and the particular fellowship in which you reside.

I hope this helps.

Respectfully,

Ray Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“Is it Christian to Celebrate Birthdays?”

Is it Christian to celebrate birthdays?

Sure! Celebrating birthdays is really celebrating the person who was born on that day, and that is a way to fulfill the second greatest commandment, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” Loving and honoring people because they are important takes many forms, and celebrating birthdays is a legitimate way to do that.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Is It Always Wrong to Lie? Even During War?”

Our pastor claims it’s always wrong to lie. Is this true? What about during war?

It’s one of the 10 Commandments: “thou shalt not bear false witness” (Ex. 20:16). In the New Testament, Jesus claimed to BE the truth (Jn. 14:6). Yes, it’s always wrong to lie, because God’s nature is truth, and lying is acting contradictory to His nature.

It’s always wrong to lie; it’s never wrong to tell the truth and trust God to work it out.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Is It Always Wrong to Kill? Even During War?”

I read your answer in your article “Is It Always Wrong to Lie? Even During War?” The last paragraph created another question in my own mind. The paragraph read, “Saving one’s own or someone else’s neck is not always the highest goal. Obedience and aligning ourselves with God’s heart and character is. Hebrews 11 has a list of people who chose martyrdom over doing what was expedient to save their lives, and they wear a crown of glory in heaven. There are better things than lying to stay out of trouble.”

My question is this – in light of your answer based upon the Ten Commandments – Is it always wrong to kill even during war?

No, because the word used in the 10 Commandments that we usually read “Thou shalt not kill” is actually the word for “murder.” There is a personal and deliberate aspect to murder that is not present in wartime killing. This difference is seen in the distinction between a cancer surgeon and a gang member who stabs someone in a fight. Both of them use knives to cut into people, but for completely different reasons with different motivations.

I hope this helps.

Sue Bohlin

“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/