

# **“If Everyone Left Unhealthy Churches, Wouldn't Many Shut Down?”**

Dear Mr. Zukeran,

I recently came across your article [Abusive Churches: Leaving Them Behind.](#) In it, you state that “it is best to leave an abusive or unhealthy church.”

Why is this a necessary step to take? If everyone were to leave churches considered unhealthy, many churches would shut down as a result. Can you clear this up for me? Thank you.

I stated that leaving an abusive church was the best thing to do. The reason is that it is very difficult to recover or worship the Lord when you are in an abusive church that is dominating your life. Being surrounded in such an environment constantly is not healthy and the atmosphere will affect your outlook. It is like being a fish swimming in an unhealthy aquarium. The more you remain in it, often the more unhealthy you get.

It is also very difficult to change an abusive church since it is structured with no accountability on the leader so it is very unlikely to change. So for your personal health, mentally and spiritually, it is best to leave and enter into a healthy environment and church.

You asked, wouldn't the abusive church shut down if people left? That is correct and that is the best thing that could happen. Abusive churches do a lot of harm to people and to the name of Christ. We do not need abusive churches growing and spreading. We need unhealthy churches to shut down and healthy churches growing and planting healthy churches. That is why I say it is best to leave an abusive church.

Patrick Zukeran

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# **“How Do the Health-and-Wealth Believers Rationalize Their Beliefs?”**

I read your [Stairway to Heaven article](#) on materialism and still can't understand why people (and especially these new mega churches) are still so into it. People have actually told me that God wants us to have wealth, and I keep receiving “religious” email chain letters about being “blessed” monetarily. I would prefer blessings of a more loving type . . . !!

My question is always, what kind of “wealth” does that necessarily mean? It is all so contradictory to Jesus' teachings as well as to His overthrowing of the merchants' tables in the Temple. How do they rationalize this way of thinking?

Thank you for your thoughtful response to my essay on materialism.

I also have difficulty understanding the “health and wealth” gospel that some profess in the name of Christ. I find no justification for it in Scripture. In fact, I find just the opposite in passages like 1 Peter 4:12-16:

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”

Paul, in Romans 5, points out that suffering is an integral part of developing the character we need to serve Christ effectively. As to where this “health and wealth” gospel comes from, I suppose it begins with the very popular view that “God wants me to be happy” rather than the biblical admonition to be holy as God is holy. Fortunately, many churches (both large and small) work hard to overcome this form of hedonism.

For Him,

Don Closson

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## **“Since Angels Aren’t Christians, Why Should They Follow Christ?”**

Why would angels follow the teachings of Christ if they are the creations and servants of God, besides the angels are not Christian but Jewish in nature. The letters “-el” at the end of their names (such as Gabriel, Uriel) is actually the Hebrew

name for God. In his original name Gabri-el is actually Hebrew for "messenger of God." Angels are not Christianity's creations nor their guardians, if anything they have more ties to Judaism.

Jesus Christ IS God, the second Person of the three-Personed God. Who is one God, in three Persons. [It's beyond me to understand, but then, who wants a God we can fully understand?]

So, angels follow the teachings of Christ because He has always been God and He was the one who created them in the first place; He existed in heaven before He took on a human body and came to earth.

I don't make a distinction between Christianity's Jewish roots and its Christian fruit because it's all one story. There IS no Christianity without Judaism; it's the first part and the foundation of our history.

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **"How Does This Angel Thing Work?"**

You mentioned two angels, Raphael and Uriel in this book of Epochs or something like that—why wasn't it included in the Holy Bible? They were not included in the King James version nor the Roman Catholic kind?

Could you pray to St. Michael to protect you or do you have to pray to Jesus Christ first to have St. Michael look after you?

## How does this work?

*You mentioned two angels, Raphael and Uriel in this book of Epochs or something like that—why wasn't it included in the Holy Bible?*

Because the names Raphael and Uriel were names made up by some people some time ago; they are not real angel names of real angels, like Gabriel and Michael are. The Book of Enoch wasn't included in the Bible because it was not inspired by God the way all the other books were; it is a piece of fiction written by a human with no input from God.

*Could you pray to St. Michael to protect you or do you have to pray to Jesus Christ first to have St. Michael look after you?*

Scripture instructs us to pray ONLY to God, not to angels or saints. That's because He wants our focus on HIM, not on angels or believers who now live in heaven. Jesus died for you—Michael the archangel didn't. (He is never called a saint in the Bible, by the way; only people are saints, which means "holy ones," and refers to those who have placed their trust in Jesus because He died in our place on the cross and paid the penalty of our sin.)

*How does this work?*

I want to honor you for your seeking heart and for your curiosity about spiritual truth. May I invite you to read a wonderful article on our website about how to have a personal relationship with God? It's full of very helpful details that I think you'll enjoy. Click here: [The Most Important Decision of Your Life](#)

The Lord bless you and keep you!

# **“What Makes You Better Than Others to Critique ‘Embraced by the Light’?”**

What makes Russ Wise or Probe Ministries greater than anybody else to say this is heresy or false teachings of God in [his analysis of \*Embraced by the Light\*](#)? What makes you better than anybody else?

If you are really intelligent then you can analyze everything down to the “perfection of God.” There is no way man can really understand the “Divinity of God.” Our mere words cannot even explain or at least understand it. I think Russ Wise should keep his opinions to himself and not say his words are better than any other. I wonder what kind of belief or religion Russ has? He must be in a perfect religion.

I noticed that something seems to be missing from your complaint about Russ Wise and Probe Ministries: God’s perspective. It seems that you are unhappy with Russ’ analysis of *Embraced by the Light* as if it were nothing but human opinion. But both Russ and Probe Ministries analyze ideas from a perspective based on what God has told us in His word. In the same way that we can tell how crooked a stick is by placing it next to one that is absolutely straight, we can tell how incorrect the ideas in a book are by comparing them to the straight truth of God’s word.

It has nothing to do with believing that we are better than

anyone else. We know better. We know it's not about us at all. It's about having confidence that God really has revealed His truth to us in the Bible, so we can confidently analyze anything that contradicts His word. This confidence can be erroneously confused with arrogance, but it's not arrogance because we are simply agreeing with what God has said. Like I said before, we know it's not about us.

I respectfully must disagree with you that "There is no way man can really understand the 'Divinity of God.' Our mere words cannot even explain or at least understand it." If mankind had no choice but to try and figure out God on our own, you would be absolutely right. But the message of the Bible and the even more stunning message of Jesus Christ, the God-man who left heaven to come to earth, is that we don't have to speculate about God. He has reached out to us. He has spoken truth to us. He has revealed Himself to us. He passionately wants to be known and loved (even if we can't fully understand Him because He is so *other*, so much more than us), and He has made Himself knowable by speaking to us in His word and in His Son. And it is on the basis of that revelation that we can compare works like *Embraced by the Light* to what God has said, and identify where they are wrong because they contradict God. Not our mere human understanding of God they contradict what God Himself said.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin

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# **“What About All the Violence and Conquering in the Name of the Christian God?”**

Just read your [answer to email](#) on the Pope's inflammatory remarks about Islam, and I had a question about this statement:

*“Muslims certainly cannot deny that Mohammed admonished Muslims to pick up their swords for Allahs cause (see my essay [Islam and the Sword](#) at Probe.org). They also cannot ignore the fact that Islam conquered both the Persian and Byzantine Empires via warfare.”*

**While both statements are or may in fact be true, one we Christians cannot deny that as much violence and conquering has been done in the name of God. One should be careful about removing the speck from a brother's eye before taking the log out of his own. Actually, I believe Christian war preceded Islamic war.**

I am not discounting the evil done in the name of Christ, and of course there were Christians fighting before there were Muslims since Christianity preceded Islam by six centuries. My point is about their very nature as belief systems. When one compares the actions of Christ with the actions of Mohammed, the lives of the apostles with the lives of Mohammeds companions, and the teaching found in the New Testament with what is taught in the Quran, one finds a distinct difference in the role that violence plays. Even when we compare the early history of the two religions we find that Christianity went through a three hundred year period of persecution while Islam conquered a region stretching from Spain to India, experienced three civil wars, and had three of its first four caliphs assassinated by other Muslims.



There is also the distinction to be made between individuals committing violence and vengeful acts, and the responsibility of governments or kings to uphold justice and protect their people from harm. There has been a 1,400 year conflict going on between the civilization that has constituted Europe after the Roman Empire fell and the Islamic world. For most of that time Europe was on the defensive side of things. Not until the late 17th century did the Islamic threat diminish after their failure to take Vienna and the Ottoman Empire was forced to sign the treaty of Karlowitz in 1699.

One also has to remember that Islam is both a religion and a political system; it does not recognize a separation between church and state. When a western nation acts against a Muslim one it is not Christianity vs. Islam, it is a political entity, democratic or otherwise, deciding to act against a religious/political entity.

All of this to say that while we can point to atrocities done in the name of Christ, they have no support in the New Testament. However, atrocities done in the name of Islam have explicit models in the life of Mohammed and can find justification and support in the Quran.

None of this discussion discounts our obligation as ambassadors for Christ to love and reach out to individual Muslims in humility and with compassion.

Thank you for your thoughtful comments.

Don Closson

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# “Is Judaism a Cult?”

I go to your website often, and I always learn something new so thank you! I was reading about cults, and by the definition, it would seem that Judaism would be considered a cult. Can this be true?

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

Thanks for your letter. I'm sorry it's taken so long for me to respond. Scholars have not always found it easy to define precisely what is meant by terms like “religion” or “cult.” Thus, there is some dispute about exactly what a cult is and how it should be defined.

In Walter Martin's classic, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, he cites with approval Dr. Braden's definition of cult:

*By the term cult I mean nothing derogatory to any group so classified. A cult, as I define it, is any religious group which differs significantly in one or more respects as to belief or practice from those religious groups which are regarded as the normative expressions of religion in our total culture.*

Walter Martin then writes, “I may add to this that a cult might also be defined as a group of people gathered about a specific person or person's misinterpretation of the Bible.”

According to these definitions, then, Judaism would be more appropriately classified as a religion (alongside other religions like Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism). And this, I think, is correct. I've never read any serious scholar who classified Judaism as a cult. And I personally think it would be a serious mistake to do so.

At any rate, that's my view.

Shalom in Christ,  
Michael Gleghorn

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# **“Am I a Prude for Refusing to Endorse the Movie “Ratatouille”?”**

**WARNING – this email contains a movie “spoiler”... My husband and I saw the G-rated Pixar movie *Ratatouille*. As a conservative Christian, I was troubled and saddened that an important element of the movie reveals that the garbage boy Linguini is the illegitimate son of the recently deceased chef Gusteau, who doesn't even know he has a son. While the movie is otherwise entertaining and worthwhile, I cannot endorse such a film. My husband, who is as devout as me, didn't think this was a big deal and that kids wouldn't put it together and neither would most adults. Am I being too prudish? Or do you think I should stand firm in my convictions that wrong is wrong...even if everybody does it?**

**One last thing, is there a Christian-based movie rating site?**

First, concerning your question about Christian movie reviewing sites:

[www.pluggedinonline.com](http://www.pluggedinonline.com)

[www.movieguide.org](http://www.movieguide.org)

[www.christianitytoday.com/movies/](http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/)

[christianity.about.com/od/christianmovies/Christian\\_Movies\\_and\\_Christian\\_Movie\\_Reviews.htm](http://christianity.about.com/od/christianmovies/Christian_Movies_and_Christian_Movie_Reviews.htm)

Secondly: while I haven't yet seen the movie (but plan to tomorrow!), I did read all the reviews at the above sites so I would have a better idea of what troubles you. I also discussed the movie with one of my Probe colleagues who took his family to see it. I fully appreciate your concern about illegitimate children, but is this part of the story lifted up as something to emulate and freely accept? Or is it a plot device that can be addressed in discussion with others after the movie? It sounds like a teachable moment to me, much like the wrong and sinful elements of Bible stories that are presented without comment by the biblical writers and invite us to interact with them wisely.

From what I read in the reviews (and in my conversation with the one who did see it), there are other wrongs in the movie such as stealing, throwing knives, arrogance, etc., which you did not indicate your objection to. Would you say you cannot endorse any movie that has anything wrong in it? I respectfully suggest that this kind of movie provides audiences with the opportunity to develop discernment in how they process what's in it, and especially how they discuss it with their children and other viewers. Personally, I find it very helpful when someone with a developed Christian worldview sees a movie and tells me, "If you see this movie, look for \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ but watch out for \_\_\_\_\_."

Our philosophy here at Probe is that there is no such thing as sheer entertainment. All movies are made for a reason, with a viewpoint, and there is something the producers and directors want you to see or think, or a certain way in which they want you to respond. So Christians need to have their thinking caps on when seeing any movie, filtering everything through the lens of God's word and His values.

In that case, when a character is revealed to be illegitimate,

our response would then be, “Oh, illegitimacy is so sad because sexual sin is sad and hurtful. God wants so much better for us, and that’s why He calls us to purity. So the issue is not the presence of an illegitimate character, but whether or not our response to it is in alignment with what God has shown us in His word.”

I would add that there are many movies that are so filled with moral filth and ungodliness that it’s like trying to find something to eat in a compost heap. We’re better off not going (or renting, or watching) them at all.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin

Addendum: I just returned from seeing the movie myself, and stand by everything I said. Excuse me, but I have an urge to go in the kitchen and cook up something *marvelous!* <grin>

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## “Why Are You Trying to Redeem Darwin?”

**I am curious, why do you call this effort “Redeeming Darwin”? What exactly about Darwin are you attempting to redeem?**

Thanks for your question. [Redeeming Darwin](#) is a part of our *Redeeming the Culture* series of studies. In this series, we take topics that are counter to and/or hostile to Christianity and educate Christians on how to use these topics defend their faith and to share the gospel. (Our first project was “[Redeeming The Da Vinci Code](#).”) By equipping Christians to use

a negative topic as a bridge to share the gospel, we are in a sense redeeming that topic. So the title does not imply that we are in some way redeeming the *person* of Darwin, but rather using the *topic* of Darwinism as a tool to accomplish a redemptive purpose.

Best regards,  
Steve Cable

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## **“Should a Christian Radio Station Accept an Underwriting Grant from a Ford Dealership?”**

I am on the board of a local Christian radio station. We have a man who is a franchise owner of a Ford Motor Company Dealership. He is a Christian and wants to support our radio station through his dealership. There is currently a national boycott against Ford for their support of homosexual agendas. Is it ethical to allow him to underwrite our station when we are in support of the national boycott of Ford products? We as a board want to do the right thing.

Thank you for your question. This is a good case of an ethical dilemma in which Christians may come to different conclusions.

1. The Bible clearly teaches that if someone believes a particular action to be wrong for them, then it is wrong. Paul says in Romans 14:4, I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks

anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. So if a station manager feels it would be wrong to receive support from a Ford dealership, then it is wrong. End of discussion.

2. However, if a station manager does NOT have an initial moral concern, then you might consider some other issues:

*(a) Many people would see a distinction between the Ford Motor Company and a local dealership. While we may disagree with the policies of the national leadership of Ford toward homosexuality, that doesn't necessarily mean that the local dealership agrees with those policies. In fact, one of the sad results of the boycott has been that many local Ford dealerships (run by godly Christians who disagree with Ford's policies) have been hurt by the boycott.*

*(b) This leads to my next point. Many Christians do not agree that a boycott of Ford Motor Company is the best way to send a signal to the company. They feel that it is too blunt an instrument. Some Christians may be led to follow the boycott, while others do not. Paul says in Romans 14:3 that the one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat nor should the one who does not eat . . . judge the one who eats. In other words, whether you participate in or refrain from a boycott is an individual decision that a station manager should be "fully convinced of" (Romans 14:5).*

*(c) Some might also point out that there is a difference between boycotting Ford and receiving a sponsorship from a local dealership. The station is not buying a Ford product but receiving an underwriting grant. Essentially, it is the difference between the station paying Ford and Ford paying the station. Obviously, this distinction is meaningless if one believes that anything Ford Motor Company does is tainted by their national policy. In that case, giving money to Ford or receiving money from Ford would be wrong.*

So I would encourage you and your station manager to consider

whether you feel it is wrong to receive a grant from the local Ford dealership as I describe in section #1. If you do, then the other points are meaningless. If you do NOT feel it would be wrong, then you might consider the three points I put under section #2.

Kerby Anderson