

“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

© 2007 Probe Ministries

“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

www.movieguide.org

www.christianitytoday.com/movies/

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>

© 2007 Probe Ministries

“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

© 2007 Probe Ministries

“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

“How Can Dementia Turn a Mature Christian So Ugly?”

I am worried by the behaviour of Christians I know who suffer from dementia. I have frequently seen them displaying racism, sexually suggestive behaviour, and generally rude and difficult behaviour unthinkable to their pre-dementia selves. How does this tie up with the idea of a Christian being transformed within? I am bothered by the thought that sanctification is only skin deep, as it were—a learned veneer.

That’s an excellent question!

I too have seen incredibly godly, mature Christians heartbreakingly transformed by Alzheimer’s and dementia into ugly caricatures of their former selves. I believe the answer lies in the nature of the two kinds of “flesh” the Bible talks about. Our “new creation” is housed in a body of physical flesh that has been impacted by the fall and marred by sin. The fall makes our brains subject to decay and disease which leads to the tragic behavior you describe. The other flesh—not our physical bodies, but that part of us which operates in our own strength, apart from God (see Romans 7:18, 8:8, 13:14; Galatians 3:3, 5:17)—is never transformed, which is why we have to crucify it and die to self. The transformation of

sanctification happens to our souls and in our spirits, but our flesh is unredeemable and still occupies a place in our physical bodies. Racism, sexually suggestive behavior, and rude and difficult behavior are all fruits of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21). Praise God, the flesh will fall away when we die or are taken up to heaven!

Hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

© 2007 Probe Ministries

“Can a Born-Again Christian Remain in a Carnal State?”

If one is truly a born again Christian, can they remain in a carnal state? If they are not willing to grow spiritually, give up those things which are offensive to God are they truly saved? Also much debate about losing one's salvation seems to be a confusing topic for some. It says in God's word that no man can pluck you out of the Father's hand but what if one decides to remove themselves by renouncing their belief in the Lord? God did not remove them, they removed themselves. We have a Bible study in our work place and this seems to be an ongoing problem to give a clear cut answer to. Please could you help me?

Your questions are perceptive and very important for understanding the Christian life. I think it's safe to say that Christians are not effectually sinless people. With that in mind, our righteousness is not ours, but Christ's. Granted, a Christian is a regenerated being. We have the Spirit of God

living in us and have the freedom to choose right over wrong. But some people seem to be changed overnight, while others are slower about showing the fruits of new birth. We must trust God to have that under consideration as He works in the life of new or not-so-new believers.

It's important that we look at our lives and the lives of others from a broader perspective than we might be used to. God works throughout our whole lives. When we become Christians we can look back at times before our salvation and see that He was working even then. I think we'll also be able to look back in eternity and see where God was working throughout our whole lives (unsaved and saved), when we weren't even aware of it. To get to the point, living "carnally" does not necessarily invalidate a person's claim to salvation. But at the least it ought to call it into question. 1 John 2:3-6 gives us an effective measure of our relationship to Christ. If we know Him, then we'll act like it. If I'm not finding the desire or the ability to follow Christ's will for my life, then I am forced to ask, "Why not?" I can recount many testimonies of people who truly came to know Christ after being in such a predicament.

A believer's security is a very important issue. For if one can forfeit his inheritance, then how many sins will it take to disqualify him. John 10:27-30 does teach that no one is able to "snatch them out of the Father's hand." Paul says in Romans 8:38-39, "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." So it seems that no one (not even the person himself) or no thing can take us from God.

Better yet, what if he chooses one day to renounce the faith he once held so dearly? I'm in no place to decide if someone's profession of faith was sincere or not. But we do have the responsibility as brothers and sisters in Christ to challenge

each other to bear fruit. If it isn't being seen, then there ought to be someone who can say, "Hey, I'm not seeing any fruit." Philippians 1:6 affirms our hope: "Being confident in this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." So, biblically speaking, salvation is for keeps. The question must be, "Is the person who isn't living for Christ really a Christian at all?" Only God and the person in question can really answer that. Our responsibility as a community of faith is to encourage one another to be true to each other's profession of faith.

I hope this helps you in your search for truth. He rewards those who seek Him.

Kris Samons
Probe Ministries

"How Does Pantheism View Good and Evil?"

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

I came across a quote for a guru:

Life has a bright side and a dark side, for the world of relativity is composed of light and shadows. If you permit your thoughts to dwell on evil, you yourself will become ugly. Look only for the good in everything so you absorb the quality of beauty.

Can you comment on how pantheism views evil and good? If you can shed some light on this quote, it would be helpful for me

to understand how to address this with someone with this belief system.

Hello _____,

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

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

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

© 2007 Probe Ministries

“Did Jesus Have a Sinful Nature?”

Did Jesus have a sinful nature? It is clear that he did not sin, but he was 100% human. Is it that he did not choose to sin but it was possible for him to do so? If the answer is yes, would this imply that we are being punished for the sins that we do and not just because we have a sinful nature?

Hello _____,

Thanks for your question. No; Jesus did not have a sinful nature. It's true that He was fully human, but like Adam before the Fall, His humanity was not in any way tainted with sin. Whether it was possible for Jesus to have sinned or not is a matter of debate. I do not think it was possible for Jesus to sin, for Jesus was not only fully human, He was also fully God and God cannot sin.

As believers, God does discipline us (and this can certainly be painful at times) as we learn in Hebrews 12:4-11. And yes, the Lord does discipline us for the things that we do, and not just because we have a sinful nature. Of course, it's important to remember that the Lord is very gracious and patient with us as well. But He will also discipline us out of love and in order to help conform us to the image of His Son.

Shalom in Christ,
Michael Gleghorn

© 2007 Probe Ministries

“Is My Husband's Cybersex Grounds For Divorce?”

My husband has been having cyber sex. Sometimes there was a camera on the other end. Is this biblical grounds for divorce?

Dear _____,

I am so sorry. What a horrible betrayal you are feeling!

I don't know God's definitive answer on this, but I do think

that cyber sex and webcams are high-tech ways of extending the sins of lust and fantasy, which are mental and emotional sins . . . but I don't believe they cross the line of adultery. Actual sex between two people has an effect of creating soul-ties to each other that compromises the marriage covenant.

I think the bigger issue is one of hard-heartedness. If you have asked your husband not to engage in cyber sex and to get rid of the camera, and he refuses because he wants what he wants even if it means hurting you, then that's the real issue. What kind of marriage is it if one person makes self-centered choices that insure the other will be hurt?

May I respectfully suggest you read Drs. John Townsend and Henry Cloud's excellent book *Boundaries in Marriage* for some wisdom on what to do next. For example, I have a friend whose husband refuses to stop going to a website where he can play games and chat with other women, and he has fallen into at least emotional affairs with a couple of them. She has said, "As long as you won't get rid of Pogo, you can do your own laundry." This way, his stubbornness and selfishness are costing him something.

Hope you find this helpful. Again, I am so sorry. My heart hurts for you.

Sue Bohlin

© 2007 Probe Ministries

"Please Help Me – I'm Lost"

Please help me, I'm lost. I'm in my 50s now and the question of life after death is on my mind a lot. I've been brought up a Methodist but stopped going to church when I was big enough

to make my own decisions. . . . Being young, I lived for the moment and never gave God much thought. But now that I'm older I want to know more.

Like what does it matter if one man lives or dies? It's not going to make any difference as the world turns. We're not supposed to care about earthly things but in this country that is supposed to be "one nation under God" we probably control half the money in the world and yet millions are dying from starvation. Why? I'm sorry just have so many questions and don't know who to go to for answers. Please help me find peace for myself!

Dear _____,

I am delighted that you wrote to us! My husband Ray and I are both in our fifties as well so we very much understand why you'd be asking these extremely important decisions now. Way to go!! <smile>

Allow me to point you to an essay on our website by Jimmy Williams called "The Most Important Decision of Your Life" here: www.probe.org/the-most-important-decision-of-your-life/.

Also, please allow me to address your question of "what it matters if one man lives or dies, since it won't make any difference as the world turns." Very few people make a noticeable difference to the world at large, but EVERYONE makes a difference to the people closest to us. The world is different because of each of our lives. The question is, what kind of difference does each of us make? One for good, or for evil?

Also, your observation is very true from a worldly perspective, but from God's perspective it makes a tremendous amount of difference because He made you for Himself, and He made you for a purpose. It matters because God wants you to know how much He loves you and how deeply He wants you to accept His invitation to find your life in Him. Ultimately, a

billion years from now, when the world as we know it isn't here anymore, only things from God's perspective will matter.

Jimmy's essay will help you grasp life from God's perspective. Let me know what you think after you read it, OK? But first let me pray for you.

Dear God, I lift up _____ to You and I thank You for the big smile on Your face as You see him turning over these important thoughts and decisions in his mind. Thank You for opening _____'s eyes to his need to see the big picture of life and to ask the eternally significant questions he's asking. Lord, it's only Your grace and goodness that allow him to know he is lost and needing peace. He would be blind to those truths if it weren't for You calling to him and allowing him to hear You calling. So help _____ understand his need for You and the promise that is his life, since You made him for a purpose, You made him so You could love him, and You made him so he could love You back, enjoy You forever, and make a difference because He's Your beloved creation. I pray You would help him cross over the line to become Your beloved son.

I bless you today, _____!

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

© 2007 Probe Ministries