

# **“People in Hell Are Destroyed, Not Live Forever”**

I am writing about your answer to the question [“Are People in Hell Isolated and Alone?”](#)

The bible clearly states that the wages of sin is DEATH not eternal life, be it in heaven or hell as you think. Consider these verses:

*Malachi 4:3 plainly says the wicked shall be ashes under our feet. Is.1:28–“...and they that forsake the Lord shall be consumed.” Is.66:17–“shall be consumed together, saith the Lord.” Rev 20:9–“...and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.” Rev 20:14, “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”*

Doesn't say second life but second death. You should look up some of the Greek and Hebrew words that have been translated into hell, that would make it more clear to you.

Thank you for your letter. You are correct in noting that the fate of unbelievers is one of heated debate these days, even among professing evangelicals. My own difficulty with the thesis of conditional immortality stems from passages like Matthew 25:46, Revelation 14:9-11 and Revelation 20:10. It is difficult for me to see how these passages can be consistent with the denial of eternal punishment.

For example, in Matthew 25:46 Jesus states: “And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. The same Greek term, *aionion* (eternal), is used to describe both punishment and life.

Revelation 14:11 reads in part: “And the smoke from their torture will go up forever and ever, and those who worship the

beast and his image will have no rest day or night." What troubles me about this verse is the concluding phrase, "those who worship the beast and his image will have no rest day or night." Again, these unfortunate people appear to be enduring eternal, conscious torment.

Finally, in Revelation 20:10 we read: "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they will be tormented there day and night forever and ever." The beast and false prophet are both human beings. And yet, along with the devil, they will endure eternal punishment. Furthermore, Revelation 19:20 states, "Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf; signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur." Please note that this takes place prior to the thousand year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:1-7). And yet, when the thousand years are over, the beast and false prophet are still being tormented in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). This lake of fire is the same place where all unbelievers are thrown in Revelation 20:15.

It's true that this is called the "second death," but does the Bible equate "death" with "annihilation"? How do you read Ephesians 2:1-2? The Ephesians were formerly "dead." But does this mean that they didn't have personal, conscious existence? Wouldn't you agree that the Ephesians were spiritually dead (i.e. separated from the spiritual life of God)? And might this not also be what the Bible means by the "second death" (i.e. unremedied spiritual death results in eternal separation from God)? When the Bible speaks of death it does not mean "annihilation." Rather, it means "separation." Physical death is the "separation" of the spirit from the body (James 2:26). Spiritual death is the "separation" of a conscious, living person from God (Ephesians 2:1-2). And the second death is the

“eternal separation” of an unredeemed person from God (Revelation 20:11-15).

This, at any rate, is why it’s so difficult for me to embrace the doctrines of conditional immortality and annihilationism.

Hope this helps.

The Lord bless you,

Michael Gleghorn

Probe Ministries

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## “I Have Questions About the Trinity”

I still have questions about the Trinity from your article [The Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Trinity](#)—here are some of them:

John 17:1-3 The Emphatic Diaglott reads this this way: “Jesus spoke these things, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the HOUR is come: glorify THY son, that the son may glorify thee as thou didst give him Authority over all flesh, so everything which thou hast given to him, he may give to them even aionian life. And this is the AIONIAN life, that they may know thee, the ONLY TRUE God, and him whom thou didst send, Jesus Christ.”

If Jesus Christ is God Almighty, then who was he praying to?

When you quoted Rev. 1:16 and 17, you were taking them out of context, surely, because the first few verses show that God sent his angel (Jesus Christ) to John to give him the Revelation. I am assuming you are going to say that it was

Jesus Christ who gave the Rev. to John. If so, then Jesus was quoting the words of God, his Father.

Are you saying that Jesus is God—equal in every way to God—or that he a powerful spirit being as God is? In the page dealing with the Trinity you mentioned that Jesus is the same nature as God, that is why I ask?

I have never believed the Trinity, but if I am wrong in not doing so, I want to find out.

Hello and thank you for your question.

Who is Jesus praying to? He is praying to God the Father. Many people misunderstand the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible shows that there is one God who has revealed himself in three distinct and separate persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. What JW's and others misunderstand is that Jesus, the Father and Holy Spirit are all the same person. The Trinity does not teach Jesus is the Father or that the Father is the Holy Spirit or the Son is the Holy Spirit. The Trinity means there exists one God revealed in three distinct persons. As seen at the Baptism of Jesus in Matthew 3, the Father spoke from heaven, the Son arose from the water, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove.

So who was Jesus praying to in John 17:1-3? It was God the Son praying to God the Father. I hope you go on to read the rest of the verse. 17:5 states, "And now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." Jesus shared in the glory of the Father. What a significant statement in light of Isaiah 42:8, where God the Father states, "I am the Lord, that is my name. I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." The glory of God is His alone. It is evident that this is the glory that belongs to God alone. Why does Jesus have it? Because He is God.

Let us look at Revelation 1:16-17. We are sure this is Jesus

speaking because of the context. Verse 1:13 states, "And among the lampstands was someone like the son of Man." Is God the Father ever called the son of man? No, this is the title of Jesus (Daniel 7:13, Matthew 12:8, 32, and 20:18.) Jesus is not quoting the Father in 1:17-18, He is stating what is true of Himself. Look at the context. Verses 1:17-18 go together. The quote begins at 1:17b, "Do not be afraid. I am the first and the last." Then it connects to verse 18, "I am the living one; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!" Is this statement true of the Father or the son? Was the Father once dead and resurrected to life? No, that is clearly true only of God the Son, Jesus who died on the cross and rose from the dead. Jesus would not be quoting a statement from the Father that was not true of the Father. The Father was never dead and resurrected to life. Context shows verses 1:17-18 are one quote and it is Jesus speaking about what is true of Himself.

Thanks for your question. Keep studying the Bible and the Bible only.

Patrick Zukeran  
Probe Ministries

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## **"Can a Christian Lose His Salvation?"**

I have been debating a Christian online about whether salvation is permanent, which I believe it is. I have seen many scriptures that show this is the case but the person I am debating has brought up two verses I have never looked at before and I don't know how to respond. The verses are 2 Peter 2:20-21:

*“For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them.”*

I looked in a couple of commentaries as well as in *When Critics Ask* (by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe) and they either said nothing about it or they didn't address the issue at hand. I have just within the last month or two started getting your newsletter and reading your articles/e-mail responses and I have been very impressed. So I was hoping that you could shed some light on this issue.

You have brought up a great question! The security of every believer is a critical issue in the Christian life. John 10:28-30 assures us that if we are given eternal life by God through Jesus Christ, no one can snatch us from the Father's hand. Romans 8:28-39 also guarantees that nothing in all of reality can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

With that said, there is the issue of the “apparent” problem passages. Of them, 2 Peter 2:20-21 seems a real nasty one. But upon reading the entire epistle from Peter, one can see that the people in question are false teachers. Peter's perspective, as that of Jude in Jude 19, is that these false teachers were not truly Christian. As Jude puts it, they are “wordly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.” Most likely these teachers publicly professed Christ as their Lord, but their subsequent rejection verified their unchanged spiritual condition.

The Bible as a whole teaches that believers are securely held in God's hand. But let us be careful not to judge others because of what we see or don't see. Challenge one another in

perseverance to bear fruit, but leave the final judgment to the word of God that is “able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Thanks so much for your insightful question. God gives understanding to those who seek it as if searching for buried treasure and precious silver. [Proverbs 2:3-5]

Kris Samons  
Probe Ministries

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## **“Why I Don’t Believe in God”**

Dear Christian Philosopher,

One day I was asked why I believed in God. I had a very hard time coming up with one reason. However, since my faith has disappeared, I have had a relatively easy time coming up with reasons that I do not believe in Him. Here are five:

- I have not perceived God. Everything that I believe exists, I have perceived. As a result, I do not believe in God (since I don’t believe that He exists).
- I have not received reliable testimony that anyone that has perceived God. However, I have received reliable testimony that others have not perceived God. Therefore, since I must perceive something (or at least hear reliable testimony from a perceiver) before I say it exists, I do not believe in God.
- I do not believe in God because he does not exist. God does not exist because everything that exists must take up space and God does not take up space. Therefore, God does not exist.

- It is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance. The Christian God is composed of spiritual substance and the world is material substance. The Christian God created the world. Since creating the world entails spiritual substance interacting with and manipulating physical substance, the Christian God cannot exist. (If spiritual substance can interact with physical substance, then how?)

- There is no such thing as spiritual substance (Descartes mind or the other realm); i.e., the soul, the devil, angels, hell etc. (If there is spiritual substance, then I would like to hear some reasons why I should believe that there is such a substance.). My reason for saying that there is no such thing as spiritual substance is due to spiritual substance being unperceivable and non-existent (assuming that to exist is to take up space). In fact, spiritual substance cannot be perceived because human-kinds faculties for perception only gather information from material substance. Since all human faculties are material, they cannot gather information from spiritual substance because the spiritual substance would have to interact with the material faculties; and it is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance.

Like I said, my faith disappeared. I believe that if someone shows me how I have made a mistake, then my faith will come back. I know that these reasons are probably not great in the eyes of a seasoned philosopher (I am just doing my undergraduate work right now), but in my stage of development as a thinker, these are huge roadblocks. Thank you.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thanks for your letter. I will respond to each of your five points individually.

1. *I have not perceived God. Everything that I believe*



*exists, I have perceived. As a result, I do not believe in God (since I don't believe that He exists).*

By perceive, do you mean through the senses? If so, for this reason to be valid you must present a case for a strong empiricism such as that of the logical positivists of the early 20th century. They believed that only that can be held as true knowledge which is empirically verifiable. This has been shown to be self-referentially incoherent, since the theory itself can't be so verified. Consider, too, the things I'm sure you believe exist even though you haven't perceived them by your senses, things such as electricity or love. You can see the effects of these things, but not the things themselves (if love can be called a "thing"). Similarly, we can see the effects or the works of God without seeing Him. If you mean you haven't perceived God in any way, there is nothing I can say to that, except that this is no proof that God doesn't exist. It could be that you have closed off any avenues by which you might perceive Him.

*2. I have not received reliable testimony that anyone that has perceived God. However, I have received reliable testimony that others have not perceived God. Therefore, since I must perceive something (or at least hear reliable testimony from a perceiver) before I say it exists, I do not believe in God.*

Again, by perceive do you mean by the senses? If so, my first response still stands. If you mean any kind of perception, then millions of people can offer positive testimony. Of course, if you have decided already that God doesn't exist, then you will write such testimonies off to something else. But that would be no argument against God's existence, but rather a testimony of your own philosophical/religious biases.

*3. I do not believe in God because he does not exist. God does not exist because everything that exists must take up space and God does not take up space. Therefore, God does*

*not exist.*

Here you first need to present an argument to prove that anything which exists must take up space. Materialists have the same obligation as theists to prove their world view.

Here are some reasons I find naturalism untenable. Consider first that if matter is all that exists (since all existing things must take up space), then the universe must be explainable purely in terms of natural laws, including the law of cause and effect. If there is a purely materialistic cause/effect explanation for everything, then even our mental processes are nothing more than the motion of atoms in our brains (whether chemical or electrical) acting in a strict cause/effect sequence. But if this is the case, how can we know whether what we think is true, or whether it is just the result of determined natural processes? How do you know that what you think about the world outside yourself actually obtains? It could all be simply mental images your brain has produced. There must be something in our reasoning abilities which isn't reducible to natural processes.

In addition, such determinism strikes at the heart of free will, which means that you didn't make a free choice to write your letter: it simply happened as a result of the natural, non-mental, processes of your brain and body.

One more note: Those working in artificial intelligence still haven't been able to produce a computer which thinks like a human. If reason were a strictly causal process surely they would have been able to do so already.

*4. It is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance. The Christian God is composed of spiritual substance and the world is material substance. The Christian God created the world. Since creating the world entails spiritual substance interacting with and manipulating physical substance, the Christian God cannot*

*exist. (If spiritual substance can interact with physical substance, then how?)*

Why do you believe it is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance? Some say that such interaction would negate natural laws. But I see no reason to accept this. We can't deny the interaction of the supernatural with the natural just because it complicates matters.

Just how this happens I cannot say. But my limited understanding shouldn't be an impediment to belief. If we have good reasons to believe God exists and created the universe, and there are no objections significant enough to overcome those reasons, then one is justified in believing in God. Because there are other reasons to believe in God, the burden is on you to prove the spiritual cannot interact with the physical.

*5. There is no such thing as spiritual substance (Descartes' mind or 'the other realm'); i.e., the soul, the devil, angels, hell etc. (If there is spiritual substance, then I would like to hear some reasons why I should believe that there is such a substance.). My reason for saying that there is no such thing as spiritual substance is due to spiritual substance being unperceivable and non-existent (assuming that to exist is to take up space). In fact, spiritual substance cannot be perceived because human-kind's faculties for perception only gather information from material substance. Since all human faculties are material, they cannot gather information from spiritual substance because the spiritual substance would have to interact with the material faculties; and it is impossible for spiritual substance to interact with physical substance.*

You (again) make your presuppositions very clear: 1) all existing things take up space, and 2) the spiritual cannot interact with the material. Again, I ask that you present a case for your materialism and for your assumption about the

impossibility of spiritual/natural interaction.

Here I have simply tried to respond to your ideas and show where I see weaknesses. For positive arguments to believe, there are numerous resources available. I suggest that you look for copies of C.S Lewis' books *Mere Christianity* and *Miracles*. For a study on mind/body dualism from a Christian perspective, see J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1987), chapter 3. Also look through the list of articles on our web site ([www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org)) under the categories Theology/Apologetics and World View/Philosophy. My articles on atheism and miracles address the issue of naturalism.

Rick Wade

Probe Ministries

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## **“You’re Overreacting About Harry Potter”**

Dear Ms. Bohlin,

It was with great concern that I read [your article regarding the Harry Potter series](#). You said,

“But there’s one substantial difficulty with the Harry Potter series. They make sorcery and witchcraft enticing to the reader. And that is not consistent with a Christian worldview, where we are called to ‘take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.’ God gives us very strong and clear commands about witchcraft: it is a sin, it is an abomination before God, and the Old Testament penalty for sorcery or witchcraft was death. The proscription

against the practice of magic is continued in the New Testament.”

Please know that in Great Britain the state religion is the very Christian Church of England. We can freely talk about God and government at the same time. There is no problem with my son's school putting on a Nativity play, the Headmistress praying at the school assembly and his teacher teaching about the life of Jesus. England has clergymen from the Anglican (Episcopalian Church in the US) Church in Parliament as representatives. This is a very Christian country and J.K. Rawlings would never make a statement about Christ without being eaten alive and her book banned from every school in the country if it was thought to be of the occult.

The book is getting lots of questions in the US for dealing with wizards, but not here. I think that is because England has such a history of King Arthur and Knights, dragons and other lore. One more story about a wizard is not considered to entice children into witchcraft anymore than any other stories. It is not an issue in the UK. There are few occults in England and no religious right or fundamentalist. The English think the Americans' obsession with Harry Potter and the occult is weird, unless there is the issue of American Christians not being as strong in their faith.

Thank you so much for your insightful letter. The difference between the UK mindset and ours in the U.S. in terms of the King Arthur and wizard mythologies provides a wonderful perspective on the whole Harry Potter phenomenon, and I am indebted to you for helping me see things more globally.

Here in the U.S., the subject of witches and magic is definitely linked to the occult and Satanism (or, at the least, the pagan religion of Wicca), whereas I see how it is probably dismissed as nothing more than mythology in the UK.

Nonetheless, God has still condemned occult practices as a

form of idolatry. Perhaps Harry Potter doesn't stir the imagination in that direction in England, but it certainly does here.

But I hear what you're saying about how the English could look at us as wierd for our reaction to Harry.

Thank you for taking the time to write!

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **“How Do I Answer This Atheist's Argument?”**

I'm a young Christian doing some study at \_\_\_\_\_ University. I am currently engaged in a debate with an atheist who reckons his argument is indestructible. I have tried to critique it but he reckons that my logic is false.

This is his proof for the non-existence of god:

*First, in order to discuss the existence of god, we must define god. So I say god must be conscious. That way we can distinguish god from any random forces that might be out there just spitting out universes. But I'm conscious and I'm not god so we must further define god so that god can be distinguished from a highly advanced alien race. So god must be the First Cause. There we have it, god must be conscious and the first cause or god doesn't exist. If god isn't conscious OR if god isn't the first cause THEN god doesn't exist. Let's examine what it means to be conscious or to have awareness. When one is aware of something and that something moves or changes then one is aware of that*

*movement or change. The change causes a change within the one who is aware of it. Example: When a leaf blows across the road the position of that leaf in my mind changes. My mind changes from knowing where the leaf was to knowing where the leaf is. To be Conscious is to be Changeable. So we can say, If god isn't CHANGEABLE or if god isn't the first cause then god doesn't exist. Now, let's examine what it means to be the first cause. The first cause must be uncaused for there can be no cause preceding the first cause. Now since no change can occur without cause (unless of course you believe that things like the universe can just pop into existence without cause) God must not be able to change. To be the First Cause is to be unchangeable. So we can say, If god isn't CHANGEABLE or if god isn't UNCHANGEABLE then god doesn't exist. Logically nothing can be changeable and unchangeable. SO GOD DOESN'T EXIST. There are only 5 logical objections to My Proof.*

- God Being Consciousness
- God Being The First Cause
- Consciousness Requiring Change
- The First Cause Requiring Unchangeableness
- Something Not Being Able To Be Both Changeable and Also Totally Unchangeable.

*Choose Your Poison. Yes, If anyone can debunk my proof I shall withdraw it and stop using it. Furthermore I shall move into the ranks of the Agnostics. Our point of contention is that you insist that The Cause must be conscious which requires change when we both know that in order for the first cause to exist it must be totally unchangeable. Now, if you or anyone else would care to explain how something can be both changeable and totally unchangeable, I'd be glad to hear it. Until then you're flying on a wing and a prayer, which means you're falling. The changeable vs. unchangeable paradox is the basis of my whole proof. The basic premise is that a thing can't both*

*have a property and not have the same property. i.e. A line can't be totally straight and partially non-straight or curved. As it turns out the definition of God which is used by most people and mainstream religions requires god to be changeable and totally unchangeable, thus creating a paradox. If I were to believe in 'god' I could still never be a Christian. Here's a good exercise that will help you choose a religion. Try to work out in your own mind what god must be like. But don't just say god must be all good try to prove each characteristic of your god.*

This is what he is saying, and quite frankly, I don't have an answer. Any help would be much appreciated.

Thanks so much for your time.

I think there are two problems here, one building upon the other. The basic problem is the atheist's understanding of God as first principle. This is an understanding bequeathed to us by Greek philosophy. Plato didn't have a God as in Judaism and Christianity. He believed in the One (or the Good) and the Demiurge. The former was remote, untouched by changing things. The latter formed what was there into the universe. While Christian thinkers sought to pull those two ideas together, an emphasis on God as unchanging remained, even to the extent of denying His passibility; that is, that He could be emotionally affected by anything outside Himself. While I disagree with open theists regarding God's knowledge of the entire future, I can agree with them that Christian theology (thanks in part to Aquinas) has let Greek philosophy shape its ideas more than it should. Although I believe God is unchanging in His nature and purposes, this doesn't mean there can't be any change of any kind in Him. We must let Scripture tell us what God is like (albeit aided sometimes by philosophical concepts); the atheist is attacking a straw man in his attempt to disprove God.

The second problem is this. Even if we concede that gaining



new knowledge does entail change (and this change cannot be allowed in God), if God knows everything – past, present and future – then there is no new knowledge for him. Therefore, there is no change.

Hope this helps.

Rick Wade  
Probe Ministries

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## **“Help Me Understand Rewards in Heaven”**

Dear Sue,

I want to ask about different rewards in heaven. In some classes I've been told that everyone is equal in heaven and there are no levels. Other classes seem to indicate that it is the way you live on earth and the deposits you make in heaven on the rewards you receive. I know that believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior guarantees your salvation, but I am a little confused on the levels in heaven and what this means. I've even been told that it is just different people's interpretation. Please help me understand!

The confusion usually comes from people confusing the differences between SALVATION and REWARDS. Salvation is a free gift, but rewards are earned by our works after we are saved. No one's works will ever earn them salvation—the only ones that count are the ones we perform after becoming a Christian. Salvation is a present reality, but our rewards will be given in the future, in heaven.

They will be given at the Judgment Seat of Christ (you may

hear some people call it by the Greek word, *bema* [bay-ma] ), when our works (NOT our sins, which were paid for at the Cross) will be tested and judged.

2 Corinthians 5:10 says, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil." Similarly, Romans 14:10, 12 says, "We will all stand before the Judgment Seat of God. . . and each one of us will give an account of himself to God."

1 Corinthians 3:9-15 describes what will happen: God will test our works by the fire of motive. If we did things in His strength and for His glory, they will pass through the refining fire and emerge as gold, silver and costly stones. If we did things in our own flesh and for our glory or for the earthly payoff, we will have gotten all our strokes on earth, and the works will be burned up, not making it through the testing "fire." (Those works are referred to as wood, hay and straw, which are easily consumed by flame.)

There are various kinds of rewards, but the Bible doesn't give a lot of information.

Matthew 10:41 talks about a prophet's reward, a righteous person's reward, and a disciple's reward.

Then there are crowns:

- James 1:12 and Revelation 2:10 refer to the "crown of life" for those who endure, remaining faithful under trials and persecution. (Some have called this the martyr's crown.)
- 2 Timothy 4:7-8 refers to the "crown of righteousness" for those who loved the Lord's coming and lived holy lives in anticipation of His return.
- 1 Peter 5:4 promises the "crown of glory" to those who shepherd God's flock with faithfulness.
- Philippians 4:1 and 1 Thessalonians 2:19 refer to

beloved believers that Paul calls his “crown of exultation (or rejoicing).”

All these crowns use the Greek word *stephanos*, which is the crown made of foliage and placed on the head of the victor of a competition.

But it can be made of precious metals as well. Rulers’ crowns symbolize dominion and authority over people, and sure enough, God’s rewards include dominion and authority:

Revelation 2:26—“He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron.” This goes along with one of the parables in Luke 19:17 where the master rewards the servant who was a faithful steward of his money; he says, “because you were faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.”

Revelation 2:17—In this book written to people undergoing persecution, Jesus promises, “To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name, written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”

We can also lose our rewards (2 John 8), and it’s possible for someone to take our crown (Revelation 3:11). So, no wonder God calls us to be faithful and persevering all the way to the end!

I’m so glad you asked this, because I’ve heard people say, “If those who become Christians as small children end up in the same place (heaven) as those who trust Christ moments before they die, then why spend your whole life serving God?” That’s because they don’t understand that what happens at the Judgment Seat of Christ will be very, very different for these two people. Our lives in heaven will be determined by the choices, sacrifices, and actions of earth. Some will be very wealthy, and others will be “barely there.” 1 Corinthians 3:15

says that the deeds of some people will be burned up, and they will suffer loss; they will be saved, but only as those escaping through the flames. It will be like watching your house burn to the ground with every single thing you own in it. . . lost. On the other hand, lots of people will see their works shown for the high quality that they are, and they will be rewarded exceedingly well because God is so generous.

I hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

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## **“I Am So Afraid—What If There Is No Heaven?”**

I am writing to you because I am very concerned and don't know where to turn for help. I am a Christian and have always felt I had a great deal of faith. I lost my father, my mother and an older sister over the years – and my faith sustained me during those traumatic times.

Recently our 38 year old daughter died quite suddenly. I am just overwhelmed with grief – and I believe the medications given her caused her sudden death. She had kidney problems – but her doctor was aware of that, and the med he gave her should not have been given to her because of her kidney problems.

Now I seem to have lost my faith completely. I cry and want so much to know she is OK and that she is not sad and lonely as we are here without her. I have begun to question if there really is a Heaven? I read recently that Heaven is something

Christians invented to take away their fear of death. Is this true? I also read a book called *Embraced by the Light* by Betty Eadie, and it really upset me. She claimed to have had an out of body experience where she went to Heaven, and then she wrote a whole book about what heaven is like – and the different levels there, and how one may stay at a lower level, or advance to a higher level.

I am so afraid – what if there is no Heaven? Or if there is, is my daughter sad and lonely because none of her family are there with her? I just don't know anymore what to believe. I try to pray – but find no peace. I am so afraid.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am so very, very sorry to hear of your tremendous loss. You must be in such shock you don't know how to "do life" at this point.

As a mother who has also lost a daughter, I want to encourage you in how the Lord comforted me. Most especially, I am comforted by the truth of Psalm 139:16—"All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be."

\_\_\_\_\_, your daughter didn't live one day less than God intended for her to live from before the foundations of the earth. It FEELS like a premature death to us who are left behind, but no one is more powerful than God, and HE is the one who determines the length of our days. So even though it is hugely painful and grievous, and even though it's tempting to blame the medications, she died on the day God knew she would die and planned for her to die. Not a day sooner, and not a day later.

Secondly, Jesus said He came from heaven (John 6:51). It is a real place. If there is no heaven, then Jesus lied. If Jesus lied, then he was not the holy Son of God, and His death was meaningless. If His death was meaningless, then none of us

have any hope. But our hope is REAL and TRUE! He died to make it possible for us to be united with God and reunited with our believing loved ones.

Paul said that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6,8). If your daughter trusted Christ, she is immersed in a living sea of light and love and glory, worshiping the Lord Jesus and enjoying the freedom that comes from being released from this fallen, decaying world. When she "graduated" from your womb to your arms, did you ever worry that she was lonely for the comfort of the dark, warm place inside you? I bet not! <smile> She was in a far, far better place when she was born. When people are in heaven, it's like graduating from the womb to our mother's arms only way, WAY better. Being with the Lord is so much better than this earth that we can't even begin to imagine it, any more than the pre-born infant can imagine what it's like to be nestled in her mother's arms, to look in her eyes, to see a glorious sunset, to listen to a symphony. To eat ice cream! To love and love back. . . all those things cannot be imagined in the womb, but they await the baby, just as the joys of heaven await us if we have trusted Christ as our Savior.

I want to suggest to you that you read Joni Eareckson Tada's wonderful book *Heaven*, because it will make you much more familiar with heaven and it will greatly comfort your heart. Unlike Betty Eadie's book [\*Embraced by the Light\*](#), Joni's book is TRUE and based completely on the Bible.

I pray you will know the warmth of God's comfort in growing measure as you grieve the loss of your daughter. One of the things that makes heaven so real to me is knowing that my daughter and my parents are there. I pray the realness of heaven will grow for you as well.

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin

# **“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

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## **“Who Are You to Say Who the TRUE God Is?”**

Who I am is irrelevant and this letter is meant with no intent on harming anyones feelings, as the matter of religious preferences is a very delicate one. I have to say that I was offended by [the advice given to a couple taking care of a young Wiccan](#). I came across this part, “tell her about what the TRUE God is like.” Now in all fairness who are you to say who the true God is??? Are you saying that all other religions are wrong? Maybe I am jumping to conclusions. This next sentence also grabbed my attention: “Those who refuse to acknowledge a personal devil are more vulnerable to spiritual warfare than anybody.” Now I realize that there is not one ultimate devil in Wicca, but there is one in Christianity.



Because this girl does not share your beliefs or even those of her parents, there is no need to tell this as advice to someone. The people of Wicca believe that evil is created by man-kind, but they still know it is there and try to use their gifts to do good and never harm anyone or thing. If a Wiccan uses their power to give anything bad or take anything good they are forbidden to use the craft and are no longer allowed in their coven to practice The Craft. Also I feel the need to point out that you do not need to practice 'Magik' to be Wiccan.

I have friends of all faiths, Christians, including people from Pentecostal, Mormon and Orthodox churches, Muslims, people from the Jewish faith and to no surprise I do know many Wiccans. I have to say that we all talk and share our different views on religion and I have never heard any one try to convince someone that their God is the true God or that because they do not believe in "Satan" they are "more vulnerable to spiritual warfare" than anybody. I just want you to think more clearly about what you are writing. I do not want to start an argument, I just wanted you to hear my views. I am sure I am not the only one who thinks this. One more thing, you also said, "We believe that there is one God." Well this is obvious as you are Christian as I believe it, but not everyone does think there is one God. Rather than trying to convert this girl shouldn't this couple have been told to tolerate her religious beliefs and help to practice it safely and carefully with the respect that she deserves. This girl does not have Christian beliefs, it should not be put upon her to change her mind and her beliefs. By all means use your faith to help people not change people.

Dear friend,

If you didn't like what we say on our website, you're probably not going to like my reply either. I am not seeking to offend you or anyone else, but it makes sense you would take offense given your worldview.

The root of the problem in the difference between our position and what you believe is our extremely different perception of religion and truth. I would guess that you see these issues like a restaurant menu where everyone can choose whatever they prefer, and it's inappropriate to tell the other diners that their choice of an entrée is wrong. Our perception of religion and of truth is more like a team of doctors looking at a patient's symptoms; when it's a matter of life and death, they'd better get the diagnosis right instead of merely settling for personal preference! ("Oh, it looks like acne to me." "Well, I think it's eczema, but you can call it acne if you want." "I know a melanoma when I see one, and this is skin cancer!" "Naw, cancer's too harsh a diagnosis, nobody likes to hear that, so I'm gonna stick with acne.")

Just as cancer will kill a person and thus a doctor does him no favors to tell him anything except the painful truth, our worldview is that man-made religions lead to spiritual death and only one—a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ—leads to life. We don't base this simply on our preference, but on historical evidence that God has spoken to us through His word and through Jesus Christ.

I know you were concerned at my advice to the couple who were caring for a girl who was dabbling in Wicca. If all religions were equally valid, then my advice would certainly be off-base. But we are staking our lives on the belief that they are not. For this couple to tolerate her religious beliefs when they are completely committed to the ultimate truth of Christianity would be like seeing a cancerous lesion on her skin and "tolerating" her skin condition by ignoring it. What appears to be kindness would end up being the cruelest thing in the world when they knew what would save her.

I know our worldview is unpopular in today's world, but we are convinced it is far more in alignment with reality than the one that says "everybody do what they want, it's all okay." We believe it's not okay.

It leads to a kind of spiritual death far worse than cancer.

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries