

Making Moral Choices – From A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson addresses making moral choices using the Bible and biblical principles, using both philosophical and practical approaches.

Love and Biblical Morality

✘ A Christian view of morality is based upon the assumption that God exists and has revealed Himself to the human race. He has chosen to reveal Himself in nature (Psalm 19, Romans 1) and in human conscience (Romans 2:14-15). He has also revealed Himself through the Bible (Psalm 119, 2 Timothy 3:16) and in the person of Jesus Christ (John 10:30, Hebrews 1:1-4).

God's character is the ultimate standard of right and wrong. And even though the Bible was written long before the development of genetic engineering or modern media, it nevertheless provides principles that can be used to evaluate the morality of social, scientific, and technological issues.

Biblical morality can be developed from learning to live God's way according to biblical principles. Though the Christian life is much more than a set of rules or principles, these principles do provide moral boundaries for behavior.

Biblical morality is also based upon love that has its source in God. Jesus was asked by the teachers of the law which was the most important commandment. "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'" The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as

yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

The two most important commandments are to love God and to love your neighbor. Essentially all biblical principles rest upon this foundation. And these principles can be found in God's revelation in the Bible. God's character as expressed in God's Word should be diligently applied to every area of life.

Jesus also taught Christians to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44-45): "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." As his opening phrase suggests, this was not the common practice of the day. In fact, it was completely contrary to the concept of love practiced in that day or even in our day.

The apostle Paul teaches that love is "the law of Christ" and thereby supreme and sufficient (Galatians 5:14; 6:2). He also teaches that love is the foundation of Christian obedience. Even if we manifest the gifts of the Spirit and do good works, they do not profit us unless they are done in love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

He also teaches that God shows His love to us in that Christ died for us (Romans 5:8) and that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 6:37-39). And this is not just a theological truth, but the "love of Christ controls us" (2 Corinthians 5:14) and provides us with an ability to live the Christian life.

Knowing God's Will

How do we make proper moral choices based upon biblical principles? The Bible does provide biblical guidelines on a vast array of issues. Christians also have the liberty to make individual moral choices in areas of moral neutrality. Ultimately, making moral choices involves discerning the will

of God in one's life.

Whole books have been written on how we can know the will of God, but we can summarize a few key principles here.

First, we can know God's will through the Bible. Before considering any other way to discern God's will, one should ask whether the Bible has already provided guidance in this area. The Bible is full of God's specific commands and principles.

A teenager doesn't have to ask if he should get drunk; the Bible has already addressed that issue (Ephesians 5:18). An unmarried couple doesn't need to ask if they should live together before they marry. Again, the Bible has addressed the topic (1 Corinthians 6:18).

The Bible provides boundaries and barriers to our moral actions. We are to stay within those moral boundaries. Paul, writing to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:6), told them "Do not go beyond what is written."

A second way we discern God's will is through prayer. We are commanded to bring our requests before God. In Philippians 4:6 we are told: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

If we are earnestly reading the Bible and seeking God's will, He will reveal it to us, often through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We read in Romans 8:27 that "The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

A third way we discern God's will is through our conscience. If our conscience is troubling us about a particular action or behavior, then we should refrain from that activity. Paul says that each person "must be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). He adds that "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

The opposite is not necessarily true. In other words, conscience is a good stop sign but not a green light. A troubled conscience is sufficient justification to refrain, and a guilty conscience is reason enough to stop a particular action or behavior.

A clear conscience is no justification for proceeding. The Bible teaches that, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). We can easily deceive ourselves into sin.

Christians should strive to have a good conscience before God and man (Acts 24:16). A troubled conscience is reason to avoid an action, but a clear conscience may not be sufficient justification to proceed.

Christian Liberty

What about times when the Bible does not clearly seem to speak to a particular action? These areas of moral neutrality are still governed by biblical principles that guide our Christian liberty.

Even though a particular action may not be prohibited in Scripture, it still may be offensive to others because of their social, ethnic, or religious background. Another person's family background or spiritual maturity is also a consideration Christians must make.

The Apostle Paul articulates the principles guiding our liberty in Romans 14-15. The specific example that he uses involves the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. While this issue is of no moral concern today, it does provide key biblical principles which we can apply in determining our response to issues not specifically addressed in the Bible.

The first principle is that Christians are not to have a judgmental attitude toward one another in regard to issues

that are morally neutral. 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 morally neutral activity, you should not be judgmental of the other person.

No one has the right to force their moral conclusions on others when the Bible does not provide clear principles on the matter. Paul asks in Romans 14:4, “Who are you to judge the servant of another?” Christians are instructed to decide these matters for themselves as they consult the Bible and their conscience.

Second, each Christian must decide what is right or wrong for him or her. Paul teaches that if you believe a particular action to be wrong for you, then it is wrong. He 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.”

He taught that all things were clean. In other words, there was no sin in eating meat sacrificed to idols (it was morally neutral). But he also teaches that if a person believes it is sinful to indulge in a practice, then it is indeed sinful for them.

Each person “must be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5). If there is doubt, then it is better to refrain from participating rather than engaging in what has become a sinful action for the person. Doubt or uncertainty is a sufficient reason to refrain from a particular activity or behavior.

A key test of Christian obedience is whether a person can do so “for the Lord” (Romans 14:6). Christians are to “live for the Lord” because “we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8). If one cannot participate in an activity while serving the Lord, then he or she should refrain. Paul says that “whatever is not from

faith is sin" (Romans 14:23).

A third principle is whether a morally neutral activity would be "an obstacle or a stumbling block" to another believer (Romans 14:13). Christians should be aware of their actions on the Christian walk of others around them. While we may have liberty in Christ to participate in an action or behavior, another believer might be offended or adversely affected by what we do.

Paul teaches that we have a moral responsibility to other believers. He says, "we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength" (Romans 15:1). In order to do so we may have to limit our Christian liberty.

At the same time there is a balance between enjoying our liberty in Christ and trying not to give offense. If one believes he or she can participate in an activity, then one should do so with that firm "conviction before God" (Romans 14:22). But it would be wise not to participate publicly but privately for the sake of a believer who might be hurt by one's actions (Romans 14:15).

A final principle is how a particular action or behavior will affect the individual believer's walk with the Lord. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:12 that; "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything."

Although these morally neutral practices are lawful, they may not be profitable and could actually master (or enslave) a person. There is nothing in the Bible about such things as poor nutrition, addiction to caffeine, or watching lots of television, yet most would agree that such behaviors are not profitable. In fact, they are frequently debilitating to the individual. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that whether "you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."

Honesty and Biblical Morality

Although the Bible admonishes us to be honest and to tell the truth, honesty seems to be at an all-time low. One study of high school students found that 71 percent of them admitted to cheating on an exam at least once in the last twelve months. And 92 percent of them said they lied to their parents in the last twelve months while 79 percent said they did so two or more times. So what does the Bible say about honesty and truth?

The Old Testament calls upon the people of God to deal honestly with one another. Leviticus 9:35 says "You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity." Likewise, Proverbs 11:1 warns that "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord." Believers are to use honest weights and be honest in their dealings with others.

A righteous person does not "take a bribe against the innocent" (Psalm 15:5). Isaiah (5:23) pronounces judgment on those "who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right."

The New Testament admonishes Christians to "have a good conscience" and desire to conduct themselves "honorably in all things" (Hebrews. 13:18). Paul said he attempted to always maintain "a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men" (Acts 24:16). Christians should "have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Corinthians 8:21).

Honesty also requires telling the truth. The Ten Commandments forbids both the swearing of false oaths and the bearing of false testimony (Exodus 20:7, 16; Deuteronomy 5:11, 20; cf. Leviticus 19:12; Jeremiah 7:9). In the Old Testament, false witnesses were to suffer the same punishment that they had hoped to inflict upon the others (Deuteronomy 19:16-21).

Telling the truth also involved more than false testimony in a court. Believers are not to spread false reports (Proverbs 12:17; 14:5, 25) or report the truth maliciously or engage in slander (Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 26:20).

Speaking evil is prohibited (Psalm 34:13; Proverbs 24:28; Ephesians 4:31; James 4:11; 1 Peter 3:10), and it disqualifies a person from God's favor (Psalm 15:3) and from a leadership position in the church (1 Timothy 3:8; Titus 2:3).

In the Old Testament, oaths and vows were used many times. Abraham (Genesis 21:22-34), Jacob (Genesis 25:33; 28:20), Joseph (Genesis 50:5), Joshua (Joshua 6:26), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:11), Saul (1 Samuel 14:24), David (1 Samuel 20:17), Ezra (Ezra 10:5), and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:25) all swore oaths or vows. The swearing of these oaths and vows underscores the seriousness of telling the truth and following up on one's commitment.

We need truth telling today like never before. Perhaps the greatest battle in society today is a battle over truth. Voters are skeptical of politicians. Proponents of various biomedical procedures (abortion, cloning) often redefine terms and mislead the public about the true nature of the procedures they advocate. We need Christians to set an example by being honest and telling the truth.

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Understanding Our Mormon

Neighbors – As Evangelical Christians

Mormon missionaries are sounding more and more like evangelical Christians. Has something changed in Mormon theology? A group of evangelical theologians have opened a dialogue with their Mormon counterparts and argue that the LDS movement is indeed changing. Don Closson considers these changes in Mormon thinking and how it affects our dialogue with our Mormon neighbors.

Mormon Neo-orthodoxy?

Have you noticed that Mormons are sounding more and more like evangelical Christians? In the last few decades individuals inside the Mormon Church, and many outside, have noticed a shift in the content and presentation of the Mormon faith. Certain aspects of Mormon theology, like the physical, limited nature of God, are either downplayed or left unsaid. Other aspects, like salvation by faith in the justifying work of Jesus Christ, are highlighted. Is something significant happening within Mormonism? Although Mormon theology has been somewhat fluid over the decades, some feel that a new band of Mormon scholars are indeed moving the religion in a new direction and that Christians need to be aware of these changes if we are to have effective dialogue with our Mormon neighbors.

Mormon sociologist Kendall White has been writing about this change in Mormon thinking since the 1960's. He writes that traditional Mormon theology produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by B. H. Roberts, James Talmage, and John Widtsoe, centered on an "optimistic humanism, finite theism, and [an] emphasis on human merit in attaining salvation."^[1] The new movement, called neo-orthodox Mormonism by some, "stresses the omnipotence and sovereignty of God,

human sinfulness and inability to merit salvation, and the necessity of salvation by grace.”^{2} The primary theological sources for neo-orthodox Mormons are the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The later writings of Joseph Smith, including sections of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the King Follett Discourse are seen as less helpful.

White argues that this theological trend is actually a return to the earliest form of Mormon beliefs found in the 1830s. It’s interesting to note that, while White admits that Mormon neo-orthodoxy is a valid form of Mormonism, he’s not in favor of it. On the other hand, Robert Millet, past dean of Religious Education at Brigham Young University, argues that the neo-orthodox movement is a positive trend and more in line with the teachings found in the Book of Mormon.

In the book *The New Mormon Challenge* evangelical theologian Carl Mosser writes that neo-orthodox Mormons “promote an understanding of the relationship between works and grace that is openly modeled after noted evangelical pastor John MacArthur’s expositions of ‘Lordship salvation.’”^{3} Mosser also argues that it is these neo-orthodox Mormon writers and teachers who are influencing typical Mormons today rather than those who support a more traditional Mormon theology.

The result is a new Mormon synthesis that may cause the traditional Christian to ask himself, Have the Mormons returned to the historic orthodox Christian faith? In what follows we will highlight some of this new Mormon theology in order to help the reader decide how orthodox neo-orthodox Mormonism really is.

Recent Events and Historical Patterns

It was a bit of a shock recently when I discovered that Ravi Zacharias, a highly respected Christian apologist, had addressed a mixed crowd of Mormons and evangelicals at the

Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City. Even more interesting is the fact that after his hour long discussion on the exclusivity of Christ, Zacharias received a standing ovation from the entire crowd. The apologist was introduced by Dr. Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary. Dr. Mouw began his comments by saying "Let me state it clearly, We evangelicals have sinned against you . . ." He added that not every evangelical has sinned against Mormons, but he feels that too often we are guilty of misrepresenting what most Mormons believe and ignoring their pleas when they protest. He went on to argue that traditional Christians and Mormons have enough in common to profit from a dialogue. He explained that, "when my good friend [and Brigham Young University professor] Bob Millet says that his only plea when he gets to heaven is 'the mercy and merit of Jesus Christ,' I want to respond by saying with enthusiasm, 'Let's keep talking!'" Topped off with the music of Michael Card, this was a unique event. It had been over 100 years since the last evangelical spoke in the Temple; Dwight L. Moody preached there in 1871.

When considering the traditionally negative view that evangelical Christians have of Mormons, this kind of event can be difficult to evaluate. Also challenging are the results of a recent George Barna survey that found 26% of those Mormons that participated were classified as "born again" by their responses. How can this be? Are all these Mormons being disingenuous regarding their true beliefs? Part of the answer lies in the fact that at any given moment there are more first generation converts within Mormonism than there are second generation. Since Mormon evangelism is primarily aimed at the Christian population, it is not surprising that many who attend Mormon worship services have carried with them a more traditional theology and are often there because of the youth programs and the accepting community that often exists within Mormon Wards.

But another part of the explanation is a movement within

Mormon circles that began with the presidency of Ezra Taft Benson. It has called Mormons back to their roots by focusing more on the Bible and the Book of Mormon and away from the later writings of Joseph Smith. The leaders of this movement have worked hard to distance themselves from the more speculative thoughts and writings of past LDS authorities.

Many evangelicals are hoping that the Mormon Church will go through something similar to the recent changes in the Reorganized Latter Day Saints Church. This group was an early offshoot from the main LDS Church which never did accept many of the later writings of Smith. In recent years, its numbers have declined significantly because many have turned back towards a traditional evangelical theology.

The Mormon Neo-Orthodox Movement

Stephen Robinson is professor of ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. He and Craig Blomberg, professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, co-wrote the book "How Wide the Divide" which explores both the similarities and distance between evangelical and Mormon theology regarding revelation, the nature of God, the person of Christ, and what one must do to be saved. Robinson passionately implores evangelicals to not give into a caricature of Mormon theology, one that few Mormons actually believe. He argues that there are legitimate reasons for misunderstanding between Mormons and evangelicals. They both use identical theological terms in different ways; in fact the LDS Church as a whole lacks a sophisticated theological language. Also, Mormonism's lack of professional clergy, creeds, catechisms, or theologians in the strict sense often contributes to the confusion.

In his book with Blomberg, Robinson complains that Mormons are chastised because they take the Bible too literally, actually believing everything in it that is written about God. He accuses evangelicals of accepting second and third century

explanations of biblical truth that are dependent upon Greek philosophical thought rather than on what the Bible actually says. Both Blomberg and Robinson agree that the two sides hold to a very different description of God and humanity. But they also conclude that many of our differences are found in areas where the Bible is silent and where the Mormon canon has claimed to fill in the void with new revelation.

However, Robinson's greatest concern is that evangelicals take him and other Mormons seriously when they claim to believe certain things to be true. For instance, Robinson believes that "through the atonement of Christ, fallen humanity may be saved by accepting and obeying the gospel of Jesus Christ."[\[4\]](#) He also argues that Mormons believe in the God of the Bible, "the Eternal Father, and in God's Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost."[\[5\]](#) He adds that they accept the biblical description of God as three and also one, but not the post-New Testament attempts to explain how this can be reconciled.

It would be more than impolite to accuse Dr. Robinson of being less than genuine when he personally claims to believe something. However, he admits that there is much theological speculation within Mormon circles and that it can be difficult to discover exactly what represents official Mormon doctrine.

Let's consider some specific examples of Dr. Robinson's beliefs and compare them to both traditional Mormon and Christian theology.

Robinson describes God as omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. However, he also believes that God and man are of the same nature or species, and that God has a body of flesh and blood. He denies that this constitutes a finite theism, a charge often attributed to Mormons. Robinson also states that salvation is only acquired through grace by faith in Jesus Christ. He argues at length that Mormons do not believe that one can be justified by works in the eyes of a righteous and Holy God, but instead that works follow

justification and conversion. He attributes evangelical claims that Mormons believe otherwise to confusion about Mormon terminology and a deficient desire to really understand what Mormons teach.

How do these theological positions compare with traditional Mormon thought? Is this a new or neo-orthodox Mormonism? Mormonism has always held that God has attained his position via a path of eternal progression, and comments to that effect by past Mormon leaders seem to conflict with Robinson's statements. For instance, when Mormon Apostle Orson Hyde said that God was once a child who rose step by step to be where he is today, it appears to contradict the idea of an unchangeable deity. Apostle John Widtsoe states the issue even more plainly. He says that God "must now be engaged in progressive development and infinite as God is, he must have been less powerful in the past than he is today."[\[6\]](#)

Robinson argues that there was once a time, before the beginning of our creation, that God was human. But he adds that any speculation about the events of that time is done so without support from the Bible or LDS literature. Robinson is different from earlier Mormons in being unwilling to speculate on how, or even when God rose from a finite human to an infinite God, but he still believes that it happened.

Robinson's beliefs about God are dramatically different from traditional Christian, and I believe biblical, teachings. The Mormon god is contingent or dependent on matter rather than its creator. He is finite in the sense that there was a time when he was not God, no matter how long ago that might have been. He is obviously not the First Cause or only self-existent being. Even though Robinson refuses to speculate on the origin of God, Mormon views imply that God is the offspring of other Gods, leading to polytheism which the Bible calls idolatry. As God said through Isaiah long ago, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God."[\[7\]](#)

Are Mormons Christian?

Above we introduced ideas about salvation from the Mormon scholar Dr. Stephen Robinson, professor of Ancient Scriptures at Brigham Young University. He states that individuals are saved by accepting the gift God has provided in his perfect Son, Jesus Christ. Robinson believes that “If humans accept this gift and enter the gospel covenant by making Christ their Lord, they are justified of their sins, not by their own works and merits, but by the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ accepted on their behalf.”[\[8\]](#) He admits that the LDS Church is thoroughly Arminian, rejecting the Calvinist doctrine of eternal security, but that this shouldn’t remove them from the sphere of biblical Christianity.

While not doubting that Dr. Robinson believes all this to be true, it is difficult to interpret Mormon doctrine in light of past statements by Mormon leaders and in Mormon writings. For instance, how do we interpret the Book of Mormon when it states “for we know that it is by grace we are saved, after all we can do”?[\[9\]](#) Or when Joseph Smith writes “We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel”?[\[10\]](#) Even more disconcerting are statements made by Bruce McConkie, a popular Mormon writer. He writes that, “Repentance is a gift from God conferred upon those who earn the right to receive it. It comes by obedience to law.” And again, he writes, it is a gift “reserved for those who abide the law that entitles them to receive it.”[\[11\]](#) These statements point to an earned salvation based upon individuals fulfilling legalistic obligations, the kind of religion that Paul condemns in the book of Galatians.

Mormon teaching tools, such as the booklet *Gospel Principles*, also make statements that appear to contradict a gospel of grace. In a chapter titled “Freedom to Choose” the book states, “We began to make choices as spirit children in our

Heavenly Father's presence. Our choices there made us worthy to come to earth. Our heavenly Father wants us to grow in faith, power, knowledge, wisdom, and all other good things. If we keep his commandments and make right choices, we will learn and understand. We will become like him."[\[12\]](#) Not only does this teach that salvation depends on works during this life, but also on works performed during a pre-existence as spirit beings.

In spite of the recent changes in Mormon theology, a person who holds to the full spectrum of Mormon teachings has a view of God, salvation, and particularly the relationship between mankind and its creator, that is radically different from what traditional Christians believe and what we think the Bible teaches. This is not a reason to stop talking with Mormons; in fact, it is why we need to continue to express the reasons for the hope that we have in Christ.

Notes

1. Carl Mosser, *The New Mormon Challenge*, ed. By Francis Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) p. 78.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 79.
4. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide* (InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL., 1997) p. 16.
5. Ibid.
6. Bill McKeever and Eric Johnson, *Mormonism 101* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2000) p. 28.
7. Isaiah 45:5
8. Blomberg and Robinson, 144.
9. 2 Nephi 25:23
10. Blomberg and Robinson, 177.
11. Ibid., 178.
12. *Gospel Principles* (Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), p. 19.

What Happens After Death? A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran brings a biblical perspective to a question we all would like to know: what happens to me after I die? He looks to the Bible to determine what we can and cannot know about our life after we pass out of our present bodies.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Differing Perspectives on Death

For the entire existence of mankind, we have struggled with the question, “What happens after death?” Our answer to this dilemma has great implications for our life here on earth. Although many avoid the issue, we must sooner or later address the question. There are many competing answers to this question.

Atheists believe that at death one ceases to exist. There is no afterlife or eternal soul that continues in eternity. All there is to look forward to is our inevitable death, the future death of mankind, and the universe. It is in the face of this future that the atheist must seek to find meaning and purpose for his own existence.

The Eastern and New Age religions that hold to a pantheistic worldview teach that one goes through an endless cycle of reincarnation until the cycle is broken and the person becomes one with the divine. What form a person becomes in the next life depends on the quality of life lived in the previous

life. When one unites with the divine, he ceases to exist as an individual, but becomes part of the divine life force, like a drop of water returning to the ocean.

Those who hold to the animistic or tribal religions believe that after death the human soul remains on the earth or travels to join the departed spirits of the ancestors in the underworld, also called the realm of the shadows. For eternity they wander in darkness, experiencing neither joy nor sorrow. Some of the spirits of the deceased may be called upon to aid or torment those on earth.

Islam teaches that at the end of history, God will judge the works of all men. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds will enter into paradise. The rest will be consigned to hell. The Koran teaches that in paradise men will be drinking wine and entertained by heavenly maidens and that they may take several of these maidens for their wives.

Most worldviews must accept their belief in the afterlife on *untested* faith, but the Christian hope is sure for two reasons; the resurrection of Christ and the testimony of God's Word. The Bible gives us the true view of what happens after death. However, many Christians have a misunderstanding of the afterlife. Some believe that they become one of the angels, others believe they go into a state of "soul sleep," while others believe they will be floating on clouds playing harps. In this article, we will examine some popular misconceptions of what lies beyond the grave and perceive what the Bible teaches.

Christians can be assured that death is not something to be feared. Instead, at death we arrive home in heaven. To live means we exist in a foreign country. Death has lost its sting and now is a victory through the resurrection of Jesus our Lord.

Near Death Experiences

For the past thirty years, thousands of people have reported experiencing what are called near death experiences (NDEs). NDEs are encounters where a person, being in full awareness, leaves the body and enters another world. Such experiences have resulted in life transformation in many individuals. What are we to make of these accounts?

Let us understand that NDEs come from those who have been *clinically* dead, not *biologically* dead. In clinical death, external life signs such as consciousness, pulse, and breathing cease. In such cases, biological death results if no steps are taken to reverse the process. Biological death, on the other hand, is not affected by any amount of attention, for it is physically irreversible.^[1]

The NDE accounts occur at various stages of clinical death. Some occur when the patient is comatose, very close to death, or pronounced clinically dead. Other accounts occur when the patient's heart stops beating. Others occur while the patient's brain ceases to register any activity on the EEG monitor. There have not been any cases of biological or irreversible death for a significant amount of time followed by a resurrection.

What has intrigued scientists and theologians in their study of NDEs is that many of the patients have similar experiences. These include leaving the body and watching from above as doctors work on it, entering a dark tunnel, seeing light, seeing others, meeting a spirit being, experiencing peace, and then returning to the body.

Scientists and doctors from various worldviews have sought to explain this phenomenon. Those from an atheistic worldview have sought to give naturalistic explanations. Their explanations range from hallucination induced by medication, chemical reactions the brain experiences in near death crises,

previous encounters long forgotten, and others. These fall short of explaining NDE events.

Many NDEs have occurred without medication. Drowning victims are one example. Also, thousands of NDE victims were able to clearly describe places and people with exact detail while they were clinically dead. One girl, while near dead, was able to describe what her family did that night at home, what was made for dinner, where everyone sat and even what was said. Others were able to describe in detail objects in rooms nearby and far away from them. One patient described a shoe on the rooftop of a hospital. When the nurses looked, they found the shoe exactly as described. A boy in an accident involving his brother and mother told those around him moments before he died, "They are waiting for me now." The doctor discovered that at that exact time in another hospital the boy's mother and brother had just died. Dr. Gary Habermas and J.P. Moreland provide a comprehensive discussion of NDEs in their book *Beyond Death*, arguing that naturalistic explanations cannot satisfactorily explain the events that occur in NDEs.

NDEs may not conclusively prove there is a heaven or hell, but they do indicate that at death the soul separates from the body, and that a person's spirit is conscious and coherent at death.

However, NDEs do not accurately reflect what lies beyond the grave. NDEs deal with accounts that give a short glimpse behind the curtain of death and therefore they give us an incomplete picture. Colossians 1:18 tells us that Jesus "is the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." Christ overcame biological death and lives forevermore as ruler over all creation. His supremacy over everything was established through His resurrection. Also, we know that Satan masquerades as an angel of light and can produce counterfeit appearances. It is imperative that we evaluate all experiences in light of Scripture.

Can We Communicate with the Dead?

Do the spirits of the dead have the ability to communicate with the living? One of the most popular current TV shows is "Crossing Over," with psychic John Edward. He, like other psychics, claims to have the ability to communicate with the spirits of the deceased. He amazes spectators with his ability to reveal details about which only the deceased loved one may have known. From this communication, people attempt to receive comfort, advice, and encouragement.

The Bible teaches that communication with the dead is not possible. Throughout the Bible God commands His people not to indulge in the practice of necromancy, the art of communicating with the dead.

Deuteronomy 18:10-11 states,

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead . . .

The Canaanites consulted spirits and the dead in hopes of gaining power and predicting future events. This practice is an abomination to God and it is for this reason the Canaanites were ejected from the land. Israel was warned not to imitate the Canaanites or they too would suffer a similar fate.

Contacting the dead is forbidden because the spirits of the dead cannot contact the living. In Luke 16, the rich man who was suffering in hell sought a way to communicate with his living family to warn them of their fate. However, he was not able to communicate in any way nor could the living communicate with him.

Who, then, are mediums and spiritists contacting? If they are indeed contacting a spiritual being, it is most likely a demonic counterfeit. Although the demonic spirit may

communicate some truths, the ultimate intention of the spirit is to deceive and take one away from the Lord. This practice can ultimately lead to demonic possession and injury to the person.

In Acts 16:16 Paul encountered girl who could predict the future because a spirit possessed her. Knowing this, Paul eventually cast the spirit out of the girl. Throughout the Bible the practice of necromancy is forbidden.

Some will try to defend necromancy by pointing to 1 Samuel 28. Here Saul requests the Witch of Endor to call up Samuel from the grave. The spirit of Samuel arises and delivers a prophetic message to Saul. Bible scholars take two views on this. Some believe it was a demonic counterfeit masquerading as Samuel. I believe since the prophecy given came to pass, this was indeed Samuel the prophet. Despite Saul's disobedience to God, God made an exception here.

Whichever view you take, it is clear this verse does not encourage one to consult mediums. Saul at this point in his life was out of God's will and because the Spirit of God had left him, he could not receive any word from God. In desperation, he disobeyed God as was the pattern of his life and suffered the consequence. His story teaches us a lesson and is not an example to follow.

One Minute After Death

What happens when we breathe our final breath? The Bible teaches what will occur.

First our immaterial soul and spirit will be separated from our physical body. Second, we will immediately receive the judgment that will determine our eternal destiny. Those who have trusted in Christ's payment on the cross for our sins will enter into eternal life in the presence of God. 2 Corinthians 5:8 states, "We are confident, I say, and would

prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." There will be no delay in a state of unconsciousness many call "soul sleep." We will immediately be in God's presence.

Second, the soul in heaven is made perfect in holiness and our old sin nature is eradicated. Hebrews 12:23 mentions "the spirits of righteous men made perfect." The spirits of the saints are in heaven and they have been made perfect. The struggle with sin that Paul described and all Christians fight comes to an end forever when we, after death, enter our glorified state.

Those who reject this gift, will receive what they have chosen, eternity separated from God in Hell. Hebrews 9:27 states, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." There is no second chance and there is no cycle of reincarnation. Our eternal destiny is determined by the decision we make for Christ here on earth.

Many assume that after receiving Christ all that remains is a joyful entrance into heaven. Scripture teaches that Jesus will reward us according to how we lived our life on earth. He taught this principle in the parable of the talents in Luke 19. Each servant was entrusted to administer the talents the master gave him. Upon the return of the master, each servant had to give an account for his stewardship. The wise servants were rewarded doubly while the wicked servant was removed.

The lesson for the Christian is that each of us will give an account for our time here on earth. This is not the same as being judged on our salvation status. Christ's death on the cross allows all who believe to enter God's kingdom. We will be judged on our works done since the time of our salvation. This judgment of believers is called the *Bema Seat judgment*. This event is described in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15:

No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the

foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work, which he has built upon it, remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

Paul states that Christ is our foundation. Our works are the building on this foundation. The materials of gold, silver, and precious stones refer to works done with pure motives for the glory of God. The works of wood, hay, and straw are works done with the wrong motives to glorify self.

At the Bema Seat, our works will be tested with divine fire. Those works that were done for the glory of God will endure the flames and will be our reward. Some will regretfully see all their works on earth burned up before their eyes and enter heaven with little or no reward.

The unbeliever will be judged and sentenced to hell. At the end of the age, he faces the Great White Throne judgment. Here, all the unrighteous dead from the beginning of time are judged based on their rejection of the Savior. They are then thrown into the lake of fire for eternity. Revelation 20:11-15 says:

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened; . . . and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. . . . And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Knowing that as Christians we will one day give an account for

our lives, we should live as wise stewards over what God has given us. Knowing the fate of the unsaved should fill us with boldness to share Christ unashamedly, with urgency to all. Knowing what lies beyond the grave should motivate us to live life on earth with a mission.

What Will We Be Like in Heaven?

Upon our physical death, the soul is separated from the body and enters immediately into the presence of the Lord. Looking again at Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:8, he says, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." The soul in heaven is made perfect in holiness and our old sin nature is eradicated. As discussed above, Hebrews 12:23 mentions "the spirits of righteous men made perfect." The spirits of the saints are in heaven and they have been made perfect. The struggle that Paul and all Christians fight with sin comes to an end forever when we, after death, enter our glorified state.

We will not remain in heaven as a soul without a body. At God's appointed time, there will be a final resurrection where the spirit will be unified with the resurrected body. Although Christians have various views on when this resurrection will take place, we all agree on the resurrection of the body. What will the resurrected body look like?

Philippians 3:20-21 says, "And we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." 1 John 3:2 promises, "But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

From these two passages we know that our glorified bodies will be like that of Christ. We will not be deified, but we will have the same qualities of His resurrection body. First, our heavenly bodies will be our glorified earthly bodies. Christ's

body that died on the cross was the same one that was resurrected. His glorified body was able to travel through walls, appear suddenly, and ascend to heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:1 reads, “[W]e have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” The hands of God will make the resurrected body. 1 Corinthians 15:39-40, 42b-43 tells us:

All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. . . . The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

In answering the mockers of the resurrection, Paul explains that our heavenly bodies will possess flesh that is of a different variety than our earthly ones. They will be bodies of flesh, but as different from our earthly bodies as humans are from animals.

We further conclude that, like a seed, the body will be sown or buried and then one day be raised to life. It is buried in death, decay, weakness, and dishonor. When it is resurrected, it will be changed in every way. It is raised imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. We will then have eternal, permanent, and perfected bodies.

We will also maintain our identities. In Luke 16:23, Lazarus, the rich man, and Abraham all retained their identity. Imagine, one day we will no longer struggle with the weakness of sin, sickness, and aging. A great future is in store for those in Christ.

What Will We Do in Heaven?

What will we do in heaven for all eternity? Some envision playing golf for eternity, while others envision saints floating on clouds strumming harps of gold. Although great thoughts, they fall short of the glorious future that actually awaits those in Christ. We are told relatively little about what activities will occur in heaven. We are only given a brief glimpse of our life to come.

First, the moment that saints of all the ages anticipate is seeing the Lord they served face to face. This will be the first and greatest moment after physical death. From then on we will have fellowship in His presence for all eternity.

Second, our life in heaven involves worship. A vivid picture is found in Revelation 19:1-5:

After this I heard what seemed to be the mighty voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. . . ." And again they shouted, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah." Then a voice came from the throne saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him both small and great."

Like the sound of roaring waters comes the praise from the saints of all ages. Recently the men from our church described the experience of singing the hymn How Great Thou Art at a Promise Keepers conference. Nothing they said could accurately describe that majestic experience. The closest they could come to putting it into words was, "Awesome! Just awesome!" Can you imagine what it will be like when we sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" along with the saints of all ages in the presence of God? Our worship here is preparation for our future, grand worship in

heaven.

Third is the aspect of rest. Heavenly rest here does not mean a cessation from activity, but the experience of reaching a goal of crucial importance. In Hebrews 4:9-11 the writer, addressing the people of God states, "There remains, then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." Heaven is the final goal reached after our pilgrimage here on earth. We will rest from our sufferings and struggles against sickness, the flesh, the world, and the devil.

Fourth, we will serve the Lord. Luke 19:11-27 teaches a parable about stewardship. The wise servants who multiplied their master's talents were given rule over ten and five cities. Revelation 22:3 tells us, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him." In 1 Corinthians 6:3 Paul rebukes the carnal Christians who cannot settle their own disputes and asks them, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" In Revelation 3:21 the Lord Jesus promises, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne." Apparently we will be given authority over a sphere in God's eternal kingdom. How much we are given depends on our faithfulness to Him on this earth.

Fifth, we will experience fellowship with God and with one another. One of the most painful experiences in life is to say goodbye. Whether it is to see loved ones move to another residence or because of death, farewells are a painful time. For the Christian, there is hope in knowing, our goodbyes are not permanent. One day we will meet again and this time we will never say goodbye again. What awaits the believer after death is a glorious future that cannot truly be imagined!

Notes

1. Gary Habermas & J.P. Moreland, *Beyond Death* (Wheaton, Ill.:

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7 Questions Skeptics Ask About the Validity of Christianity

Rusty Wright considers some common questions skeptics ask about our belief in Christianity. He shows us how to answer these questions from an informed biblical worldview.

Questions of Faith

Picture the scene. You're discussing your faith with a coworker or neighbor, perhaps over lunch or coffee. You explain your beliefs but your friend questions:

How could a loving God allow evil and suffering? The Bible is full of contradictions. What about people who've never heard of Jesus?

How do you feel about these questions and objections? Anxious? Confused? Defensive? Combative?

Sensitively and appropriately answering questions that skeptics ask you can be an important part of helping them to

consider Jesus. Peter told us, "In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."[{1}](#) This series looks at seven common questions skeptics ask and gives you some pointers on how to respond. Consider first a story.

As the flight from Chicago to Dallas climbed in the sky, I became engrossed in conversation with the passenger to my left. "Aimee," a French businesswoman, asked me about my work. On learning I was a Christian communicator, she related that a professing Christian had signed a contract with her, attempted to lead her to Christ, then later deceitfully undercut her. "How could a Christian do such a thing?" she asked.

I told her that Christians weren't perfect, that some fail miserably, that many are honest and caring, but that it is Jesus we ultimately trust. Aimee asked question after question: "How can you believe the Bible?" "Why do Christians say there is only one way to God?" "How does one become a Christian?"

I tried to answer her concerns tactfully and explained the message of grace as clearly as I could. Stories I told of personal pain seemed to open her up to consider God's love for her. She did not come to Christ in that encounter, but she seemed to leave it with a new understanding.

Hurting people everywhere need God. Many are open to considering Him, but they often have questions they want answered before they are willing to accept Christ. As Christian communicators seek to blend grace with truth,[{2}](#) an increasing number of skeptics may give an ear and become seekers or believers.

As you interact with skeptics, compliment them where you can. Jesus complimented the skeptical Nathanael for his pursuit of truth.[{3}](#) Listen to their concerns. Your listening ear speaks

volumes. It may surprise you to learn that your attitude can be just as important as what you know.

Dealing with Objections

How do you deal with questions and objections to faith that your friends may pose?

When I was a skeptical student, my sometimes-relentless questions gave my Campus Crusade for Christ friends at Duke University plenty of practice! I wanted to know if Christianity was true. After trusting Christ as Savior, I still had questions.

Bob Prall, the local Campus Crusade director, took interest in me. At first his answers irritated me, but as I thought them through they began to make sense. For two years I followed him around campus, watching him interact. Today, as I am privileged to encounter inquisitive people around the globe, much of my speech and manner derive from my mentor.

Consider some guidelines. Pray for wisdom, for His love for inquirers^{4} and for your questioner's heart. If appropriate, briefly share the gospel first. The Holy Spirit may draw your friends to Christ. Don't push, though. It may be best to answer their questions first.

Some questions may be intellectual smokescreens. Once a Georgia Tech philosophy professor peppered me with questions, which I answered as best I could.

Then I asked him, "If I could answer all your questions to your satisfaction, would you put your life in Jesus' hands?" His reply: "[Expletive deleted] no!"

Okay. This first objection is one you might have heard:

1. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.

I once gave a speech arguing *for* this proposition. Later, I reconsidered. In the 1960s, many women took the drug thalidomide seeking easier pregnancies. Often they delivered deformed babies. Sincerely swallowing two white pills may cure your headache if the pills are aspirin. If they are roach poison, results may differ.

After discussing this point, a widely respected psychologist told me, "I guess a person could be sincere in what he or she believed, but be sincerely wrong." Ultimately faith is only as valid as its object. Jesus demonstrated by His life, death and resurrection that He is a worthy object for faith.[{5}](#)

Focus on Jesus. Bob Prall taught me to say, "I don't have answers to every question. But if my conclusion about Jesus is wrong, I have a bigger problem. What do I do with the evidence for His resurrection, His deity and the prophecies He fulfilled? And what do I do with changed lives, including my own?"

I don't have complete answers to every concern you will encounter, but in what follows I'll outline some short responses that might be useful.

The second question is:

2. Why is there evil and suffering?

Sigmund Freud called religion an illusion that humans invent to satisfy their security needs. To him, a benevolent, all-powerful God seemed incongruent with natural disasters and human evil.

God, though sovereign, gave us freedom to follow Him or to disobey Him. Oxford scholar C.S. Lewis estimated that eighty percent of human suffering stems from human choice. Lewis called pain "God's megaphone" that alerts us to our need for Him.[{6}](#) This response does not answer all concerns (because God sometimes does intervene to thwart evil) but it suggests

that the problem of evil is not as great an intellectual obstacle to belief as some imagine.

Pain's emotional barrier to belief, however, remains formidable. When I see God, items on my long list of questions for Him will include a painful and unwanted divorce, betrayal by trusted coworkers, and all sorts of disappointing human behavior and natural disasters. Yet in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection^{7} I have seen enough to trust Him when He says He "causes all things to work together for good to those who love God."^{8}

3. What about those who never hear of Jesus?

Moses said, "The secret things belong to the LORD."^{9} Some issues may remain mysteries. God's perfect love and justice far exceed our own. Whatever He decides will be loving and fair. One can make a case that God will make the necessary information available to someone who wants to know Him. An example: Cornelius, a devout military official. The New Testament records that God assigned Peter to tell him about Jesus.^{10}

A friend once told me that many asking this question seek a personal loophole, a way so they won't need to believe in Christ. That statement angered me, but it also described me. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* wrote, "If you are worried about the people outside [of faith in Christ], the most unreasonable thing you can do is to remain outside yourself."^{11} If Christianity is true, the most logical behavior for someone concerned about those without Christ's message would be to trust Christ and go tell them about Him.

Here's a tip: When someone asks you a difficult question, if you don't know the answer, admit it. Many skeptics appreciate honesty. Don't bluff. It's dishonest and often detectable.

4. What about all the contradictions in the Bible?

Ask your questioner for specific examples of contradictions. Often people have none, but rely on hearsay. If there is a specific example, consider these guidelines as you respond.

Omission does not necessarily create contradiction. Luke, for example, writes of two angels at Jesus' tomb after the Resurrection.[{12}](#) Matthew mentions "an angel."[{13}](#) Is this a contradiction? If Matthew stated that only one angel was present, the accounts would be dissonant. As it stands, they can be harmonized.

Differing accounts aren't necessarily contradictory. Matthew and Luke, for example, differ in their accounts of Jesus' birth. Luke records Joseph and Mary starting in Nazareth, traveling to Bethlehem (Jesus' birthplace), and returning to Nazareth.[{14}](#) Matthew starts with Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, relates the family's journey to Egypt to escape King Herod's rage, and recounts their travel to Nazareth after Herod's death.[{15}](#) The Gospels never claim to be exhaustive records. Biographers must be selective. The accounts seem complementary, not contradictory.

Time precludes more complex examples here. But time and again, supposed biblical problems fade in light of logic, history, and archaeology. The Bible's track record under scrutiny argues for its trustworthiness.

5. Isn't Christianity just a psychological crutch?

My mentor Bob Prall has often said, "If Christianity is a psychological crutch, then Jesus Christ came because there was an epidemic of broken legs." Christianity claims to meet real human needs such as those for forgiveness, love, identity and self-acceptance. We might describe Jesus not as a crutch but an iron lung, essential for life itself.

Christian faith and its benefits can be described in psychological terms but that does not negate its validity. "Does it work?" is not the same question as, "Is it true?"

Evidence supports Christianity's truthfulness, so we would expect it to work in individual lives, as millions attest.

A caution as you answer questions: Don't offer "proof" but rather evidences for faith. "Proof" can imply an airtight case, which you don't have. Aim for certainty "beyond a reasonable doubt," just as an attorney might in court.

Don't quarrel. Lovingly and intelligently present evidence to willing listeners, not to win arguments but to share good news. Be kind and gentle.[{16}](#) Your life and friendship can communicate powerfully.

6. How can Jesus be the only way to God?

When I was in secondary school, a recent alumnus visited, saying he had found Christ at Harvard. I respected his character and tact and listened intently. But I could not stomach Jesus' claim that "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."[{17}](#) That seemed way too narrow.

Two years later, my spiritual and intellectual journey had changed my view. The logic that drew me (reluctantly) to his position involves three questions:

- *If God exists, could there be only one way to reach Him?* To be open-minded, I had to admit this possibility.
- *Why consider Jesus as a candidate for that possible one way?* He claimed it. His plan of rescuing humans – "by grace...through faith...not...works"[{18}](#) was distinct from those requiring works, as many other religions do. These two kinds of systems were mutually exclusive. Both could be false or either could be true, but both could not be true.
- *Was Jesus' plan true?* Historical evidence for His resurrection, fulfilled prophecy[{19}](#) and deity, and for the reliability of the New Testament[{20}](#) convinced me I could

trust His words.

One more common objection:

7. I could never take the blind leap of faith that believing in Christ requires.

We exercise faith every day. Few of us comprehend everything about electricity or aerodynamics, but we have evidence of their validity. Whenever we use electric lights or airplanes, we exercise faith – not blind faith, but faith based on evidence. Christians act similarly. The evidence for Jesus is compelling, so one can trust Him on that basis.

As you respond to inquirers, realize that many barriers to faith are emotional rather than merely intellectual.

As a teenager, I nearly was expelled from secondary school for some problems I helped create. In my pain and anger I wondered, “Why would God allow this to happen?” I was mad at God! In retrospect, I realize I was blaming Him for my own bad choices. My personal anguish at the time kept me from seeing that.

Your questioners may be turned off because Christians haven’t acted like Jesus. Maybe they’re angry at God because of personal illness, a broken relationship, a loved one’s death, or personal pain. Ask God for patience and love as you seek to blend grace with truth. He may use you to help skeptics become seekers and seekers become His children. I hope He does.

Notes

1. 1 Peter 3:15 NIV.
2. John 1:14.
3. John 1:45-47.
4. Romans 9:1-3; 10:1.
5. For useful discussions of evidences regarding Jesus, visit www.WhoIsJesus-Really.com.
6. C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan,

1974), 89-103 ff. The Problem of Pain was first published in 1940.

7. A short summary of Resurrection evidences is at Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, "Who's Got the Body?" 1976, www.probe.org/whos-got-the-body/.

8. Romans 8:28 NASB.

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9. Deuteronomy 29:29 NASB.

10. Acts 10.

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12. Luke 24:1-9.

13. Matthew 28:1-8.

14. Luke 1:26-2:40.

15. Matthew 1:18-2:23.

16. 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

17. John 14:6 NASB.

18. Ephesians 2:8-9 NASB.

19. A summary of some of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled is at Rusty Wright, "Are You Listening? Do You Hear What I Hear?" 2004, www.probe.org/are-you-listening-do-you-hear-what-i-hear/.

20. A summary of evidences for New Testament reliability is at Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, "The New Testament: Can I Trust It?" 1976, www.probe.org/the-new-testament-can-i-trust-it/.

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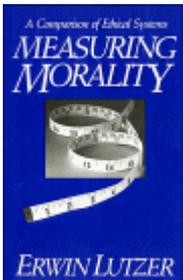
Cultural Relativism

Kerby Anderson presents the basics of cultural relativism and evaluates it from a Christian worldview perspective. Comparing the tenets of cultural relativism to a biblical view of ethics shows how these popular ideas fail the reasonableness test.

This article is also available in [Spanish](#).



John Dewey



Any student in a class on anthropology cannot help but notice the differences between various cultures of the world. Differences in dress, diet, and social norms are readily apparent. Such diversity in terms of ethics and justice are also easily seen and apparently shaped by the culture in which we live.

If there is no transcendent ethical standard, then often culture becomes the ethical norm for determining whether an action is right or wrong. This ethical system is known as *cultural relativism*.^{1} Cultural relativism is the view that all ethical truth is relative to a specific culture. Whatever a cultural group approves is considered right within that culture. Conversely, whatever a cultural group condemns is wrong.

The key to cultural relativism is that right and wrong can only be judged relative to a specified society. There is no ultimate standard of right and wrong by which to judge culture.

A famous proponent of this view was John Dewey, often considered the father of American education. He taught that moral standards were like language and therefore the result of custom. Language evolved over time and eventually became organized by a set of principles known as grammar. But language also changes over time to adapt to the changing circumstances of its culture.

Likewise, Dewey said, ethics were also the product of an evolutionary process. There are no fixed ethical norms. These are merely the result of particular cultures attempting to organize a set of moral principles. But these principles can also change over time to adapt to the changing circumstances of the culture.

This would also mean that different forms of morality evolved in different communities. Thus, there are no universal ethical principles. What may be right in one culture would be wrong in another culture, and vice versa.

Although it is hard for us in the modern world to imagine, a primitive culture might value genocide, treachery, deception, even torture. While we may not like these traits, a true follower of cultural relativism could not say these are wrong since they are merely the product of cultural adaptation.

Clifford Gertz argued that culture must be seen as “webs of meaning” within which humans must live.^{2} Gertz believed that “Humans are shaped exclusively by their culture and therefore there exists no unifying cross-cultural human characteristics.”^{3}

As we will see, cultural relativism allows us to be tolerant toward other cultures, but it provides no basis to judge or

evaluate other cultures and their practices.

William Graham Sumner

A key figure who expanded on Dewey's ideas was William Graham Sumner of Yale University. He argued that what our conscience tells us depends solely upon our social group. The moral values we hold are not part of our moral nature, according to Sumner. They are part of our training and upbringing.

Sumner argued in his book, *Folkways*: "World philosophy, life policy, right, rights, and morality are all products of the folkways."^{4} In other words, what we perceive as conscience is merely the product of culture upon our minds through childhood training and cultural influence. There are no universal ethical principles, merely different cultural conditioning.

Sumner studied all sorts of societies (primitive and advanced), and was able to document numerous examples of cultural relativism. Although many cultures promoted the idea, for example, that a man could have many wives, Sumner discovered that in Tibet a woman was encouraged to have many husbands. He also described how some Eskimo tribes allowed deformed babies to die by being exposed to the elements. In the Fiji Islands, aged parents were killed.

Sumner believed that this diversity of moral values clearly demonstrated that culture is the sole determinant of our ethical standards. In essence, culture determines what is right and wrong. And different cultures come to different ethical conclusions.

Proponents of cultural relativism believe this cultural diversity proves that culture alone is responsible for our morality. There is no soul or spirit or mind or conscience. Moral relativists say that what we perceive as moral convictions or conscience are the byproducts of culture.

The strength of cultural relativism is that it allows us to withhold moral judgments about the social practices of another culture. In fact, proponents of cultural relativism would say that to pass judgment on another culture would be ethnocentric.

This strength, however, is also a major weakness. Cultural relativism excuses us from judging the moral practices of another culture. Yet we all feel compelled to condemn such actions as the Holocaust or ethnic cleansing. Cultural relativism as an ethical system, however, provides no foundation for doing so.

Melville Herskovits

Melville J. Herskovits wrote in *Cultural Relativism*: "Judgments are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation."^[5] In other words, a person's judgment about what is right and wrong is determined by their cultural experiences. This would include everything from childhood training to cultural pressures to conform to the majority views of the group. Herskovits went on to argue that even the definition of what is normal and abnormal is relative to culture.

He believed that cultures were flexible, and so ethical norms change over time. The standard of ethical conduct may change over time to meet new cultural pressures and demands. When populations are unstable and infant mortality is high, cultures value life and develop ethical systems to protect it. When a culture is facing overpopulation, a culture redefines ethical systems and even the value of life. Life is valuable and sacred in the first society. Mercy killing might become normal and acceptable in the second society.

Polygamy might be a socially acceptable standard for society. But later, that society might change its perspective and

believe that it is wrong for a man to have more than one wife. Herskovits believed that whatever a society accepted or rejected became the standard of morality for the individuals in that society.

He believed that “the need for a cultural relativistic point of view has become apparent because of the realization that there is no way to play this game of making judgment across cultures except with loaded dice.”^{6} Ultimately, he believed, culture determines our moral standards and attempting to compare or contrast cultural norms is futile.

In a sense, the idea of cultural relativism has helped encourage such concepts as multiculturalism and postmodernism. After all, if truth is created not discovered, then all truths created by a particular culture are equally true. This would mean that cultural norms and institutions should be considered equally valid if they are useful to a particular group of people within a culture.

And this is one of the major problems with a view of cultural relativism: you cannot judge the morality of another culture. If there is no objective standard, then someone in one culture does not have a right to evaluate the actions or morality of another culture. Yet in our hearts we know that certain things like racism, discrimination, and exploitation are wrong.

Evolutionary Ethics

Foundational to the view of cultural relativism is the theory of evolution. Since social groups experience cultural change with the passage of time, changing customs and morality evolve differently in different places and times.

Anthony Flew, author of *Evolutionary Ethics*, states his perspective this way: “All morals, ideas and ideals have been originated in the world; and that, having thus in the past been subject to change, they will presumably in the future

too, for better or worse, continue to evolve.”[{7}](#) He denies the existence of God and therefore an objective, absolute moral authority. But he also believes in the authority of a value system.

His theory is problematic because it does not adequately account for the origin, nature, and basis of morals. Flew suggests that morals somehow originated in this world and are constantly evolving.

Even if we concede his premise, we must still ask, Where and when did the first moral value originate? Essentially, Flew is arguing that a value came from a non-value. In rejecting the biblical idea of a Creator whose character establishes a moral standard for values, Flew is forced to attempt to derive an *ought* from an *is*.

Evolutionary ethics rests upon the assumption that values are by nature constantly changing or evolving. It claims that it is of value that values are changing. But is *this* value changing?

If the answer to this question is no, then that would mean that moral values don't have to always change. And if that is the case, then there could be unchanging values (known as absolute standards). However, if the value that values change is itself unchanging, then the view is self-contradictory.

Another form of evolutionary ethics is *sociobiology*. E. O. Wilson of Harvard University is a major advocate of sociobiology, and claims that scientific materialism will eventually replace traditional religion and other ideologies.[{8}](#)

According to sociobiology, human social systems have been shaped by an evolutionary process. Human societies exist and survive because they work and because they have worked in the past.

A key principle is the reproductive imperative.[{9}](#) The ultimate goal of any organism is to survive and reproduce. Moral systems exist because they ultimately promote human survival and reproduction.

Another principle is that all behavior is selfish at the most basic level. We love our children, according to this view, because love is an effective means of raising effective reproducers.

At the very least, sociobiology is a very cynical view of human nature and human societies. Are we really to believe that all behavior is selfish? Is there no altruism?

The Bible and human experience seem to strongly contradict this. Ray Bohlin's [article](#) on the Probe Web site provides a detailed refutation of this form of evolutionary ethics.[{10}](#)

Evaluating Cultural Relativism

In attempting to evaluate cultural relativism, we should acknowledge that we could indeed learn many things from other cultures. We should never fall into the belief that our culture has all the answers. No culture has a complete monopoly on the truth. Likewise, Christians must guard against the assumption that their Christian perspective on their cultural experiences should be normative for every other culture.

However, as we have already seen, the central weakness of cultural relativism is its unwillingness to evaluate another culture. This may seem satisfactory when we talk about language, customs, even forms of worship. But this non-judgmental mindset breaks down when confronted by real evils such as slavery or genocide. The Holocaust, for example, cannot be merely explained away as an appropriate cultural response for Nazi Germany.

Cultural relativism faces other philosophical problems. For

example, it is insufficient to say that morals originated in the world and that they are constantly changing. Cultural relativists need to answer how value originated out of non-value. How did the first value arise?

Fundamental to cultural relativism is a belief that values change. But if the value that values change is itself unchanging, then this theory claims an unchanging value that all values change and evolve. The position is self-contradictory.

Another important concern is conflict. If there are no absolute values that exist trans-culturally or externally to the group, how are different cultures to get along when values collide? How are we to handle these conflicts?

Moreover, is there ever a place for courageous individuals to challenge the cultural norm and fight against social evil? Cultural relativism seems to leave no place for social reformers. The abolition movement, the suffrage movement, and the civil rights movement are all examples of social movements that ran counter to the social circumstances of the culture. Abolishing slavery and providing rights to citizens are good things even if they were opposed by many people within society.

The Bible provides a true standard by which to judge attitudes and actions. Biblical standards can be used to judge individual sin as well as corporate sin institutionalized within a culture.

By contrast, culture cannot be used to judge right and wrong. A changing culture cannot provide a fixed standard for morality. Only God's character, revealed in the Bible provides a reliable measure for morality.

Notes

1. The general outline for this material can be found in chapter two of *Measuring Morality* (Richardson, Tx.: Probe Books, 1989).
2. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
3. E. M. Zechenter, "Cultural Relativism and the Abuse of the Individual, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 1997, 53:323.
4. William Graham Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), 76.
5. Melville J. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism* (New York: Random House, 1973), 15.
6. Ibid., 56.
7. Anthony Flew, *Evolutionary Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), 55.
8. E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).
9. Robert Wallace, *The Genesis Factor* (New York: Morrow and Co., 1979).
10. Dr. Ray Bohlin, "[Sociobiology: Evolution, Genes and Morality](#)"

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The Urantia Book – A Biblical

Worldview Perspective

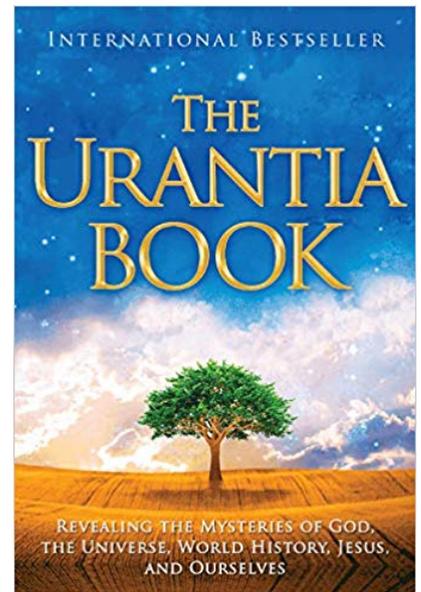
Dr. Michael Gleghorn takes a hard look at the claims of The Urantia Book and finds it lacking in substance and evidence.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Introduction to *The Urantia Book*

Not long ago a woman wrote to me about a very painful episode in her life. About fifteen years ago her husband embarked on a spiritual quest that ultimately destroyed their marriage and family. He began reading *The Urantia Book*, a massive tome of 2,097 pages that was allegedly revealed by celestial beings from higher universes. He also became involved in various occult practices such as channeling and astral projection. Eventually, she and her husband divorced, leaving both her and her children hurt and confused.



Of course, it would probably not be fair to blame all of this family's difficulties on *The Urantia Book*. Although my correspondent's experience was quite negative, others describe their own encounter with *The Urantia Book* in very positive terms. If you visit the official Urantia Foundation Web site you can read many of these testimonials for yourself.[\[1\]](#) One woman wrote, "I have found *The Urantia Book* to be the most enlightened source of wisdom I have ever come across." And another person declares *The Urantia Book* to be "the most conclusive and inspiring book on our existence."

So what is *The Urantia Book*? Where did it come from and what does it teach? And how do its doctrines compare with those of biblical Christianity? These are just a few of the questions

that we want to consider in this article.

The Urantia Book claims to have been revealed by superhuman personalities from higher universes. The word “Urantia” is simply the book’s name for Earth. The book consists of 196 papers and is divided into four major parts entitled: 1. “The Central and Superuniverses,” 2. “The Local Universe,” 3. “The History of Urantia,” and 4. “The Life and Teachings of Jesus.” The alleged “authors” of these papers refer to themselves by their order of being with such glorious titles as Divine Counselor, Perfector of Wisdom, Brilliant Evening Star and Chief of Seraphim. Although originally written in English, the book has since been translated into Dutch, Finnish, French, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. In addition, translations into a number of other languages are currently underway. These include Arabic, Chinese, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Polish, Romanian, and Swedish--just to name a few.

Although devoted Urantians are absolutely convinced that every part of *The Urantia Book* was revealed by celestial intelligences, there are a number of problematic issues that need to be addressed. We’ll consider a few of these later in this article. Before we do so, however, it is first necessary to give some account of the origin of *The Urantia Book*.

The Origin of the Urantia Papers

The Urantia Book was first published in 1955. But the alleged “revelations” from extra-planetary personalities apparently began early in the twentieth century.[\[2\]](#) Who received these “revelations”? And who wrote them down in the massive volume that has come to be known as *The Urantia Book*?

While there is not space to specifically mention everyone who played a role in this process, two individuals were key in the reception and recording of this “revelation.” The first, Dr.

William Sadler, lived from 1875 to 1969. He was a psychiatrist, teacher, and prolific writer. The other individual's identity cannot be known with certainty. Dr. Sadler referred to this person as the "contact personality" and the "sleeping subject."[{3}](#) In a manner similar to that of Edgar Cayce, the so-called "sleeping prophet," the "sleeping subject" of our story was the vehicle through whom the celestial visitors supposedly communicated their revelations to Dr. Sadler and others. This small group of people, known as the Contact Commission, "was the focal point for the production of . . . the final text of The Urantia Book."[{4}](#)

Although members of the Contact Commission were sworn to secrecy regarding the identity of the "contact personality," Martin Gardner has made a strong case that the evidence points to Wilfred Custer Kellogg, Sadler's brother-in-law and a relative of the famous Kellogg family.[{5}](#) Of course, not everyone agrees with Gardner's conclusions. Ernest Moyer, a Urantian researcher, while acknowledging his inability to determine the identity of the "sleeping subject," is nonetheless convinced that it was not Wilfred.[{6}](#)

Although the identity of the "sleeping subject" may never be known with certainty, we have a fairly good record of how the Urantia papers came into being. Although there is some debate about the precise date in which Dr. Sadler first became aware of the "sleeping subject," it was probably in the summer of 1912.[{7}](#) "In 1923 the Sadlers began to invite twenty or thirty friends over for Sunday afternoon teas to discuss religious topics. At about the fourth meeting Sadler began telling the group, which came to be called the Forum, about the sleeping subject and his startling revelations."[{8}](#) He invited Forum members to help prepare questions for the celestials. The following Sunday members returned with hundreds of questions. "Shortly thereafter," Sadler wrote, "the first Urantia paper appeared in answer to these questions . . . This was the procedure followed throughout the many years of the reception

of the Urantia papers.”[{9}](#) By the time this process was over there were 196 papers, consisting of 2,097 pages of material, that had allegedly been channeled through the “sleeping subject.”

Problems with *The Urantia Book*

In his article, “A History of the Urantia Movement,” Dr. Sadler stated, “The [Urantia] Papers were published just as we received them. The Contact Commissioners had no editorial authority. Our job was limited to ‘spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.’”[{10}](#) But is this really so? There is actually ample evidence for questioning this statement.

Urantian researcher Ernest Moyer has carefully documented that Dr. Sadler made changes to the text of *The Urantia Book*.[{11}](#) The unsettling thing about these changes, at least for loyal Urantians, is that they were made after 1935, the date that Dr. Sadler claimed *The Urantia Book* was “completed and certified” in its entirety.[{12}](#) The evidence for such changes is compelling. Matthew Block, another Urantian researcher, discovered that human sources published after 1935 were later incorporated into *The Urantia Book*. For example, a book by Charles Hartshorne, published in 1941, lists seven possible meanings of “absolute perfection.” Block discovered that these same seven meanings were reprinted in *The Urantia Book* almost word for word. This is merely one of several examples that could be offered of human sources published after 1935 that were later plagiarized in *The Urantia Book*.[{13}](#)

But not only were changes made after the book had been “completed and certified,” they were also made after *The Urantia Book* was first published in 1955. Many examples could be offered, but let me simply mention two. First, both Martin Gardner and Ernest Moyer point out that in the first printing of *The Urantia Book*, toward the end of the account of the Last Supper, Jesus is said to have addressed the twelve apostles.

However, as the context makes clear, only eleven of the apostles were currently present. Judas had already left the group. According to Gardner, “in later printings ‘the twelve’ was replaced by ‘the apostles,’” thus eliminating the error.[{14}](#) Second, both Gardner and Moyer also note that in the first printing of *The Urantia Book* the wise men are said to have visited the newborn Jesus “in the manger.” However, according to a later passage in *The Urantia Book*, this visit must have occurred when Jesus and his parents were in a room at the inn. Gardner notes, “When this contradiction was noticed, the words ‘in the manger’ were removed from the next printing.”[{15}](#)

What are we to conclude from such known and acknowledged errors, contradictions and plagiarisms in *The Urantia Book*? Such problems clearly raise doubts about the integrity of this “revelation.” Wherever the information in *The Urantia Book* has come from—whether extra-planetary personalities, human beings, demonic spirits, or some combination of these—the source of this information is not entirely trustworthy. Moreover, it is not entirely biblical either.

The Bible and *The Urantia Book*

In his appendix to *The Mind at Mischief*, Dr. Sadler stated that the information imparted through the “sleeping subject” was “essentially Christian.”[{16}](#) Since this information is allegedly contained in *The Urantia Book*, we would expect the contents of this book to likewise be “essentially Christian.” But are they?

If we compare the teachings of *The Urantia Book* with those of the Bible, we quickly discover that *The Urantia Book*, far from being consistent with biblical Christianity, actually denies or distorts almost every fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. For example, contrary to the testimony of Jesus in the New Testament—that the Scriptures are the word of God (Matt.

15:3-6), inspired by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 22:43), and completely true and accurate in all details (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:44; John 17:17)—*The Urantia Book* has Jesus declaring to Nathaniel, “the Scriptures are faulty and altogether human in origin” (*UB*, 1767).

The rejection of the Bible as a fallible human document sets the stage for the rejection of many other biblical doctrines as well. For example, *The Urantia Book* rejects the Bible’s views about God, Christ, man, sin, and salvation. Contrary to the biblical position that there is only one God (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 45:21), *The Urantia Book* espouses polytheism, the belief in many “Gods.” Martin Gardner points out that the term “Gods” (a capitalized plural) “appears more than a hundred times” in *The Urantia Book*.[{17}](#) For instance, on page 364 we read, “We are all a part of an eternal project which the Gods are supervising and outworking.” Although *The Urantia Book* does acknowledge the existence of one supreme God, it rejects biblical Trinitarianism in favor of its own view that there is actually a “Trinity of Trinities” (*UB*, 1170-73). But this is only the beginning. According to Gardner, there are so many “gods” in *The Urantia Book* that its polytheism “puts Greek and Hindu mythology to shame.”[{18}](#)

The view of Jesus presented in *The Urantia Book* is equally disturbing and unbiblical. To begin, the virgin birth is rejected. Jesus was simply born of Joseph and Mary (*UB*, 1344-45). Nevertheless, although he had human parents, he is also presented as the incarnation of Michael of Nebadon, the creator of our universe and one of “more than 700,000 Creator Sons of the Eternal Son.”[{19}](#) This clearly conflicts with the New Testament’s view of Jesus, which reveals that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38). Furthermore, John tells us that Jesus is the one and only eternal Son of God in an absolutely unique sense (John 1:1-2, 14; 3:16). He is *not* merely one of more than 700,000 other Creator Sons; He is truly unique.

These doctrinal differences are only the tip of the iceberg. There are many other differences between *The Urantia Book* and the Bible. However, due to space considerations, I can only mention the following.

The Urantia Book declares, "There has been no 'fall of man.'" (UB, 846). This explains, at least in part, why there is also no need for any blood atonement for sin (UB, 60). *The Urantia Book* tells us, "The whole idea of ransom and atonement is incompatible with the concept of God as it was taught and exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth" (UB, 2017). The notion of "substituting an innocent sufferer for a guilty offender" is dismissed as a "childish scheme" (UB, 2017). What, then, was the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross? According to *The Urantia Book*, "We know that the death on the cross was not to effect man's reconciliation to God but to stimulate man's *realization* of the Father's eternal love and his Son's unending mercy" (UB, 2019). Obviously, these teachings strike at the very heart of the Christian message.

Genesis 3-5 and Romans 5 make it quite clear that there has indeed been a "fall of man" into sin and rebellion against his Creator. The entire race was ruined and condemned because of Adam's disobedience. Paul tells us plainly that "the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Rom. 5:18). The ideas of ransom and substitutionary atonement are not incompatible with Jesus' view of God. Indeed, Jesus Himself stated that He came "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). The Bible tells us that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), but it also tells us that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). Contrary to *The Urantia Book*, Jesus did not die merely to stimulate man's *realization* of the Father's love; He died to reconcile us to God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:22). It is because Christ died for our sins that God can now offer us salvation as a free gift (Rom. 6:23). We cannot earn this gift; we can only gratefully receive it through faith in Christ (Rom. 3:22-28; Eph. 2:8-9).

The Urantia Book proclaims a different God, a different Jesus, and a different Gospel than the Bible. Its message, allegedly revealed by higher spiritual beings, is fundamentally at odds with biblical Christianity. In light of this, it's sobering to think of all the biblical warnings about lying and deceptive spirits (e.g. 1 Kings 22:22-23; John 8:44; 1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:7-10). Dr. Sadler once wrote that if there was anything supernatural about mediumistic phenomena, it was probably demonic.[\[20\]](#) But when he actually encountered someone whose channeling he thought genuine, he did not resort to this hypothesis. He embraced the revelations and eventually helped publish *The Urantia Book*. It's a pity he didn't stick with his original hypothesis. Who knows? It may have even been true.[\[21\]](#)

Notes

- See "What People Are Saying About *The Urantia Book* . . ." at <http://www.urantia.org/about.html#What> (Dec. 2, 2003).
- Martin Gardner, *Urantia: The Great Cult Mystery* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), 114.
- William S. Sadler, "A History of the Urantia Movement," at <http://www.urantia.org/pub/ahotum.html>.
- "Where Did *The Urantia Book* Come From?" at <http://www.urantia.org/about.html#Where> (Dec. 2, 2003).
- Gardner, *Urantia*, 97-134.
- See Ernest Moyer, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation*, chapters 16-17, at <http://www.world-destiny.org/tocp.htm>.
- Gardner, *Urantia*, 114-122.
- Ibid, 116.
- Sadler, "A History of the Urantia Movement," at <http://www.urantia.org/pub/ahotum.html>.
- Ibid.
- See Moyer, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation*, chapters 34, 37, and 43 at <http://www.world-destiny.org/tocp.htm>.

- Sadler, “A History of the Urantia Movement,” at <http://www.urantia.org/pub/ahotum.html>.
- For more information, see Gardner, *Urantia*, 321-57.
- Gardner, *Urantia*, 126. See also Moyer, *The Birth of a Divine Revelation*, chapter 43, at <http://www.world-destiny.org/tocp.htm>.
- Ibid.
- Gardner, *Urantia*, 125.
- Ibid., 25.
- For example, see Sadler, *The Truth About Spiritualism* (Chicago: McClurg, 1923), 207-08 and *The Physiology of Faith and Fear* (Chicago: McClurg, 1912), 467.
- Sadler made a distinction between mediums and seers. He viewed the former as those who claim to communicate with the dead; the latter, as those who might genuinely be in touch with some sort of divine reality (see Gardner, *Urantia*, 109). Although Sadler thought it possible that demonic spirits might be behind some mediumistic phenomena, he believed the “sleeping subject” was a seer—not a medium. Nevertheless, if demonic spirits actually exist, and if they can impersonate the spirits of the dead, then why couldn’t such spirits also impersonate celestial beings from higher universes?

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Race and Racial Issues – A

Biblical Perspective

Christian

Kerby Anderson looks at the issue of race from a Christian worldview perspective. The Bible clearly teaches that all people are valuable and loved by God with no distinction based on race. As Christians, we are called to set an example by seeing all peoples as worthy of our love and our respect.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Race has divided people in our world for millennia, and the prejudice of racism is still with us today. So in this article we are going to focus on some important aspects of race and racial issues.

At the outset we should acknowledge that, although we will use the term “race” through this discussion, it is not a very precise term. First, the Bible really only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups. But the Bible doesn’t provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences.

The Bible teaches that God has made “from one blood every nation of men” (Acts 17:26). Here Paul is teaching the Athenians that they came from the same source in the creation as everyone else. We are all from one blood. In other words, there are no superior or inferior races. We are all from the same race: the human race.

Race is also an imprecise term in large part because it is not based upon scientific data. People of every race can interbreed and produce fertile offspring. It turns out that the so-called differences in the races is not very great. A

recent study of human genetic material of different races concluded that the DNA of any two people in the world would differ by just 2/10ths of one percent.^{1} And of this variation, only six percent can be linked to racial categories. The remaining 94 percent is “within race” variation.

Let’s put it another way. All the racial differences that have been so important to people for generations are statistically insignificant from a scientific point of view. These differences are trivial when you consider the 3 trillion base pairs of human DNA.

A third reason the term “race” also lacks precision is due to interracial marriage. While it is probably true that the so-called races of the world were never completely divided, it is certainly true that the lines are becoming quite blurred today. Take golfer Tiger Woods as one example. His heritage is Thai, black, white, Chinese, and Native American.

Isn’t it ironic that at a time when racial lines are blurring more and more each generation, the government still collects data that requires individuals to check one box that represents their racial or ethnic heritage? A growing number of people are finding it hard to classify themselves by checking just one box.

The Curse on Ham

Sadly, one of the most destructive false teachings supposedly based on the Bible is the so-called “curse on Ham.” Ham was one of Noah’s three sons (along with Shem and Japheth).

In the past, certain cults and even some orthodox Christian groups have held to the belief that the skin color of black people was due to a curse on Ham and his descendants. Unfortunately, this false teaching has been used to justify racial discrimination and even slavery.

One group said, "We know the circumstances under which the posterity of Cain (and later Ham) were cursed with what we call Negroid racial characteristics."[\[2\]](#) Another group argued that "The curse which Noah pronounced upon Canaan was the origin of the black race."[\[3\]](#)

First, let's clearly state that the Bible does not teach that people with black skin color are cursed by God. This curse was not the origin of the black race or black racial characteristics.

Second, it wasn't Ham who was cursed but his son Canaan (Gen. 9:18-27; 10:6). Only one of Ham's four sons (Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan) was cursed, so how could all black people be cursed?

As it turns out, the curse on Canaan has unfolded in history. The descendants of Canaan were perhaps one of the most wicked people to live on earth. They were the inhabitants, for example, of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Third, even if a curse is given, the Bible clearly places limitations on curses to three or four generations. In Exodus 20:5-6 God says, "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Notice that this passage seems to teach that curses based upon disobedience are reversed when people repent and turn back to obedience. So not only is a curse limited, obedience to God's principles can break it.

Fourth, the Bible teaches that the fulfillment of the curse on Canaan took place with the defeat and subjugation of Canaan by Israel (Joshua 9:23; 1 Kings 9:20-21). This had nothing to do with placing black people under a permanent curse.

Although the idea of “the curse on Ham” has been dying a well-deserved death, it is still important to remember that not so long ago people were misinterpreting a biblical passage to justify their racism and discrimination. No one race or people group is inferior to any other. In fact, the Bible teaches that preferences based upon race, class, or ethnic origin are sinful and subject to God’s judgment (James 2:9-13). All of us are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27) and have value and dignity.

Racism

Racism has no doubt been the scourge of humanity. It usually surfaces from generalized assumptions made about a particular race or cultural group. While it is wrong and unfair to assign particular negative characteristics to everyone within a racial group, it is done all the time. The bitter result of these racial attitudes is intolerance and discrimination.

Often racism goes beyond just individual attitudes. These racial attitudes can become the mindset of a particular people group who may use cultural as well as legal means to suppress another race. These cultural norms and laws can be used by the majority race to exploit and discriminate against the minority race.

Although racism has existed throughout the centuries, it gained an unexpected ally in the scientific realm in the nineteenth century. In 1859, Charles Darwin published his famous work *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection of the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. It was the last part of that title that no doubt furthered some of the ideas of racial superiority that flourished during that time.

It is not at all clear that Darwin meant to apply the concept of favored races in this particular book to human beings. In

fact, he did write more on this subject later, but the provocative nature of the subtitle was enough to fuel discussions about racial superiority and inferiority. Later Darwinists took the concept far beyond what Charles Darwin intended.

So why do people hold racist attitudes? Three reasons are: feelings of pride, feelings of inferiority, and feelings of fear. Pride and arrogance fuel racism. When we are proud of who we are, we can easily look down upon those who are different from us and do not manifest the same characteristics that we do. We can start believing we are superior to another person or race.

Racism, however, can come from the opposite end of the emotional spectrum: inferiority. We may not feel good about ourselves. So in order to feel good about ourselves, we disparage another person or race.

Racism also results from fear. We fear what we don't understand. We fear what is strange and foreign. Racial and cultural differences may even seem dangerous to us. Racial attitudes can surface if we don't seek to know and understand those who are different from us.

We should stand strong against racism and racist attitudes wherever we find them: in the society, in individuals, even within the church.

Biblical Perspective

We have already noted that the Bible really only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups, but the Bible doesn't provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences. The

Bible teaches that God has made "of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26 KJV).

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to have feelings of superiority. In Philippians 2, Paul admonishes the Christians to live in harmony with one another. They are to have a gentle spirit toward one another, and to let this gentle spirit be known to others.

Christians are also admonished to refrain from using class distinctions within the church. In James 2, believers are told not to make class distinctions between various people. They are not to show partiality within the church. Showing favoritism is called sin and the one showing favoritism is convicted by the law. Surely these commands would also apply to holding views of racial superiority and inferiority.

Likewise Paul instructs Timothy (1 Tim. 5:21) to keep his instructions without partiality and to do nothing out of favoritism. This command would also exclude making racial distinctions based on a view of racial superiority.

Finally, we see that Paul teaches the spiritual equality of all people in Christ. For example, he teaches in Colossians 3:11 that "there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." This is a significant passage because it shows that Christ has removed four kinds of distinctions: national distinctions (Greek or Jew), religious distinctions (circumcised or uncircumcised), cultural distinctions (barbarian or Scythian), and economic distinctions (slave or free).

A similar passage would be Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In Christ, our human distinctions lose their significance. No one is superior to another. A believing Jew is not superior to

a believing Greek. A believing slave is of no higher rank than a believing free person.

Racism and racist attitudes are wrong. Christians should work to remove such ideas and attitudes from society.

Becoming Culturally Sensitive

Here are some suggestions on how to become more sensitive to differences in race and culture.

First, we need to take an accurate assessment of ourselves. Often our assumptions and predispositions affect the way we perceive and even treat others. A person who says he or she has no prejudices is probably in denial. All of us perceive the world differently and find it easier to accept people who are like us and harder to understand people who are different from us.

Our cultural worldview affects how we perceive others. It affects how we evaluate what others think and what others do. So an important first step in becoming more racial and culturally sensitive is to evaluate ourselves.

Second, we should try to empathize with others. We must start learning how to look at life and our circumstances from the viewpoint of others. Instead of trying to make others think like us, we should strive to begin to begin to think like them. That doesn't mean we have to agree with their viewpoint, but it does mean that becoming empathetic will be helpful in bridging racial and cultural barriers.

Third, learn to withhold judgment. Tolerance (in the biblical sense of the word) is a virtue we should cultivate. We should be willing to put aside our critical thinking and judgment until we know someone better. Taking the time to listen and understand the other person will help build bridges and dismantle barriers that often separate and isolate races and

cultures.

Fourth, do not consider yourself superior to another. One of the root causes of racism is a belief in racial superiority. Paul tell us in Romans 12:3 that a man should not “think more highly of himself than he ought to think.” Differences in race and culture should never be used to justify feelings of racial superiority which can lead to racist attitudes.

Fifth, develop cross cultural traits. A missionary who goes overseas must learn to develop personal traits that will make him or her successful in a new and different culture. Likewise, we should develop these traits so that we can reach across a racial and cultural divide. Friendliness and open communication are important. Flexibility and open-mindedness are also important. Developing these traits will enhance our ability to bridge a racial and cultural gap.

Finally, we should take a stand. We shouldn't tell (or allow others to tell) racial and ethnic jokes. These are demeaning to others and perpetuate racism and racial attitudes. Instead we should be God's instrument in bring about racial reconciliation. We should seek to build bridges and close the racial and cultural divide between people groups and reach out with the love of Jesus Christ.

Notes

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Martial Arts – A Christian View

Dr. Zukeran looks at the popular activity of marital arts from a biblical worldview perspective. He determines that Christians may safely participate in martial arts as long as they distance themselves from the Eastern philosophical ideas associated with most forms of martial arts.

The Origins and Popularity of the Martial Arts

Gliding across the Pacific, the Asian martial arts have become part of the mainstream of American culture. Today there are an estimated two to three million practitioners in the United States, 40 percent of which are children between the ages of 7 and 14.^{1} The martial arts industry generates annual revenue topping the \$1 billion mark.

Why this rise in popularity? For one thing, people today are interested in and more willing to accept Eastern ideas. What was once considered “foreign” is now embraced as old, and thus “tried and true.” Advocates extol the physical benefits and self-discipline that result from its practices. Movies further popularize martial arts with films such as *Enter the Dragon*, *Rush Hour*, and the Oscar winning *Crouching Tiger-Hidden Dragon*. The rise in crime also has people seeking to learn ways to protect themselves and their loved ones.

There are few written records regarding the origin of martial arts. These are interwoven with myths or verbal traditions that make it difficult to accurately trace the record. Archaeological evidence indicates that the martial arts may have begun as early as 2000 BC in the Fertile Crescent.^{2} From there it traveled eastward to India and China.

The father of the Asian martial arts according to the most popular tradition is an Indian Buddhist Monk named Bodhidharma who arrived in China in the late fifth century A.D. Settling in a monastery in the Songshan Mountains located in the Kingdom of Wei, he developed a series of mind-body exercises designed to improve the health of the monks and assist them in meditation. Based on the movements of different real and mythological animals and incorporating concepts from Taoism and Zen Buddhism, Bodhidharma taught a style of combat known as Shao-lin gung fu. Gradually, Shao-lin gung fu migrated from the temples to the Chinese populace. It was adapted and refined as it spread across the country and eventually, to the world.

Martial arts have been very popular among Christians. Scot Conway, founder of the Christian Martial Arts Foundation, estimates between 50 and 70 percent of American martial artists – and roughly 20 percent of all instructors – consider themselves Christians.^{3} But other Christians argue that the philosophy of Asian martial arts is wholly incompatible with biblical teaching. They point to the origin of Eastern mysticism as reason for Christians to avoid any level of participation. Still others say Jesus' exhortation to "turn the other cheek" shows that using force is wrong.

How should a discerning Christian respond? Can we participate in the martial arts and be consistent with our biblical convictions?

Differences in the Martial Arts

Should Christians participate in the martial arts? In order to make an informed decision, it is helpful to recognize that there are two basic categories for martial arts. It is important to note that the division is not rigid; in some cases, values from one type may be blended or subtly integrated into the other. But for simplicity and clarity, we will use the two main groups.

One type, called “internal” or “soft” martial art, focuses on inner spiritual development, balance, form, and mental awareness. This soft art emphasizes two principles – that the mind dictates action and that the opponent’s own force is used to defeat him or her.[{4}](#) Students are taught Taoist and Buddhist philosophical principles such as the “chi” force and the “yin and yang” concept. Through breath control, soft art practitioners seek to “collect, cultivate, and store” this chi force which is located in the body. Some believe they can use the chi force to strike down opponents from a distance. Examples of internal or soft martial arts include the Chinese Tai-chi Chuan and the Japanese Aikido.

The second category of martial arts is called the “external” or “hard” art. This type teaches that physical reactions precede mental reaction. It also promotes the idea that an opponent’s force should be met with an equal but opposite force. While the hard martial art system also uses breath control like the soft arts, the emphasis is on developing strength and quickness through the use of straight and linear body motions.[{5}](#) The hard arts include certain forms of Chinese kung fu, and Shao Lin boxing. The Japanese arts were adapted from Chinese kung fu. The hard arts include Ju-jitsu, Judo, Karate, Ninjitsu, and Kendo. The Korean martial arts include Tae Kwon Do and Tang Soo Do.

While there are religious concepts in the martial arts, few schools would qualify as religious movements, and few seek to meet the religious needs of the student. However, a little exposure to Eastern mysticism may lead to greater involvement in the future. So as a general rule, Christians should avoid the internal or soft martial arts because of the concentration on the teachings of Eastern religions and philosophies. Several schools even utilize the occult techniques of meditation and altering consciousness. External or hard martial arts, on the other hand, concentrate primarily on physical training. These physical lessons usually do not

conflict with our biblical convictions.

Before joining a dojo or martial arts gym, one needs to know the worldview of the instructor. Even some hard martial arts teachers incorporate Eastern ideas and occult practices into their styles. Look for instructors who teach the physical movements but exclude the Eastern ideas.

Eastern Concepts in the Martial Arts

Since martial arts are traditionally based on the Eastern philosophies of Taoism and Zen Buddhism, several key concepts can be prominent in the classes. Let's look at three of them.

The concept of "chi" or "ki" is central in some martial arts. Chi is believed to be the impersonal life energy that flows throughout the universe and pulses through the human body. By harnessing the chi in individuals, martial artists believe they can perform at higher levels of ability or can release chi power resulting in devastating effects. Chi is controlled through specialized breathing techniques, gymnastics, and meditation.

Another common martial arts teaching is the Taoist (pronounced "dow-ist") concept of yin and yang, that nature consists of conflicting elements which function in perfect balance to one another. As mankind should live in harmony with the Tao, so the martial artist must strike hard with firmness at times, but at other times accept the energy of the opponent, then reroute the energy, causing the opponent to defeat himself. This redirection allows a relatively gentle resolution, and brings one into harmony with the opponent and the flow of nature.

A Christian must also avoid the practice of Eastern meditation. The goal of this type of meditation is to empty one's mind, alter one's consciousness, or unite with the impersonal divine. Scott Shaw writes, "Meditation is a sacred

process. It is the method used by the spiritual warrior to calm the mind and to connect the body and mind with the infinite.”{6} This greater awareness supposedly enables the martial artist to increase his or her performance. In many schools, the combined use of Eastern meditation and the chi are essential to mastering the art. (Not all martial arts use meditation for this purpose. Some use it to focus on the lesson or task at hand such as picturing the action in your mind before physically carrying it out.)

But the mysticism of Taoism and Buddhism is not compatible with Christianity; neither is Eastern meditation the same as biblical meditation. The Bible does not teach altering our consciousness or emptying our minds. Instead, the goal of Scriptural meditation is to *fill* our minds with God’s Word. (Psalm 1:2) Another danger of Eastern meditation is that it can open our minds to the occult, a practice the Bible prohibits. The Bible does not teach the Eastern idea of chi, that there is an impersonal life energy of the universe within us. Rather, the Bible says that each individual has an eternal soul that will either go to heaven or to hell based on whether or not they have a relationship with Christ.

Self Defense or Turn the Other Cheek?

Besides concerns about the role of Eastern religion in the martial arts, some people think martial arts encourages violence. Martial arts teach fighting, and so are contrary to the Bible’s instructions about pacifism. Is there ever a time when Christians can use force?

Christian pacifists believe it is always wrong to injure another person. Many interpret Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:38-48, where he states, “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also . . .”, to mean never use violence. This is exemplified in the life of Christ who suffered silently and did not retaliate while enduring torture even unto death.

Despite these arguments, the proper interpretation of the Matthew 5 passage does not teach pacifism. In Jewish culture, to be struck or slapped on the cheek was an insult (2 Corinthians 11:20). Jesus was teaching that when a disciple is insulted for being a follower of Christ, the disciple should not retaliate with force. However, being insulted is a very different situation from being attacked by a mugger or your wife being attacked by a rapist.

In the Gospels, Christ did not resist violent attacks because of His unique mission to be the sacrifice for our sins. However, in the Old Testament, the preincarnate Christ judged wicked nations with the sword. (Judges 6:11-16). Not only did He smite His enemies, He aided Israel in being an instrument of judgment as well. Revelation predicts the glorified Christ coming to judge the nations with a sword. Also in the New Testament, Jesus and His disciples did not teach military leaders to withdraw from the military (e.g., Matthew 8:8-13, Luke 3:14). In Romans 13, Paul writes that the government has the right to "bear the sword." In other words, a righteous government can use capital punishment when an offender is worthy of death.

Therefore, complete pacifism is not the spirit of Christian teaching. In fact, the most loving thing to do when a friend or family member is attacked by a harmful foe is to risk one's life and use force to restrain the enemy. If a man is attacking a child, or a woman is being raped, it would be morally wrong not to sacrifice your life and restrain the assailant even with deadly force if necessary.

The Bible allows a Christian to use self-defense and force when confronted with a criminal act. Force may not be used for revenge or out of unjust anger. Christians who engage in the martial arts should have a clear understanding of this. The use of martial arts must be for self-defense and protecting loved ones from acts of evil. One should never use their fighting system to instigate combat or seek revenge.

Should Christians Participate in the Martial Arts?

To summarize what I have covered so far, I believe that the physical aspect of martial arts can be separated from the Eastern religious and philosophical teachings. Also, I believe the Bible teaches us that there is a time when we are called to use force, even deadly force to halt acts of evil.

Here are some practical guidelines if one is deciding to participate in the martial arts or if one is selecting a school. First, a person should check his or her motives. One should not engage in martial arts if one's motives include becoming a tough guy, showing off, or gaining revenge. Parents should make it clear to their children that the martial arts are never to be used for affectation or for instigating conflicts. Unworthy motives are detrimental to one's walk with the Lord and witness to others. Positive reasons include physical conditioning, discipline, and self-defense. Develop parameters for limiting the use of force. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control. Force is used in defensive purposes only.

Generally speaking, Christians should avoid the soft or internal form of martial arts because they tend to emphasize Eastern philosophical and religious ideas. External or hard martial arts emphasize the physical training. However, it would be wise to be on guard because many instructors of external martial arts may incorporate Eastern mysticism in to their system. Also, one should be careful to avoid the possibility of being enticed to learn about Eastern spirituality as they advance.

Find out the worldview of the instructor. The role of religion in the martial arts depends mostly on the instructor, so choosing a proper instructor is the most important factor. Some instructors claim to teach the physical aspect only.

However, as students advance, instructors begin to incorporate Eastern religious ideas to help students attain a higher level of performance. Observe advanced classes to see if they incorporate Eastern practices. There is also helpful information through Christian organizations such as Karate for Christ and the Christian Martial Arts Foundation.

The Christian life involves caring for the nurture and growth of our mind, spirit, and our body which is the temple of the Holy Spirit. I have benefited greatly from my time in the martial arts. It has provided me great exercise, discipline, and opportunities to witness for Christ. There were times in my life when I had to use force to restrain hostile persons or protect loved ones. I believe that the martial arts can be beneficial to Christians who are informed and mature.

Notes

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3. Erwin Castro, B.J. Oropeza, and Ron Rhodes, "Enter the Dragon? Wrestling with the Martial Arts Phenomenon Part I," Christian Research Institute, <http://www.equip.org/free/dm066.htm>, 2.
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6. Scott Shaw, *The Warrior is Silent* (Rochester, VT.: Inner Traditions International, 1998), 53.

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<p>See Also:</p>

<p><u>"Martial Arts and Just War Theory"</u></p>
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Alternative Medicine – A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran applies a biblical worldview perspective as he assesses the rise of alternative medicine in the mainstream of American culture. He points out the types that are purely fraudulent and those which may be useful for some people.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

The Rise of Alternative Medicine

Alternative medicine has blazed its way into the mainstream of American culture while also making significant gains in the medical community. Nearly half of all U.S. adults now participate in some kind of alternative therapy.^{1} A recent study showed that Americans spend almost \$30 billion a year on alternative treatments.^{2}

Alternative medicine remains a controversial issue. Do these medicines actually work? Do these alternative therapies embrace an Eastern religious system? Should Christians be involved with alternative treatments? How do we evaluate a particular practice that is unconventional?

The sudden rise of alternative medicine can be attributed to a growing dissatisfaction with conventional medical practices. Modern methods have mainly focused on the physical symptoms. However, we are spiritual, social and emotional creatures as well. Healing improves when all of these components are addressed. Conventional medicine has also been criticized for its impersonal approach. Overworked doctors may spend only a few minutes diagnosing the problem without much follow-up.

The main reason people may be flocking to alternative medicine is that it offers hope when conventional medicine has failed. The frightened and discouraged look there as a last resort. Many therapists profess to heal cancer or know the secret to prolonged youth. For example, Hollywood guru Deepak Chopra writes that his therapies can take us to “. . . a place where the rules of everyday existence do not apply.” Through his methods we can “. . . become pioneers in a land where youthful vigor, renewal, creativity, joy, fulfillment, and timelessness are the common experience of everyday life, where old age, senility, infirmity and death do not exist and are not even entertained as a philosophy.”^{3} These are attractive temptations to those without hope.

As discerning individuals, we must not be enticed by such claims. The Bible teaches that we live in a fallen world. Despite our best efforts people get sick, and sometimes they die. When faced with a serious illness, we first must accept the consequences of the Fall. God can heal any time He chooses using whatever method He wills. However, He does not work contrary to His nature or revealed truth. If an apparent healing leads someone to embrace teachings contrary to Scripture, we should question whether that healing came from God.

So when the test results are bad, we should not panic in fear, but trust God's sovereignty and control over our lives. We should seek wise counsel from doctors and our pastors. Then, if an alternative medicine is recommended, we should make sure it has been medically tested and does not promote a false teaching or false hope. In dealing with illness, we can honor God or we can blemish our testimony. In the following sections, let us consider how to wisely evaluate alternative medicines.

Getting a Handle on Alternative Medicines

Today there are hundreds of therapies labeled “alternative medicine,” but what exactly does that mean? A broad definition would be any therapy that is not accepted by the dominant medical establishment of our culture. There are several characteristics of alternative medicine. For example, these therapies are not practiced in hospitals or physicians’ offices. They focus on natural methods of healing with an emphasis on preventing disease. They are also more likely to treat chronic ailments after conventional medicine has failed.

Alternative medicine originates from the traditions of ancient cultures, particularly China and India. For instance, 370 different healing drugs were used in Mesopotamia while 600 were common in India. The Chinese had 2000 herbs, metals, and minerals as ingredients in 16,000 different preparations.[\[4\]](#) Despite the variety, many historians agree that these ancient medical practices had little success in actually curing disease. The real effects are still under scrutiny today including comparisons with the strides made by modern medicine. Despite the shortfalls of conventional medicine, we live longer and are healthier than people of long ago.

Ancient alternative medicine was greatly influenced by Eastern religions. That is why today’s users of so-called “rediscovered” alternative medicines can still see those religious concepts interwoven with the treatments. Many alternative medicine proponents approach holistic health from a pantheistic worldview. Central to pantheism is the idea of monism—the idea that everything in the universe is one ultimate reality. If all is one, then man is divine. Since we are divine, we are without sin. Sin is merely an illusion that creates false guilt. This guilt is what leads to illness.

Deepak Chopra writes, “. . . the seeds of God are inside us. . . . When we make the journey of the spirit, we water these divine seeds. . . . In the eyes of the spirit, everyone is

innocent, in all senses of the word. Because you are innocent, you have not done anything that merits punishment or divine wrath.”[\[5\]](#)

Some advocates of alternative medicine would point out that the biblical view of health is also considered holistic. Indeed, God made man a complex being with physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions, and He cares about every aspect of our personhood. (You can see these aspects in Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23.) Contrary to pantheism, the Bible teaches God is a personal being and we are His created beings. We were meant for a personal relationship with Him, but we are separated from this by sin. Biblical health begins with a right relationship with a personal God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Rather than ignoring sin, it must be dealt with through repentance and restoration. Finally, a Christian must acknowledge that God may have a purpose for suffering, and that there is value to yielding to His plan.

Should a Christian Use Alternative Medicine?

When it comes to selecting an alternative therapy, there is a smorgasbord of choices. How can a Christian discern an acceptable alternative medicine from one that is unacceptable? In making a decision, it is helpful to identify the different alternative medicines. The authors of *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What Is Good and What Is Not?*[\[6\]](#) give five categories of alternative therapies.

The first category is *complementary* therapies. These deal with lifestyle issues such as diet, exercise and stress. The next category is *scientifically unproven* therapies. These have undergone scientific research, but with little evidence for their effectiveness. Herbal remedies would be an example of scientifically unproven therapies.

A third category is *scientifically questionable* therapies.

These are therapies which contradict basic scientific principles or that cannot be easily verified. An example is Chinese acupuncture that teaches a contradictory understanding to what is known about human physiology. A fourth category is *life energy* therapies. These assume life energy called “Chi” or “Prana” that can be manipulated using a variety of techniques. Maybe you have heard of “[Reiki](#)” and therapeutic touch. The final category of therapies is *quackery* and *fraud*. These are therapies that have been shown to have no reasonable benefit.

Before deciding to use an alternative medicine, a Christian should consider first under which category the particular therapy falls. Generally speaking, complementary therapies provide important insights into maintaining good health. Scientifically unproven and questionable therapy must be studied and decisions made on a case-by-case basis. Many of the proofs for alternative medicine are based on controversial interpretations of scientific theories or testimonies of users.^[7] The wisest approach is to only use cures endorsed by sound medical research and controlled testing. Christians should avoid therapies that fall under the life energy and fraud categories.

Consult your physician and pharmacist. Too often individuals will engage in alternative treatments without informing their physician. Proponents of alternative medicine try to discourage their clients from using conventional medical methods, claiming their way to be the best. This can be a dangerous concept. An alternative therapist may prescribe approaches contrary to your doctor’s recommendation, or give you medicines that may react negatively with your prescribed medications.

Finally, be a wise steward. Don’t spend your resources on therapies that have been proved ineffective or questionable. Watch out for practitioners of a false religious system. In my pastoral experience, I have witnessed Christians turn to

shamans and Chinese folk medicine when diagnosed with a serious illness. In all cases the alternative therapy did not help the situation and cost the family monetarily. More importantly, it impaired their witness for Christ. Make your lifestyle, especially the way you handle illness, a testimony for Christ.

Life Energy Therapies

As mentioned earlier, there are five categories of alternative medicines. Christians should avoid *life energy* and *quackery* and *fraud* therapies.

Let us take a careful look at life energy therapies. Although there are over 60 different names for these therapies, they are all based on six fundamental principles.^{8} Practitioners believe that life energy flows throughout the universe. There are numerous names for this impersonal energy. Traditional Chinese medicine calls this energy “Chi” while Indian Ayurvedic medicine titles it “Prana.” Some Christians mistakenly equate this with the Holy Spirit. The two are not the same.

Life energy therapists believe that humans are composed of energy surrounded by a material body. Life energy therapy directs this energy so that it flows throughout the body unhindered. Disease is believed to be the result of an imbalance or blockage in the energy flow. Traditional Chinese medicine describes an elaborate system of channels within the body called meridians. To cure an illness, the body must be manipulated to restore the flow of energy through the meridians.

Traditional Chinese and Indian practitioners believe they can determine one’s energy flow by looking at the skin color, symptoms, tongue, and pulse. Therapeutic touch practitioners say they can sense the energy flow by moving their hands above the skin. Supposedly there are now high tech machines that can

measure this energy flow. Many of these machines, for example the Vegatest and its spin-offs, have been deemed fraudulent and are illegal.[{9}](#)

It is said that life energy can be re-directed to treat an offending illness. Life energy therapists believe they can adjust the flow of energy through physical manipulation or invisible transfer from healer to patient. In traditional Chinese medicine, needles are used to unplug holes or stimulate the flow of this energy. Massage, exercise, and herbs are also believed to restore Chi as are breathing and meditation techniques.

Miracles are believed to occur by altering the life energy. This is the message presented in *Star Wars*. In the movie, the Jedi masters could control the life energy, or Force, to perform miraculous feats. The concept of God and energy are used interchangeably. From this we can conclude that life energy is, in essence, God. Since we are energy, we are divine because we are of the same essence as the Divine.

Christians should avoid therapists who expound life energy therapy. Many ideas are built on a pantheistic worldview, causing these therapies to embrace or at least acknowledge Eastern mysticism. Also, their teachings have drifted far from objective knowledge of the human body. Finally, God is not an impersonal force, and He cannot be manipulated by formulas or healing rituals. God will not heal through any practice that is contrary to His Word.

Herbal Treatments

Wherever you look, it seems like there is an infomercial or ad for herbal products. According to a 1998 study in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, between 1990 and 1997, there was a 380 percent rise in herbal remedies and a 130 percent increase in high dose vitamin use in the US.[{10}](#) Current estimates say 60-72 million Americans use herbal

supplements.[\[11\]](#) Many herbal treatments make remarkable claims of healing cancer, arthritis, depression, and other illnesses. What are we to make of the herbal craze?

Be discerning if you choose to use herbs. *Natural* does not guarantee *safe*. There are many natural herbs that can produce dangerous, and even deadly, side effects. Be wary of the marketing hype. Despite the ads, the truth of the matter is that research has concluded that the effectiveness of herbal use is questionable at best. You also need to consider quality control. Unlike prescription and non-prescription drugs that are tightly regulated by the FDA, no organization is directly responsible for monitoring the quality or concentrations of herbal products. Be skeptical of “a pill for every ill” mentality. Finally, be sure to avoid anyone who claims to have a secret formula, especially if he reports to have been persecuted by the American Medical Association or Federal Drug Administration. Avoid any retailer, radio ad, or person who is bent on selling his product as a cure-all.

Some herbal treatments are costly and provide no enhancement. However, some herbal supplements *have* shown some promising benefits. Herbal treatments may prove to be helpful additions to conventional treatments. Herbs like ginseng have shown to be beneficial for Type 2 diabetes, for example. Herbal preparations are sometimes less potent in dosage than prescriptions drugs and may be less toxic.

It is important to thoroughly research the product you are considering using. Inform your doctor and pharmacist. They know your medical history and can alert you to any potentially dangerous interactions between herbs and pharmaceutical drugs. Be leery of thinking that if taking a little is good, a heavier dose must be even better. Find out whether the herbs are for long or short term. Check the quality of the product and be aware of the possible side effects. Don't assume that if the product has been used for a while, even for centuries, it must be better.

There is no biblical admonition forbidding the use of herbal products. However, Christians should approach the herbal market from an informed perspective. Some excellent books on the subject are *The American Pharmaceutical Association Practical Guide to Natural Medicines* and *Alternative Medicine: A Christian Handbook*. Excellent Web sites include herbalgram.com and naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com/.

In times of health and especially in dealing with illness, our goal is always to honor the Lord.

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Yoga and Christianity: Are They Compatible? – A Biblical

Worldview Perspective

Michael Gleghorn takes a hard look at yoga to determine if the practice is compatible with Christian living. After examining the spiritual underpinnings of yoga and the relationship of the physical aspects to the spiritual teaching, he concludes that Christians seeking physical exercise would be wise to consider techniques other than yoga.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

What is Yoga?

What is yoga? For many in the West, yoga is simply a system of physical exercise, a means of strengthening the body, improving flexibility, and even healing or preventing a variety of bodily ailments. But if we inquire into the history and philosophy of yoga we discover that “much more than a system of physical exercise for health, Yoga is . . . [an] ancient path to spiritual growth.” It is a path enshrined in much of the sacred literature of India.^{1} Thus, if we truly want a better understanding of yoga, we must dig beneath the surface and examine the historical roots of the subject.

Before we begin digging, however, we must first understand what the term “yoga” actually means. “According to tradition, ‘yoga’ means ‘union,’ the union...of the finite ‘jiva’ (transitory self) with the infinite’...Brahman’ (eternal Self).”^{2} “Brahman” is a term often used for the Hindu concept of “God,” or Ultimate Reality. It is an impersonal, divine substance that “pervades, envelops, and underlies everything.”^{3} With this in mind, let’s briefly look at three key texts that will help us chart the origin and development of yoga within India.

It appears that one can trace both the practice and goal of yoga all the way back to the *Upanishads*, probably written

between 1000-500 B.C.{4} One *Upanishad* tells us: “Unite the light within you with the light of Brahman.”{5} Clearly, then, the goal of yoga (i.e. union with Brahman) is at least as old as the *Upanishads*.

In addition, the word “yoga” often appears in the *Bhagavad Gita*, a classic Hindu text possibly written as early as the fifth century B.C.{6} In chapter 6, Krishna declares: “Thus joy supreme comes to the Yogi . . . who is one with Brahman, with God.”{7}

Finally, in about A.D. 150, the yogi Patanjali systematized yoga into eight distinct “limbs” in his *Yoga Sutras*. These eight limbs are like a staircase, supposedly leading the yogi from ignorance to enlightenment. In order, the eight limbs are: *yama* (self-control), *niyama* (religious observances), *asana* (postures), *pranayama* (breathing exercises), *pratyahara* (sense control), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (deep contemplation), and *samadhi* (enlightenment){8} It’s interesting to note that postures and breathing exercises, often considered to be the whole of yoga in the West, are steps three and four along Patanjali’s “royal” road to union with Brahman.

We see that yoga is an ancient spiritual discipline deeply rooted in the religion of Hinduism. This being so, we may honestly wonder whether it’s really wise for a Christian to be involved in yoga practice. Next, we’ll continue our discussion by examining some of the important doctrinal differences between yoga and Christianity.

Yoga and Christianity: What are the Differences?

Many people today (including some Christians) are taking up yoga practice. We’ll later consider whether yoga philosophy can truly be separated from yoga practice, but we must first establish that there are crucial doctrinal differences between

yoga and Christianity. Let's briefly look at just a few of these.

First, yoga and Christianity have very different concepts of God. As previously stated, the goal of yoga is to experience union with "God." But what do yogis mean when they speak of "God," or Brahman? Exactly what are we being encouraged to "unite" with? Most yogis conceive of "God" as an impersonal, spiritual substance, coextensive with all of reality. This doctrine is called pantheism, the view that everything is "God." It differs markedly from the theism of biblical Christianity. In the Bible, God reveals Himself as the personal Creator of the universe. God is the Creator; the universe, His creation. The Bible maintains a careful distinction between the two.[{9}](#)

A second difference between yoga and Christianity concerns their views of man. Since yoga philosophy teaches that everything is "God," it necessarily follows that man, too, is "God." Christianity, however, makes a clear distinction between God and man. God is the Creator; man is one of His creatures. Of course man is certainly unique, for unlike the animals he was created in the image of God.[{10}](#) Nevertheless, Christianity clearly differs from yoga in its unqualified insistence that God and man are distinct.

Finally, let's briefly consider how yoga and Christianity differently conceive man's fundamental problem, as well as its solution. Yoga conceives man's problem primarily in terms of ignorance; man simply doesn't realize that he is "God." The solution is enlightenment, an experience of union with "God." This solution (which is the goal of yoga) can only be reached through much personal striving and effort. Christianity, however, sees man's primary problem as sin, a failure to conform to both the character and standards of a morally perfect God. Man is thus alienated from God and in need of reconciliation. The solution is Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."[{11}](#) Through Jesus' death

on the cross, God reconciled the world to Himself.[{12}](#) He now calls men to freely receive all the benefits of His salvation through faith in Christ alone. Unlike yoga, Christianity views salvation as a free gift. It can only be received; it can never be earned.

Clearly, Christianity and yoga are mutually exclusive viewpoints. But is every kind of yoga the same? Isn't there at least one that's exclusively concerned with physical health and exercise? Next, we'll take a closer look at hatha yoga, the one most often believed to be purely physical in nature.

What Is Hatha Yoga?

Here we've learned that yoga is an ancient spiritual discipline rooted in a belief system that is utterly incompatible with Christianity. But is this true of *all* yoga? Isn't *hatha* yoga simply concerned with physical development and good health?

Hatha yoga is primarily concerned with two things: *asana* (physical postures) and *pranayama* (breathing exercises). But it's important to realize that both *asana* and *pranayama* also play a significant role in Patanjali's *raja* (or "royal") yoga. In the traditional eight "limbs" of Patanjali's system, *asana* and *pranayama* are limbs three and four. What then is the relationship of hatha to raja yoga?

Former yoga practitioner Dave Fetcho states that yoga postures "evolved as an integral part of Raja . . . Yoga."[{13}](#) He points out that the author of the famous handbook, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, "presents Hatha . . . solely and exclusively for the attainment of Raja Yoga."[{14}](#) He also cites a French yoga scholar who claims, "the sole purpose of . . . Hatha Yoga is to suppress physical obstacles on the . . . Royal path of Raja Yoga and Hatha Yoga is therefore called 'the ladder to Raja Yoga.'"[{15}](#) Fetcho concurs, noting that the physical postures are "specifically designed to manipulate

consciousness...into Raja Yoga's consummate experience of *samadhi*: undifferentiated union with the primal essence of consciousness." [\[16\]](#) These statements should make it quite clear that hatha, or physical, yoga has historically been viewed simply as a means of aiding the yogi in attaining enlightenment, the final limb of raja yoga.

This is further confirmed by looking at Iyengar yoga, possibly the most popular form of hatha yoga in the U.S. The Web site for the Iyengar Yoga Institute of San Francisco states: "BKS Iyengar studies and teaches yoga as unfolded in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali [sic] and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika among other classical texts. Thus Asana, or postures, are taught as one of the eight limbs . . . of yoga defined by Patanjali." [\[17\]](#) In fact, the ultimate goal of Iyengar hatha yoga is precisely the same as that of Patanjali's raja yoga. [\[18\]](#) Both aim to experience union with "God," Brahman, or universal consciousness.

If all these things are so, it seems increasingly apparent that hatha yoga may ultimately involve its practitioners in much more than physical exercise. Although it may not be obvious at first, the ultimate goal of hatha is the same as every other form of yoga: union of the self with an impersonal, universal consciousness. We must remember that the Bible never exhorts Christians to seek such an experience. If anything, it warns us of the potential dangers in doing so. Next, we'll consider whether yoga practice might, in fact, be dangerous—and why.

Can Yoga be Harmful?

Despite its touted health benefits, there are numerous warnings in authoritative yoga literature which caution that yoga can be physically, mentally, and spiritually harmful if not practiced correctly.

For instance, Swami Prabhavananda warns of the potentially

dangerous physical effects that might result from yoga breathing exercises: “Unless properly done, there is a good chance of injuring the brain. And those who practice such breathing without proper supervision can suffer a disease which no known science or doctor can cure.”{19}

In addition, many yogis warn that yoga practice can endanger one’s sanity. In describing the awakening of “kundalini” (coiled serpent power) Gopi Krishna records his own experience as follows: “It was variable for many years, painful, obsessive...I have passed through almost all the stages of...mediumistic, psychotic, and other types of mind; for some time I was hovering between sanity and insanity.”{20}

Finally, however, from a Christian perspective it seems that yoga could also be spiritually harmful. To understand why, let’s return to the experience of “kundalini.” Yoga scholar Hans Rieker declares, “Kundalini [is] the mainstay of all yoga practices.”{21} But what exactly is kundalini and why is it so central to yoga practice?

Swami Vivekananda summarizes the kundalini experience as follows: “When awakened through the practice of spiritual disciplines, it rises through the spinal column, passes through the various centres, and at last reaches the brain, whereupon the yogi experiences samadhi, or total absorption in the Godhead.”{22} And researcher John White takes the importance of this experience even further declaring: “Although the word kundalini comes from the yogic tradition, nearly all the world’s major religions, spiritual paths, and genuine occult traditions see something akin to the kundalini experience as having significance in “divinizing” a person. The word itself may not appear...but the concept is there...as a key to attaining godlike stature.”{23}

Reading such descriptions of the kundalini, or coiled serpent power, the Christian can almost hear the hiss of that “serpent of old...who deceives the whole world.”{24} In Eden, he flattered

our first parents by telling them: “You will be like God.”[{25}](#) And though Christianity and yoga have very different conceptions of God, isn’t this essentially what yoga promises?

Swami Ajaya once said, “The main teaching of Yoga is that man’s true nature is divine.”[{26}](#) Obviously this is not the Christian view of man. But if the goal of yoga is to realize one’s essential divinity through union with “God,” then shouldn’t the Christian view the practice that leads to this realization as potentially spiritually harmful? Next, we’ll conclude our discussion by asking whether it’s really possible to separate yoga philosophy from yoga practice.

Can Philosophy and Practice be Separated?

We’ve seen that yoga is an ancient spiritual discipline whose central doctrines are utterly incompatible with those of Christianity. Even hatha yoga, often considered to be exclusively concerned with physical development, is best understood as merely a means of helping the yogi reach the goal of samadhi, or union with “God.” Furthermore, we’ve seen that all yoga, including hatha, has the potential to be physically, mentally, and spiritually harmful.

In light of such evidence, it may appear that this question—“Can yoga philosophy be separated from yoga practice?”—has already been answered in the negative. And this is certainly the view of many yoga scholars. Dave Fetcho, formerly of the Ananda Marga Yoga Society, has written, “Physical yoga, according to its classical definitions, is inheritably and functionally incapable of being separated from Eastern religious metaphysics.”[{27}](#) What’s more, yoga authorities Feuerstein and Miller, in discussing yoga postures (asana) and breathing exercises (pranayama), indicate that such practices are more than just another form of physical exercise; indeed, they “are *psychosomatic* exercises.”[{28}](#) Does this mean that separating theory from practice is simply impossible with yoga?

If one carefully looks through an introductory text on hatha yoga, {29} one will see many different postures illustrated. A number of these may be similar, if not identical, to exercises and stretches one is already doing. Indeed, if one is engaged in a regular stretching program, this is quite probable. This raises an important question: Suppose that such beginning level yoga postures are done in a context completely free of yogic philosophy. In such a case as this, doesn't honesty compel us to acknowledge at least the *possibility* of separating theory from practice?

While I hate to disagree with scholars who know far more about the subject than I do, this distinction does seem valid to me. However, let me quickly add that I see this distinction as legitimate *only* at the very beginning of such practices, and *only* with regard to the postures. The breathing exercises, for various reasons, remain problematic. {30} But this distinction raises yet another question, for how many people begin an exercise program intending never to move beyond the most basic level? And since by the very nature of yoga practice, such a distinction could *only* be valid at the very earliest of stages, why would a Christian ever want to begin this process? It seems to me that if someone wants an exercise program with physical benefits similar to yoga, but without all the negative spiritual baggage, they should consider low-impact or water aerobics, water ballet, or simple stretching. {31} These programs can be just as beneficial for the body, without potentially endangering the soul. In my opinion, then, Christians would be better off to never begin yoga practice.

[Note from the webmistress: Also see [Why a Christian Alternative to Yoga?](#) on the PraiseMoves.com website for an excellent treatment of this subject from a former yoga instructor who explains why the two are incompatible.]

Notes

1. Raphael, *Essence and Purpose of Yoga: The Initiatory*

- Pathways to the Transcendent* (Massachusetts: Element Books, Inc., 1996), back cover.
2. Brad Scott, "Exercise or Religious Practice? Yoga: What the Teacher Never Taught You in That Hatha Yoga Class" in *The Watchman Expositor* (Vol. 18, No. 2, 2001): 5.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid., 6.
 5. Ibid., cited in Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, *The Upanishads: Breath of the Eternal* (New York: New American Library, 1957), 120ff.
 6. *Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Juan Mascaro (New York: Penguin Books, 1962), back cover.
 7. Ibid., 71.
 8. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 601.
 9. See Romans 1:18-25.
 10. See Genesis 1:26.
 11. John 1:29.
 12. See 2 Corinthians 5:19.
 13. Dave Fetcho, "Yoga," (Berkeley, CA: Spiritual Counterfeits Project, 1978), cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 602.
 14. Ibid., 603.
 15. Ibid.
 16. Ibid., 602.
 17. See "Source and Context: Patanjali and Ashtanga Yoga" at <http://www.iyisf.org/>. This quotation was obtained from the site on March 1, 2002.
 18. Ibid.
 19. Swami Prabhavananda, *Yoga and Mysticism* (Hollywood, CA: Vedanta Press, 1972), 18, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 604.
 20. Gopi Krishna, *The Awakening of Kundalini* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), 124, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 608.
 21. Hans Ulrich Rieker, *The Yoga of Light: Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (New York: Seabury Press, 1971), 101, cited in

- Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 606.
22. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1970), 16, cited in Scott, "Exercise or Religious Practice? Yoga: What the Teacher Never Taught You in That Hatha Yoga Class," 5.
23. John White, ed., *Kundalini Evolution and Enlightenment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1979), 17, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 606.
24. See Revelation 12:9.
25. See Genesis 3:5.
26. Swami Rama, *Lectures on Yoga: Practical Lessons on Yoga* (Glenview, IL: Himalayan International Institute of Yoga, Science and Philosophy, 1976, rev.), vi, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 596.
27. Dave Fetcho, "Yoga," 2, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 600.
28. George Feuerstein and Jeanine Miller, *Yoga and Beyond: Essays in Indian Philosophy* (New York: Schocken, 1972), 27-28, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 600.
29. For example, Richard Hittleman, *Introduction to Yoga* (New York: Bantam Books, 1969)
30. For instance, the breathing exercises can be physically dangerous. Sri Chinmoy wrote, "To practice pranayama without real guidance is very dangerous. I know of three persons who have died from it..." See *Great Masters and the Cosmic Gods* (Jamaica, NY: Agni Press, 1977), 8, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 604. In addition, however, from a Christian perspective such exercises may also be mentally and spiritually dangerous (at least potentially) because they can induce altered states of consciousness that may make one more vulnerable to demonic deception. Indeed, psychologist Ernest L. Rossi has written of pranayama: "The manual manipulation of the nasal cycle during meditation (dhyana) is the most thoroughly documented of techniques for altering consciousness." See Benjamin B. Wolman and Montague Ullman, eds., *Handbook of States of Consciousness* (New York:

Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1986), 113, cited in Ankerberg and Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, 595.

31. Of course such programs will need to be tailored to each individual's needs and goals. It's always a good idea to talk to your doctor before beginning any new exercise program.

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