

Why We Shouldn't Hate Philosophy: A Biblical Perspective

Michael Gleghorn examines the role of philosophy in a Christian worldview. Does philosophy help us flesh out our biblical perspective or does it just confuse our understanding?

A Walk on the Slippery Rocks

For many people in our culture today, Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians got it right: "Philosophy is a walk on the slippery rocks." But for some in the Christian community, they didn't go far enough. Philosophy, they say, is far more dangerous than a walk on slippery rocks. It's an enemy of orthodoxy and a friend of heresy. It's typically a product of wild, rash, and uncontrolled human speculation. Its doctrines are empty and deceptive. Worse still, they may even come from demons!

Such attitudes are hardly new. The early church father Tertullian famously wrote:

What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic? . . . I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic . . . Christianity. After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research.[\[1\]](#)

Should Christians, then, hate and reject all philosophy? Should we shun it, despise it, and trample it underfoot? Doesn't the Bible warn us about the dangers of philosophy and urge us to avoid it? In thinking through such questions, it's important that we be careful. Before we possibly injure

ourselves with any violent, knee-jerk reactions, we may first want to settle down a bit and ask ourselves a few questions. First, what exactly is philosophy anyway? What, if anything, does the Bible have to say about it? Might it have any value for the Christian faith? Could it possibly help strengthen or support the ministry of the church? Are there any potential benefits that Christians might gain from studying philosophy? And if so, what are they? These are just a few of the questions that we want to consider.

But let's begin with that first question: Just what is philosophy anyway? Defining this term can be difficult. It gets tossed around by different people in a variety of ways. But we can get a rough idea of its meaning by observing that it comes from two Greek words: *philein*, which means "to love," and *sophia*, which means "wisdom." So at one level, *philosophy* is just the love of wisdom. There's nothing wrong with that!

But let's go further. Socrates claimed that the unexamined life was not worth living. And throughout its history, philosophy has gained a reputation for the careful, rational, and critical examination of life's biggest questions. "Accordingly," write Christian philosophers J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, "philosophy may be defined as the attempt to think rationally and critically about life's most important questions in order to obtain knowledge and wisdom about them."[\[2\]](#) So while philosophy may *sometimes* be a walk on slippery rocks, it may also be a potentially powerful resource for thinking through some of life's most important issues.

Beware of Hollow and Deceptive Philosophy

In their recent philosophy textbook, Moreland and Craig make the following statement:

For many years we have each been involved, not just in scholarly work, but in speaking evangelistically on

university campuses with groups like . . . Campus Crusade for Christ . . . Again and again, we have seen the practical value of philosophical studies in reaching students for Christ. . . The fact is that there is tremendous interest among unbelieving students in hearing a rational presentation and defense of the gospel, and some will be ready to respond with trust in Christ. To speak frankly, we do not know how one could minister effectively in a public way on our university campuses without training in philosophy.[{3}](#)

This is a strong endorsement of the value of philosophy in doing university evangelism on today's campuses. But some might be thinking, "What a minute! Doesn't the Bible warn us about the dangers of philosophy? And aren't we urged to avoid such dangers?"

In Colossians 2:8 (NIV), the apostle Paul wrote, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." What does this verse mean? Is Paul saying that Christians shouldn't study philosophy? Let's take a closer look.

First, "the Greek grammar indicates that 'hollow and deceptive' go together with 'philosophy.'" [{4}](#) So Paul is not condemning *all* philosophy here. Instead, he's warning the Colossians about being taken captive by a particular "hollow and deceptive" philosophy that was making inroads into their church. Many scholars believe that the philosophy Paul had in mind was a Gnostic-like philosophy that promoted legalism, mysticism, and asceticism. [{5}](#)

Second, Paul doesn't forbid the *study* of philosophy in this verse. Rather, he warns the Colossian believers not to be *taken captive* by empty and deceptive human speculation. This distinction is important. One can *study* philosophy, even "empty and deceptive" philosophy, without being *taken captive*

by it.

What does it mean to be “taken captive”? When men are taken captive in war, they are forced to go where their captors lead them. They may only be permitted to see and hear certain things, or to eat and sleep at certain times. In short, captives are under the *control* of their captors. This is what Paul is warning the Colossians about. He’s urging them to not let their beliefs and attitudes be *controlled* by an alien, non-Christian philosophy. He’s not saying that philosophy in general is bad or that it’s wrong to study philosophy as an academic discipline.

But doesn’t Paul also say that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world? And doesn’t *this* count against the study of philosophy?

Is Worldly Wisdom Worthless?

In 1 Corinthians 1:20 (NIV) the apostle Paul wrote, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” Some Christians think this passage teaches that the study of philosophy and human wisdom is both foolish and a waste of time. But is this correct? Is that really what Paul was saying in this passage? I personally don’t think so.

We must remember that Paul himself had at least some knowledge of both pagan philosophy and literature – and he made much use of reasoning in personal evangelism. In Acts 17 we learn that while Paul was in Athens “he *reasoned* in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there” (v. 17; NIV). On one occasion he spent time conversing and disputing with some of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (v. 18). Further, when it suited his purposes, Paul could quote freely (and accurately) from the writings of pagan

poets. In Acts 17:28 he cites with approval both the Cretan poet Epimenides and the Cilician poet Aratus, using them to make a *valid theological point about the nature of God and man* to the educated members of the Athenian Areopagus. Thus, we should at least be cautious before asserting that Paul was opposed to *all* philosophy and human wisdom. He obviously wasn't.

But if this is so, then in what sense has God made foolish the wisdom of the world? What did Paul mean when he wrote this? The answer, I think, can be found (at least in part) in the very next verse: "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21; NASB). In other words, as Craig and Moreland observe, "the gospel of salvation could never have been discovered by philosophy, but had to be revealed by the biblical God who acts in history."[6](#) This clearly indicates the *limitations* of philosophy and human wisdom. But the fact that these disciplines have very real *limitations* in no way implies that they are utterly *worthless*. We need to appreciate something for what it is, recognizing its limitations, but appreciating its value all the same. Philosophy by itself could never have discovered the gospel. But this doesn't mean that it's not still a valuable ally in the search for truth and a valuable resource for carefully thinking through some of life's greatest mysteries.

In the remainder of this article, we'll explore some of the ways in which philosophy *is* valuable, both for the individual Christian and for the ministry of the church.

The Value of Philosophy (Part 1)

Moreland and Craig observe that "throughout the history of Christianity, philosophy has played an important role in the life of the church and the spread and defense of the gospel of

Christ.”{7}

John Wesley, the famous revivalist and theologian, seemed well-aware of this fact. In 1756 he delivered “An Address to the Clergy”. Among the various qualifications that Wesley thought a good minister should have, one was a basic knowledge of philosophy. He challenged his fellow clergymen with these questions: “Am I a tolerable master of the sciences? Have I gone through the very gate of them, logic? . . . Do I understand metaphysics; if not the . . . subtleties of . . . Aquinas, yet the first rudiments, the general principles, of that useful science?”{8} It’s interesting to note that Wesley’s passion for preaching and evangelism didn’t cause him to denigrate the importance of basic philosophical knowledge. Indeed, he rather insists on its importance for anyone involved in the teaching and preaching ministries of the church.

But *why* is philosophy valuable? What practical benefits does it offer those involved in regular Christian service? And how has it contributed to the health and well-being of the church throughout history? Drs. Moreland and Craig list many reasons why philosophy is (and has been) such an important part of a thriving Christian community.{9}

In the first place, philosophy is of tremendous value in the tasks of Christian apologetics and polemics. Whereas the goal of apologetics is to provide a reasoned defense of the truth of Christianity, “polemics is the task of criticizing and refuting alternative views of the world.”{10} Both tasks are important, and both are biblical. The apostle Peter tells us to always be ready “to make a defense” for the hope that we have in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15; NASB). Jude exhorts us to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (v. 3; NASB). And Paul says that elders in the church should “be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Tit. 1:9; NASB). The proper use of philosophy can be a great help in fulfilling

each of these biblical injunctions.

Additionally, philosophy serves as the handmaid of theology by bringing clarity and precision to the formulation of Christian doctrine. “For example, philosophers help to clarify the different attributes of God; they can show that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation are not contradictory; they can shed light on the nature of human freedom, and so on.”[\[11\]](#) In other words, the task of the theologian is made easier with the help of his friends in the philosophy department!

The Value of Philosophy (Part 2)

Let’s consider a few more ways in which philosophy can help strengthen and support both the individual believer and the universal church.

First, careful philosophical reflection is one of the ways in which human beings uniquely express that they are made in the image and likeness of God. As Drs. Craig and Moreland observe, “God . . . is a rational being, and humans are made like him in this respect.”[\[12\]](#) One of the ways in which we can honor God’s commandment to love him with our minds (Matt. 22:37) is to give serious philosophical consideration to what God has revealed about himself in creation, conscience, history, and the Bible. As we reverently reflect on the attributes of God, or His work in creation and redemption, we aren’t merely engaged in a useless academic exercise. On the contrary, we are loving God with our minds—and our hearts are often led to worship and adore the One “who alone is immortal and . . . lives in unapproachable light” (1 Tim. 6:16; NIV).

But philosophy isn’t only of value for the individual believer; it’s also of value for the universal church. Commenting on John Gager’s book, *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity*, Drs. Moreland and Craig write:

The early church faced intellectual and cultural ridicule from Romans and Greeks. This ridicule threatened internal cohesion within the church and its evangelistic boldness toward unbelievers. Gager argues that it was primarily the presence of philosophers and apologists within the church that enhanced the self-image of the Christian community because these early scholars showed that the Christian community was just as rich intellectually and culturally as was the pagan culture surrounding it.[*{13}*](#)

Christian philosophers and apologists in our own day continue to serve a similar function. By carefully explaining and defending the Christian faith, they help enhance the self-image of the church, increase the confidence and boldness of believers in evangelism, and help keep Christianity a viable option among sincere seekers in the intellectual marketplace of ideas.

Of course, not all philosophy is friendly to Christianity. Indeed, some of it is downright hostile. But this shouldn't cause Christians to abandon the task and (for some) even calling of philosophy. The church has always needed, and still needs today, talented men and women who can use philosophy to rationally declare and defend the Christian faith to everyone who asks for a reason for the hope that we have in Christ (1 Pet. 3:15). As C.S. Lewis once said, "Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered."[*{14}*](#) These are just a few of the reasons why we shouldn't hate philosophy.

Notes

1. Tertullian, "The Prescriptions Against the Heretics," trans. S.L. Greenslade, in *Early Latin Theology* (Vol. V in "The Library of Christian Classics"; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 31-32; cited in Hugh T. Kerr, ed., *Readings in Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 39.

2. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13.
3. Ibid., 4-5.
4. Ibid., 18.
5. Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 487.
6. Craig and Moreland, 19.
7. Ibid., 12.
8. John Wesley, "An Address to the Clergy," delivered February 6, 1756. Reprinted in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3d ed., 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 6:217-31; cited in Craig and Moreland, 4.
9. See Craig and Moreland, 14-17. I have relied heavily on their observations in this, and the following, section of this article.
10. Ibid., 15.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 16.
14. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949), 50; cited in Craig and Moreland, 17.

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The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands: A Christian View

Sue Bohlin looks at this important book from a distinctly Christian perspective. Filtering the advice through a biblical worldview increases the purity and strength of the

message on how to minister effectively to your husband.

Why We Need This Book

Talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger has written a book that is improving thousands of marriages: *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands*.^{1} We need this book because millions of wives either don't know how to love their husbands wisely and well, or they're too self-centered to see it as important. Dr. Laura credits this dismal condition to forty years of feminist philosophy, "with its condemnation of just about everything male as evil, stupid, and oppressive, and the denigration of female and male roles in families."^{2} While the women's movement certainly had a hand to play in the disintegration of relationships and the family, I believe the core cause is our sinful self-centeredness, just as the Bible says.^{3}

Which is why we need help, and God instructs older women to train younger women to love their husband and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.^{4} *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* is a great resource for learning these important values and skills.

God gives us great power as women. Dr. Laura says, "Men are borne of women and spend the rest of their lives yearning for a woman's acceptance and approval. . . . Men admittedly are putty in the hands of a woman they love. Give him direct communication, respect, appreciation, food and good lovin', and he'll do just about anything you wish—foolish or not."^{5}

We'll be looking at these aspects of the proper care and feeding of husbands in this article, starting with a man's need for *direct communication*.

- We can improve on communication by doing it less. God made us verbal creatures, which can frustrate men with the

overwhelming amount of our words. Instead of expecting her husband to be a girlfriend (and men make wonderful husbands, but not girlfriends), the wise wife selects for true connecting value, gives the bottom line first, and chooses her timing well.

- Men make terrible mind readers, so be direct. Dropping subtle hints doesn't work with most men, and it doesn't mean a man is insensitive, uncaring, or oblivious.
- Spell out whether you want help and advice, or if you're just venting. God made men to want to be our heroes, so understand you can frustrate him if he can't fix what's hurting you because all you want is someone to listen.
- And finally, take whatever he says at face value. Women tend to overanalyze men when they are just not that complicated.

Respect

A listener to Dr. Laura's radio show named Edgar wrote, "There are a few things that men want so bad they would do anything for it. I think a good number of men want respect more than love. They like to feel they have some power. I nearly cry when you tell a woman caller to respect her husband. There is so much selfishness in the world—in marriages. Prosperity has allowed women to be so independent, and thus so selfish. I always feel as though I come last—my feelings come last, my needs come last." [\[6\]](#)

"A good number of men want respect more than love." God knew this when He made us. His commands to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:33 reflects each one's deepest needs: "Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Dr. Emerson Eggerichs of LoveandRespect.com points out that this verse commands a husband to love his wife. Why? She needs love like she needs air to breathe. This same verse commands a wife to respect her

husband. Why? He needs respect like he needs air to breathe. [{7}](#)

- Respect means treating someone in a way that builds him up and doesn't tear him down, never denigrating or attacking. [{8}](#)
- Respect means always treating the other person with the dignity they deserve as a person made in the image of God.
- Respect means grasping that a man's needs and wants are every bit as valid and important as a woman's needs and wants.
- Respect means not venting to others, *especially* the children. One woman wrote to Dr. Laura, "No emotional outlet is worth damaging my husband's reputation." [{9}](#)

There are three A's that men long for from their wives: attention, affection, and affirmation. Respect involves paying attention to what they do simply because they're the ones doing it.

Respect means allowing the other person to be different and do things differently than you. One repentant wife told Dr. Laura, "And in the end, it doesn't much matter that they eat PBJ sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner for a day or that one tooth brushing gets overlooked or whatever little thing that used to set me off!" [{10}](#)

One way to give respect is to give grace instead of resenting the things he does that complicate your life (like leaving drinking glasses in the living room or clothing on a chair). Ask yourself, "Is he *intentionally* doing this to bug me? To make my life difficult? If he were to die tomorrow, what wouldn't I give to have him back leaving these things out?"

Appreciation

Ask any woman what she wants, and near the top of her list she'll tell you, "I want to be acknowledged and appreciated

for the things I do.” Well, men want the same thing!

A man named Evan wrote to Dr. Laura: “My wife feels that if she doesn’t remind me again and again, something won’t get done. But the fact is, it makes me feel like her child and that Mommy needs to check up on me. It’s degrading. I want to be admired. I want to be acknowledged for being the breadwinner and making sure that we are all well taken care of. My greatest pleasure is when I feel like her hero. Like her ‘man.’ Not her boy.”[\[11\]](#)

It doesn’t matter what a husband’s primary love language is, every man wants to be shown appreciation for who he is and what he does.

I love to suggest to young wives and mothers, “Keep a gratitude journal to help you be on the lookout for the things your husband does that you appreciate. Every night, write down three things you noticed. And then *tell him* the kinds of things that are in your book!”

- Thank him for going to work every morning even when he doesn’t feel like it.
- Thank him for being faithful to you.
- Thank him for loving you.
- Thank him for giving you children—or even desiring to.
- Thank him for taking out the garbage, and changing the oil in your car, and mowing the yard.
- Thank him for bringing home his paycheck and not spending it on gambling or booze or drugs or women.

And then there’s the opposite of appreciation. The universal complaint of men who e-mailed Dr. Laura about her book “was

that their wives criticize, complain, nag, rarely compliment or express appreciation, are difficult to satisfy, and basically are not as nice to them as they'd be to a stranger ringing their doorbell at three A.M.!"[{12}](#) So allow me to make some suggestions:

- Request, don't demand. Demanding is rude and disrespectful.
- Don't nag. If you have to ask more than once, ask as if it were the first time you were making the request.
- Keep your mouth shut about things that don't matter. Ask yourself, is this the hill you want to die on?
- Don't be controlling—which is micromanaging. Dr. Laura wrote, "When women micromanage, their husbands give up trying to please them, and then the wives complain that their men don't do anything for them."[{13}](#)

Proverbs says, "Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body."[{14}](#) (This is truer no place more than in marriage.) Let your words be kind and full of appreciation.

Support

A man named Roy wrote to Dr. Laura with some good advice for wives: "If you can't accentuate the positive, at least acknowledge it. The world is full of messages to men that there are standards we don't meet. There is always another man who is more handsome, more virile, or more athletic than we are. None of that matters if the most important person in our life looks up to us, accepts us as we are, and loves us even though we aren't perfect. . . . All I know is that the husband who has a wife who supports him and praises him for the positive things he does is the envy of all the other men who have to live with criticism, sarcasm, and constant reminders of their failures."[{15}](#)

Men desperately want and need the support of their wives. This is reflected in what God reveals in His Word when He says, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."[{16}](#) And through the apostle Paul, God instructs wives to relate to their husbands in a way that meets this need when He says, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."[{17}](#)

Submission is basically giving support with a willing, cooperative heart.

A wife's submission includes knowing her gifts and strengths, and using them to serve her husband and family.

Service has a bad name, but both husbands and wives are called to serve God first and then each other; husbands are called to sacrificially love and serve their wives with Jesus as their pattern.[{18}](#)

So what does support look like?

- Believing in him. Telling him, "You have what it takes." Being his #1 fan.
- Cultivating a cooperative heart.
- Being generous and openhearted—willing to use your gifts and strengths to help him succeed.
- Understanding the importance of making him look good: never saying anything negative in public.
- Creating a home that's a safe haven from the world.
- Having a warm heart with a positive, cheerful demeanor. Women set the temperature of the home; we are thermostats, not thermometers, of the family. (On the other hand, Proverbs says "A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand."[{19}](#))

- Being interested in him and his life.
- Showing thoughtfulness. What does he like? Do it.
- And though by no means exhaustive, it also means being a person of faithfulness and integrity. That means keeping your promises and being dependable. As Proverbs 31 puts it, “Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.”[{20}](#)

Good Lovin’

Dr. Laura writes that men need to feel the approval, acceptance and attachment from their women that comes from physical intimacy.[{21}](#) For women, emotional intimacy leads to physical intimacy. For men, it’s the other way around; physical intimacy is the key to opening their hearts.

A man named Chris writes: “I don’t understand why women don’t understand that sex is a man’s number one need for his wife. It’s not just the act and sensation of pleasure, but it’s the acceptance by a woman of her man. There’s a communion that happens during intercourse that will bond a man to his woman, and he in turn will then begin to give of himself emotionally to her.”[{22}](#)

Wives can discover that giving themselves sexually to their husbands with a warm, open-hearted, loving spirit, can be the most effective encouragement to getting their husbands to open up emotionally.

“What attracts men to women is their femininity, and femininity isn’t only about appearance, it’s also about behaviors. Looking womanly and behaving sweetly and flirtatiously are gifts wives give to their husbands.” We see this modeled in the Song of Solomon, where the King’s bride displays her feminine charms in a holy seduction of her husband, and the way she tells him what she loves about his

body. {23}

Instead, our culture has things backward; many unmarried girls and women flaunt their bodies with a total lack of modesty or propriety. Once they marry, it's flannel nightgowns, wool socks, and no makeup.

Dr. Laura calls wives to give themselves sexually to their husbands, even when they don't feel like it, as an act of love. It's really no different, she points out, than the fact that they expect their husbands to go to work and earn money to support the family even on days they don't feel like it.

She's echoing what God said in 1 Corinthians 7 about husband and wife both fulfilling their marital duty to each other because each one's body belongs not just to themselves but to each other. He also said not to deprive each other for extended periods of time lest we be tempted.

Consider the wisdom of radio listener Herb: "Sex is to a husband what conversation is to a wife. When a wife deprives her husband of sex for days, even weeks on end, it is tantamount to his refusing to talk to her for days, even weeks. Think of it that way, wives, and realize what a deleterious impact enforced sexual abstinence has on a good man who is determined to remain faithful." {24}

I can't recommend *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* highly enough. In fact, I gave a copy to my new daughter-in-law! Let me close with one more piece of wisdom from Dr. Laura: "[M]en are simple creatures who come from a woman, are nurtured and brought up by a woman, and yearn for the continued love, admiration and approval of a woman. . . Women need to better appreciate the magnitude of their power and influence over men, and not misuse or abuse it." {25} Amen!

Notes

1. Laura Schlessinger, *The Proper Care and Feeding of*

Husbands, New York: HarperCollins, 2004.

2. Schlessinger, 3.

3. Jeremiah 17:9

4. Titus 2:4

5. Schlessinger, xvii.

6. Schlessinger, 1.

7.

<http://www.loveandrespect.com/Articles/article.asp?aid=43&cat=1>

8. Schlessinger, 157.

9. Schlessinger, 159.

10. Schlessinger, 158.

11. Schlessinger, 31.

12. Schlessinger, 37-38.

13. Schlessinger, 57.

14. Prov. 16:24

15. Schlessinger, 47-48.

16. Gen. 2:18.

17. Eph. 5:22, 24.

18. Eph. 2:25, 28.

19. Prov. 27:15.

20. Prov. 31:11.

21. Schlessinger, 25.

22. Schlessings, 129.

23. Song of Solomon 5:10-16

24. Schlessinger, 119.

25. Schlessinger. 10.

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The Five People You Meet in Heaven – A Biblical Worldview Critique

Written by Patrick Zukeran

Dr. Zukeran presents a biblical worldview critique of the story by Mitch Albom, The Five People You Meet in Heaven. Albom's story presents some interesting ideas about the afterlife, but falls far short of expressing a complete understanding of God's description of heaven. It misses the importance of being created in God's image, being redeemed to be able to spend eternity with our Creator, and the fellowship with God and all the saints for eternity.

Brief Synopsis

Eddie lives an insignificant life as a maintenance man for the rides at the Ruby Pier amusement park. One day a mechanical failure causes a fatal accident. Eddie rescues a young girl from her death but in the effort, he is killed. This is when the adventure begins.

Eddie enters heaven and discovers it is not a garden but a place where he will meet five people whose lives intersected with his in some significant way on earth, some readily known to Eddie and some unknown to him. These five explain the meaning of Eddie's life and the purpose of heaven. Through this best-seller fictional story, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, author Mitch Albom teaches us his understanding of the meaning of life.

In heaven, Eddie learns five key lessons from the five individuals. First, every life is interconnected so each person impacts others throughout his or her lifetime in ways that may not be recognized. Second, we should live sacrificing

for others, for such acts inevitably lead to good outcomes. Third, forgiveness is necessary to find inner peace. Fourth, love is a powerful virtue that lasts eternally. And finally, our life, as insignificant as it may seem, has a purpose.

Heaven is a place where we find inner peace with ourselves when we learn these lessons. Through this process, we are cleansed of negative thoughts and scars we carried in our lifetime and find true inner peace. After this, we will choose our heavenly dwelling. There we will wait for newcomers whose lives intersected ours on earth. We will be one of the five people they will meet as they learn the meaning of their life on earth.

What accounts for the popularity of Albom's work? He addresses two life questions that every individual wrestles with and desperately seeks answers to: What is the meaning of my existence? and What happens after death? In a creative way, here is a story that offers significance to each person's life and hope beyond the grave.

Albom is an excellent writer and is sincere in his effort. This story causes each one of us to wrestle with these key questions of our existence and eternal destiny, issues many choose to ignore but must inevitably face. He also teaches some valuable life lessons. For these reasons, the story is enjoyable and thought provoking.

But after reading the story, I found that Albom's answers fall short of providing satisfactory solutions to every person's dilemma. In some ways he gets us closer to the answer, but never really gets there. Christians will find that he gives us some appetizers, but fails to deliver the main dish. In what follows, I will present a biblical critique of this story and explain how Albom scratches the surface but never finishes the quest for meaning, significance, and eternal hope.

The Quest for Meaning

What is the meaning of my existence? Does my ordinary life make a difference? Will I look back on my life with regret, feeling that I contributed nothing significant in my lifetime? These are issues most people ask throughout their lifetime and seek answers for.

In *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, Mitch Albom teaches that one does not have to be famous or powerful to impact the lives of others. Every person who has understanding can know his or her life was worthwhile.

In Albom's story, the meaning of life comes from understanding that everyone's life is interconnected. Therefore, even small decisions and actions we take can significantly affect the lives of others. In a CBS interview, Albom stated, "I think the meaning of life is that we're all kind of connected to one another. I'm living proof of the influence that one person can have on other people. Look at what Morrie did for me talking to me. And I wrote a book to try to pay his medical bills and went from one person to another person and people come up and say your book changed my life. How did that happen? I'm convinced that everybody has an effect on everyone."[\[1\]](#)

It is true that our life does affect others, some in very significant ways. However, we are still left empty at the end of the novel because Albom's proposed solution falls short of providing ultimate meaning for our existence.

In the story, the main character Eddie learns in heaven that he impacted the lives of others both positively and negatively, often unintentionally. Knowing our life led to another's tragedy or greater enjoyment still begs the question, "So what?" It may feel good temporarily to know I made a difference, but that will not bring everlasting satisfaction. Why should we care if our lives affected others? Before we can answer the question, "What is the meaning of

life?" we must first answer the question, "Why were we created?"

If we are a cosmic accident as Darwinian evolutionary theory teaches, there is no intended purpose for our existence. Therefore, our lives have no ultimate meaning, and impacting the lives of others is meaningless, for our final destiny is extinction.

If God created us for a purpose, then we need to find out why He created us. The answer to the meaning of life is directly tied to the origins question. Since Albom does not answer the origin question, he cannot provide an adequate answer for the meaning of life question. The Bible teaches that we were created by God to love Him, love others, and fulfill His calling upon our lives. Any answer that does not include God as a centerpiece of the answer will fall short, and Albom basically leaves God out of his version of heaven.

Albom's Heaven

Could the traditional Christian view of heaven be wrong? Albom gives us a very different picture. Albom developed his idea from a story his uncle, Edward Beitchman, told him when he was a child. One night his uncle was lying near death and woke up to see his deceased relatives standing at the foot of the bed. When asked, "What did you do?" his uncle responded, "I told them to get lost. I wasn't ready for them yet."[\[2\]](#) Albom remembered this story and began to develop his concept of heaven for the story.

Albom states, "Somewhere, swimming in my head, was the image my uncle had given me around that table, a handful of people waiting for you when you die. And I began to explore this simple concept: what if heaven was not some lush Garden of Eden, but a place where you had your life explained to you by people who were in it—five people—maybe you knew them, maybe

you didn't, but in some way you were touched by them and changed forever, just as you inevitably touched people while on earth and changed them, too."

His idea that heaven is a reunion with five people who explain the meaning of your life is masterfully pictured in this work. With each encounter the main character Eddie is taught a new lesson that puts the pieces of his earthly life together so that it begins to make sense. Some lessons bring joy, others bring remorse, but the pain is a cleansing process that results in inner peace. After this, individuals will choose their happiest moment on earth and that will be their eternal abode where they await the opportunity to teach a recently deceased newcomer the meaning of that person's life.

If heaven was a place similar to Albom's story, we would be very disappointed, for it is too small and shallow. Our souls are much bigger than this. How quickly we would get bored once we discovered the impact our life made and then spent eternity in a heaven we dream up for our pleasure. Earthly pleasure becomes painful when we get too much of it. The heaven described in the Bible is very different from this earth. Our joy is not wrapped in repeating earthly pleasures but is found in a person, Jesus Christ, who is the center of all creation. Our present earth is fallen and suffers the effects of sin. In heaven, sin and its consequences are not present.

God is the main focus in heaven, but unfortunately, in Albom's story, God plays a very small role. Psalm 16:11 states, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Only a heaven created by and centered on God will be big enough for our soul.

Do All People Go to Heaven?

Albom's bestseller presents a new and creative vision of

heaven. I agree with Albom that there is a heaven and an existence beyond the grave. However, it appears that Albom implies that everyone will go to heaven, and with this I disagree.

Albom portrays realistic characters in his story, none of whom lived a perfect life. All are guilty of some sin and negative behaviors that have consequences, some greater than others. There is some remorse when individuals in heaven learn how their actions caused negative results, but there is not a just payment for their sin.

Albom appears to assume that everyone will eventually find peace when they learn their lessons from the five people they meet. Although this is a comforting note, it is not what the Bible teaches. Albom's story doesn't reveal the dilemma facing all human beings: sin, failing to perfectly live up to God's perfect standard. It is because of sin that the Bible teaches that not everyone can enter heaven. Jesus states in Matthew 7:13, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The reason is found in the biblical understanding of human nature and God's nature. Man is sinful while God is holy, perfect, and without sin. The Bible teaches that all are guilty of sin and cannot enter into the eternal presence of a holy and just God. Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." What is required is a perfect savior who will pay the price for sin. Albom does not deal with the true nature of God, man, heaven's purpose, man's dilemma of sin, and the solution that God freely offers.

The Bible also teaches that there is a price for rejecting God's gift of grace, Jesus Christ. Jesus states, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to

save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:17-18). All who reject Christ cannot stand before a holy God, and will be separated from Him eternally in Hell.

Fiction can often teach principles that are true. However in this work, Albom's foundational idea of heaven misses the mark because he does not present a proper understanding of human nature and God's holiness.

The People You Will We Meet In Heaven

Who will we really meet in heaven? Our answer is revealed in the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible is proven to be God's inspired word through miraculous confirmation and the testimony of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Jesus confirmed His claim to be God through His miraculous life and resurrection, and He affirms the authority of the Bible. The truth about heaven then is revealed not in a novel but in this divine revelation.

The next people we will meet in heaven are the saints of all the ages past (Rev. 7:9 and 19:1). There will be more than five; there will be a multitude! Along with them will be the angelic host.

Will we understand the meaning and see the impact of our life on earth? We will know everything about our life and much more. **We will come to a full understanding of God's plan for all of creation.** Only then will we see how our lives played a role in God's overall plan. We will see things from a renewed perspective because our minds will be transformed and freed from the limitations that resulted from sin. 1 Cor. 13:12 states, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall

know fully, even as I am fully known.” If we knew the glory of the real heaven, we would say Albom’s, and any human attempt to describe heaven, is too small.

Notes

1. CBSNews.com, The Early Show, “Five People You Meet In Heaven,” Sept. 25, 2003, <http://www.cbsnews.com>.
2. The Five People You Meet in Heaven Web site, <http://www.albomfivepeople.com/abouteddie.htm>, 5/25/2005


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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 19:11 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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Goddess Worship – A Christian View

Pagan, Wiccan, and practitioners of New Age religion are turning to belief in a Goddess to express their God-created desire to worship. Russ Wise examines goddess worship from a Christian perspective.

*“The goddess, or Great Mother, has existed since the beginning of time . . . it is out of the primordial depths of her womb that the Universe and all life is born.” –Morwyn, *Secrets of a Witch's Coven**

Reverence for the goddess is becoming prevalent in our day. The goddess is embraced by witchcraft, radical feminism, the occult, and the liberal church. The New Age that is about to dawn upon us will be, according to the occult world, a feminine age. Likewise, those who hold this view believe that

this current, masculine age has been an age of destruction and broken relationships among humanity. The New Age with its feminine energies will bring balance to the destructive aspects of the Piscean Age.

Rosemary Radford Ruether, in her book *Womanguides: Readings Toward a Feminist Theology*, states that

It is to the women that we look for salvation in the healing and restorative waters of Aquarius. It is to such a New Age that we look now with hope as the present age of masculism succeeds in destroying itself.

According to Starhawk, a feminist and a practicing witch,

The symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The goddess does not rule the world; She is the world.(1)

In order for this feminine age to come into full fruition, a shift in consciousness must take place in the world. This shift in thinking and perception of reality will bring forth the goddess.(2)

According to those who believe in the Great Goddess, Europe was once inhabited by a matriarchal, egalitarian society. Europeans, they claim, worshipped a matrifocal, sedentary, peaceful, art-loving goddess 5,000 to 25,000 years before the rise of the first male-oriented religion. They maintain that this egalitarian culture was overrun and destroyed by a semi-nomadic, horse-riding, Indo-European group of invaders who were patrifocal, mobile, warlike, and indifferent to art.(3)

These Indo-European invaders considered themselves to be superior to the peaceful and art-loving goddess worshippers because of their superior military ability. The matriarchal religion of these early settlers was eventually assimilated into the patriarchal religion of the invaders. As these invaders imposed their patriarchal culture on the conquered

peoples, rapes(4) and myths about male warriors killing serpents (symbols of the goddess worshippers) appeared for the first time. As the assimilation of cultures continued, the Great Goddess fragmented into many lesser goddesses.

According to Merlin Stone, author of *When God Was a Woman*, the disenthronement of the Great Goddess, begun by the Indo-European invaders, was finally accomplished by the Hebrew, Christian, and Moslem religions that arose later.(5) The male deity took the prominent place. The female goddesses faded into the background, and women in society followed suit.(6)

The Goddess and Witchcraft

In the world of witchcraft the goddess is the giver of life. Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., in her book *Goddesses in Everywoman*, has this to say about the goddess:

The Great Goddess was worshipped as the feminine life force deeply connected to nature and fertility, responsible both for creating life and for destroying life.(7)

Bolen goes on to say that "the Great Goddess was regarded as immortal, changeless, and omnipotent" prior to the coming of Christianity. For witches, the goddess is the earth itself. Mother Earth, or Gaia, as the goddess is known in occult circles, is an evolving being, as is all of nature. Starhawk, in her best-selling book *The Spiral Dance*, says that "the model of the Goddess, who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. Witchcraft can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just survive, but thrive."(8)

The witch views Gaia, or Mother Earth, as a biosystem. She attributes consciousness to the earth and believes it to be spiritual as well. In other words, Gaia is a living and evolving being that has a spiritual destiny.

The environmental movement of our day is greatly influenced by

those who practice witchcraft or hold neo-pagan beliefs. Witchcraft is an attempt to reintroduce the sacred aspect of the earth that was, according to its practitioners, destroyed by the Christian world. The goddess is, therefore, a direct affront against the male-dominated religion of the Hebrew God.

Christianity teaches that God is transcendent, is separate from nature, and is represented to humankind through masculine imagery. Witchcraft holds a pantheistic view of God. God is nature, therefore God is in all things and all things are a part of God. However, this God is in actuality a goddess.

A fundamental belief in witchcraft is the idea that the goddess predates the male God. The goddess is the giver of all life and is found in all of creation. "The importance of the Goddess symbol for women cannot be overstressed. The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy, our aggression as healthy, and our anger as purifying. Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, own our bodies, and celebrate our emotions." (9)

For Betty Sue Flowers, a University of Texas English professor, the women's spirituality movement is the answer to the male-oriented religion of Christianity. At the International Conference on Women's Spirituality in Austin, Texas, Flowers stated that

The goddess is a metaphor that reminds us of the female side of spirituality. Metaphors are important. You can't know God directly. You can only know images of God, and each image or metaphor is a door. Some doors are open and others are closed. A door that is only male is only half open. (10)

The Goddess and Feminism

For many in the feminist world, the goddess is an object of worship. Those in the women's spirituality movement "reject

what they call the patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition, deploring sexist language, predominantly masculine imagery and largely male leadership.”(11)

According to a *Wall Street Journal* article by Sonia L. Nazario, “women first wanted to apply feminism to political and economic realms, then to their families. Now, they want it in their spiritual lives.”(12)

To understand fully the implications of the women’s spirituality movement, one only needs to read the current literature on the subject. The editors of the book *Radical Feminism* state that “political institutions such as religion, because they are based on philosophies of hierarchical orders and reinforce male oppression of females, must be destroyed.”

The radical feminist believes that the traditional church must be dismantled. Naomi Goldenberg, in her book *Changing of the Gods*, states that “the feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh. . . . It is likely that as we watch Christ and Yahweh tumble to the ground, we will completely outgrow the need for an external God.”(13) The deity that many in the feminist camp are searching for takes on the form of a goddess. Some in the goddess movement, according to a *Wall Street Journal* article, “pray for the time when science will make men unnecessary for procreation.”(14) The radical feminist sees the goddess movement as a spiritual outlet for her long-held beliefs. Mark Muesse, an assistant professor of religious studies at Rhodes College, agrees that “some feminist Christians push for changes ranging from the ordination of women and the generic, non-sexual terms for God and humanity to overhauling the very theology.”(15)

Perhaps the most descriptive word for the feminist movement is “transformation.” Catherine Keller, associate professor of theology at Xavier University says in her essay “Feminism and the New Paradigm” that “the global feminist movement is

bringing about the end of patriarchy, the eclipse of the politics of separation, and the beginning of a new era modeled on the dynamic, holistic paradigm. Radical feminists envision that era, and the long process leading toward it, as a comprehensive transformation."

Another aspect of this transformation is the blending of the sexes. The feminist movement seeks a common mold for all of humanity. Jungian psychotherapist John Weir Perry believes that we must find our individuality by discovering androgyny. He states, "To reach a new consensus, we have to avoid falling back into stereotypes, and that requires truly developing our individuality. It is an ongoing work of self-realization and self-actualization. For men it means growing into their native maleness and balancing it with their femaleness. For women, it's the same—growing into their full womanhood, and that includes their masculine side."(16)

This process sounds more like androgyny or sameness than it does individuality.

This paradigm-shift is nothing less than the reordering of man's understanding of God, a shift in thinking of God through predominantly masculine imagery to seeing and experiencing God as a goddess, the mother of life.

The Goddess and the Occult

In the world of the occult, also known as the New Age, the goddess is believed to be resident within the individual and simply needs to be awakened. In other words, the individual is inherently divine. Starhawk, a witch who works with the Catholic priest Matthew Fox at his Institute of Creation Spirituality, says that an individual can awaken the goddess by invoking or inviting her presence. Starhawk tells us that "to invoke the Goddess is to awaken the Goddess within, to become . . . that aspect we invoke. An invocation channels power through a visualized image of Divinity."

Starhawk continues, "We are already one with the Goddess—she has been with us from the beginning, so fulfillment becomes . . . a matter of self-awareness. For women, the Goddess is the symbol of the inmost self. She awakens the mind and spirit and emotions."(17)

Jean Shinoda Bolen, a Jungian analyst and clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, answered the question, What ails our society? by saying, "we suffer from the absence of one half of our spiritual potential—the Goddess."(18) Individuals who follow New Age teaching believe that the male-dominated religion of this present age has done an injustice to humanity and the ecosystem. Therefore there must be a balancing of energies. The male energies must diminish and the feminine energies must increase in order for the goddess to empower the individual.

The New Age of occultism promises to be an age of peace, harmony, and tranquility, whereas the present dark age of brokenness and separation continues to bring war, conflict, and disharmony. So it is the goddess with her feminine aspects of unity, love, and peace that will offer a solution for mankind and circumvent his destruction. For many in our society, this appears to be the answer to man's dilemma. However, an occult solution that denies Christ's atonement for sin cannot fully meet a Holy God's requirement for wholeness.

For the pagan, the goddess represents life and all it has to offer. "The Goddess religion is a conscious attempt to reshape culture."(19) This reshaping is nothing less than viewing man and his understanding of reality from a female-centered perspective, the focus of which is on the Divine as female. Therefore considerable emphasis is placed on feminine attributes, ultimately focusing on eroticism and sexuality. "Women are clearly the catalyst for the formation of the new spirituality. It is women above all who are in the process of reversing Genesis . . . by validating and freeing their sexuality."(20)

A major part of this transformative process is the empowerment of women. The rise of the goddess is a direct assault on the foundation of Christianity. This new spirituality affirms bisexuality, lesbianism, homosexuality, and androgyny through the expression of transvestitism.

As this revival of the goddess continues, a growing lack of distinction between male and female will become the norm. Jungian psychotherapist John Weir Perry believes that "both current psychology and ancient history point to an emerging transformation in our sense of both society and self, a transformation that includes redefining the notion of what it means to be men and women."(21)

The Bible clearly indicates that men and women were created as distinctive beings, male and female. The rising occult influence in our society seeks to undermine the biblical absolute that gives our culture stability. Once again the Bible rings true as it states, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."(22)

The Goddess and the Liberal Church

The message of the goddess has gained a hearing in the church as well. The philosophy of the goddess is currently being taught in the classrooms of many seminaries. Mary Daly, who considers herself to be a Christian feminist, says this about traditional Christianity: "To put it bluntly, I propose that Christianity itself should be castrated."(23) The primary aim of this kind of "Christian" feminist is to bring an end to what she perceives as male-dominated religion by castrating the male influence from the religion.

Daly continues by saying, "I am suggesting that the idea of salvation uniquely by a male savior perpetuates the problem of

patriarchal oppression.”(24)

Rev. Susan Cady, co-author of *Sophia: the Future of Feminist Spirituality* and pastor of Emmanuel United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, is one example of the direction that Daly and others are taking the church. The authors of *Sophia* state that “Sophia is a female, goddess-like figure appearing clearly in the Scriptures of the Hebrew tradition.” *Wisdom Feast*, the authors’ latest book, clearly identifies Jesus with Sophia. Sophialogy presents Sophia as a separate goddess and Jesus as her prophet. The book takes liberty with Jesus by replacing Him with the feminine deity Sophia.

Another example of how goddess theology (feminist spelling for theology) is making its way into the liberal church is through seminars held on seminary campuses. One such seminar, “Wisdomweaving: Woman Embodied in Faiths,” was held at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in February of 1990. Linda Finnell, a wiccan and one of the speakers, spoke on the subject of “Returning to the Goddess Through Dianic Witchcraft.” Two of the keynote speakers were of a New Age persuasion. In fact, one speaker, Sr. Jose Hobday, works with Matthew Fox and Starhawk at the Institute for Creation Spirituality.

A growing number of churches in the United States and around the world are embracing the New Age lie. Many churches have introduced A Course in Miracles, Yoga, Silva Mind Control, Unity teachings, and metaphysics into their teaching material. Some churches have taken a further step into the New Age by hiring individuals who hold a metaphysical world view.

Whether the individual seeks the goddess through witchcraft, the feminist movement, the New Age, or the liberal church, he or she is beginning a quest to understand and discover the “higher self.” The higher self, often referred to as the “god self,” is believed to be pure truth, deep wisdom. This truth or wisdom embodies the basic lie of deification. As Christians

we must learn to discern every spirit lest we become deceived.

Notes

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2. Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), xiv.
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4. See also Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest, *The Holy Book of Womwn's Mysteries* (Oakland, Calif.: Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, 1986), 12.
5. See also Gadon, *The Once and Future Goddess*, xiii.
6. Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 21.
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8. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 25.
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10. Carlos Vidal Greth, "The Spirit of Women," *The Austin-American Statesman*, 5 Mar. 1991, sec. D.
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13. Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 4, 25.
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 16. John Weir Perry, "Myth, Ritual, and the Decline of Patriarchy," *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992): 103.
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 20. Donna Steichen, "The Goddess Goes to Washington," *Fidelity Magazine* (December 1986): 42.
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 22. 2 Tim. 4:3.
 23. Alice Hageman, *Theology after the Demise of God the Father: a Call for the Castration of Sexist Religion* (New York: Association Press, 1974), 132.
 24. Hageman, *Theology*, 138.
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Buddhism: A Christian Perspective

Dr. Patrick Zukeran gives a brief overview of the basic beliefs of Buddhism, covering the doctrine of salvation, eternal state, the founder, and a comparison to Christianity.



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

For centuries, Buddhism has been the dominant religion of the Eastern world. With the rise of the Asian population in the United States, Buddhism has had a tremendous impact on this country as well. Presently, there are an estimated 300 million Buddhists in the world and 500 thousand in the United States.^[1] It remains the dominant religion in the state of Hawaii, and many prominent Americans have accepted this religion, including the former governor of California, Jerry Brown,^[2] Tina Turner, Phil Jackson (coach of the Los Angeles Lakers), Richard Gere, and Steven Seagal. The Dalai Lama has become a prominent spiritual figure for many throughout the world.

The Origin of Buddhism

Buddhism began as an offspring of Hinduism in the country of India. The founder was Siddhartha Gautama. It is not easy to give an accurate historical account of the life of Gautama since no biography was recorded until five hundred years after his death. Today, much of his life story is clouded in myths and legends which arose after his death. Even the best historians of our day have several different—and even contradictory—accounts of Gautama's life.

Siddhartha Gautama was born in approximately 560 B.C. in northern India. His father, Suddhodana, was the ruler over a district near the Himalayas which is today the country of Nepal. Suddhodana sheltered his son from the outside world and confined him to the palace where he surrounded Gautama with pleasures and wealth.

Despite his father's efforts, however, Gautama one day saw the darker side of life on a trip he took outside the palace walls. He saw four things that forever changed his life: an old man, a sick man, a dead man, and an ascetic. Deeply distressed by the suffering he saw, he decided to leave the luxury of palace life and begin a quest to find the answer to the problem of pain and human suffering.

Gautama left his family and traveled the country seeking wisdom. He studied the Hindu scriptures under Brahmin priests, but became disillusioned with the teachings of Hinduism. He then devoted himself to a life of extreme asceticism in the jungle. He soon concluded, however, that asceticism did not lead to peace and self-realization but merely weakened the mind and body.

Gautama eventually turned to a life of meditation. While deep in meditation under a fig tree known as the *Bohdi* tree (meaning, "tree of wisdom"), Gautama experienced the highest degree of God-consciousness called *nirvana*. Gautama then became known as *Buddha*, the "enlightened one." He believed he had found the answers to the questions of pain and suffering. His message now needed to be proclaimed to the whole world.

As he began his teaching ministry, he gained a quick audience with the people of India since many had become disillusioned with Hinduism. By the time of his death at age 80, Buddhism had become a major force in India.

Expansion and Development of Buddhism

Buddhism remained mostly in India for three centuries until King Ashoka, who ruled India from 274-232 B.C., converted to Buddhism. Ashoka sent missionaries throughout the world, and Buddhism spread to all of Asia.

Even before its expansion, two distinct branches developed, a conservative and a liberal school of thought. The conservative school is labeled Theravada, and it became the dominant form of Buddhism in Southeast Asia. Thus, it is also called Southern Buddhism. Southern Buddhism has remained closer to the original form of Buddhism. This school follows the Pali Canon of scripture, which, although written centuries after Gautamas death, contains the most accurate recording of his teachings.

The liberal school is Mahayana Buddhism, which traveled to the north into China, Japan, Korea, and Tibet, and is also called Northern Buddhism. As it spread north, it adopted and incorporated beliefs and practices from the local religions of the land. The two branches of Buddhism are so different they appear to be two different religions rather than two branches of the same tree. Here are a few differences.

Theravada Buddhism sees Buddha as a man. Gautama never claimed to be deity, but rather a “way shower.” Mahayana Buddhism, however, worships Buddha as a manifestation of the divine Buddha essence. Since Gautama, many other manifestations or *bodhisattvas* have appeared. An example is Tibetan Buddhism, which worships the spiritual leader the Dalai Lama as a bodhisattva.

Theravada adheres to the Pali Canon and Buddhas earliest teachings. Since Mahayana believes there have been many manifestations, this branch incorporates many other texts written by the bodhisattvas as part of their canon.

Theravada teaches that each person must attain salvation through their own effort, and this requires one to relinquish earthly desires and live a monastic life. Therefore, only those few who have chosen this lifestyle will attain nirvana. Mahayana teaches that salvation comes through the grace of the bodhisattvas and so many may attain salvation.

Divine beings do not have a place in Theravada. The primary focus is on the individual attaining enlightenment, and a divine being, or speculations of such, only hinders the process. Therefore, several sects of this branch are atheistic. Mahayana, on the other hand, has many diverse views of God since this branch is inclusive, and has adopted the beliefs and practices of various religions. Many schools are pantheistic in their worldview while others are animistic. Buddha is worshipped as a divine being. Some schools pay homage to a particular bodhisattva sent to their people. Other

schools have a mixture of gods whom they worship. For example, Japanese Buddhism blended with Shintoism and includes worship of the Shinto gods with the teachings and worship of Buddha.

When speaking with a Buddhist, it is important to understand what branch of Buddhism they are talking about. The two branches are dramatically different. Even within Mahayana Buddhism, the sects can be as different as Theravada is to Mahayana.

The Way of Salvation

The main question Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, sought to answer was, "Why is there pain and suffering?" His belief in reincarnation (the belief that after death one returns to earthly life in a higher or lower form of life according to his good or bad deeds) prompted a second question that also needed to be answered: "How does one break this rebirth cycle?" The basic teachings of Buddhism, therefore, focus on what Gautama believed to be the answer to these questions. These basic tenets are found in the Four Noble Truths and in the Eight-fold Path. Let us begin with the Four Noble Truths.

The First Noble Truth is that there is pain and suffering in the world. Gautama realized that pain and suffering are omnipresent in all of nature and human life. To exist means to encounter suffering. Birth is painful and so is death. Sickness and old age are painful. Throughout life, all living things encounter suffering.

The Second Noble Truth relates to the cause of suffering. Gautama believed the root cause of suffering is desire. It is the craving for wealth, happiness, and other forms of selfish enjoyment which cause suffering. These cravings can never be satisfied for they are rooted in ignorance.

The Third Noble Truth is the end of all suffering. Suffering will cease when a person can rid himself of all desires.

The Fourth Noble Truth is the extinguishing of all desire by following the Eight-fold path. "The Eight-fold path is a system of therapy designed to develop habits which will release people from the restrictions caused by ignorance and craving."[\[3\]](#)

Here are the eight steps in following the Eight-fold path. The first is the Right View. One must accept the Four Noble Truths. Step two is the Right Resolve. One must renounce all desires and any thoughts like lust, bitterness, and cruelty, and must harm no living creature. Step three is the Right Speech. One must speak only truth. There can be no lying, slander, or vain talk. Step four is the Right Behavior. One must abstain from sexual immorality, stealing, and all killing.

Step five is the Right Occupation. One must work in an occupation that benefits others and harms no one. Step six is the Right Effort. One must seek to eliminate any evil qualities within and prevent any new ones from arising. One should seek to attain good and moral qualities and develop those already possessed. Seek to grow in maturity and perfection until universal love is attained. Step seven is the Right Contemplation. One must be observant, contemplative, and free of desire and sorrow. The eighth is the Right Meditation. After freeing oneself of all desires and evil, a person must concentrate his efforts in meditation so that he can overcome any sensation of pleasure or pain and enter a state of transcending consciousness and attain a state of perfection. Buddhists believe that through self-effort one can attain the eternal state of nirvana.

In Buddhism, one's path to nirvana relies on the effort and discipline of the individual. By contrast, Jesus taught our goal is not a state of non-conscious being, but an eternal relationship with God. There is nothing one can do to earn a right relationship with God. Instead, we must receive His gift of grace, the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ and

this restores our relationship with our creator.

Karma, *Samsara*, and *Nirvana*

Three important concepts in understanding Buddhism are *karma*, *samsara*, and *nirvana*.

Karma refers to the law of cause and effect in a person's life, reaping what one has sown. Buddhists believe that every person must go through a process of birth and rebirth until he reaches the state of *nirvana* in which he breaks this cycle. According to the law of karma, "You are what you are and do what you do, as a result of what you were and did in a previous incarnation, which in turn was the inevitable outcome of what you were and did in still earlier incarnations."[\[4\]](#) For a Buddhist, what one will be in the next life depends on one's actions in this present life. Unlike Hindus, Buddha believed that a person can break the rebirth cycle no matter what class he is born into.

The second key concept is the law of *samsara* or *transmigration*. This is one of the most perplexing and difficult concepts in Buddhism to understand. The law of Samsara holds that everything is in a birth and rebirth cycle. Buddha taught that people do not have individual souls. The existence of an individual self or ego is an illusion. There is no eternal substance of a person, which goes through the rebirth cycle. What is it then that goes through the cycle if not the individual soul? What goes through the rebirth cycle is only a set of feelings, impressions, present moments, and the karma that is passed on. "In other words, as one process leads to another, ... so one's human personality in one existence is the direct cause of the type of individuality which appears in the next."[\[5\]](#) The new individual in the next life will not be exactly the same person, but there will be several similarities. Just how close in identity they will be

is not known.

The third key concept is *nirvana*. The term means “the blowing out” of existence. Nirvana is very different from the Christian concept of heaven. Nirvana is not a place like heaven, but rather an eternal state of being. It is the state in which the law of karma and the rebirth cycle come to an end. It is the end of suffering; a state where there are no desires and the individual consciousness comes to an end. Although to our Western minds this may sound like annihilation, Buddhists would object to such a notion. Gautama never gave an exact description of nirvana, but his closest reply was this. “There is disciples, a condition, where there is neither earth nor water, neither air nor light, neither limitless space, nor limitless time, neither any kind of being, neither ideation nor non-ideation, neither this world nor that world. There is neither arising nor passing-away, nor dying, neither cause nor effect, neither change nor standstill.”[\[6\]](#)

In contrast to the idea of reincarnation, the Bible teaches in Hebrews 9:27 that “man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment.” A major diverging point between Buddhism and Christianity is that the Bible refutes the idea of reincarnation. The Bible also teaches that in the eternal state, we are fully conscious and glorified individuals whose relationship with God comes to its perfect maturity.

Jesus and Gautama

There is much I admire in the life and teachings of Gautama. Being raised in the Japanese Buddhist culture, I appreciate the ethical teachings, the arts, and architecture influenced by Buddhism. As I studied the life and teachings of Gautama and of Jesus, I discovered some dramatic differences.

First, Buddha did not claim to be divine. Theravada remains true to his teaching that he was just a man. The idea that he

was divine was developed in Mahayana Buddhism 700 years after his death. Furthermore, Northern Buddhism teaches that there have been other manifestations of the Buddha or bodhisattvas and some believe Jesus to be one as well. However, Jesus did not claim to be one of many manifestations of God; He claimed to be the one and only Son of God. This teaching was not the creation of his followers but a principle He taught from the beginning of His ministry. In fact, the salvation He preached was dependent on understanding His divine nature.

Second, Buddha claimed to be a way shower. He showed the way to nirvana, but it was up to each follower to find his or her own path. Christ did not come to show the way; He claimed to be the way. While Buddhism teaches that salvation comes through Buddhas teachings, Christ taught salvation is found in *Him*. When Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life" (John 14:6), He was saying He alone is the one who can give eternal life, for He is the source of truth and life. Not only did He make the way possible, He promises to forever be with and empower all who follow Him to live the life that pleases God.

Third, Buddha taught that the way to eliminate suffering and attain enlightenment was to eliminate all desire. Christ taught that one should not eliminate all desire but that one must have the right desire. He stated, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be satisfied." Christ taught that we should desire to know Him above all other wants.

Fourth, Buddha performed no miracles in his lifetime. Christ affirmed His claims to be divine through the miracles He performed. He demonstrated authority over every realm of creation: the spiritual realm, nature, sickness, and death. These miracles confirmed the claims that He was more than a good teacher, but God incarnate.

Finally, Buddha is buried in a grave in Kusinara at the foot

of the Himalaya Mountains. Christ, however, is alive. He alone conquered sin and the grave. His death paid the price for sin, and His resurrection makes it possible for all people to enter into a personal and eternal relationship with God.

After a comparative study, I came to realize Buddha was a great teacher who lived a noble life, but Christ is the unique revelation of God who is to be worshipped as our eternal Lord and Savior.

Notes

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3. Kenneth Boa, *Cults, World Religions, and the Occult* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, (1977) p. 35
4. Davis Taylor and Clark Offner, *The World's Religions*, Norman Anderson, ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1975), p. 174.
5. John Noss, *Man's Religions* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 182.
6. Taylor and Offner, *The World's Religions*, p. 177.

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Cultural Relativism

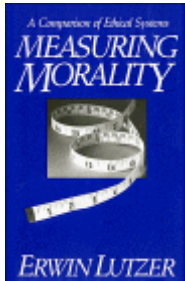
Kerby Anderson presents the basics of cultural relativism and evaluates it from a Christian worldview perspective. Comparing the tenets of cultural relativism to a biblical view of ethics shows how these popular ideas fail the

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

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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).
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UFOs and Alien Beings – A Christian Worldview Response

Michael Gleghorn addresses issues related to reports of UFO and alien sightings. He considers the various possible causes before closing with a biblical, Christian perspective pointing out these reports are often presented like false gospels. At the end of the day, even an alien cannot take away from the importance of faith in Christ.



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

A Tale of Two Hypotheses

It seems that almost everyone is interested in reports of UFOs

and alien encounters. But how should these reports be understood? Where do these “unidentified flying objects” come from and what are they? Are intelligent beings visiting us from another planet or some other dimension? Or are UFO reports merely a collection of hoaxes, hallucinations, and misidentified phenomena? Can all UFO reports be adequately explained, or are there some that seem to defy all natural explanations? These are just a few of the questions we want to consider in this article.

First, however, it’s essential to note that most UFOs (unidentified flying objects) become IFOs (identified flying objects). John Spencer, a British UFO researcher, estimates that as many as 95 percent of received UFO reports “are turned into IFOs and explained satisfactorily.”[\[1\]](#) For example, the report might be found to have been a clever prank or to have some natural explanation. Planets, comets, military aircraft, and rockets (among many others) have all been mistaken for UFOs. But even if 99 percent of UFO reports could be satisfactorily explained, there would still be thousands of cases that stubbornly resist all natural explanations. These are called *residual* UFO reports.

If residual UFOs are not hoaxes, hallucinations, or some natural or man-made phenomena, then what are they? Most UFO researchers hold either to the extraterrestrial hypothesis or the interdimensional hypothesis. The extraterrestrial hypothesis holds that technologically advanced, interplanetary space travelers are indeed visiting our planet from somewhere else in the cosmos. Stanton Friedman, a representative of this view, states clearly, “The evidence is overwhelming that some UFOs are alien spacecraft.”[\[2\]](#)

The interdimensional hypothesis agrees “that some UFOs are real phenomena that may exhibit physical . . . effects.”[\[3\]](#) However, unlike the extraterrestrial hypothesis, this view does not believe that UFOs and alien beings come from somewhere else in our physical universe. So where *do* they come

from? Some suggest that they come from some other universe of space and time. But others believe that they come from some other dimension entirely, perhaps a spiritual realm.[{4}](#)

How might we tell which, if either, of these two hypotheses is correct? Astronomer and Christian apologist Dr. Hugh Ross suggests that we employ the scientific approach known as the “process of elimination.” He writes, “Mechanics use it to find out why the car won’t start. Doctors use it to find out why the stomach hurts. Detectives use it to find out who stole the cash. This process can also be used to discover what could, or could not, possibly give rise to UFO phenomena.”[{5}](#)

So what happens if we apply this process to the extraterrestrial hypothesis? Although quite popular here in America, there are some serious scientific objections to this viewpoint.

The Extraterrestrial Hypothesis

In the first place, it is highly improbable that there is another planet in our cosmos capable of supporting physical life. Dr. Ross has calculated the probability of such a planet existing by natural processes alone as less than 1 in 10^{174} . You actually have “a much higher probability of being killed in the next second by a failure in the second law of thermodynamics (about one chance in 10^{80}).”[{6}](#) Thus, apart from the supernatural creation of another suitable place for life, our planet is almost certainly unique in its capacity to support complex biological organisms. (See the Probe article [“Are We Alone in the Universe?”](#)) This alone makes the extraterrestrial hypothesis extremely improbable. But it gets even worse!

Suppose (against all statistical probability) that there *is* a planet with intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. What is the likelihood that such creatures are visiting our planet?

And what sort of difficulties would they face in doing so?

Probably the greatest challenge to interstellar space travel is simply the immense size of the universe. One group of scientists, assuming that any alien spacecraft would likely maintain communication with either the home planet or with other members of their traveling party, “scanned all 202 of the roughly solar-type stars within 155 light-years of Earth. Not one intelligible signal was detected anywhere within the vicinity of these stars.”[\[7\]](#) This implies that, at a minimum, E.T. would have to travel 155 light-years just to reach earth. Unfortunately, numerous galactic hazards would prevent traveling here in a straight line. Avoiding these deadly hazards would increase the minimum travel distance to approximately 230 light-years.[\[8\]](#)

Dr. Ross estimates that “any reasonably-sized spacecraft transporting intelligent physical beings can travel at velocities no greater than about 1 percent” of light-speed.[\[9\]](#) Although this is nearly 7 million miles per hour, it would still take about twenty-three thousand years to travel the 230 light-years to earth! Of course, a lot can go wrong in twenty-three thousand years. The aliens might run out of food or fuel. Their spacecraft might be damaged beyond repair by space debris. They might be destroyed by a contagious epidemic. The mind reels at the overwhelming improbability of successfully completing such a multi-generational mission.

In light of these facts, it doesn't appear that the extraterrestrial hypothesis can reasonably survive the process of elimination. Does the interdimensional hypothesis fare any better? A growing number of serious UFO researchers believe it can. Let's take a look.

The Interdimensional Hypothesis

The interdimensional hypothesis holds that residual UFOs “enter the physical dimensions of the universe from ‘outside’

the four familiar dimensions of length, height, width, and time.”{10} Where do they come from? Some believe that they come from another physical universe of space and time. But this does not seem possible. General relativity forbids “the space-time dimensions of any other hypothetically existing universe” from overlapping with our own.{11} For this reason, many researchers believe that residual UFOs must come from some other dimension entirely, perhaps even a spiritual realm.

What evidence can be offered for such a bold hypothesis? Many point to the strange behavior of residual UFOs themselves. Hugh Ross contends that residual UFOs “must be nonphysical because they disobey firmly established physical laws.”{12} Among the many examples that he offers in support of this statement, consider the following:{13}

1. Residual UFOs generate no sonic booms when they break the sound barrier, nor do they show any evidence of meeting with air resistance.
2. They make impossibly sharp turns and sudden stops.
3. They send no detectable electromagnetic signals.

For example, “relative to the number of potential observers, ten times as many sightings occur at 3:00 A.M. (a time when few people are out) as at either 6:00 A.M. or 8:00 P.M. (times when many people are outside in the dark).”{14} If residual UFOs were simply random events, then we would expect more sightings when there are more potential observers. The fact that these events are nonrandom may suggest some sort of intelligence behind them. This is further supported by the fact that some people are more likely to see a residual UFO than others. Numerous researchers have observed a correlation between an individual’s involvement with the occult and their likelihood of having a residual UFO encounter. This may also suggest some kind of intelligence behind these phenomena.

Finally, residual UFOs not only appear to be nonphysical and intelligent, they sometimes seem malevolent as well. Many of

those claiming to have had a residual UFO encounter have suffered emotional, psychological, and/or physical injury. A few people have even died after such encounters. In light of these strange characteristics, many researchers have reached similar conclusions about the possible source of these phenomena.

The Occult Connection

Many serious UFO investigators have noticed a striking similarity between some of the aliens described in UFO reports and the demonic spirits described in the Bible. Although it may not be possible to know whether some aliens are actually demons (and I certainly do not claim to know this myself), the well-documented connection between UFO phenomena and the occult cannot be denied.

In 1969 Lynn Catoe served as the senior bibliographer of a publication on UFOs researched by the Library of Congress for the U.S. Air Force Office of Scientific Research. After a two-year investigation, in which she surveyed thousands of documents, she drew explicit attention to the link between UFOs and the occult. She wrote, "A large part of the available UFO literature . . . deals with subjects like mental telepathy, automatic writing and invisible entities . . . poltergeist manifestations and 'possession.' Many . . . UFO reports . . . recount alleged incidents that are strikingly similar to demonic possession and psychic phenomena." [\[15\]](#) Veteran UFO researcher John Keel agrees. After surveying the literature on demonology he wrote, "The manifestations and occurrences described in this imposing literature are similar if not entirely identical to the UFO phenomenon itself." [\[16\]](#) The bizarre claim of alien abduction may lend some credibility to these remarks.

Many (though not all) of those who report an abduction experience describe the aliens as deceptive and hostile. Whitley Strieber, whose occult involvement preceded the

writing of both *Communion* and *Transformation*, at times explicitly referred to his alien visitors as “demons.” For example, in *Transformation* he described his emotional reaction to the aliens with these words: “I felt an absolutely indescribable sense of menace. It was hell on earth to be there, and yet I couldn’t move, couldn’t cry out, couldn’t get away . . . Whatever was there seemed so monstrously ugly, so filthy and dark and sinister. Of course they were demons. They had to be. And they were here and I couldn’t get away.”[\[17\]](#)

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that abduction is often physically and emotionally painful, Mr. Strieber tends to believe that its purpose is ultimately benevolent. When integrated correctly, the abduction experience can provide a catalyst for spiritual growth and development. Still, he candidly admits that he is really not sure precisely *who* or *what* these beings actually are, and he continues to warn that many of them are indeed hostile and malevolent.[\[18\]](#) In light of this, one can’t help wondering about the experiences related in Mr. Strieber’s books. If his encounters with aliens were not merely hallucinatory, or due to some mental disorder, isn’t it at least possible that his sinister visitors really were demons? As noted above, many UFO investigators would indeed consider this (or something very much like it) a genuine possibility.

Another Gospel?

In his letter to the Galatians the Apostle Paul delivered a stirring indictment against every gospel but that of Christ. “But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed” (1:8-9). Evidently, the purity of the gospel was deeply important to Paul.

In today’s pluralistic society a variety of gospels are being

preached. And among the great throng of voices clamoring for our attention are many UFO cults. Since the 1950s a number of these cults have arisen, often around a charismatic leader who claims to be in regular contact with otherworldly beings. Interestingly, unlike the abduction phenomenon, most contactees do not claim to have ever seen the aliens with whom they communicate. Rather, they claim that the aliens communicate with them psychically or telepathically. The contactee is simply a channel, or medium, through whom the aliens communicate their messages to humankind. This method of contact is rather intriguing for those who favor the interdimensional hypothesis. As John Saliba observes, "Many contactees . . . write about UFOs and space beings as if these were psychic phenomena, belonging to a different time/space dimension that lies beyond the scope . . . of modern science." [\[19\]](#)

So what sort of messages do the aliens allegedly communicate to contactees? Often they want to help guide us to the next stage of our spiritual evolution or give us advice that will help us avoid some global catastrophe. Strangely, however, many of them also want to deny or distort traditional doctrines of biblical Christianity. Oftentimes these denials and distortions concern the doctrine of Christ. For example, the Aetherius Society "views Jesus Christ as an advanced alien being . . . who communicates through a channel and travels to Earth in a flying saucer to protect Earth from evil forces." [\[20\]](#) As a general rule, "UFO religions . . . reject orthodox Christology (Jesus' identity as both God and man) and thus reject Jesus Christ as the . . . Creator and . . . Savior of humankind." [\[21\]](#)

A deficient Christology, combined with an acceptance of biblically forbidden occult practices like mediumistic channeling (see Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:10-12; etc.), make many UFO cults spiritually dangerous. By preaching a false gospel, they have (perhaps unwittingly) placed themselves under a

divine curse. By embracing occult practices, they have opened the door to potential demonic attack and deception. Nevertheless, there is hope for those involved with these cults. There is even hope for those tormented by hostile beings claiming to be aliens. The Bible tells us that through His work on the cross, Jesus disarmed the demonic rulers and authorities (Col. 2:15). What's more, for those who flee to Him for refuge, He makes available the "full armor of God," that they might "stand firm against the schemes of the devil" (Eph. 6:11). Regardless of *who* or *what* these alien beings might be, no one need live in fear of them. If Jesus has triumphed over the realm of evil demonic spirits, then certainly no alien can stand against Him. Let those who live in fear turn to Jesus, for He offers rest to all who are weary and heavy-laden (Matt. 11:28).

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20. Ross, et al., *Lights in the Sky*, 150.

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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.

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See Also:

["Martial Arts and Just War Theory"](#)

Christianity and Racism – Was Jesus a Racist?

Rusty Wright takes a hard look at this question: does

Christianity promote racism? He looks at the lives and teachings of Jesus and Paul to see if they taught equality of all races or promoted racism. He finds that it is not the teachings of Christianity that promote racism. A biblical worldview will create a love for all people and a desire to help them develop personal faith.

Does Christianity Promote Racism?

Thirty years after the heyday of the Civil Rights movement, racial issues in the US remain sensitive. Racial quotas in the workplace and academia continue to be controversial. Prominent corporations are accused of racist practices. Certain supremacy groups promote the Bible, God and the white race. Race and politics interact in ways that carry both national and international significance.

A few years back, the Southern Baptist Convention made headlines for renouncing racism, condemning slavery and apologizing for the church's intolerant past. That laudable contrition raised a deeper question: Why would Christianity ever be associated with racial oppression in the first place? How did the faith whose founder told people to "love one another" ever become linked with human bondage and social apartheid?

African-American theologian James Cone notes that "In the old slavery days, the Church preached that slavery was a divine decree, and it used the Bible as the basis of its authority."[{1}](#)

"Not only did Christianity fail to offer the ... [Black] hope of freedom in the world, but the manner in which Christianity was communicated to him tended to degrade him. The ... [Black] was taught that his enslavement was due to the fact that he had been cursed by God. ... Parts of the Bible were carefully selected to prove that God had intended that the...[Black] should be the servant of the white man...."[{2}](#)

As a white baby boomer growing up in the South, I experienced segregated schools, restrooms, drinking fountains and beaches. My parents taught and modeled equality, so the injustice I saw saddened me deeply. I was appalled that the Ku Klux Klan used the Bible and the cross in its rituals.

During college, a friend brought an African-American student to a church I attended in North Carolina. The next Sunday, the pastor announced that because of "last week's racial incident" (the attendance of a Black), church leaders had voted to maintain their longstanding policy of racial segregation. Thereafter, any Blacks attending would be handed a note explaining the policy and asking that they not return. I was outraged and left the church. (Postscript: A few years ago I learned that that white church had folded and that an African-American church came to use the same facility. Maybe God has a sense of humor.)

Does Christianity promote racism? Is it mainly a faith for whites? This article will examine these two burning questions.

Was Jesus Racist?

Does the Christian faith promote racism? Is it mainly for whites? Certain extremists think so. Some slavery-era ministers wrote books justifying slavery. George D. Armstrong wrote in *The Christian Doctrine of Slavery*, "It may be... that Christian slavery is God's solution of the problem [relation of labor and capital] about which the wisest statesmen of Europe confess themselves at fault."[\[3\]](#)

Consider another book, *Slavery Ordained of God*. In it, Fred A. Ross wrote, "Slavery is ordained of God, ... to continue for the good of the slave, the good of the master, the good of the whole American family, until another and better destiny may be unfolded."[\[4\]](#)

Those words seem quite different from the biblical injunction

to “love your neighbor as yourself,” a statement with equally poignant historical roots.

In first-century Palestine, the Jews and Samaritans were locked in a blood feud. Divided by geography, religion and race, the two groups spewed venom. Each had its own turf. Jews considered the Samaritans to be racial “half-breeds.” The two groups disputed which followed the Bible better and on whose land proper worship should occur.

The Samaritans were often inhospitable to{5} and hostile toward the Jews. Many Jewish pilgrims deliberately lengthened their journeys to bypass Samaria. Jews publicly cursed Samaritans in their synagogues, would not allow Samaritan testimony in Jewish courts, and generally considered Samaritans excluded from eternal life.{6}

Once a Jewish lawyer asked Jesus of Nazareth, “Who is my neighbor?”{7} Jesus, who as Jew surprised people by mixing freely with Samaritans, told him a now famous story. Robbers attacked a Jewish traveler, beating him and leaving him half-dead. Two Jewish religious leaders ignored the injured man as they passed by. But a Samaritan felt compassion for the Jewish victim – his cultural enemy – and bandaged his wounds, transported him to an inn and provided for his care. Jesus’ point? This “Good Samaritan” was an example of how we should relate to those with whom we differ.

The founder of the Christian faith was no racist. He told people to get along. What about a chief expositor of the Christian faith? And why is eleven o’clock Sunday morning often the most segregated hour of the week? Let’s turn now to these important questions.

Was A Chief Expositor of the Faith A Racist?

Does Christianity promote racism? As we have seen, Jesus of

Nazareth was no racist. Living in a culturally and racially diverse society that was in many ways analogous to ours, He promoted harmony by His example and His words. What about Paul, one of the chief expositors of faith in Christ?

Paul often had to counsel members of the communities he advised about diversity issues. Some in the groups with which he consulted were Jews, some were non-Jews or "Gentiles." Some were slaves and some were free. Some were men and some were women. The mix was potentially explosive.

From prison, Paul wrote to a friend whose slave had run away, had met Paul, and had come to faith. Paul appealed to his friend on the basis of their relationship to welcome the slave back not as a slave but as a brother. He offered to repay any loss from his own pocket. The letter survives in the New Testament as the book of "Philemon" and is a touching example of a dedicated believer seeking to internally motivate a slaveholder to change his attitudes and behavior.{8}

Paul felt that the faith he had once persecuted could unify people. He wrote to one group of believers that because of their common spiritual commitment, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one..."{9} Paul, a Jew by birth, wrote to some non-Jewish believers that "Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us."{10}

Paul exhorted another group of believers to live in harmony. He wrote, "Since God chose you to be the holy people whom he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. You must make allowance for each other's faults and forgive the person who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. And the most important piece of clothing you must wear is love. Love is what binds us all together in perfect harmony."{11}

Paul promoted harmony, not discord. If the founder of the faith and its chief expositor were not racists, why is eleven o'clock Sunday morning often the most segregated hour of the week?

True Followers?

Why is Christianity often associated with racism? The short answer is that some that claim to be followers of Jesus are not really following Him. They may have the label "Christian," but perhaps they never have established a personal friendship with Christ. They may be like I was for many years: a church member, seemingly devoted, but who had never accepted Christ's pardon based on His death and resurrection for me. Or they may have genuine faith, but haven't allowed God into the driver's seat of their life. I've been there, too.

I shall always remember Norton and Bo. Norton was a leader of the Georgia Black Student Movement in the 1970s. Bo was a racially prejudiced white Christian. Once during an Atlanta civil rights demonstration, Bo and some of his cronies beat Norton up. The animosity ran deep.

Norton later discovered that Christianity was not a religion of oppressive rules, but a relationship with God. As his faith sprouted and grew, his anger mellowed while his desire for social justice deepened. Meanwhile, Bo rejected his hypocrisy and began to follow his faith with God in control. Three years after the beating, the two unexpectedly met again at a Christian conference. Initial tension melted into friendship as they forgave each other, reconciled and treated each other like brothers.

Of course not all disobedient Christians are racists. Nor is everyone not aligned with Jesus a racist. But faith in Christ can give enemies motivation to reconcile, to replace hatred with love.

Historical examples abound of true faith opposing racism. John Newton, an 18th-century British slave trader, came to faith, renounced his old ways, became a pastor, and wrote the famous hymn, "Amazing Grace." Newton encouraged his Christian friend, William Wilberforce, who faced scorn and ridicule in leading a long but successful battle in Parliament to abolish the slave trade.

Does Christianity promote racism? No, true Christianity seeks to eliminate racism by changing people's hearts.

After I had spoken on this theme in a sociology class at North Carolina State University, a young African-American woman told me, "All my life I've been taught that white Christians were responsible for the oppression of my people. Now I realize those oppressors were not really following Christ."

Is Christianity just for whites? Norton, the Black activist, certainly did not think so. Let's look further at the faith that crosses racial divides.

The Heart of the Matter

Is Christianity just for whites? Jesus and Paul said anyone who believed would be plugged into God forever. Africa has millions who follow Jesus. Koreans send missionaries to the US. And don't we need them!

In Cape Town, South Africa, Saint James Church has been a beacon of diversity and social concern with its white, Black, Asian and biracial members. One Sunday evening, radical Black terrorists sprayed the multiracial congregation with automatic gunfire and grenades. Eleven died and 53 were wounded, some horribly maimed. The world press was astounded by the members' reaction.

Lorenzo Smith, who is biracial, saw his wife, Myrtle, die from shrapnel that pierced her heart as he tried to shield her. Yet he forgave the killers. "I prayed for those that committed the

crime," he told me, "so they, too, can come to meet [the Lord]."

The president of the West African nation of Benin came to the US a few years back with a message for African American leaders: His compatriots were sorry for their ancestors' complicity in the slave trade. An often-overlooked component of slavery's historical stain is that Black Africans sold other Black Africans into slavery. When rival tribes made war, the victors took prisoners and made them indentured servants, often selling them to white slave merchants.

Benin's President Kerekou, who in recent years had made his own commitment to Christ, invited political and church leaders to his nation so his tribal leaders could seek reconciliation with African Americans.

Brian Johnson, an African-American organizer, said the realization that Blacks sold other Blacks into slavery has been difficult for many African Americans to handle. "This made it difficult to hold the White man responsible," he explained as we spoke. "This creates some problems in our own psyche. We have to deal with another angle to this.... It's not merely a Black-White thing."

The problem is in human hearts, Johnson believes. "All have sinned," he claims, quoting the New Testament.[{12}](#) "All of us need to confess our wrong and appeal to [God] for forgiveness."

Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy lamented that "Everybody thinks of changing humanity, but nobody thinks of changing himself."[{13}](#) True Christianity is not just for whites, and it does not promote racism but seeks to eliminate it. Changing corrupt institutions is very important. An ultimate solution to racism involves changing individual hearts.

Notes

1. James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), p. 74.
 2. E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p.115. Quoted in *ibid*. Bracketed words are mine.
 3. Quoted in Frazier, *loc. cit.*; quoted in Cone *loc. cit.* Neither emphasis nor bracketed words are mine. Emphasis is likely Frazier's or Armstrong's. Bracketed words could be either Frazier's or Cone's.
 4. Quoted in Frazier, *loc. cit.*; quoted in Cone *loc. cit.*
 5. Luke 9:52-53.
 6. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957, 1961, 1966), pp. 958-960. See also John 4:1-45.
 7. Luke 10:29 ff.
 8. Philemon 1-25.
 9. Galatians 3:28 NIV.
 10. Ephesians 2:14 NLT.
 11. Colossians 3: 12-14 NLT.
 12. Romans 3:23 NIV.
 13. *World Christian magazine* (February 1989), p. U8.
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