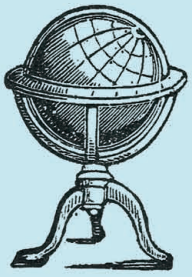
INERRANCY

AND

WORLDVIEW

ANSWERING MODERN CHALLENGES TO THE BIBLE



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Introduction

Many people—even people who would call themselves Christians—have difficulties with the Bible. Some people are morally offended by parts of the Bible. Some parts of it do not fit modern ideas about good religion. What do we do with these parts? The Bible has exclusive claims about what is right and wrong in religion. It makes exclusive claims about God. It says that Jesus is the only way to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). It talks about hell.

Some people are troubled by apparent discrepancies between the Bible and modern science. What do we do with these discrepancies? Some people have decided that we must give up on the Bible. They say that the Bible has been shown to be outmoded and primitive. Others hope to find some core of truth in it, though they argue that the "wrappings" around the core need to be discarded.

Still others think that the Bible is the word of God, true for all time. But can they explain how to relate it intelligently to the swirl of modern questions and controversies?

These are important questions, so important that we can profit from taking our time to work toward answers. The challenge of interpreting the Bible has many dimensions and many challenges. We cannot consider them all equally.[1] We focus here on issues involving response to our modern situation.

Our Modern Situation

Our modern situation offers us various competing assumptions about religion, about the nature of humanity, about what is wrong with the world,

[1]All the books I have published relate in one way or another to biblical interpretation. For discussion of many kinds of questions about interpreting the Bible, I must direct readers to these books and books written by other authors. Readers who want an overview of most of the foundational areas, brought together in one place, may consult Vern S. Poythress, *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1999).

about the purpose of life, and so on. These assumptions may have effects on how people read the Bible. We can begin to answer many of our difficulties in a number of areas if we make ourselves aware of the assumptions that we tend to bring along when we study the Bible.

But our deepest difficulties cannot be resolved merely on a narrowly intellectual plane. Our deepest difficulty is *sin*, rebellion against God. We have desires in our hearts that resist the Bible's views and what God has to say. We want to be our own master. The Bible talks about those who resist God as being "dead in . . . trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) and "darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart" (Eph. 4:18). God himself must overcome our resistance (Acts 16:14; 2 Tim. 2:25–26; John 3:3–8). We will focus primarily on more intellectual difficulties, because these can be more directly and more easily addressed. But it is wise to remember that more stubborn difficulties lurk beneath the surface.

1

How Can Only One Religion Be Right?

Let us consider one common difficulty that modern people have with the Bible: how can there be only *one* true religion?[1]

The View that All Religions Are Right

People ask this question partly because they are aware of multiple religions—Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism, to name a few. How do we respond to this multiplicity? One person, whom we may call Sue, concludes that all religions are equally right. She says that they all have a common core having to do with a loving God and being kind to your neighbor. But in selecting a common core Sue shows her own personal religious preferences. Sue speaks of a loving God. But Buddhism does not believe in a personal God. So Sue has excluded Buddhism rather than being all-inclusive. She has also excluded polytheism, which believes in many gods rather than one.[2] Sue speaks of being kind to your neighbor. But some religions have practiced child sacrifice (Deut. 18:9–10).

[1]See the further discussion in Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 3–21.

[2]A more nuanced discussion would have to consider monism as religion. By breaking down the distinctions between religions and trying to move toward one God behind all religions, Sue may be on the way to trying to break down all distinctions whatsoever. All is one. This view, articulated within philosophical Hinduism, actually has an affinity with polytheism. According to Hinduism, the "One" has a plurality of manifestations

When Sue talks about a common core, she has also put into the background the irreconcilable differences between major religions. The Bible teaches that Jesus is the Son of God. The Qur'an says that he is not the son of God, but only a prophet. The New Testament part of the Bible teaches that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. Modern Judaism denies that he is. Sue implicitly disagrees with all of these convictions when she implies that they really do not matter. Christianity, Islam, and Orthodox Judaism all exclude one another by having beliefs that are denied by the other two. Sue in practice excludes all three by saying that the exclusive beliefs are not the "core." Tim Keller observes, "We are all exclusive in our beliefs about religion, but in different ways."[3]

The View that All Religions Are Wrong

Let us consider another example. Donald looks over the field of religions and concludes that they are all wrong. He thinks that they all make arrogant, overreaching claims to know the truth. The differences between the claims show that no one really knows.

Donald's position is just as exclusive as Sue's, and just as exclusive as the claims of any one traditional religion. How so? He claims to know better than any religious practitioner the true status of religious claims. But you have to know a lot about God—whether he exists, whether he reveals himself, what kind of God he is—to make a claim that excludes all religions before seriously investigating any of them in detail. Donald thinks that religious claims are arrogant. The irony is that he is acting arrogantly in claiming to be superior to all religions.

Social Influence on Religious Beliefs

Many people in many cultures have had confidence in their religious views. But Donald does not have confidence in any religion. And today in Europe, Canada, and the United States we meet many people like him. Why? Sometimes sociology of religion has played a role. Sociologists observe that many people hold the religion of their parents or the predominant religion in their location and in their ethnic group. Religious convictions are passed on by society, and especially by parents. When Donald observes this social dimension of religion, he concludes that exclusive religious claims are a

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in nature, and this plurality is worshiped as many gods. See John N. Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), esp. chap. 3.

[3]Keller, *Reason for God*, 13.

product of narrow ethnocentricity. Donald thinks that religion as a whole is suspect.

But now let us ask why Donald is so different from many people in non-Western cultures who confidently belong to a particular religion. Just like other people, Donald has received social influences, including the influence of sociology of religion. Donald's views about religion have been socially shaped. If social shaping undermines truth, it undermines the truth of Donald's views as well as everyone else's. Donald's views are just as "ethnocentric" as everyone else's, but Donald is unaware of it.[4]

Worldviews

Part of the challenge in searching for the truth is that we all do so against the background of assumptions about truth. Many basic assumptions about the nature of the world fit together to form a *worldview*. A worldview includes assumptions about whether God exists, what *kind* of God might exist, what kind of world we live in, how we come to know what we know, whether there are moral standards, what is the purpose of human life, and so on. Donald and those like him have inherited many convictions from the society around them.

Most modern worldviews differ at crucial points from the worldview offered in the Bible. When we come to the Bible and try to listen to its claims, we can easily misjudge those claims if we hear them only from within the framework of our own modern assumptions. Letting the Bible speak for itself, that is, letting it speak in its own terms, includes letting the Bible speak from within its own worldview rather than merely our own.

A Personal God

I propose, then, to explore this theme of differing worldviews through subsequent chapters. But I want to focus a little more narrowly. One crucial piece in the biblical worldview concerns who God is. According to the Bible, God is the Creator and sustainer of the world, and God is personal. God's *personal* character makes a difference. If you want to find out about an apple sitting in a fruit bowl, there are many ways you might go about it. You might photograph it, chemically analyze it, smell it, cut it up, eat it. It is up to you; the apple has no choice in the matter. But getting to know a person is different. You are not completely in charge. You may be able to observe

[4]"If the pluralist had been born in [Morocco] he probably wouldn't be a pluralist" (ibid., 11, quoting Alvin Plantinga, "A Defense of Religious Exclusivism," in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, ed. James F. Sennett [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 205). "You can't say, 'All claims about religions are historically conditioned except the one I am making right now'" (Keller, *Reason for God*, 11).

a stranger's actions at a distance. But for real acquaintance, you must meet the person, and the person must cooperate. It is up to the other person how much he or she will tell you.

Some of the thinking about religion makes a mistake right here. If, in our thinking, God or religion becomes like an apple, we are in charge and we do our own investigating in whatever way we please. On the other hand, if God is a person, and in fact a person infinitely greater than we, it is up to him how he chooses to meet us. Until we get to know him, we cannot say whether he makes himself known in all religions equally, or in none of them, or in one particular way that fits his character.

The Bible claims to be God's communication to us. That is an exclusive claim. But mere exclusiveness, as we have seen, does not disqualify the claim. We have to find out by reading the Bible, not by rejecting it beforehand. And we have to reckon with the fact that God as a person may be different from what we imagine him to be. Getting acquainted succeeds better if it takes place without a lot of prejudice getting in the way.[5]

[5]See chap. 32, on pride.

2

Are Moral Rules a Straitjacket?

Consider a second difficulty with the Bible. Some modern people see the moral instruction in the Bible as a straitjacket.[1] They may disagree with some of the Bible's specific moral pronouncements. But they have a deeper difficulty: absolute moral rules seem to them to be an assault on their freedom.

The Worldview Question

People in other cultures have not found the same difficulty with the Bible. Many Christians in previous centuries have valued its instruction. So what causes the differences?

Once again, competing worldviews are one source of difference. The God of the Bible is a personal God. According to the Bible's teaching and its personalist worldview, God has a moral character. Whether or not we accept his moral guidance matters to him.

But if that is all we say, we can still feel as though moral rules are an imposition on human freedom. The Bible has a many-sided reply to this modern feeling. God made human beings in his image (Gen. 1:26–28), so that we have a moral character ourselves. We have a sense of right and wrong. And God made us with a purpose, so that we would grow in fellowship with him and find freedom and satisfaction in fellowship with him rather than in isolation.

[1]Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 35–50.

Different worldviews lead to different conceptions of freedom. If there were no God, freedom might mean freedom to create our own purposes. It might mean freedom from all constraint, which implies, in the end, freedom from the constraints of personal relationships. The ideal freedom would be to live in isolation. On the other hand, if God exists and is personal, freedom means not isolation but joy in appreciating both other human beings and God the infinite person. God's moral order is designed by God to guide us into personal fellowship and satisfaction. It is for our good. It is for our freedom, we might say, in the true sense of "freedom." The person who goes astray from God's wise guidance burdens himself with sorrows and frustrations. In fact, he ends up being a slave to his own desires.

What Makes Sense

The person who rejects the Bible's moral guidance thinks that he has good reasons for rejecting it. It seems reasonable to him to seek "freedom" rather than the Bible's instruction, which he deems to be oppressing and confining. But his judgments about freedom and about oppression are colored by a worldview. He already has assumptions about what would be a meaningful and fulfilling life—what true freedom would mean. And his assumptions depend on his conception of whether God is relevant, and whether God is personal. Thus, he may reject the Bible not because the Bible does not make sense in its own terms, but because he is not reading it on its own terms. He is injecting his own worldview and his own agenda about the kind of freedom that he pictures for himself as ideal.

The Bible's own view of the matter has still another dimension. The Bible indicates that God created us and designed us to have personal fellowship with him and to follow his ways. But we have gone astray and rebelled. We want to be our own master. That is sin. Sin colors our thinking and makes us dislike the idea of submitting to anyone else. Even though God's way is healthy and our own way is destructive, we do not want to stop following our own way. So when we interact with the Bible, we are not just innocent evaluators. We have a destructive agenda. And that is part of the problem. The problem is not just the worldviews "out there," so to speak, but the worldviews and sinful desires "in here." Our secret desires for sin mesh with the ideological offerings of the worldviews that are "on sale" in our society.

TWO

How Could a Good God Allow Suffering?

"I just don't believe the God of Christianity exists," said Hillary, an undergrad English major. "God allows terrible suffering in the world. So he might be either all-powerful but not good enough to end evil and suffering, or else he might be all-good but not powerful enough to end evil and suffering. Either way the all-good, all-powerful God of the Bible couldn't exist."[1]

"This isn't a philosophical issue to me," added Rob, Hillary's boyfriend. "This is personal. I won't believe in a God who allows suffering, even if he, she, or it exists. Maybe God exists. Maybe not. But if he does, he can't be trusted."

FOR many people it is not the exclusivity of Christianity that poses the biggest problem, it is the presence of evil and suffering in the world. Some find unjust suffering to be a philosophical problem, calling into question the very existence of God. For others it is an intensely personal issue. They don't care about the abstract question of whether God exists or not—they

refuse to trust or believe in any God who allows history and life to proceed as it has.

In December 2004, a massive tsunami killed more than 250,000 people around the rim of the Indian Ocean. Over the following weeks, newspapers and magazines were full of letters and articles asking "Where was God?" One reporter wrote: "If God is God, he's not good. If God is good, he's not God. You can't have it both ways, especially after the Indian Ocean catastrophe."[2] Despite the confident assertion of the columnist, the effort to demonstrate that evil disproves the existence of God "is now acknowledged on (almost) all sides to be completely bankrupt."[3] Why?

Evil and Suffering Isn't Evidence *Against* God

Philosopher J. L. Mackie makes this case against God in his book *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford, 1982). He states it this way: If a good and powerful God exists, he would not allow pointless evil, but because there *is* much unjustifiable, pointless evil in the world, the traditional good and powerful God could not exist. Some other god or no god may exist, but not the traditional God.[4] Many other philosophers have identified a major flaw in this reasoning. Tucked away within the assertion that the world is filled with pointless evil is a hidden premise, namely, that if evil appears pointless to me, then it must *be* pointless.

This reasoning is, of course, fallacious. Just because you can't see or imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn't mean there can't be one. Again we see lurking within supposedly hard-nosed skepticism an enormous faith in one's own cognitive faculties. If our minds can't plumb the depths

of the universe for good answers to suffering, well, then, there can't be any! This is blind faith of a high order.

The fallacy at the heart of this argument has been illustrated by the "no-see-ums" illustration of Alvin Plantinga. If you look into your pup tent for a St. Bernard, and you don't see one, it is reasonable to assume that there is no St. Bernard in your tent. But if you look into your pup tent for a "no-see-um" (an extremely small insect with a bite out of all proportion to its size) and you don't see any, it is not reasonable to assume they aren't there. Because, after all, no one can see 'em. Many assume that if there were good reasons for the existence of evil, they would be accessible to our minds, more like St. Bernards than like no-see-ums, but why should that be the case?[5]

This argument against God doesn't hold up, not only to logic but also to experience. As a pastor, I've often preached on the story of Joseph in Genesis. Joseph was an arrogant young man who was hated by his brothers. In their anger at him, they imprisoned him in a pit and then sold him into a life of slavery and misery in Egypt. Doubtless Joseph prayed to God to help him escape, but no help was forthcoming, and into slavery he went. Though he experienced years of bondage and misery, Joseph's character was refined and strengthened by his trials. Eventually he rose up to become a prime minister of Egypt who saved thousands of lives and even his own family from starvation. If God had not allowed Joseph's years of suffering, he never would have been such a powerful agent for social justice and spiritual healing.

Whenever I preach on this text, I hear from many people who identify with that narrative. Many people have to admit that most of what they really needed for success in life came to them through their most difficult and painful experiences. Some look back on an illness and recognize that it was an irreplaceable season of

personal and spiritual growth for them. I have survived a bout with cancer and my wife has suffered with Crohn's disease for years, and we would both attest to this.

I knew a man in my first parish who had lost most of his eyesight after he was shot in the face during a drug deal gone bad. He told me that he had been an extremely selfish and cruel person, but he had always blamed his constant legal and relational problems on others. The loss of his sight had devastated him, but it had also profoundly humbled him. "As my physical eyes were closed, my spiritual eyes were opened, as it were. I finally saw how I'd been treating people. I changed, and now for the first time in my life I have friends, real friends. It was a terrible price to pay, and yet I must say it was worth it. I finally have what makes life worthwhile."

Though none of these people are grateful for the tragedies themselves, they would not trade the insight, character, and strength they had gotten from them for anything. With time and perspective most of us can see good reasons for at least *some* of the tragedy and pain that occurs in life. Why couldn't it be possible that, from God's vantage point, there are good reasons for all of them?

If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn't stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can't know. Indeed, you can't have it both ways.

Evil and Suffering May Be (If Anything) Evidence *for* God

Horrendous, inexplicable suffering, though it cannot disprove God, is nonetheless a problem for the believer in the Bible. However, it

is perhaps an even greater problem for nonbelievers. C. S. Lewis described how he had originally rejected the idea of God because of the cruelty of life. Then he came to realize that evil was even more problematic for his new atheism. In the end, he realized that suffering provided a better argument for God's existence than one against it.

> *My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of "just" and "unjust"? . . . What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? . . . Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies. . . . Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple.*[6]

Lewis recognized that modern objections to God are based on a sense of fair play and justice. People, we believe, *ought* not to suffer, be excluded, die of hunger or oppression. But the evolutionary mechanism of natural selection *depends* on death, destruction, and violence of the strong against the weak—these things are all perfectly natural. On what basis, then, does the atheist judge the natural world to be horribly wrong, unfair, and unjust? The nonbeliever in God doesn't have a good basis for being outraged at injustice, which, as Lewis points out, was the reason for objecting to God in the first place. If you are *sure* that this natural world is unjust and filled with evil, you are assuming the reality of some extra-natural (or supernatural) standard by which to make your judgment. The philosopher Alvin Plantinga said it like this:

> *Could there really be any such thing as horrifying wickedness [if there were no God and we just evolved]? I don't see how. There can be such a thing only if there is a way that rational creatures are supposed to live,* obliged *to live. . . . A [secular] way of looking at the world has no place for genuine moral obligation of any sort . . . and thus no way to say there is such a thing as genuine and appalling wickedness. Accordingly, if you think there really is such a thing as horrifying wickedness (. . . and not just an illusion of some sort), then you have a powerful . . . argument [for the reality of God].*[7]

In short, the problem of tragedy, suffering, and injustice is a problem for everyone. It is at least as big a problem for nonbelief in God as for belief. It is therefore a mistake, though an understandable one, to think that if you abandon belief in God it somehow makes the problem of evil easier to handle.

A WOMAN IN MY CHURCH once confronted me about sermon illustrations in which evil events turned out for the good. She had lost a husband in an act of violence during a robbery. She also had several children with severe mental and emotional problems. She insisted that for every one story in which evil turns out for good there are one hundred in which there is no conceivable silver lining. In the same way, much of the discussion so far in this chapter may sound cold and irrelevant to a real-life sufferer. "So what if suffering and evil doesn't logically disprove God?" such a person might say. "I'm still angry. All this philosophizing does *not* get the Christian God 'off the hook' for the world's evil and suffering!" In response the philosopher Peter Kreeft points out that the Christian God came to earth to deliberately put himself *on* the hook of human suffering. In Jesus Christ, God experienced the

greatest depths of pain. Therefore, though Christianity does not provide the reason for each experience of pain, it provides deep resources for actually facing suffering with hope and courage rather than bitterness and despair.

Comparing Jesus to the Martyrs

The gospel narratives all show that Jesus did not face his approaching death with anything like the aplomb and fearlessness that was widely expected in a spiritual hero. The well-known Maccabean martyrs, who suffered under the Syrian rule of Antiochus Epiphanes, were the paradigms for spiritual courage in the face of persecution. They were famous for speaking defiantly and confidently of God even as they were having limbs cut off. Contrast that with the demeanor of Jesus, who is depicted as profoundly shaken by his impending doom. ". . . He began to be deeply distressed and troubled" saying, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Mark 14:33-34). Luke describes Jesus before his death as being in "agony" and describes a man with all the signs of being in physical shock (Luke 22:44). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all show Jesus trying to avoid death, asking the Father if there isn't some way out of it ("If it be your will . . . take this cup from me"—Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). Finally, on the cross itself, Jesus does not, as the Maccabean martyrs, confidently call onlookers to be faithful to God. Rather, he cries out that God has forsaken him (Matthew 27:46).

On the cross, Jesus suffered a three-hour-long death by slow suffocation and blood loss. As terribly painful as that was, there have been far more excruciating and horrible deaths that martyrs have faced with far greater confidence and calmness. Two famous examples are Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, who were burned

at the stake at Oxford in 1555 for their Protestant convictions. As the flames leapt up, Latimer was heard to say calmly, "Be of good comfort, Mr. Ridley, and play the man! We shall this day light such a candle by God's grace, in England, as I trust never shall be put out."

Why was Jesus so much more overwhelmed by his death than others have been, even more than his own followers?

The Suffering of God

To understand Jesus's suffering at the end of the gospels, we must remember how he is introduced at their beginning. The gospel writer John, in his first chapter, introduces us to the mysterious but crucial concept of God as tri-personal. The Son of God was not created but took part in creation and has lived throughout all eternity "in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18)—that is, in a relationship of absolute intimacy and love. But at the end of his life he was cut off from the Father.

There may be no greater inner agony than the loss of a relationship we desperately want. If a mild acquaintance turns on you, condemns and criticizes you, and says she never wants to see you again, it is painful. If someone you're dating does the same thing, it is qualitatively more painful. But if your spouse does this to you, or if one of your parents does this to you when you're still a child, the psychological damage is infinitely worse.

We cannot fathom, however, what it would be like to lose not just spousal love or parental love that has lasted several years, but the infinite love of the Father that Jesus had from all eternity. Jesus's sufferings would have been eternally unbearable. Christian theology has always recognized that Jesus bore, as the substitute in our place, the endless exclusion from God that the

human race has merited. In the Garden of Gethsemane, even the beginning and foretaste of this experience began to put Jesus into a state of shock. New Testament scholar Bill Lane writes: "Jesus came to be with the Father for an interlude before his betrayal, but found hell rather than heaven opened before him, and he staggered."[8] On the cross, Jesus's cry of dereliction—"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—is a deeply relational statement. Lane writes: "The cry has a ruthless authenticity . . . Jesus did not die renouncing God. Even in the inferno of abandonment he did not surrender his faith in God but expressed his anguished prayer in a cry of affirmation, 'My God, my God.' "[9] Jesus still uses the language of intimacy—"my God"—even as he experiences infinite separation from the Father.

Redemption and Suffering

The death of Jesus was qualitatively different from any other death. The physical pain was nothing compared to the spiritual experience of cosmic abandonment.[10] Christianity alone among the world religions claims that God became uniquely and fully human in Jesus Christ and therefore knows firsthand despair, rejection, loneliness, poverty, bereavement, torture, and imprisonment. On the cross he went beyond even the worst human suffering and experienced cosmic rejection and pain that exceeds ours as infinitely as his knowledge and power exceeds ours. In his death, God suffers in love, identifying with the abandoned and god-forsaken.[11] Why did he do it? The Bible says that Jesus came on a rescue mission for creation. He had to pay for our sins so that someday he can end evil and suffering without ending us.

Let's see where this has brought us. If we again ask the question: "Why does God allow evil and suffering to continue?" and

we look at the cross of Jesus, we still do not know what the answer is. However, we now know what the answer isn't. It can't be that he doesn't love us. It can't be that he is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering *so* seriously that he was willing to take it on himself. Albert Camus understood this when he wrote:

> *[Christ] the god-man suffers too, with patience. Evil and death can no longer be entirely imputed to him since he suffers and dies. The night on Golgotha is so important in the history of man only because, in its shadows, the divinity ostensibly abandoned its traditional privilege, and lived through to the end, despair included, the agony of death. Thus is explained the "Lama sabachthani" and the frightful doubt of Christ in agony.*[12]

So, if we embrace the Christian teaching that Jesus is God and that he went to the Cross, then we have deep consolation and strength to face the brutal realities of life on earth. We can know that God is truly *Immanuel*—God *with* us—even in our worst sufferings.

Resurrection and Suffering

I think we need something more than knowing God is with us in our difficulties. We also need hope that our suffering is "not in vain." Have you ever noticed how desperate the families of lost loved ones are to say that? They work to reform laws or change social conditions that led to the death. They need to believe that the death of their loved ones has led to new life, that the injustice has led to greater justice.

For the one who suffers, the Christian faith provides as a resource not just its teaching on the Cross but also the fact of the resurrection. The Bible teaches that the future is not an immaterial "paradise" but a new heaven and a new earth. In Revelation 21, we do not see human beings being taken out of this world into heaven, but rather heaven coming down and cleansing, renewing, and perfecting this material world. The secular view of things, of course, sees no future restoration after death or history. And Eastern religions believe we lose our individuality and return to the great All-soul, so our material lives in this world are gone forever. Even religions that believe in a heavenly paradise consider it a consolation for the losses and pain of this life and all the joys that might have been.

The Biblical view of things is resurrection—not a future that is just a *consolation* for the life we never had but a *restoration* of the life you always wanted. This means that every horrible thing that ever happened will not only be undone and repaired but will in some way make the eventual glory and joy even greater.

A few years ago I had a horrible nightmare in which I dreamed that everyone in my family had died. When I awoke my relief was enormous—but there was much more than just relief. My delight in each member of my family was tremendously enriched. I looked at each one and realized how grateful I was for them, how deeply I loved them. Why? My joy had been greatly magnified by the nightmare. My delight upon awaking took the terror up into itself, as it were, so that in the end my love for them was only greater for my having lost them and found them again. This same dynamic is at work when you lose some possession you take for granted. When you find it again (having thought it was gone forever) you cherish and appreciate it in a far deeper way.

In Greek (specifically Stoic) philosophy there was a belief that

history was an endless cycle. Every so often the universe would wind down and burn up in a great conflagration called a *palengenesia*, after which history, having been purified, started over. But in Matthew 19:28 Jesus spoke of his return to earth as *the* palingenesis. "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things (Greek *palingenesis*), the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne." This was a radically new concept. Jesus insisted that his return will be with such power that the very material world and universe will be purged of all decay and brokenness. All will be healed and all might-have-beens will *be*.

Just after the climax of the trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, Sam Gamgee discovers that his friend Gandalf was not dead (as he thought) but alive. He cries, "I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself! *Is everything sad going to come untrue?*"[13] The answer of Christianity to that question is—yes. Everything sad is going to come untrue and it will somehow be *greater* for having once been broken and lost.

Embracing the Christian doctrines of the incarnation and Cross brings profound consolation in the face of suffering. The doctrine of the resurrection can instill us with a powerful hope. It promises that we will get the life we most longed for, but it will be an infinitely more glorious world than if there had never been the need for bravery, endurance, sacrifice, or salvation.[14]

Dostoevsky put it perfectly when he wrote:

> *I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage, like the despicable fabrication of the impotent and infinitely small Euclidean mind of man, that in the world's finale, at the moment of eternal harmony, something so precious will come to pass that it will*

suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, of all the blood that they've shed; that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened.[15]

More succinctly, C. S. Lewis wrote:

They say of some temporal suffering, "No future bliss can make up for it," not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.[16]

This is the ultimate defeat of evil and suffering. It will not only be ended but so radically vanquished that what has happened will only serve to make our future life and joy infinitely greater.

THREE

Christianity Is a Straitjacket

"Christians believe that they have the absolute truth that everyone else has to believe—or else," said Keith, a young artist living in Brooklyn. "That attitude endangers everyone's freedom."

"Yes," agreed Chloe, another young artist. "A 'one-Truth-fits all' approach is just too confining. The Christians I know don't seem to have the freedom to think for themselves. I believe each individual must determine truth for him- or herself."

Is a belief in absolute truth the enemy of freedom? Most people I've met in New York City believe that it is. Christianity names some beliefs "heresy" and some practices "immoral." It bars from its community those who transgress its doctrinal and moral boundaries. This seems to contemporary observers to endanger civic freedom, because it divides rather than unites our population. It also appears to be culturally narrow, failing to recognize that various cultures have different perspectives on reality. Finally, it seems to enslave or at least infantilize its members, determining what they must believe and practice in every particular. M. Scott Peck told of counseling a woman named Charlene who

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What Happens When You Die? At Home with the Lord

July 18, 1993 by John Piper | Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:10 | Topic: Death & Dying | Series: What Happens When You Die?

> Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord — for we walk by faith, not by sight — we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Today I want to begin a four-week series entitled, "What Happens When You Die?" By "you" I mean believers in Jesus Christ. If you are not a believer, the aim of these messages is to wake you up from the slumber of indifference to the question of death and eternity and to motivate you to consider Jesus Christ as the only way to eternal life and the only escape from hell and eternal death. "I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). There is no other way to God.

In this sermon I will try to answer from Scripture the question, "What happens immediately at the moment of death?" In the following four weeks the questions will be:

- What happens to you at the coming of Christ?
- What happens to believers at the Judgment?
- What is our final place: a distant heaven, or the new earth where lions and lambs lie down in peace?
- What is the most essential bridge that links this life and the next?

Why This Theme Is Crucial to Consider

There is a long list of reasons why this theme seems crucial to me for our consideration. Let me mention a few of them:

1. The Possibilities of Eternal Joy or Eternal Misery

The possibilities for joy and misery after you die are trillions of times greater than in the few years on this

earth before you die. The Bible compares this life to a vapor that appears as you breathe on a cold winter morning and then vanishes (James 4:14). The Bible describes the time after death as "ages of ages." Not just one or two ages of thousands of years, but ages of ages; thousands and thousands of ages (Revelation 14:11). It matters infinitely what happens to you after you die.

2. The Question of Authentic Faith

This theme forces the question as to whether our faith is real, substantial, biblical faith in objective, external reality outside ourselves. Namely, is our faith in God or is it a mere subjective experience of feelings and thoughts inside ourselves that function as an emotional cushion to soften the bumps of life and give us a network of friends? Facing eternity has an amazing effect of sobering us out of religious delusions.

3. The Centrality of God

Thinking about death and eternity helps keep God as the center of our lives by testing whether we are more in love with this world than we are in love with God himself. Does the thought of dying give us more pain at losing what we love on earth than it gives us joy at gaining Christ?

4. The Call to Christian Courage

When the biblical truth of this theme grips you, it frees you from fear and gives courage to live the most radical, self-sacrificing life of love. The person who can truly say, "To die is gain," will be able to say like no one else, "To live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). But if you can't say, "To die is gain," then you will probably say, in one degree or another, "Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die" (1 Corinthians 15:32). Being sure of what happens when you die is indispensable as a believer in Christ for your daily courage and for not losing heart through the pain and the diminishing health of this life.

That brings us to our text.

Providing the Basis of Not Losing Heart

What Paul is doing in 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10 is showing the Corinthians why he does not lose heart in spite of all the troubles and afflictions (4:8–12). Especially in view of the fact that he knows he is dying; his body is wearing away. Look at 4:16 — "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day."

It is utterly crucial that we not lose heart. Some of you have taken such a pounding physically and financially and relationally that you have often been tempted to "lose heart"; to give up. To say, "It isn't worth it." "Que sera, sera." "Who cares?" Paul faced the same temptation (vv. 8–12) and this text holds one of the keys to why he did not lose heart.

To show that this really is crucial to his point here, look at verses 6 and 8 of chapter 5 which is part of the same train of thought. Verse 6: "Therefore, being always of good courage . . . " Verse 8: "We are of good courage, I say." We'll come back to these verses in a moment, but the point now is simply to show you that what Paul is doing here is giving the basis of being of good courage and not losing heart. That is the effect I would like it to have on you.

The Threat: His Body Is Decaying

Now let's go back to 4:16 and follow his line of thought to see what is threatening to make Paul lose heart and lose courage, and what is keeping him from losing heart.

Verse 16: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying . . . " Here is the threat he is dealing with: His body — "the outer man" — is decaying; it is wearing out. He can't see the way he used to (and there were probably no glasses). He can't hear the way he used to. He does not recover from beatings the way he used to. His strength walking from town to town does not hold up the way it used to. He sees the wrinkles in his face and neck. His memory is not as good. His joints get stiff when he sits still. In other words, he knows that he, like everybody else, is dying. His outer man is decaying. That's the threat to his courage and joy.

Now Why Doesn't He Lose Heart?

The first part of the answer is again in verse 16: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." He doesn't lose heart because day by day his heart, his inner man, is being renewed. If his decaying body tends to make him lose heart, something else tends to make him gain heart. What is it?

Fixing His Eyes on What Can't Be Seen

His renewed heart comes from something very strange: it comes from looking at what he can't see. Verse 18: "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." This is Paul's way of not losing heart: looking at what you can't see.

Recall how Jesus criticized the religious leaders in his day: "Seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear" (Matthew 13:13). In other words there was something to "see" in Jesus's life and teaching which they didn't see but should have seen. That has got to be reversed if we are to get our hope and our courage from Jesus and not lose heart. It has to be said of us, "Not seeing, they see; and not hearing, they hear." That's what Paul was doing in verse 18; he was looking at things that are not seen.

Paul illustrates this in chapter 5, verse 7: "We walk by faith, not by sight." This doesn't mean that we leap into the dark without evidence of what's there. But it does mean that the most precious and important realities in the world are beyond our senses now, and we "look" at them (v. 18) through what we know of Christ from faithful witnesses who have seen him and heard his voice. We strengthen our hearts — we renew our courage — by fixing the gaze of our hearts on invisible, objective truth that we learn about through the testimony of those who knew Christ and were taught by him (cf. Ephesians 1:18–23).

Looking to the Unseen Weight of Glory Being Prepared

What truth? What do we fix our gaze on to experience day by day the renewal of the inner man in the face of death?

To answer this we look back to verse 17 for a powerful summary statement, and we look forward into chapter 5 for the unpacking of this summary statement.

Verse 17: We renew our inner man each day by looking at this truth: "Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

The decaying of your body is not meaningless. The pain, pressure, frustration, and affliction are not happening in vain. They are not vanishing into a black hole of pointless suffering. Instead this "momentary, light affliction [he calls it that even though it lasted for years and was unremitting and often excruciating] is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

In other words, the unseen things that Paul looks at to renew his inner man is the immense weight of glory that is being prepared for him not just after, but through and by, the wasting away of his body. There is a correlation between the decay of Paul's body and the display of Paul's glory. When he is hurting, he fixes his eyes not on how heavy the hurt is, but on how heavy the glory will be because of the hurt.

What Does This Unseen Glory Consist Of?

Now what does he see when he looks to the unseen glory? As he goes on in chapter five he fills in some of what he sees as he looks at the unseen.

Now the next two messages concern these verses: the resurrection body and the judgment of believers. But neither of these is the focus of this message. So if I pass over something too quickly, read the next sermon.

Verses 1–5 are about the hope of receiving new, glorious bodies at the resurrection. Verses 9–10 are about the judgment and Paul's effort to please Christ the Judge. Our focus is on verses 6–8, the hope of being with Christ immediately when you die.

His Great, Final Hope

But let me read you the verses about the resurrection body because there is a crucial connection between this hope and the hope of being with Christ (without a new body) immediately when you die. Verses 1–5:

> For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down [he's talking about his body which is decaying], we have a building from God [a building as opposed to a tent for a house — that is, something more durable and lasting, namely, a new resurrection body], a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house [this "tent-house," our present body] we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven [that is, our resurrection body; he mixes metaphors here shifting back and forth now between being clothed and being housed]; inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked [in other words, he does not prefer to put off his present body like a garment and become a disembodied soul — that's what nakedness means]. For indeed while we are in this tent [this mortal body], we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed [we don't want to be a bodiless soul], but to be clothed [on top of our present clothes — he wants the second coming of Christ to happen so that he will not have to die and be without a body, but rather have his present body swallowed up in the glorious resurrection life of the new body], in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

We'll talk more about this in the next message. For now, here's the crucial point: If Paul had his preference, he would choose to receive his new resurrection body at the second coming of Christ without having to die. And the reason he gives is that the experience of "nakedness" — that is being stripped of his body — is not something as good as having his body swallowed up by life as he is changed in the twinkling of an eye at the second coming of Christ.

This means that the great final hope of the Christian is not to die and be freed from our bodies, but to be raised with new, glorious bodies, or, best of all, to be alive at the second coming so that we do not have to lose our body temporarily and be "naked" (souls without bodies, cf. Matthew 10:28; Revelation 6:9; Hebrews 12:23) until the resurrection.

Present with the Lord Immediately After Death

But does that mean that dying and going to be with Christ does not happen, or that it is not good? No. Paul puts things back in perspective again in verses 6–8.

> Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord [the full intimacy we long for is not possible here] — for we walk by faith, not by sight — we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Now get this. In verse 4 Paul says, "He does not want to be unclothed." His first preference is not to be "absent from the body." He says that in comparison to being over-clothed with the new resurrection body if he is alive at the second coming of Christ. That would be his first preference. But if that is not possible — if the choice is between more life here by faith and going to be with Christ — he prefers that God would take him; EVEN IF it means nakedness, that is, even if it means that he must be stripped of his body.

And the reason for this willingness to leave his body behind is not because the body is bad — O, how he wants the experience of the new resurrection body — but because being at home with the Lord is so irresistibly attractive to Paul. Verse 8: "I prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."

Summary

So Paul renews his inner man by looking to unseen things. He looks at three possibilities and prefers them in descending order. First, he prefers that Christ would come and clothe his mortal body with immortality so that he would not have to die and be an incomplete, disembodied soul. But if God does not will that, Paul prefers to be absent from the body to living on here, because he loves Christ more than he loves anything else. To be absent from the body will mean to be at home with the Lord; a deeper intimacy and greater at-homeness than anything we can know in this life. Finally, if God wills that it is not time for the second coming or time for death, then Paul will walk by faith and not by sight.

In that faith he will be of good courage and, even though his outer man is decaying, his inner man will be renewed day-by-day through this faith in the unseen weight of glory.

Examine yourself. Do you share these biblical priorities and values in life? Do you long mainly for the second coming? And secondly, do you long to be at home with Christ even if it costs you the surrender of your body? Third, are you committed to walk by faith until he comes or until he calls?

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What Happens When You Die? The Dead Will Be Raised Imperishable

July 25, 1993 | by John Piper | Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 | Topic: Death & Dying | Series: What Happens When You Die?

> Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

Paul's Three Preferences About Living and Dying

What we saw last week was that the apostle Paul had three preferences about living and dying — in descending order.

1. To Be Alive When Christ Returns

His first preference was not to die at all but to be alive when Jesus returns and instead of having to experience the separation of soul and body, that he would experience the transformation of his mortal body into an immortal one that would live with Christ forever in the kingdom.

He says this in 2 Corinthians 5:4, "While we are in this tent [this temporary, mortal body], we groan, being burdened, because we don't want to be unclothed [i.e., bodiless], but to be clothed upon, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." He does not want to be "unclothed" in the sense of being stripped of his body. He wants his body to be swallowed up into the new spiritual, immortal body at the last trumpet when Christ descends from heaven to establish his kingdom and bring this age to a close. That's Paul's first preference.

2. To Die and Be with Christ

He knows he cannot know, let alone control, when Christ is coming. So he is not sure if that first preference will come true. So he expresses his second preference, namely, to die and be with Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:8 he says, "We are of good courage and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." Rather than groan here and bear the struggles and sicknesses and sin of this life, he would rather die and be with the Lord.

In Philippians 1:21 he says, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." He struggles with the need to stay here for the sake of ministry against the longing to be done with the struggle and enjoy the immediate

presence of Jesus. He says in verse 23, "I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better." So his second preference is this: if God wills for Christ to be delayed, then Paul would rather go to be with him — if Christ does not yet come to be with us — even if he must be stripped (even painfully stripped) of his body.

3. To Go On Walking by Faith Not by Sight

The third preference is that, if God wills, and if it is better for the people of the Lord and the glory of Christ, Paul is willing to remain on the earth and to walk by faith and not by sight. He is willing to postpone the deeper, more immediate intimacy of seeing and being with Jesus if that's God's will. In 2 Corinthians 5:6–7 he says, "We are always of good courage and know that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith and not by sight." He said to the Philippians that he would remain and continue with them all for the advancement and joy of their faith (1:25). So his third preference is to press on with the ministry and use his time on the earth to advance faith and joy in others as far as he can.

Are We Out of Step with These Priorities?

Now we need to ask if we are out of step with these three priorities. Do we set our minds on things that are above (Colossians 3:2)? Do we live like our citizenship is in heaven and wait eagerly for the Savior to return (Philippians 3:20)? Do we feel like death would be more gain than loss (Philippians 1:21)? Are we so entangled with this world that leaving it is the worst thing we can think of?

When I pray for revival at Bethlehem and in the American Church, this is mainly what I have in mind: Lord, pour out your Spirit in such a way that your people desire Christ more than they desire other things and other people. Revival is the inflaming of love to Christ. Revival is not first miracles like healing or prophetic utterances or speaking in tongues — as precious as those things are (and I do mean precious!). It is possible to have the gift of healing, and yet love health more than we love going to be with Christ. It is possible to have the gift of prophecy, and yet crave pornography more than you crave the second coming of Jesus. It is possible to speak in tongues and love your gold rings and $1,200 suits and $40,000 cars more than you believe that death is gain.

Which is why when I pray for revival, I pray first for the most radical thing: the utter devotion and allegiance of your hearts to Christ. That you would love him so deeply and long for him so passionately that his coming would be your great hope, and death would be gain, and life would be for Christ and his kingdom.

To that end I want to focus here on the resurrection of our bodies as those who are in Christ. I am talking to believers and I am praying that unbelievers who hear me will turn from the dead-end street of self-reliance and believe. "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved" — you will be forgiven and after you die you will be raised to live with Christ forever.

Refocusing on Our Final Hope: Bodily Resurrection

It seems to me that the hope of resurrection does not have the same place of power and centrality for us today that it had for the early Christians. And I think one of the reasons for that is that we have a wrong view of the age to come. When we talk about the future and the eternal state, we tend to talk about heaven, and heaven tends to imply a place far away characterized by non-material, ethereal, disembodied spirits.

In other words, we tend to assume that the condition that the departed saints are in NOW without their bodies is the way it will always be. And we have encouraged ourselves so much with how good it is for them

now that we tend to forget how it is an imperfect state and not the way it will always be, nor the way Paul wanted it to be for himself. Yes to die is gain, and yes, to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord, but NO this is not our ultimate hope. This is not the final state of our joy. This is not our final or main comfort when we have lost loved ones who believe.

The Comfort Paul Offered to the Thessalonians

For example, when the church in Thessalonica lost believing loved ones, the main comfort that Paul offered was not that they were with Christ (as true and wonderful as that is), but that they would be raised bodily from the dead in time to participate physically in the coming of Christ. He said (in 1 Thessalonians 4:15), "We who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep." "Precede"? What does he mean by that? Precede in what sense?

Precede in What Sense?

The next verse answers the question: "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first." "First!" Ah, there's the key. We will not precede them, for they will rise first. You see how different that is from the way we tend to comfort each other today. We would say, "We won't precede them, because they are already with the Lord." We would be thinking merely in terms of going to heaven. They got there first by leaving their bodies behind.

But that is not what Paul says. As true as it is, that is not the main hope or the main comfort for us Christians. What Paul does say is this: We will not precede them because they will be raised first. Not because they go to heaven first, which is true, but because they will be raised first.

In other words, Paul is not thinking mainly of heaven far away but of the glory of what happens here: their bodies will not be left in the grave while we have the joy of physically meeting the Lord in the air and welcoming him to his kingdom. They won't stay in the grave while we are changed in the twinkling of an eye and clothed with immortality. No, verse 17 says, "The dead in Christ will rise first. Then [and only then] we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [not before them] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."

"With the Lord"

And when he says, "with the Lord," he means with the one whom (because of the resurrection) we can see and hear and touch with our bodies — with eyes and ears and hands something like what we have now. That is our hope — to be with the risen Christ with a body like his glorious body. To know him in a form like his. Our final destiny and our eternal state is not an ethereal, disembodied state in a distant heaven. It is to reign with Christ here on the renewed earth. This hope was so vibrant for the early Christians that they comforted each other not mainly with the joys of the disembodied state after death, but with the hope of resurrection bodies (cf. Philippians 3:21).

One of the Greatest Descriptions of the Resurrection

Now look at today's text for one of the greatest descriptions of that event.

"Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit the Kingdom of God"

Verse 50: "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." What does that mean? Is it a wholesale denial of the bodily resurrection? No. "Flesh and blood" simply means "human nature

as we know it" — mortal, perishable, sin-stained, decaying. Something so fragile and temporary as the body we now have will not be the stuff of the eternal, durable, unshakable, indestructible kingdom of God. But that doesn't mean there won't be bodies.

It means that our bodies will be greater. They will be our bodies, but they will be different and more wonderful. Verse 52: "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed." When he says "the dead will be raised" he means we — the dead — will be raised. If God meant to start all over with no continuity between the body I have now and the one I will have, why would Paul say, "The dead will be raised"? Why would he not say, "The dead will not be raised" since they are decomposed and their molecules are scattered into plants and animals for a thousand miles and so God will start from scratch since there are no bodies to raise, and he will make totally new bodies that have no connection with the old ones? He did not say that, because it is not true.

The Dead Will Be Raised and They Will Be Changed

He said two things; the dead will be raised (that teaches continuity); and he said they will be changed — they will be made imperishable and immortal. The old body will become a new body. But it will be your body. God is able to do what we cannot imagine. The resurrection is not described in terms of a totally new creation but in terms of a change of the old creation. "We shall all be changed" (v. 51b).

An Analogy to Seeds and Plants

Look back now at verses 37–38. Paul compares the resurrection to what happens to a seed when it goes into the ground. "That which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as he wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own." The point is that there is connection and continuity between the simple seed and the beautiful plant. When you plant a wheat seed, you don't get a barley plant. But on the other hand there is difference. A plant is more beautiful than a seed.

Verses 42–44 apply the analogy to the resurrection body: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

Why Does It Matter?

I can hear someone say, "Why bother!" Let it go. Who needs it? All that matters is the spiritual realities of love and joy and peace and righteousness and goodness and truth. Why the big fuss over arms and legs and hands and feet and hair and eyes and ears and tongues? It seems so earthly.

The Physical Universe Exists to Glorify God

We will see more of the answer in two weeks when we talk about the new earth. But let me close with part of the answer today by pointing you to 1 Corinthians 6:19–20. God did not create the physical universe willy-nilly. He had a reason, namely, to add to the ways his glory is externalized and made manifest. "The skies are telling the glory of God." That's why he made them.

Your body fits into that same category of physical things that God created for this reason. He is not going to back out on his plan to glorify himself through human beings and human bodies. So 1 Corinthians 6:19–20 says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your

body."

Honoring the Work of Jesus

Why does God go to all the trouble to dirty his hands to reestablish your body and clothe it with immortality? Because his Son paid the price of his life so that God could be glorified in your body forever and ever. "You were bought with a price, therefore glorify God with your bodies." God will not dishonor the work of his Son. That's why he will raise your body.

The sting of death is sin (15:56), but Christ bore the curse of sin. The power of sin is the law (15:56), but Christ satisfied the demands of the law. Therefore Paul cries out, "Thanks be to God who gives the victory through Jesus Christ." When Christ died, he forgave sin and fulfilled the law and defeated death and obtained not just our souls but also our bodies.

Therefore God will honor the work of his Son by raising your body from the dead, and you will use your body to glorify him forever and ever. That is why you have a body now. And that is why it will be raised imperishable.

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December 20, 2005

What Does the Bible Say about Near Death Experiences?

We all want to know about heaven. We want to know about the place our Savior has prepared for us, and we want to know our loved ones are safe. These desires are good and right, and God's Word tells us much about what we can expect. In the new heavens and the new earth, there is no more pain, no more sorrow, no more suffering (Rev. 21:4). Satan has been conquered through the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11), and death has been defeated forever (1 Cor. 15:25-28). Those who have trusted in Christ will receive resurrected bodies that can never die (1 Cor. 15:42, 52-57), and because of the new covenant, believers can never again rebel against their Creator because He has given them new hearts (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; Ezek. 11:19-20). Finally and forever, Christians will be delivered not only from the power and penalty of sin but from the presence of sin as well.

While we can be absolutely certain about all of these promises because God has revealed them to us in His Word, what should Christians believe about near death experiences and the accounts of heaven that accompany them? Some of the most popular and best-selling books among evangelical Christians for more than a decade have been accounts of near death experiences, including *90 Minutes in Heaven* by Don Piper (2006), *23 Minutes in Hell* by Bill Wiese (2006), and *To Heaven and Back* by Mary C. Neal (2012). By far the most popular book of the past decade, though, is Todd Burpo's *Heaven is for Real* (2010), which recounts the story of his four-year-old son, Colton, who says he visited heaven while under anesthesia during an appendectomy. This book has sold more than 7 million copies and spent 50 weeks on top of the *New York Times* bestseller list. Does the Bible give Christians any guidance as to whether such accounts are real and therefore trustworthy?

First, Scripture recounts many instances of people who did not simply have near death experiences but who actually died and were raised to life (e.g., the Shunammite's child (2 Kings 4:32–37), Jairus' daughter (Matt. 9:18–26), the widow's son (Luke 7:11–16), Dorcas (Acts 9:36-41), and more); nevertheless, no one who is raised from the dead ever gives an account of heaven or the afterlife, including Lazarus who was in the grave for four days (John 11:1–44). Instead, these passages emphasize God's power over death and confirm that Jesus is the Messiah. Moreover, even for those in Scripture who actually had visions of heaven (e.g., Paul (2 Cor. 12:1-4) and John (Revelation chs. 4-6), among others), their accounts are not concerned with providing details of what heaven is like; rather, the emphasis in these passages is on God and His glory. Furthermore, Scripture is absolutely clear that people do not go to heaven and come back: "Who has ascended to heaven and come down?" (Proverbs 30:4). Jesus' answer: *"No one* has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man" (John 3:13, emphasis added).

In contrast to the emphases of Scripture, the emphasis of the many best-selling books on near death experiences is not on God's power and glory but on detailed and often fanciful descriptions of heaven that not only are not present in Scripture but often conflict with what Scripture actually teaches. In defiance of Scripture, many who recount their experiences claim to have actually visited heaven, not that they simply had a vision. Yet another example that conflicts with Scripture is Colton's claim in *Heaven is for Real* that he received a halo and wings, which perpetuates the unbiblical belief that Christians will become like angels when they die (cf. 1 Cor.

15:12-58). Furthermore, even if these accounts do not directly contradict biblical teaching, accounts of near death experiences all disagree on various details, even though those who have these experiences claim that what they saw is completely true and reliable. These inconsistencies, combined with the unbiblical emphases and scriptural contradictions, should lead us to seriously question (and ultimately reject as untrue) the accounts of what humans claim to have experienced and should encourage us all the more to rely on the only certain source of truth: God's Word.

In the end, the question is really whom do we trust? Do we trust the experiences of fallible human beings that have been recorded by uninspired human authors, or do we believe the perfect and inerrant Word of God that, while it may not provide us all the details we would like, is always completely and perfectly true? Speaking through the prophet Isaiah, God rhetorically asks: "[S]hould not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?" (Isa. 8:19; cf. Deut. 18:10-12). Ever since the Fall, the desire of the human heart is to know everything—even the details that God in His wisdom has chosen not to reveal to us. When we crave to know more than what He has revealed, may our posture be one of humility, seeking to trust what He has made known in His all-sufficient Word. Indeed, may we rely not on ourselves or the words of mortal man but on the Word of God that endures forever and will *never* pass away (Matt. 24:35; cf. 1 Peter 1:24-25).



By Sean DeMars

A “Gospel” that Almost Killed Me

I’m in a bathtub. I can’t get up. I feel like I’m about to die. Mercury poisoning.

The water in the tub has grown cold. Maybe that’s why I feel so cold. I’ve been marinating in my own soup stock for the past two hours. I’m floating in and out of consciousness. Whenever I can concentrate I begin to pray.

“Jesus, please, save me. Please, heal me. I repent, I put my whole heart into prayer right now, and I cast out any doubt or fear. I know you can heal me. Please heal me!”

My mom’s keys are rattling in the doorknob now, and I hear the door thud shut in the distance. I hear her purse sliding across the counter and her keys landing next to it. I barely recognize her figure as she tries with all of her wiry might to pull me out of the tub. I spend the next two days in the hospital. My mom wants to know why I didn’t let her know, why I didn’t want to go to the hospital, why I didn’t do something.

“Mom, Jesus is my doctor. I’m blessed, and I know that he would have healed me.” This is me trying to live out what I think is true Christianity.

I had just gotten saved two months prior. I’m fresh out of jail and I’m walking around the projects where I used to stomp like a tiny teenage giant. I’ve got a bare back, a few tattoos, and a Bible in my hand. I’m just praying for the opportunity to share the Christ with someone.

I meet a man named Roger who invites me into his home. He buys me lunch and we spend all day talking about the Bible. This guy knows way more than me. I’ve never heard anyone spout off so many Scriptures in such rapid-fire succession. “This guy is legit...” I say under my breath.

Over the course of the next six months, this man indoctrinates me with the prosperity gospel. Just a few months earlier, I’d never even opened a Bible. I have no idea that I’m being given arsenic in my kool aid. I take it all. I believe it all. I know it’s true. It has to be. It’s all right here in Scripture. Look, she touched the hem of his garment and was healed. Look, Jesus couldn’t heal them because they didn’t have enough faith. Look, all throughout the Old Testament you see curses for sins, and blessings for righteousness. Prosperity for the good, pain for the bad. It’s so plain. So obvious.

But stuff isn't making sense. I'm still without a job. I can't pay my rent. My mom isn't getting saved, and I keep getting cold sores. None of these things should be happening. There must be sin hidden somewhere in my heart.

Now I have the flu, and I don't have any money to buy groceries. I just need to claim it. I just need to rebuke Satan and his lies, and believe that what I have proclaimed in the name of Jesus will surely come to pass. Maybe I'm not tithing enough. Time to double up. I'll get it back one hundred-fold. Maybe more. I just need to sow in faith.

But it's still not happening. "Roger, hey man, I don't understand. It seems like this stuff isn't working. What am I doing wrong?"

"Dude, I don't know exactly what it is, but I know the problem ain't with God or his Word. It's got to be something in your heart, or in your life. Let's pray about it."

Fast forward a year. I'm nineteen and married now. We're struggling hard. I can't pay the rent or the electricity bill, and I just lost another job. My wife wasn't saved when we met. She gets saved during the course of our friendship, and somewhere in there, she starts listening to me and taking in all of the "truth" I'm giving her. She does wonder, though, where the disconnect is. When the ATM receipt says we're negative forty dollars, I rebuke myself, the ATM, and the receipt. I claim my blessing even in the face of this lie from Satan. I know that Jesus is looking down on me, proud of my strength in the midst of such persecution and adversity. "In the name of Jesus!"—I keep claiming what he's promised me.

The prosperity gospel and word of faith movement are basically the same thing, but I've never heard anything about any of those things before. All of the good Bible-loving Baptists around me are afraid of me because I probably robbed their sons, stole their cars, or vandalized their church. Yet because of my powerful testimony, scores of churches invite me to come and share. I preach a false gospel every time I go. Not once does anyone ever sit me down and talk with me about the danger that my soul is in. Not a word. Not a peep. Not to my face, anyway. I now know that they waited respectfully until I left, and then talked amongst themselves about how sad it is to see such passion so misdirected.

All I know, the only thing I know, is that I love Jesus. He saved me. I was destroying myself and anyone who was unfortunate enough to be caught up in my gravitational pull. I was dying, and I was going to die twice. One night, on an empty road in the middle of nowhere, in a scene so strange it has to be true, Jesus saved me. He saved me from sin, and death, and hell. I want to spend the rest of my life serving Jesus with all of me. I think that this refuse called "gospel," this message of prosperity and proclamation, is what I must do. So I obey. In my mind, this is what it means to be a Christian. This is all I've known. I think this is what God wants of me. So I continue in white-knuckled obedience. I keep pressing, keep pushing. And one random day I join Myspace.

I like to argue on Myspace. I'm nineteen and I have a big mouth. The internet offers me a perfect avenue to express myself and condemn those who can't see the truth that I see, obey the law as well as I do, and lack the faith I radiate like a fiery sun. I'm perusing this wasteland one evening in Seattle, and an old man pops up on my QuickTime video player. He's really bringing the thunder. He's preaching on holiness like no one I've ever heard. I'm hooked. I go to the next video.

Amazing. I've never heard anyone preach like this. I go to the next one. It's says "John Piper: Prosperity Gospel Sermon Jam." I'm excited. He's going to really give the jolt I need to keep going.

But after the clip I'm furious. I close my computer. Another wolf. Another preacher who just has it so wrong. The video was the worst attack on my faith that I've ever seen or heard. I stop watching right after he says "this crap called gospel!" Unbelievable.

I carry on with my life, but I just can't help it. I keep going back to YouTube, and eventually I go to this website that has all of his teachings. I tell myself that I'm just going to read or listen to or watch his other stuff. I'll avoid the stuff I don't like; the stuff that's wrong. The other stuff is just too good, though. It's breathing life into my soul.

I don't remember much about the night the truth took over. Most of the really painful events that we experience are deadened in our memories, right? Our brains are protecting us from the trauma of having to relive the pain over and over again. But this night, I'm crying. I'm devastated. I've been considering the possibility for months now, and it finally clicked about five minutes ago. Almost everything that I think I know about God, the Bible, the cross, and the gospel of Jesus Christ is wrong. Dead wrong. I feel it now, down in my bones, and it burns with the pain that only God can give.

Repentance begins. "Amber, baby, we need to talk. Everything I've ever taught you about Christ is wrong. Can you ever trust me again? Can we start over? Will you give me another chance?"

I feel like an adulterer. I begin undoing everything that needs to be undone. I failed as a husband, and by the grace of God I'm trying to fix it. I have no one and nothing. I don't have any non-prosperity gospel friends, because I ditched them if they couldn't get with the program. They were only holding me back and hurting my faith. That's what I told myself. Now I'm alone. I do have the internet, though…

So I'm watching Paul Washer videos and spending hours on DesiringGod.org. I've never even heard the word "reformed," and I can't find one single book about the prosperity gospel. Not one that's attacking it, anyway. That's what I really want.

I'm hurt—badly. I don't trust anyone, and I'm angry at everyone—at Christians, anyway. Why didn't anyone tell me? How could I have been so blind? I'm angry at myself. I'm broken, but the Spirit is carrying me.

God did heal my mercury poisoning, but it wasn't because of my power to proclaim that healing into existence. And he accomplished a far greater rescue when he delivered me from the prosperity gospel. It's been nearly six years since the Lord saved me from myself and the damnable heresy that had ensnared me.

I'm writing this from Peru where my family and I are trying to reach a people group who do not have the gospel. I'm still picking up the pieces. I still have a hard time praying for healing, or prosperity and blessing, both of which are thoroughly biblical. I still feel my diaphragm twitch whenever someone says "In the name of Jesus." I know the truth now, and I try to walk in line with it every day. The white-knuckled discipline that I once devoted to the prosperity gospel, I now devote to trusting fully in the finished work of Christ and the grace that I breathe in to survive.

Here's the bottom line: I was a heretic. But Christ had saved me from my sin, and he saved me from my heresy too. When it comes to embracing the prosperity gospel, I doubt that you would have found anyone more dedicated or ruthless than me. I was the chosen one. But I was ensnared in a false gospel. And so is everyone else who is trusting in this "crap called gospel," to borrow a phrase from that old man's video.

Brothers, call it what it is. Pastors, call it what it is. Don't let even a hint of this junk live in your church. Preach against it, and preach a gospel that shines so bright and burns so hot that any other gospel that tries to approach it burns up upon entry. Don't treat this like an asymptomatic sniffle in an otherwise healthy body; treat it like the cancer that it is. Preach, teach, counsel, shepherd, and pray a clear and true gospel, and leave no room for anything less glorious or true.

If you meet someone who is lost in this false gospel, please, please, please love them and tell them the truth. Sit them down, buy them lunch, and open up your Bibles. Speak life. Be brave. Odds are, no one has ever loved them enough to tell them the truth about themselves. The truth is that they cannot be saved by a false gospel, and the prosperity gospel is certainly that.

Jesus saved me from the prosperity gospel, and he can save more. He will save more. How could he not?



By David W. Jones

Errors of the Prosperity Gospel

Over a century ago, speaking to the then-largest congregation in all Christendom, Charles Spurgeon said,

> I believe that it is anti-Christian and unholy for any Christian to live with the object of accumulating wealth. You will say, "Are we not to strive all we can to get all the money we can?" You may do so. I cannot doubt but what, in so doing, you may do service to the cause of God. But what I said was that to live *with the object* of accumulating wealth is anti-Christian.[1]

Over the years, however, the message being preached in some of the largest churches in the world has changed—indeed, a new gospel is being taught to many congregations today. This gospel has been ascribed many names, such as the "name it and claim it" gospel, the "blab it and grab it" gospel, the "health and wealth" gospel, the "prosperity gospel," and "positive confession theology."

No matter what name is used, the essence of this new gospel is the same. Simply put, this egocentric "prosperity gospel" teaches that God wants believers to be physically healthy, materially wealthy, and personally happy. Listen to the words of Robert Tilton, one of the prosperity gospel's best-known spokesmen: "I believe that it is the will of God for all to prosper because I see it in the Word, not because it has worked mightily for someone else. I do not put my eyes on men, but on God who gives me the power to get wealth."[2] Teachers of the prosperity gospel encourage their followers to pray for and even demand material flourishing from God.

FIVE THEOLOGICAL ERRORS OF THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL

Recently, Russell Woodbridge and I wrote a book entitled *Health, Wealth, and Happiness* to examine the claims of prosperity gospel advocates.[3] While our book is too wide-ranging to summarize here, in this article I'd like to review five doctrines we cover in our book—doctrines on which prosperity gospel advocates err. By discerning these errors regarding key doctrines, I hope readers of this article will plainly see the dangers of the prosperity gospel. The doctrines that I will cover are the Abrahamic covenant, the atonement, giving, faith, and prayer.

1. The Abrahamic covenant is a means to material entitlement.

The first error we'll consider is that the prosperity gospel views the Abrahamic covenant as a means to material entitlement.

The Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22) is one of the theological bases of the prosperity gospel. It is good that prosperity theologians recognize that much of Scripture is the record of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, but it is bad that they do not maintain an orthodox view of this covenant. They hold an incorrect view of the inception of the covenant; more significantly, they hold an erroneous view concerning the application of the covenant.

Edward Pousson best stated the prosperity view on the application of the Abrahamic covenant when he wrote, "Christians are Abraham's spiritual children and heirs to the blessings of faith.… This Abrahamic inheritance is unpacked *primarily in terms of material entitlements*."[4] In other words, the prosperity gospel teaches that the primary purpose of the Abrahamic covenant was for God to bless Abraham materially. Since believers are now Abraham's spiritual children, they have inherited these financial blessings.

Prosperity teacher Kenneth Copeland wrote, "Since God's Covenant has been established and prosperity is a provision of this covenant, you need to realize that prosperity belongs to you now!"[5]

To support this claim, prosperity teachers appeal to Galatians 3:14, which refers to "the blessings of Abraham [that] might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus." It is interesting, however, that in their appeals to Gal. 3:14, prosperity teachers ignore the second half of the verse, which reads, "…that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." In this verse Paul was clearly reminding the Galatians of the spiritual blessing of salvation, not the material blessing of wealth.

2. Jesus' atonement extends to the "sin" of material poverty.

A second theological error of the prosperity gospel is a faulty view of the atonement.

Theologian Ken Sarles writes that "the prosperity gospel claims that both physical healing and financial prosperity have been provided for in the Atonement."[6] This seems to be an accurate observation in light of Kenneth Copeland's comment that "the basic principle of the Christian life is to know that God put our sin, sickness, disease, sorrow, grief, *and poverty* on Jesus at Calvary."[7] This misunderstanding of the scope of the atonement stems from two errors that proponents of the prosperity gospel make.

First, many who hold to prosperity theology have a fundamental misconception of the life of Christ. For example, teacher John Avanzini proclaimed, "Jesus had a nice house, a big house,"[8] "Jesus was handling big money,"[9] and he even "wore designer clothes."[10] It is easy to see how such a warped view of the life of Christ could lead to an equally warped misconception of the death of Christ.

A second error that leads to a faulty view of the atonement is a misinterpretation of 2 Corinthians 8:9, which reads, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that you through his poverty might become rich." While a shallow reading of this verse may lead one to believe Paul was teaching about an increase in material wealth, a contextual reading reveals Paul was actually teaching the exact opposite principle. Indeed, Paul was teaching the Corinthians that since Christ accomplished so much for them through the atonement, they should empty themselves of their riches in service of the Savior. This is why just five short verses later Paul would urge the Corinthians to give their wealth away to their needy brothers, writing "that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack" (2 Cor. 8:14).

3. Christians give in order to gain material compensation from God.

A third error of the prosperity gospel is that Christians should give in order to gain material compensation from God. One of the most striking characteristics of the prosperity theologians is their seeming fixation with the act of giving. Students of the prosperity gospel are urged to give generously and are confronted with such pious statements as, "True prosperity is the ability to use God's power to meet the needs of mankind in any realm of life,"[11] and, "We have been called to finance the gospel to the world."[12] While these statements appear to be praiseworthy, this emphasis on giving is built on

motives that are anything but philanthropic. The driving force behind this teaching on giving is what prosperity teacher Robert Tilton referred to as the "Law of Compensation." According to this law, which is purportedly based on Mark 10:30,[13] Christians need to give generously to others because when they do, God gives back more in return. This, in turn, leads to a cycle of ever-increasing prosperity.

As Gloria Copeland put it, "Give $10 and receive $1,000; give $1,000 and receive $100,000…in short, Mark 10:30 is a very good deal."[14] It is evident, then, that the prosperity gospel's doctrine of giving is built upon faulty motives. Whereas Jesus taught his disciples to "give, hoping for nothing in return" (Luke 10:35), prosperity theologians teach their disciples to give because they will get a great return.

4. Faith is a self-generated spiritual force that leads to prosperity.

A fourth error of prosperity theology is its teaching that faith is a self-generated spiritual force that leads to prosperity. Whereas orthodox Christianity understands faith to be trust in the person of Jesus Christ, prosperity teachers espouse quite a different doctrine. In his book The Laws of Prosperity, Kenneth Copeland writes, "Faith is a spiritual force, a spiritual energy, a spiritual power. It is this force of faith which makes the laws of the spirit world function….There are certain laws governing prosperity revealed in God's Word. Faith causes them to function."[15] This is obviously a faulty, perhaps even heretical, understanding of faith.

According to prosperity theology, faith is not a God-granted, God-centered act of the will. Rather it is a humanly wrought spiritual force, directed at God. Indeed, any theology that views faith solely as a means to material gain rather than justification before God must be judged faulty and inadequate.

5. Prayer is a tool to force God to grant prosperity.

Finally, the prosperity gospel treats prayer as a tool to force God to grant prosperity. Prosperity gospel preachers often note that we "have not because we ask not" (Jas. 4:2). Advocates of the prosperity gospel encourage believers to pray for personal success in all areas of life. Creflo Dollar writes, "When we pray, believing that we have already received what we are praying, God has no choice but to make our prayers come to pass….It is a key to getting results as a Christian."[16]

Certainly prayers for personal blessing are not inherently wrong, but the prosperity gospel's overemphasis upon man turns prayer into a tool believers can use to force God to grant their desires.

Within prosperity theology, man—not God—becomes the focal point of prayer. Curiously, prosperity preachers often ignore the second half of James' teaching on prayer which reads, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions" (Jas. 4:3). God does not answer selfish requests that do not honor his name.

Certainly all our requests should be made known to God (cf. Phil. 4:6), but the prosperity gospel focuses so much upon man's desires that it may lead people to pray selfish, shallow, superficial prayers that do not bring God glory. Furthermore, when coupled with the prosperity doctrine of faith, this teaching may lead people to attempt to manipulate God to get what they want—a futile task. This is far removed from praying that God's will would be done.

A FALSE GOSPEL

In light of Scripture, the prosperity gospel is fundamentally flawed. At bottom, the prosperity gospel is actually a false gospel because of its faulty view of the relationship between God and man. Simply put, if the prosperity gospel is true, grace is obsolete, God is irrelevant, and man is the measure of all things. Whether they are talking about the Abrahamic covenant, the atonement, giving, faith, or prayer, prosperity teachers turn the relationship between God and man into a quid pro quo transaction. As James R. Goff noted, God is "reduced to a kind of 'cosmic bellhop' attending to the needs and desires of his creation."[17] This is a wholly inadequate and unbiblical view of the relationship between God and man.

FIVE TRADEMARKS OF SOFT PROSPERITY

To aid in that discernment, let me outline five trademarks of soft prosperity, particularly as they show up in sermons and books.

1. Soft prosperity elevates "blessings" over the blessed God.

First, soft prosperity elevates "blessings" over the blessed God. When blessings are divorced from the triune God, compromise ensues. True blessedness resides in God alone, "the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15). By consequence, to seek God's blessing requires seeking him (Isa. 55:6-7; Matt. 6:33). Christ is the true treasure (Matt. 13:44-46), and any pursuit of blessing that makes God a means to another end is erroneous and idolatrous.

2. Soft prosperity detaches verses from the redemptive framework of the Bible.

Second, soft prosperity detaches verses from the redemptive framework of the Bible. When preachers present isolated verses as time-honored principles for claiming God's blessings, a counterfeit gospel results. Instead of relating all blessings to Christ, they directly apply individual verses to people today.

Such a promise motivates the strong and extinguishes the weak. Unless a passage is rightly related to redemptive framework of the Bible, verses like Psalm 1:3 become treadmills on which earnest Christians tire themselves out. Genuine Christ-centered expositional preaching prevents this sort of textual manipulation, and guards against the gospel of soft prosperity.

More specifically, soft prosperity delights in the tangible promises of the Old Testament.[3] The error is often found in promising old covenant blessings to new covenant saints. Whenever we read the Old Testament, faithful interpreters must see how the promises first related to Israel in their historic and theocratic state; second, to Jesus who perfectly fulfilled the law (Matt. 5:17); and third, to us. Because we live under the new covenant, there will always be continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament promise and its contemporary fulfillment. Preachers must learn how to interpret these ancient texts at the textual, epochal, and canonical levels.[4] Likewise, healthy churches must learn to see how every blessing is found in relationship to Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant.

3. Soft prosperity diminishes the curse that Christ bore and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Third, soft prosperity diminishes the curse that Christ bore and the blessing of the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, blessedness is not an amorphous idea. Deuteronomy 27-28 specifies the content of the Mosaic covenant's blessings and curses. Quoting these verses, soft prosperity preachers advertise divine blessings through greater obedience, but they ignore the fine print. Only one man has so perfectly obeyed God's so as to merit God's blessing (Heb. 10:5-10). And for Jesus' covenantal obedience, he was sentenced to death on a Roman cross, accursed for the sins of his people (Gal. 3:10-13).

Perhaps the greatest problem with the soft prosperity is the way it assumes the cross of Christ, instead of adoring the Blessed One who bore the wrath of God in our place (Gal. 3:13). Soft prosperity preachers speak often about what you can do to experience God's favor, but they rush past the cross, missing the fact that every spiritual gift has been secured for the believer by Jesus, who gives us his Spirit as the preeminent blessing (Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:3). Although they don't deny the Romans Road, they are driving on another highway.

4. Soft prosperity relies on pastor-prescribed therapeutic techniques.

Fourth, soft prosperity relies on pastor-prescribed therapeutic techniques. By assuming the gospel, soft prosperity preachers fill the vacuum with a full plate of therapeutic techniques. With the language of Zion, they emphasize the good

works of the believer. Although not explicitly denying salvation by grace through faith, pastors who repeatedly insist on life tips, techniques, and strategies for saintly success undermine the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

5. Soft prosperity largely addresses first world, middle-class problems.

While the previous four trademarks could in many ways apply to hard or soft prosperity preaching, one striking difference remains. Whereas hard prosperity preaching invites followers to name it and claim it, soft prosperity preachers inspire the upwardly mobile to reach for their dreams. In the former, good health and a strong portfolio prove God's tangible salvation; in the latter, preachers proclaim a religion of therapeutic solutions. To quote only one of their teachers: "Do I believe in supernatural return on giving? Yes, sir! Do I believe God blesses tithes and offerings? Yes, I do. But why should we teach you to claim a car without teaching you about the car payment and interest rates on loans."[5] T. D. Jakes' message promises the same gold, through a different line of credit—superabundant faith mixed with well-ordered works. In short, this softer prosperity preaching appeals to first world, middle-class people who are too busy living to examine a message that reaffirms their natural aspirations for success. Tragically, "believers" who buy into this false gospel may remain ignorant of their greatest need—atonement for sin before a holy God—unless confronted with true gospel of Jesus Christ.

A BETTER THEOLOGY OF BLESSING

In the end, the tragedy of the soft prosperity gospel is the way it focuses so much on earthly improvements. By offering Christians their best life now, the eternal realities of heaven and hell are lost. This brings the very real possibility that many who hear the soft prosperity gospel are and will remain lost.

In response, Christians must learn to recognize the error of soft prosperity. And we—especially pastors—must prayerfully work to liberate others from it. First we must confess the ways that desires for earthly success have latched on to our own hearts. Second, we must present the biblical gospel, which far exceeds the offer of saintly success. We must extol the riches of the true gospel and trust that when God's sheep hear his call to repent of their sin and cling to Christ, they too will sell their soft prosperity and receive as a free gift the only treasure that counts—Jesus Christ, the only blessed king.

1 On the difference between hard and soft prosperity gospels, see Kate Bowler's revealing study, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 78.

2 In order, Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael Horton, Christless *Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), esp. 65-100; Stephen J. Nichols, *Jesus Made in America: A Cultural History from the Puritans to The Passion of the Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), esp. 173-97.

3 See a list of such verses in Michael Schäfer's article, "The Prosperity Gospel and Biblical Theology."

4 For a helpful treatment of this approach, see Edmund Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1979).

5 Cited in Bowler, *Blessed*, 119.

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By David W. Jones

The Prosperity Gospel in My Own Heart

While I had been exposed to the prosperity gospel earlier in life, it was not until I began seminary that I thought seriously about it. I began to serve in local churches during my time as a student, and I was amazed to find so many people under my care consuming property gospel material via different forms of media. Moreover, many people seemed to view their relationship with God as a quid pro quo transaction. He was treated as a celestial sugar daddy who existed to make them healthy, wealthy, and happy on account of service rendered.

Early in my academic career, I published in a rather obscure theological journal an article entitled "The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel."[1] In it I attempted to synthesize my initial objections to prosperity theology, as well as hopefully to give basic direction to those caught up in the prosperity gospel movement. To my surprise, I received immediate feedback about my short publication—both positive and negative. In fact I continue to receive more feedback about that piece than anything else I have written.

These two experiences prompted me to ask this question: why are evangelical Christians drawn to the prosperity gospel? And why does it resonate with so many people generally? After some reflection and investigation, the answer at which I arrived was surprising: the prosperity gospel resides in the heart of all men; the prosperity gospel is even in my own heart.

Imagine you're driving to church on a cold, rainy Sunday morning, and to your dismay you get a flat tire. What is your immediate thought? "God, really? I'm going to church. Isn't there some drug dealer or abusive husband you could have afflicted with a flat tire?" *That's the prosperity gospel.*

Or maybe you don't get that promotion at work, your child gets sick, or you're unfairly criticized at church. The result? You get mad at God because you were overlooked, troubled, or disparaged. *That's the prosperity gospel.*

The very thought that God owes us a relatively trouble-free life, and the anger we feel when God doesn't act the way we believe he is supposed to act, betray a heart that expects God to prosper us because of our good works. *That's the prosperity gospel.*

It may be easy for you to spot the spiritual charlatans on television, selling their modern-day indulgences, proof-texting biblical passages, and promising us our best life now if we just have enough faith in faith. But don't forget that what

makes the prosperity gospel so attractive is that it caters to the desires of the fallen human heart. It promises much while requiring little. It panders to the flesh.

While you may be mature enough to resist the systematized prosperity gospel of the movement's self-proclaimed purveyors, don't overlook the latent prosperity gospel that dwells within your own heart. The true gospel says, whatever may come our way, Jesus is enough.

Is he enough for you?

1 David W. Jones, "The Bankruptcy of the Prosperity Gospel: An Exercise in Biblical and Theological Ethics," Faith and Mission 16, no. 1 (Fall 1998): 79–87.

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Biblical Ethics: An Overview

Biblical Ethics: An Introduction

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, God gives people specific instructions about how he wants them to conduct their lives. The study of these instructions and their wise application to life is known as the discipline of biblical ethics. These instructions from God about ethical living involve many commands, laws, moral standards, ideals, prohibitions, and principles of wisdom relating to moral judgment. They also concern matters of moral accountability, including rewards and punishments that provide incentives for pleasing God and avoiding what he abhors. From start to finish, ethical understanding in the Bible is about applying the holiness of God to human life on earth (Lev. 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7; 1 Pet. 1:14–16). This article offers an overview of such biblical ethics as based on the totality of moral revelation in the Word of God, and several articles that follow it show the application of Christian ethics to specific moral issues.

An Overview of Ethical Instruction and Example in the Bible

The first example of ethical instruction in the Bible is seen when God gave Adam and Eve commands, both positively, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28), and negatively, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen. 2:17). Later in the Bible God gave his people the foundational guidelines set forth in the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1–17; cf. Deut. 5:6–21), and then he added the numerous, even more detailed laws that are found in large portions of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. These laws not only prescribed and prohibited certain actions but also taught people about right attitudes of heart: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart" (Deut. 6:5; cf. Lev. 19:18; Ps. 40:8; 119:16). In addition to direct commands, the Bible also teaches about moral living through narrative literature (revealing what pleases or displeases God), wisdom literature (revealing characteristics of good judgment), and prophetic words (revealing how people and nations are accountable to God), all of which indicate the kinds of conduct, character, and goals that God either approves or disapproves.

When Jesus came, he lived a life of perfect obedience to God, for he said, "I always do the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:29), and many passages affirm that Jesus' life was completely free of sin: He was "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15), and he was "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8; cf. John 15:10; Acts 3:14; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:19; 1 John 2:1; 3:5). Jesus employed three characteristic motifs in his ethical teaching. First, he often described moral living in terms of *God reigning as a king and his people's duty*

as citizens to obey the rules of his kingdom (cf. esp. Matt. 5:3, 10, 19–20; 6:10, 33; 13:37–43, 47–50; 18:23–35; 21:31–32, 43). Second, he frequently described moral living in terms of *the obligations, loyalties, and privileges of children in a family headed by God as a loving Father* (cf. esp. Matt. 5:9, 16, 43–48; 6:1–4, 14–15; 12:50; 23:9; Mark 3:35; John 12:36). Third, Jesus taught in terms of *disciples following, imitating, and obeying him as a beloved teacher, mentor, and role model* (cf. esp. Matt. 10:24–25; 16:24; Mark 10:43–45; Luke 6:40; John 13:15–17; 14:15, 21, 23–24; 15:10, 12). And at the end of his ministry he commissioned his followers to teach other disciples from all nations "to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20). In addition to his teaching, Jesus' life is also a pattern for believers to imitate, for "whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:6).

The Bible ends with a picture of the new Jerusalem, a city in which the only residents are those who obey God's moral standards, for "nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false" (Rev. 21:27), and those who are kept "outside" are "sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (Rev. 22:15). Obedience to God's ethical standards brings him glory (Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:20) and is also best for his people (Ps. 1:1; John 14:21; Rom. 12:2; Heb. 12:10).

Justification by Faith and the Importance of Moral Obedience

The NT clearly teaches that justification, that is, pardon and acceptance with God, comes to people only through faith in Christ alone, who is offered to sinful humanity as Savior by God's grace alone: "by grace you have been saved through faith" and "this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works" (Eph. 2:8–9). But then Paul immediately says that God wants Christians to live in obedience to him: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). It is impossible to read the NT epistles, or to listen to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, without hearing dozens upon dozens of moral commands, standards, warnings, and promises telling Christians how they should live in order to please God in their daily conduct. Therefore it must be seen as a matter of great importance to God that his people, who have been justified by faith alone, live every day of their lives walking in obedience to God's moral standards (Heb. 12:14). In fact, in John 14, Jesus four times stresses the essential connection between loving him and obeying what he commands (John 14:15, 21, 23, 24). Empowered by the Holy Spirit, daily obedience expressing faith, loyalty, and love toward Christ will have a transforming effect. The conscience will be clear (1 Tim. 3:9; cf. 1:5); the heart will know great peace (Phil. 4:9); joy will abound (Rom. 14:17); assurance will be strong (2 Pet. 1:5–10); and distressing experiences will be taken in stride (1 Pet. 2:18–24).

God's Holy Character as the Source of His Moral Standards

God's moral standards are never arbitrary or capricious, but are all consistent with and derived from his own moral character. This is why Paul can say, "be *imitators of God*, as beloved children" (Eph. 5:1). This theme of imitating God's moral character is found throughout the Bible: "we love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15, quoting Lev. 11:44). The commands not to lie but to speak truthfully are

grounded in the imperative that believers should increasingly live out the image of their Creator, who does not lie (Col. 3:9–10).

Other commands also reflect the pattern of imitation of God. "Honor your father and your mother" (Ex. 20:12) is a reflection of the Son honoring the Father and being obedient to the Father's will within the counsels of the Trinity (cf. John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). The command not to murder (Ex. 20:13) is grounded in the fact that God is the Creator and sustainer of life and places immense value on the lives of human beings created in his image (Gen. 9:6). The command "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14) is a command to be faithful in marriage relationships, based on imitating God's faithfulness in all his covenant commitments. The command not to steal (Ex. 20:15) is grounded in a respect for the fact that a sovereign God has entrusted stewardship of possessions to various individuals, and people should respect that stewardship. The command not to covet (Ex. 20:17) is based on imitation of the fact that God himself delights in the excellence of his holy character and his providential arranging of things; therefore, we too should delight in his arrangements and never be discontented with them.

But if all God's moral standards are grounded in his unchanging moral character, it follows that he could not have given commands that were substantially different from these. He could not have commanded people, e.g., to be unfaithful, or to lie, or to murder others. Why? Because such commands would be contrary to the moral character of God himself, or would suggest that God's moral character changes so that he is sometimes actually unfaithful, or tells lies, or unjustly hates and destroys human lives. Anything contrary to the holiness of God is abhorrent and dishonoring to God because it violates his moral character (cf. Prov. 30:9). God cannot issue, and could never have issued, moral standards in contradiction to those he gave, not because God's sovereignty is limited by anything or anyone other than himself, but only because God can never be other than he is. He can never cease to be God. And he can never be untrue to his unchanging moral character.

If one understands the ethical system found in the Bible to be grounded in the moral character of God, this also provides an answer to the age-old philosophical question, "How can one ever reason from *what is* (a description of reality) to *what ought to be* (a prescription of right and wrong)?" If *what is* (that is, what exists in the universe) begins with God himself and his moral character, then *God's very being* determines the nature of the things that are right and wrong, and thus God's being determines, in an ultimate sense, *what ought to be*.

This understanding of the Bible's ethical system also implies that God's moral standards (when rightly understood and applied) are for all people and all cultures throughout all history, because they are the moral standards of the eternal Creator of the universe.

How Can People Discover God's Moral Standards?

It may at first seem overwhelming when someone is told, "Just obey the entire Bible as it applies to your situation in life." The Bible is a large and diverse book and contains some stipulations (esp. in the OT) that hardly seem to apply today. Must all biblical commands be treated the same, or does the Bible itself provide reasons for classifying various commands in different categories? To address this, most Christian interpreters have agreed to some broad principles for determining how various biblical commands apply today. These principles of interpretation include the following:

1. *The NT is written directly for followers of Christ living under the new covenant.* Though "all Scripture" (including all of the OT) is "profitable" for the Christian (2 Tim. 3:16), immediate application to life is clearer when reading the NT, for these books were written to Christian believers who were in the same situation as Christians are today with respect to God's overall plan for the history of salvation; they were living in the new covenant age, and so are God's people today. Searching the NT is a good "first step" in resolving an ethical question.

2. *Many details of the Mosaic law are either no longer binding or were never meant for everyone.* While some aspects of God's law delivered to Moses reflected God's standards of moral holiness for all time, many other aspects did not deal directly with morality but with procedures for conducting the Levitical worship system under the old covenant, or with ceremonies and rituals that showed Israel to be a distinct nation, or with administrating the civil government of Israel upon entering the Promised Land. Most interpreters agree, therefore, that what God ordered for the civil government of Israel (though wise) was never meant for other nations and other governments, and that the ceremonial requirements of the old covenant are not applicable today. Thus, e.g., laws concerning circumcision, sacrifices, unclean foods, and clothing are part of the "ceremonial" regulations that set Israel apart from other nations but are no longer binding today, in the NT (or new covenant) age (cf. Heb. 9:1–10:18). Similarly, many of the laws and penalties in the Mosaic law code were intended only for the civil government of the nation of Israel at that period of time (such as laws in Israel that applied the death penalty to the serving of other gods, witchcraft, persistently disobedient children, adultery, and homosexual behavior). But many other sections of the OT (e.g., Proverbs, but also other parts of the OT including many Mosaic laws) contain teaching that conveys God's wisdom regarding human conduct in general. (A detailed solution to the question of which, and in what way, OT laws apply to NT believers is beyond the scope of this article.)

3. *Some general principles must be applied with wisdom from the rest of the Bible.* There are some passages, especially in Jesus' earthly teaching, that are difficult to understand in terms of how broadly they should be taken and to whom they should apply. Passages like "Do not refuse the one who would borrow from you" (Matt. 5:42) are generalizations that powerfully address attitudes of the heart. But like every command, applying them to specific situations requires interpreting them in light of the whole of Scripture, including passages that command wisdom and good stewardship. Similarly, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1) must be interpreted in light of Jesus' other command to "judge with right judgment" (John 7:24).

4. *Where it is necessary to apply a command under far different cultural circumstances, there is usually enough similarity between the biblical context and present circumstances for Christian readers to make an appropriate connection.* For example, it is not difficult to move from "the wages of the *laborers who mowed your fields*, which you kept back by fraud" (James 5:4) to "the wages of the *employees who work in your factory*, which you kept back by fraud." It is not difficult to move from "honor the *emperor*" (1 Pet. 2:17) to "honor *government officials*." And it is not difficult to move from "You shall not covet your neighbor's … *ox*" (Ex. 20:17) to "You shall not covet you neighbor's *car* or *boat*."

Similarly adjusted application seems to be required in the case of certain NT commands dealing with physical actions that carried symbolic meaning, when the meaning of the same action would be different today. In such cases, Christians should not apply the commands as first expressed unless

situated in a similar cultural circumstance where the physical action would have the same meaning. Such physical actions with culturally-variable symbolic meaning include at least these: (1) Greeting one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:14) simply conveyed the idea of a welcoming greeting, and other actions (such as shaking hands, or bowing, or hugging) symbolize the same thing in different cultures. (2) Washing one another's feet (John 13:14) symbolized taking a servant-like attitude that can be expressed in other ways in settings where it is not customary for people to take off their shoes and wash their feet on coming in from the outside. (3) Women or wives wearing head coverings in worship (1 Cor. 11:4–16) apparently symbolized that a woman was married (see notes on 1 Corinthians 11), which is similar to what a wedding band symbolizes in many cultures today. But while a few such physical actions, by their symbolic nature, are culturally relative, readers should understand that the number of commands in this category is really quite small, and that it would be a mistake to exaggerate their significance and begin to wonder if vast sections of the ethical teachings of the Bible are culturally relative. The vast majority of NT ethical teachings, together with those OT teachings that apply to NT believers, require the direct obedience of Christians today just as in the first century.

Developing a Framework for Ethical Decision Making

The overall goal for making ethical decisions should be to understand and then obey the teaching of the entire Bible with regard to any particular situation. Here are some steps readers should follow when having to make important ethical decisions: (1) *Pray*. All decisions should rely on praying for God's wisdom at the beginning and throughout the process (James 1:5). (2) *Study the Bible*. Search for and seek understanding of all biblical passages and their principles that have relevance for the situation under consideration. (3) *Study the situation*. Understand the situation by gathering and assessing relevant information (it is often impossible to make a wise decision until the facts become more clear). (4) *Study the people involved*. Try to understand the character, motives, and values of the people involved or affected by the decision to be made, including any relevant background, personal habits and characteristics, motivations, and relationships, as well as special interests that may be influencing the reactions of each relevant party. (5) *The goal*. Understand that the glory of God and the good of others are ever the twin purposes of moral action, and that the merely good or permissible must never be allowed to obstruct the quest for the best.

Wisdom is the skill of combining these factors so as to rightly apply the teachings of the Bible to real people in real-life situations, in such a way that one is truly thinking God's thoughts after him. Such wisdom is a skill that can be improved over time through repeated practice and nearness to God (Heb. 5:14; James 1:5–8). Mature Christians who have grown through testing (James 1:2–4; 2 Pet. 1:5–9), pastors, and pastoral counselors are often especially skilled in doing this.

A good answer to an ethical question will not limit itself to a discussion of right and wrong actions, for good moral conduct in any situation will involve (1) *good ends* (that is, the results sought or achieved), (2) *good motives* (the desires and attitudes that people have in the situation), and (3) *good means* (the actions that are taken to achieve the ends). The Bible itself requires people to consider all three of these factors, for good ends are mentioned (see 1 Cor. 10:31; 14:26), good motives are required (see Ex. 20:17 and Matt. 5:28), and good means or actions are commanded while bad ones are prohibited (Ex. 20:12–15). A life fully pleasing to God will conform to each of these three standards set by Scripture.

The Beginning of Life and Abortion

The Image of God

The ethics of abortion, embryonic stem cell research, fetal tissue transplantation, and other issues at the beginning of life will not be fully and rightly understood apart from God's revelation about the origin and sanctity of human life. At the zenith of God's creative activity, he made man (as male and female) in his own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26–27). From the "dust from the ground" God made a "living creature," Adam (Gen. 2:7), whose material body was absolutely earthly (cf. Ps. 90:3 and 103:14) but whose source of life was decidedly divine. Therefore, any view of origins that does not affirm that humanity began through a special creative act of God is sub-biblical.

Since God is the Creator of human life, all human beings belong to God. As the apostle Paul would later declare before the philosophers in Athens, "In [God] we live and move and have our being; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring'" (Acts 17:28). Thus, being created by God both *elevates* human beings in that they are not accidents of history and *humbles* them because God is gracious and sovereign over them.

Although God's words when he first created human beings were, "Let us make man in our *image*, after our *likeness*" (Gen. 1:26), the Bible nowhere explains precisely what constitutes the image of God (Latin, *imago Dei*). Interpreters have suggested that it includes: (1) humankind's upright bodily form, (2) human dominion over nature, (3) human reason, (4) human pre-fallen righteousness, (5) human capacities, (6) the juxtaposition between man and woman, (7) responsible creaturehood and moral conformity to God, (8) personhood, and (9) various composites of the above views. Because the Hebrew words for "image" (*tselem*) and "likeness" (*demut*) are used for things that are similar to, and representative of, something else, a combination of the above views is best: the image of God means that human beings are like God (in several ways) and represent God on the earth. The image of God is a rich relational and functional status that human beings enjoy by virtue of being God's creation.

It is clear from Scripture that *only* human beings are said to bear the image of God. Humans are unique. In fact, the covenant with Noah specifies that while humans may kill animals for food, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, *for God made man in his own image*" (Gen. 9:6). Animals may be killed for human sustenance, but human beings may not murder other human beings. Thus the entire human race is morally distinguishable from other living species. Even before homicide was forbidden by a direct command not to murder (Ex. 20:13), unjustifiable killing was a violation of the special dignity vested in human beings by God himself (cf. Gen. 4:8–16). This is the foundation of the doctrine of the sanctity, or sacredness, of every human life.

When the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, took on human flesh through the incarnation, God sanctified humanity. In Jesus we see both perfect God and real humanity, and in his incarnation and resurrection we see the importance of the physical aspect of human nature. The affirmation of the Apostles' Creed that Jesus was "born of the Virgin Mary" entails that, like every other member of the human race, Jesus was once a human embryo. The creedal affirmations of "the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting" mean that the body is a constituent aspect of humanity from the beginning of life throughout eternity. Thus every human life—from conception to natural death—is to be received as

a gift from the sovereign Creator, is to be treated with reverence and respect, and is not to be harmed without biblical justification.

OT Texts

God's people were warned not to imitate their neighbors who committed infanticide through child sacrifice. The law strictly instructed them to "not give any of your children to offer them to Molech" (Lev. 18:21), prescribing the death penalty for violating this command (Lev. 20:2–5). Child sacrifice was also known during Solomon's reign (1 Kings 11:7). The brutal practice spread to Moab (2 Kings 3:27), Judah (2 Kings 16:3), and the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:17). But Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel condemned the practice, calling on God's people to repent of it (Isa. 57:5; Jer. 7:31; Ezek. 16:20–21).

It is in this context that the ethics of abortion should be determined. Like infanticide, abortion was not unknown in the ancient world. The most common means were mechanical methods and drugs delivered through pessaries (devices placed in the vagina).

OT Judaism always forbade abortion. Only one biblical text has been used to argue to the contrary (Ex. 21:22–25), and its interpretation is disputed. The text says, "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined" (Ex. 21:22). Some interpret "that her children come out" as a miscarriage ("so that there is a miscarriage, but there is no further harm"). According to this interpretation, unborn human life does not have the same value as someone already born, because the normal penalty for causing death is a capital sentence (a life for a life), and yet, in this passage, the one causing the injury is merely fined.

There are good textual reasons, however, for another interpretation, namely, that the Bible is describing a premature live birth ("so that she gives birth prematurely, but there is no injury"). First, the Hebrew word *yeled* is used for what comes from the womb in this case. This word is never used for anything other than for a child who can live outside the womb. Another Hebrew word, *golem*, means "fetus" and is used only one time in the OT (Ps. 139:16, "unformed substance"). Furthermore, *yatsa'*, the verb that refers to what happened to the child, ordinarily refers to live births (Gen. 25:26; 38:28–30; Job 3:11; 10:18; Jer. 1:5; 20:18). The word normally used for miscarriage, *shakal*, is *not* used here (cf. Gen. 31:38; Ex. 23:26; Job 21:10; Hos. 9:14). Finally, even *if* the text were referring to a miscarriage, it would not indicate that an unborn child is valued less than one who is already born, for this hypothetical situation refers to an *accidental* occurrence. Most societies, including ancient Israel, recognized that unintentional manslaughter should be distinguished from premeditated killing. In the latter case, the death penalty was imposed. In the former, cities of refuge were established (cf. Num. 35:6). Thus, more literal translations render Exodus 21:22, "When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that *her children come out*, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined" (esv). This text then places great protection on the unborn child, for "if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life" (Ex. 21:23). The death of the baby is at least judged according to the same principles that apply to the taking of other human life (e.g., the death of the mother); see note on Exodus 21:22–25.

Psalm 139 speaks powerfully to the nature of unborn human life. David exults in God's omniscience and his omnipresence (Ps. 139:1–12). In verse 13 he celebrates God's intricate involvement in his own

fetal development: “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” The word *kilyah* is used to refer to the “inward parts” (lit., kidneys). In Hebrew poetry the inward parts were typically the seat of the affections, the hidden part of a person where grief may be experienced (Job 16:13), where the conscience exists (Ps. 16:7), and where deep spiritual distress can be felt (Ps. 73:21). God formed David’s deepest being. He wove him, or colorfully embroidered him, in his mother’s womb, so that he was “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14). In verse 16 the psalmist refers to his “unformed substance” being observed by God. David suggests that God’s knowledge of him reached even to his earliest development *in utero* (in the uterus). No wonder the Hebrews found abortion and infanticide morally blameworthy. In addition, David’s confession that he was a sinner from conception (Ps. 51:5) further testifies to his belief in personhood from conception, since only persons can be considered sinners.

God’s judgment fell on those who killed the unborn. Elisha wept when he foresaw the crimes of the king of Syria, who would “kill their young men with the sword and dash in pieces their little ones and rip open their pregnant women” (2 Kings 8:12). Amos prophesied against the Ammonites because they “have ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border” (Amos 1:13).

Extrabiblical Jewish Literature

The noncanonical Jewish wisdom literature further clarifies first-century Judaism’s view of abortion. For example, the Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides 184–186 (c. 50 b.c.–a.d. 50) says that “a woman should not destroy the unborn in her belly, nor after its birth throw it before the dogs and vultures as a prey.” Included among those who do evil in the apocalyptic Sibylline Oracles were women who “aborted what they carried in the womb” (2.281–282). Similarly, the apocryphal book 1 Enoch (2nd or 1st century b.c.) declares that an evil angel taught humans how to “smash the embryo in the womb” (69.12). Finally, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus wrote that “*the law* orders all the offspring to be brought up, and forbids women either to cause abortion or to make away with the fetus” (Against Apion 2.202).

Contrast these injunctions with the barbarism of Roman culture. Cicero (106–43 b.c.) records that according to the Twelve Tables of Roman Law, “deformed infants shall be killed” (De Legibus 3.8). Plutarch (c. a.d. 46–120) spoke of those who he said “offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds; meanwhile the mother stood by without a tear or moan” (Moralia 2.171D).

Early Christian Literature

Against the bleak backdrop of Roman culture, the Hebrew “sanctity of human life” ethic provided the moral framework for early Christian condemnation of abortion and infanticide. For instance, the Didache 2.2 (c. a.d. 85–110) commands, “thou shalt not murder a child by abortion nor kill them when born.” Another noncanonical early Christian text, the Letter of Barnabas 19.5 (c. a.d. 130), said: “You shall not abort a child nor, again, commit infanticide.” There are numerous other examples of Christian condemnation of both infanticide and abortion. In fact, some biblical scholars have argued that the silence of the NT on abortion per se is due to the fact that it was simply assumed to be beyond the pale of early Christian practice. Nevertheless, Luke (a physician) points to fetal personhood when he

observes that the unborn John the Baptist "leaped for joy" in his mother's womb when Elizabeth came into the presence of Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus at the time (Luke 1:44).

More than merely condemning abortion and infanticide, however, early Christians provided alternatives by rescuing and adopting children who were abandoned. For instance, Callistus (d. c. a.d. 223) provided refuge to abandoned children by placing them in Christian homes, and Benignus of Dijon (3rd century) offered nourishment and protection to abandoned children, including some with disabilities caused by unsuccessful abortions.

Ethical Conclusions

Based on the consistent testimony of Scripture, the early Jewish and Christian tradition, and what can be known of God's moral law through natural revelation (Rom. 2:15), the unborn child should be protected as a person from the moment of conception. A strong argument can in fact be made for this even apart from biblical revelation, for the only differences between babies *in utero* and babies that are born are: (1) their location; (2) their size; (3) their level of dependence; and (4) their level of development—but these are not morally relevant factors that would allow death for one set of babies (the preborn) and life for the other (those who have been born).

What then of the "hard cases" concerning pregnancy resulting from rape or incest? Christians should give compassionate care to those affected by such sins—including both the mother and the unborn child. But if it is wrong to put such a child to death after it is born (and surely this is wrong), then surely it is wrong to put that same child to death before it is born. The preborn baby should be treated as a person in the image of God.

For this reason, embryonic stem cell research, which involves the creation of human embryos in order to harvest their stem cells for medical uses, should be viewed as the intentional creation and destruction of distinct, individual, tiny human lives. Other sources of stem cells should be used instead, where the removal of the cells does not harm a human being.

What if abortion is necessary to save the life of the mother? Here it is necessary to recognize that removing the unborn child (e.g., from the fallopian tube) is done with the direct intention of saving the life of the mother, not with the direct intention of taking the child's life (which, if the medical technology exists, should also be preserved). Nevertheless, in such a rare and tragic case the choice would be between the loss of one life (the baby's) and the loss of two lives (both the baby's and the mother's). This is the only type of situation in which abortion would be morally justified, as making the best of an extremely difficult situation.

The witness of Scripture, as confirmed by the testimony of the early church, is that every human being, from conception through natural death, is to be respected as a person created in the image of God, whose life has special dignity by virtue of his or her relationship to the Creator. Like the early church, Christians should be known as a people who protect, nurture, and cherish children as gifts from the Lord (Ps. 127:3).

Bioethics

Bioethics is a relatively new term that literally means “life ethics.” The umbrella category of bioethics generally includes the ethics of human medicine, the biosciences, and biotechnology.

The Ethics of Western Medicine and the Hippocratic Oath

Medicine has a long and laudable history. Western scientific medicine began with the Greeks, who developed much of the early knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and even modern symbols of medicine. From the start, both Jews and Christians have had a positive view of medicine. The healing ministry of Jesus, the Great Physician (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; Luke 9:6), did much to provide the warrant for medicine among Christians.

The ethics of Western medicine reaches back to the Greek physician Hippocrates (460–370 b.c.). The son of a physician himself, Hippocrates practiced as an itinerant doctor in Thrace, Thessaly, and Macedonia. The philosopher Plato referred to Hippocrates as “a professional trainer of students” (Phaedrus 270C–D). The medical oath that bears his name was probably formulated by the Hippocratic school after his death. Jewish and Christian versions of the oath were produced after that time.

Over against the charlatans of the day, a Hippocratic physician could be counted on as someone who had mastered a particular set of skills and whose ethical standards were reflected in the oath he swore. Those who took the Hippocratic Oath promised to use their skills to help the sick and pledged not to euthanize a patient, perform abortions, prescribe abortifacient drugs, or have a sexual relationship with a patient, among other things. They also promised to teach their skills to worthy apprentices. The so-called Hippocratic consensus dominated medicine for nearly 2,500 years. Jews and Christians rejected the polytheism of the Hippocratic school but affirmed its ethical and professional ideals. Medical historian Albert Jonsen writes in The Birth of Bioethics: “The Judeo-Christian religious tradition, with its strong emphasis on divine commands that enforce respect for the sanctity of life, enhanced the prohibitions of abortion and euthanasia that are obscurely expressed in the Oath and prescribed caring compassion for the poor and even enemies. The literature of medical duty is profoundly marked by these moral traditions” (p. 7).

Only a very few medical schools still require that graduating physicians affirm the original oath. In a recent survey of the schools that used some form of the oath, only 8 percent of the oaths forbade abortion and only 14 percent prohibited euthanasia. Thus, Christians today have the opportunity to revive life-affirming ethics amid a very pluralistic medical and scientific culture in which affirmation of life is frequently downplayed.

Contemporary Medical Ethics

Current discussions of medical ethics have arisen in large part from the Nuremberg Trials in post-World War II Germany (1945–1949), which focused on the way human subjects were abused in medical research, and from debates in the 1960s over the allocation of scarce medical resources, like kidney dialysis. Early ethics committees serving medical treatment centers were disparaged in the media as “God squads” because they determined who did and did not receive life-sustaining treatment. Today, hospital ethics committees meet regularly to consult on difficult moral questions that arise in patient care and to help fashion hospital policies that enhance overall medical care.

Increasingly, emerging biotechnologies are coming under the scrutiny of the bioethics community. Genetic engineering, human stem cell research, human and animal cloning, artificial intelligence, cybernetics, nanotechnology, robotics, and an ever-expanding array of technologies require wise ethical reflection and careful policy recommendations.

Theologian Nigel Cameron has helpfully categorized the issues in bioethics under the rubric of "taking life," "making life," and "remaking life."

Taking Life

While Christians differ on the issues of euthanasia, assisted suicide, and abortion, which have long been within the realm of bioethics, it is accurate to say that in general Christians are life-affirming. In fact, as the article on The End of Life argues in more detail, the vast majority of Christians agree, for various reasons, that euthanasia and assisted suicide are not consistent with the biblical witness concerning the sanctity of human life (cf. Ex. 20:13) and the role of others in providing compassionate care. Likewise, most Christians believe that inducing abortion is wrong, except to save a mother's life (see The Beginning of Life and Abortion).

Christians are often at the forefront of alternatives to medicalized forms of killing. The early church, e.g., rescued children from infanticide by providing homes and building orphanages. Many contemporary Christians support pregnancy care centers that provide alternatives to abortion by offering pregnant mothers education, resources, and shelter as they await the delivery of their children. The hospice and palliative care movement was begun by a Christian nurse and physician, Dame Cicely Saunders (1918–2005), as a means of caring compassionately for the terminally ill.

Making Life

The range of ethical issues surrounding procreation and contraception fall under the category of "making life." Contraception has been debated since ancient times. Christians generally divide into two camps. Those who affirm so-called natural family planning believe that every act of sexual union should be open to the possibility of procreation. From this viewpoint, no method of birth control is allowed that either presents a barrier to fertilization or introduces hormones that make the uterus inhospitable to a maturing embryo. Other Christians believe that contraception may be used to limit the number of children born to a family as long as the method is not abortifacient (i.e., something that causes an abortion).

Assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) pose significant moral questions for Bible believers. Louise Brown, the world's first "test tube" baby, was born in 1978. Since then, in vitro fertilization (IVF, the fertilization of egg cells by sperm outside the woman's womb) has been quite controversial. Typically, IVF involves the fertilization of about a dozen ova in a medical laboratory. Only two or three ova are transferred to a woman's uterus, leaving the others to be cryopreserved (frozen) for later use. Given that the embryo is a human person with a right to life, many Christians have repudiated the practice due to the fact that 25 percent of these human embryos often die in the thawing process and many are likely to be discarded or used for research purposes. (However, it is possible that newer technology will allow the fertilization of only one or two ova that will actually be implanted in the woman's womb.)

Additional reproductive arrangements—like surrogate motherhood, artificial insemination using donor sperm, and sperm or egg donation—introduce third parties or their gametes into the reproductive relationship. The biblical ideal, however, is for procreation to take place within the context of a one-man, one-woman union (see Marriage and Sexual Morality). Intentionally causing conception outside of that framework and introducing third parties into the procreative relationship raises significant ethical, legal, social, psychological, and familial concerns. The intrusion of the sperm of a man other than a woman's husband into the intimate process of pregnancy and birth, e.g., can introduce significant difficulties into a marriage relationship. The relationship of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar in the OT illustrates the tensions that may be present in even "low-tech" reproductive relationships (Genesis 16).

Even more ethical objections arise when a human embryo is conceived and allowed to develop for a short time solely for the purpose of harvesting its stem cells for the purpose of scientific research. In such cases, a new human life is created (see The Beginning of Life and Abortion) solely so that it would be destroyed for research purposes. This is inconsistent with the Bible's view of the sanctity of human life (cf. Ex. 20:13). Other sources of stem cells (such as those taken from adults or from umbilical cord blood) can be used in medical research without destroying a human life.

Adoption has always been commended as an ethical option for Christian couples facing infertility, and is a practical way to care for orphans (cf. James 1:27) and to provide a living parable of the Christian's spiritual adoption by God. A particular form of adoption seems morally commendable for Christians, in which a husband and wife decide to adopt a so-called "snowflake baby" (a previously frozen embryo that would otherwise have been discarded). The embryo is implanted in the adopting wife's womb, develops as a normal baby, and is born as a normal, healthy child. In this case, conception of the baby had already occurred as a result of the decision of others, and the couple who adopts such a baby is actually saving a life. (However, the potential "third-party" difficulties mentioned in the previous paragraph should be fully taken into account.)

Remaking Life

Researchers are increasing exploration into new ways to either repeat or reconstruct God's fundamental design for human life. These new scientific technologies are laudable when used for healing purposes. Thus, e.g., Christians should affirm the use of implantable computer chips to assist the blind to see, and the development of high-tech prostheses to replace limbs lost in accidents or war. But using these technologies for reasons beyond healing to allegedly "enhance" human capacities is problematic.

Using pharmaceuticals (such as steroids) or genetic engineering to create higher-than-normal IQs or faster-than-normal athletes not only raises profound ethical questions about justice in academics or sports respectively but also challenges the understanding of what it means to be human and who has the authority to alter the human species.

Some suggest that life-prolonging technologies might enable people to live forever, either in their physical bodies or in some other way. Again, while few question the morality of using technology for therapeutic purposes, many worry that enhancement technologies entail a sort of hubris, sometimes described as "playing God." The Bible warns against the sin of questioning the Creator. "Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?'" (Rom. 9:20). After all, Christians know

that they are already guaranteed immortality through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:12–20) and that physical death will be followed by a resurrection to a renewed, eternally healthy physical body freed from the ravages of disease and death. This hope does not totally nullify health-enhancing and life-prolonging technologies, but it does mean that they should never be the believer's ultimate hope (1 Cor. 15:51–54; Rev. 21:4). The wise use or nonuse of new technologies—medical or otherwise—must be seen as part of Christian discipleship.

Science and Ethics within a Christian Worldview

Christians have often been at the cutting edge of science, medicine, and compassionate care. Because they believe that all truth is God's truth, there is no arena excluded from the lordship of Christ, including the biological sciences. At the same time, Christians are "people of the Book" and bring a Christian world- and life-view—including ethical perspectives—into their thinking about science. The world cannot afford the development of science without ethical reflection. Ethical reflection must be developed in the context of accurate information. Therefore, Christians should see it as an expression of their discipleship to celebrate biological sciences that enable them to better understand just how fearfully and wonderfully made humans are (Ps. 139:14). Christians should seek to be good stewards over the opportunities that these developments offer (Gen. 1:28; 1 Cor. 4:2; 1 Pet. 4:10). At the same time, Christians should affirm that science is to serve the glory of God and the good of his creatures (1 Chron. 16:24; Ps. 96:3; Isa. 6:3), not to provide yet another opportunity for the self-aggrandizement that constitutes idolatry. Finally, Christians must continue to demonstrate love for God and neighbor that extends itself in compassionate care of those who are suffering (Luke 10:33–37).

The End of Life

The Origin of Death

God did not originally create human beings to be subject to death, but "sin came into the world through one man, and *death through sin*, and so death spread to all men because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). This refers to the sin of Adam recorded in Genesis 3.

God had previously instructed Adam, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). Therefore when Adam and Eve sinned, they immediately experienced *spiritual "death,"* that is, a separation from God. In addition, the just sentence of *physical death* began to be gradually imposed on them in that they experienced aging, leading eventually to death. God told Adam, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). Since the time of Adam, all human beings have been subject to aging and inevitable physical death (except Enoch in Gen. 5:24; cf. Heb. 11:5; and Elijah in 2 Kings 2:11–12).

Why Do Christians Die?

Although Christians have been forgiven of their sins and are no longer under sentence to suffer the penalty of death for those sins (Rom. 6:23; 8:1; 1 Cor. 15:3), they are still subject to physical death

because God has not yet applied to their lives all of the benefits that were earned by Christ for his people. In fact, Paul says that death will be the "last enemy to be destroyed" (1 Cor. 15:26). For this reason, believers today, living in a fallen world, are still subject to aging and death.

Yet death does not come to believers because God is punishing them, for, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Rather, death is the final outcome of living in a fallen world. Just as Christians are not kept from all sicknesses, floods, and earthquakes, etc., and just as the agricultural fields of Christians still grow as many weeds as the fields of non-Christians, so Christians will experience death as well.

However, Christians should have confidence that God will use even the experience of final illness and death as one of those events that "work together for good" for those who "love God and are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Jesus Christ, who himself experienced physical death as a human being, often seems particularly near to Christians as they die, for they "suffer with him" (Rom. 8:17; cf. Phil. 3:10; 1 Pet. 4:13). Paul hoped to honor Christ in his death as he had in his life: "it is my eager expectation and hope that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death" (Phil. 1:20). The risen Lord Jesus encouraged Christians in Smyrna, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10; cf. Heb. 11:35; Rev. 12:11).

What Happens When People Die?

When Christians die, their physical bodies are buried in the earth, but their spirits (or souls) go immediately into the Lord's presence in heaven. Paul said, "My desire is to depart *and be with Christ*" (Phil. 1:23), and "we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). When Stephen was dying, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59; cf. Gen. 35:18; Eccles. 12:7; Luke 23:43; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 6:9). Then at Christ's second coming, when he returns to the earth, believers' bodies will be raised from the dead, made perfect, and reunited with their spirits (1 Cor. 15:23, 51–52; 1 Thess. 4:16–17).

When unbelievers die, their bodies also are buried in the earth, but their spirits go immediately to experience separation from God and punishment for their sins. "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27; cf. Luke 16:24–26; see also notes on 1 Pet. 3:18; 4:6).

Funerals and Burial

It is not wrong for Christians to grieve deeply over the loss of fellowship with those who have died, even if the deceased were believers and there is great confidence that they are with the Lord in heaven. Grief at loss of any sort is natural. Although the apostles themselves were present in the early church in Jerusalem, and the believers in Jerusalem were sure that Stephen was in heaven with Christ (cf. Acts 7:59), they still expressed profound grief: "Devout men buried Stephen *and made great lamentation over him*" (Acts 8:2). Although Jesus knew he would raise Lazarus from the dead, when he came to the tomb of Lazarus, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). These examples indicate that it is right and proper to grieve at the death of a Christian loved one. But Christians should not "grieve as others do who have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13), that is, their grief should not be the grief of despair, but grief mixed with joy and hope for future reunion (see 1 Cor. 15:55–57; Rev. 14:13).

When unbelievers die, if there has been no indication of saving faith in the person's life, it would not be right to give the person's loved ones assurance that the one who has died is in heaven. But it is still right to recall and speak of pleasant memories, and to remember the good things that the person did in his or her lifetime, much as David did after hearing that Saul had died (see 2 Sam. 1:19–25).

The Bible does not give any direct commands about how to treat the body of a person who has died, but there are recurring instances in Scripture of treating a person's body with dignity and respect, up to and including the time of burial (cf. 1 Sam. 31:11–12; 1 Kings 13:29–30; Mark 6:29; Luke 23:56; John 19:38–42). This can be done in a variety of ways according to what is understood in each culture as signifying respect and honor to the memory of the person who has died.

Regarding cremation, Christians have held differing views. Some object that cremation (which entails destroying the physical body) undermines the expectation of a future resurrection of the body when Christ returns. (When Jesus rose from the dead, it was his same body that was raised and made perfect, and so it will be with Christian believers; see 1 Cor. 15:35–45.) Others, however, think cremation is sometimes the wisest choice, perhaps for economic reasons, because burial land is scarce, or for other reasons. The body is eventually going to die and disintegrate in any case, and God will raise it from the dead and re-create it in its more perfect condition (i.e., in its glorified prime), no matter how scattered it is. If cremation is chosen for a Christian who has died, care should be taken to make clear that the family still should expect a future resurrection of the very same body that has died and now returns "to dust" (Gen. 3:19). But many Christians still prefer a simple and dignified burial of the person's body in the ground, in part because this gives a clear picture of awaiting the resurrection on the day Christ returns.

Euthanasia

The sixth commandment, "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13), prohibits any act that would intentionally, or through carelessness, take the life of another human being (see note on Deut. 5:17; the exceptions of capital punishment, killing in war, and self-defense are not in view here, nor are they implied by the meaning of the Hebrew terminology in the passage). The expression most frequently used for violating the sixth commandment is "shedding innocent blood" (cf. Ex. 23:7; Deut. 19:10, 13; Ps. 10:8; Prov. 6:17).

This prohibition against murder applies to all human beings, including: the elderly, those who are terminally ill, and those who wish to die. Intentionally taking the life of any of these people would break the commandment, "You shall not murder" (cf. also 2 Sam. 1:10, 14–15). Nations that have allowed for physician-assisted suicide find that a society can quickly move from merely *allowing* "the right to die" to the belief that there is "an *obligation* to die" on the part of the elderly and the very ill people who are "draining resources" from the society. In such situations it becomes likely that a number of elderly people will be put to death against their will.

It is important, however, to maintain a clear distinction between *killing a person* and *letting someone die*. Killing in the wrongful sense of murder, as prohibited in Exodus 20:13, means actively doing something to a patient that hastens or causes his or her death. But "letting someone die" means allowing someone to die without interfering with the process that is already taking place. In cases where it is

clearly known to be the patient's wish to be allowed to die, and when there is no reasonable human hope of recovery, and where death seems imminent—then it does not seem wrong to allow such a person to die, rather than either to initiate an artificial life support system or to prolong the natural dying process by artificial means. For such situations, nothing in Scripture would prohibit a dying person from praying for God to take his life. On the other hand, where there is a reasonable human hope of recovery, and where there is a realistic, practical ability to help, the obligation to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39) implies that active measures should be taken to save the person's life. In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus indicated that the priest and the Levite were both wrong for neglecting to do what could be done to save a badly injured man, who with care was able to recover (Luke 10:30–37).

The hardest end-of-life decisions are often related to removing a dying patient from artificial life support, which can involve various measures from an artificial lung to simply providing artificial hydration and nutrition. Christians hold different positions over exactly when in such cases the moral line is crossed from *letting someone die* to *killing*. When considering the proper course of action, Christians should remember that while death is an enemy to resist (1 Cor. 15:26), natural mortality is still part of living in a fallen world (cf. Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12; Heb. 9:27). There is therefore nothing wrong with accepting natural mortality by removing a dying patient from artificial means that are only slowing the natural death process.

There are more complex cases where medication given to alleviate a patient's pain may also have a secondary effect of hastening a person's death. In such cases, some Christian ethicists say that the two most important considerations are: (1) the primary purpose for giving the medication and (2) the patient's own wishes regarding the alleviation of pain. Other Christian ethicists claim that, in such cases, the moral value of improving life quality is always less than the moral value of honoring the sanctity of human life, and, while doing what they can to alleviate pain, Christians should never give higher priority to improving the quality of life (reducing pain) over honoring the sanctity of life (not killing a person).

Wherever possible, it is both wise and loving for people who are still in good health to complete the appropriate legal and medical forms to make known their wishes regarding medical care at the end of life. These decisions should also be verbally communicated to those who will likely have to make end-of-life decisions about each person.

Suicide

Suicide is murder of oneself, and it is prohibited by the command, "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). It is a serious sin against God and brings immense, lifelong grief to loved ones who are left, but the Bible nowhere teaches that suicide is a unique and unforgiveable sin that prevents a person who has lived by faith in Christ from being saved.

Christ's Victory over Death

Finally, Christians need have no fear of death: "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The verse continues, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55–57).

Marriage and Sexual Morality

What Is Marriage?

Marriage is the fundamental institution of all human society. It was established by God at creation, when God created the first human beings as "male and female" (Gen. 1:27) and then said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28).

Marriage begins with a commitment before God and other people to be husband and wife for life. In Malachi 2:14, marriage is viewed as a "covenant" commitment in which God stands as a "witness." And Jesus says that a married couple constitutes a unity that "God has joined together" (Matt. 19:6). Therefore when a marriage occurs, a man and woman have a new status before God: he now considers them to be husband and wife together.

Some kind of public commitment is also necessary to a marriage, for a society must know to treat a couple as married and not as single. Sexual intercourse alone does not constitute a marriage, as was evident from the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well in Samaria, where he said to her, "For you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband" (John 4:18). She was living with a man but that did not mean she was married to him, for there had been no public commitment recognized by God or by the community (cf. also Ex. 22:16–17).

Both Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:5 view the "one flesh" unity that occurs as an essential part of the marriage. That is why sexual intercourse after a marriage ceremony is often said to "consummate" the marriage, and (except in cases where it is physically impossible, because of disability, injury, or advanced age) it is thought that a marriage has not fully begun until sexual intercourse has occurred.

Marriage is a picture of the covenantal relationship between Christ and the church, with the husband representing the former and the wife representing the latter: "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32).

Some Will Not Be Married

The Bible also recognizes that not everyone will be married, and even among those who are married some will be widowed or divorced and therefore will become single again. In 1 Corinthians 7:7–40, Paul sees advantages to both being single and being married. Jesus himself was never married, and Paul was not married at the time of his ministry (see 1 Cor. 7:7; 9:5; it is impossible to know whether he was previously married or not). Jesus and Paul are examples of godly singleness coupled with wonderful effectiveness in ministry. But Paul says, "Each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another" (1 Cor. 7:7), and therefore both remaining single and becoming married are morally permissible choices depending on the kind of life that God has called each person to live (see 1 Cor. 7:17, 27–28, 36–38).

Polygamy

Why did God allow polygamy in the OT? Nowhere in the Bible did God ever command polygamy or tell anyone to marry more than one wife. Rather, God temporarily allowed polygamy to occur (he did not give any general prohibition against it) without giving it any explicit moral approval. Nevertheless, in the OT narratives, whenever a man has two or more wives, it seems to lead to trouble (see Genesis 16; 29–31; 1 Samuel 1; 1 Kings 11; note the prohibition in Deut. 17:17). In addition, polygamy is horribly dehumanizing for women, for it does not treat them as equal in value to their husbands, and therefore it does not recognize that they share fully in the high status of being created "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27) and of being worthy of honor as "heirs with you of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). The requirement that an elder be "husband of one wife" (1 Tim. 3:2) would exclude polygamists from being elders (evidence for polygamy among Jews in the 1st century is found in Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 17.14; Mishnah, Yebamoth 4.11; Ketuboth 10.1, 4, 5; Sanhedrin 2.4; Kerithoth 3.7; Kiddushin 2.7; Bechoroth 8.4; and Justin Martyr, Dialogue 134; for polygamy among non-Jews, see 2 Macc. 4:30; Josephus, Jewish Antiquities 17.19; Tertullian, Apology 46). This has practical application today in missionary contexts in cultures where polygamy is still practiced: the Bible would not encourage a husband to divorce any of his multiple wives when this would leave them without support and protection. But it would not allow a man with multiple wives to be an elder. This restriction would provide a pattern that would generally lead to the abolition of polygamy in a church in a generation or two.

Sexual Intimacy and Moral Standards for Marriage

The Bible views sexual intimacy in marriage as a blessing from God. God said to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gen. 1:28), which implies that God created them so that they would have sexual intercourse together and thereby bear children (cf. Gen. 1:31). Sex is seen within the context of marriage ("his wife," Gen. 2:24) from the very beginning of creation. After the fall, sexual intimacy in marriage is still viewed positively (see Prov. 5:15–19; Song of Solomon; 1 Cor. 7:2–5).

Why is adultery wrong? (1) Because God says it is wrong: "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14). (2) Adultery pictures unfaithfulness in the relationship between Christ and the church, giving a picture of Christ being unfaithful to his people and abandoning them, and not keeping his covenant with them, or else picturing the church as worshiping other gods and being unfaithful to Christ (cf. Mal. 2:14; Eph. 5:31–32). (3) Adultery intrudes another person into the "one flesh" relationship of marriage (cf. Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31). (4) Adultery destroys trust within a marriage because it is the most serious kind of violation of a marriage vow. (5) Adultery often leads to children being born without two parents to raise them or else leads to abortion to end an unwanted pregnancy, both of which consequences contradict God's ideal. (6) Adultery is thus frequently and understandably pictured in Scripture as destroying a person's life: "He does not know that it will cost him his life" (Prov. 7:23; cf. 5:3–14; 6:27–29, 32–33; 7:21–23).

Sexual intercourse between unmarried persons is also consistently viewed as morally wrong throughout Scripture, from the laws of Moses (Ex. 22:16–17; Deut. 22:13–21) to the teachings of Jesus, who implicitly rebuked the woman at the well for living with someone to whom she was not married (John 4:16–18; cf. also Gen. 38:24; Matt. 15:19 [*porneia* or "sexual immorality" is distinguished from adultery, and the 1st-century understanding of the word would certainly include any sexual intercourse outside of marriage]; John 8:41; Acts 15:20; 1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2, 9; 1 Thess. 4:3; note the imagery in 2 Cor.

11:2).

God requires not only right conduct but also purity of heart: "You shall not covet … your neighbor's wife" (Ex. 20:17; cf. Prov. 6:25; Matt. 5:27). The opposite of desiring to commit adultery is having a deep love for one's wife or husband and a strong desire for a positive sexual relationship within one's own marriage, as well as a sense of revulsion at the thought of embracing anyone else in the same way. This purity of heart, like other inward virtues, needs prayerful cultivation if it is to be sustained.

Looking at pornography is a direct violation of Jesus' command against gazing at a woman "with lustful intent" (Matt. 5:28; cf. Job 31:1–2). Pornography attracts a man's affections and desires away from his marriage and away from his wife. It inevitably brings moral uncleanness in the heart, long-lasting harmful memories, and destructive consequences to one's marriage relationship (the same is true for the future marriage of those who are single). It ultimately leads in many cases to other sins, such as prostitution, rape, and other kinds of violence against women, because it dehumanizes them and fails to recognize and respect them as persons made in God's image and valuable in his sight.

Differing Roles in Marriage

The Bible clearly affirms that both men and women are created in God's image and have equal value and dignity in God's sight and for the work of his kingdom on earth (Gen. 1:27, 31; Acts 2:17–18; 8:12; Gal. 3:28; 1 Pet. 3:7). At the same time, the Bible indicates that husband and wife are called to different roles in marriage. God gives to the husband a responsibility for loving, humble headship (or leadership) in the marriage. Husbands are to love their wives "as Christ loved the church" (Eph. 5:25), and "the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23). God has given to the wife a responsibility for joyful, intelligent submission to her husband's headship and support of her husband's leadership role (though never to comply if her husband tells her to sin against God). The NT says, "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). These distinct roles are affirmed in a number of NT passages (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3; Col. 3:18–19; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1–7). Since these responsibilities are patterned on the relationship between Christ and the church, they are not due to particular circumstances in individual cultures or societies but are applicable for all marriages, for all cultures and all time. They are a part of the "very good" creation that God established from the beginning. In addition, such "equality in value" but "difference in roles" between husbands and wives reflects the equality in deity but differences in roles between the Father and the Son in the Trinity (see note on 1 Cor. 11:3).

Are there other distinctive roles for men and women in marriage? Husbands and wives will often share in responsibilities and help each other as partners in establishing a household and raising a family. Yet a number of passages suggest that the primary responsibility for providing for the family and protecting the family belongs to the husband, while the primary responsibility for caring for the home and children belongs to the wife. See, e.g., Genesis 3:14–19 (note that pain is introduced into Eve's responsibility of childbearing and Adam's responsibility of tilling the ground to raise food); Isaiah 4:1 (a reversal of the normal order in a time of God's judgment); 1 Timothy 5:3–16 (widows, not widowers, are to be supported by the church); and Titus 2:5. There is a pattern of men having responsibility to protect women and children in Numbers 1:2–3; Deuteronomy 3:18–19; 20:7–8; 24:5; Joshua 1:14; 23:10; Judges 4:8–10; 9:54; 1 Samuel 4:9; Nehemiah 4:13–14; Jeremiah 50:37; Nahum 3:13. Yet these

passages (concerning men providing for and protecting their loved ones, and women caring for children) present narrative patterns rather than direct commands (as with headship and submission), so it seems that Scripture gives somewhat more freedom for individual differences in these areas.

Divorce and Remarriage

God's Original Plan

God's original plan for the human race, as indicated in his creation of Adam and Eve as husband and wife, is lifelong, monogamous marriage. Jesus affirmed this in responding to a question about divorce:

> And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female [from Gen. 1:27], and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh' [from Gen. 2:24]? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:3–6).

In this reply Jesus rebukes and corrects a first-century practice of easy divorce for trivial reasons. For example, the Mishnah said, "The school of Shammai say: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her. … And the school of Hillel say [he may divorce her] even if she spoiled a dish for him. … Rabbi Akiba says, [he may divorce her] even if he found another fairer than she" (Mishnah, Gittin 9.10). Rather than entering into this debate among rabbis, Jesus first affirms God's original plan for marriage and shows that it remains God's ideal for all marriages.

Malachi views marriage as a "covenant" between a husband and wife, a covenant to which God was a witness and to which therefore God will hold people accountable: "the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant" (Mal. 2:14). Therefore marriage is an especially serious commitment (1) between husband and wife, (2) to the society in which they live, and (3) before God himself (whether or not he is explicitly acknowledged in the marriage ceremony).

But What If One Spouse Is Unfaithful?

In marriage, a man and a woman commit to live with each other as husband and wife for life. In order for them to keep this commitment, both parties have to remain in the marriage. But when one party decides to leave the marriage for another partner, it becomes impossible for the remaining spouse to faithfully fulfill his or her commitment (a husband, e.g., cannot live with and act as a husband to a wife who is living with another man). Because of such cases, it seems that in both the OT and the NT God allowed divorce, in order to give some relief to the one spouse when the other has deserted the marriage or desecrated it by adultery.

Although divorces took place in OT times (assumed by Lev. 21:7, 14; Num. 30:9; Deut. 24:1–4), the only OT law concerning divorce is found in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 (see note). It envisions a situation in

which a man divorces and sends away his wife, she subsequently remarries, and then becomes divorced or widowed. In such a case the law forbids the first husband to marry her again.

Jesus' Teachings on Divorce

Many of the first-century rabbis expanded on Deuteronomy 24:1–4, using it to justify divorce for many reasons, even trivial ones (see above). This fact lies behind the remainder of the exchange between the Pharisees and Jesus in Matthew 19:

> They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (vv. 7–9).

Jesus' statement, "Because of your hardness of heart," should not be understood to imply that only "hard-hearted" individuals initiate divorce but rather, "because your hard-hearted rebellion against God led to serious defilement of marriages." The presence of sin in the community meant that some marriages would be deeply harmed, and God therefore provided divorce as a solution in those cases.

When Jesus says that anyone who divorces his wife "*except for sexual immorality*, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matt. 19:9), he implies the converse: divorce and remarriage on the ground of one's spouse's sexual immorality are *not* prohibited and do *not* constitute adultery. It is the one exception Jesus makes to the requirement that marriage be lifelong, for sexual immorality seriously defiles, indeed disrupts, the "one flesh" union (Matt. 19:5). When Jesus says, "and marries another," he implies that both divorce and remarriage are allowed in the case of sexual immorality and that someone who divorces because his spouse has committed adultery may marry someone else without committing sin (see notes on Matt. 19:3–9). Therefore, if "sexual immorality" (Gk. *porneia*, which included any sexual intercourse contrary to the moral commands of Scripture) occurs, then divorce is allowed but not required. In fact, forgiveness and reconciliation, restoring the marriage, should always be the first option.

Where divorce was allowed—in Greek, Roman, and Jewish culture—the right to remarry (another person) was always assumed in the first century. For example, the Mishnah says, "The essential formula in the bill of divorce is, 'lo, thou art free to marry any man'" (Mishnah, Gittin 9.3).

But in Matthew 19:1–9 where Jesus allows divorce on the grounds of *porneia*, Jesus was simultaneously prohibiting divorce on the numerous other grounds that were being invoked in the first century. If divorce is secured for other reasons (but see a further exception below), then God does not count the divorce as valid (for such divorcers would be committing adultery should they marry someone else; see Matt. 19:9).

In Matthew 5:32, Jesus affirms essentially the same teaching:

> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits

adultery.

Jesus says that the husband who wrongfully divorces his wife "makes her commit adultery" because in that society, it was assumed that a divorced woman would usually need to marry someone else for financial support and protection, and yet Jesus still says this new relationship is, at least initially, "adultery" because there was not a proper reason for the divorce. But Jesus places most of the blame on the husband who wrongly divorced her, saying that he thereby "makes her commit adultery." In the last sentence of the passage, "whoever marries a divorced woman" should be taken in context with the preceding sentences, and so it means, "and whoever marries such a wrongly divorced woman as I have just spoken about …" (see note on Matt. 5:31–32).

In the parallel statements about divorce in Mark 10:11–12 and Luke 16:18, Jesus does not include the exception clause, "except for sexual immorality." The most likely reason is that there was no dispute or disagreement among Jews, or in Greek or Roman culture, that adultery was a legitimate ground for divorce, and Jesus is not addressing that issue (see notes on Mark 10:10–11 and Luke 16:18). This does not invalidate the more extensive teaching given in Matthew, because Jesus' acceptance of the exception for adultery, though not stated explicitly by Mark and Luke, was assumed as being beyond question. (Other interpreters think that Mark 10:11–12 and Luke 16:18 prohibit all divorces and they then understand Matt. 5:32 and 19:9 to refer to special circumstances of some kind, not divorce in general.)

Does Paul Add a Second Reason for Divorce?

Many interpreters hold that Paul adds a second legitimate reason for divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:12–15. Paul is facing a new situation that was not addressed by Jesus—the situation of a Christian and non-Christian married to one another. (In the context to which Jesus was speaking, Jewish people only married other Jews, and both husband and wife therefore were part of the Jewish religious community.) When a believer has an unbelieving spouse, Paul says that they should remain married if the unbeliever is willing to do so (1 Cor. 7:12–14). "But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace" (1 Cor. 7:15). Most interpreters think this implies the freedom to obtain a legal divorce and the freedom to marry someone else. When an unbelieving spouse has deserted the marriage, God releases the believing spouse from the twin unending stresses of (1) a lifelong vain hope of reconciling with an unbeliever who has left, and (2) a lifelong prohibition against enjoying the good blessings of marriage again. (But some interpreters hold that remarriage is never allowed after divorce. On that view, Paul is saying only that the believing spouse is not bound to continue to seek reconciliation.)

Would this passage apply to desertion by someone who professes to be a Christian? In such cases, a question arises as to whether the person is genuinely a believer or is making a false profession of faith. Each situation will be different, and a Christian involved in such a difficult circumstance should seek wise counsel from the leaders of his or her church. Where possible, the steps of church discipline outlined in Matthew 18:15–17 should be followed in an attempt to bring reconciliation to the marriage. If that process results in the final step of excommunication from the church, then it would seem appropriate to treat the deserting spouse as an unbeliever ("let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"; Matt. 18:17). But it must be emphasized that, if reconciliation of the marriage can at all be brought about, that should always be the first goal.

Are There Other Grounds for Divorce?

In addition to the two grounds of sexual immorality or desertion by an unbelieving spouse, are there any other legitimate, biblical grounds for divorce? Some interpreters have argued that repeated instances of physical abuse should be seen as an additional legitimate ground for divorce. Others would respond that many other means should be used to bring the abuse to an immediate halt, including separation (for the eventual purpose of bringing restoration along with the complete cessation of the abuse), church discipline, confrontation and counseling, police action, a court order, and other kinds of intervention by church members, family, and friends. But these would stop short of adding a reason for divorce that neither Jesus nor Paul specified.

Some have argued that a prominent school of rabbinic interpretation in the time of Jesus allowed divorce in cases where a husband did not provide enough material or emotional support to his wife. This was based on their interpretation of a law concerning a slave woman in Exodus 21:10–11. Since Jesus did not explicitly correct this view, they argue that he must have allowed the legitimacy of some other kinds of divorces, such as divorce for prolonged, unrepented physical or emotional abuse. But an argument from what Jesus did *not* say is of dubious validity, especially since Jesus' words "whoever divorces his wife" (Matt. 19:9) are so extensive in scope and seem to rule out additional exceptions not specified in the Bible itself.

What should be done if someone has been divorced for other reasons than those given in the Bible and then has married someone else? Jesus says that in such a case the person has committed "adultery" (Matt. 19:9), so the marriage began with adultery. But when Jesus says, "and marries another" in that same verse, he implies that the second marriage is in fact a true marriage. Jesus does not say, "and *lives outside of marriage* with another" (which was possible, see John 4:18), but "and *marries* another." Therefore, once a second marriage has occurred, it would be further sin to break it up, for it would be destroying another marriage. The second marriage should not be thought of as continually living in adultery, for the man and woman are married to each other, not to anyone else. The responsibility of the husband and wife in such a case is to ask God for his forgiveness for previous sin, and then for his blessing on the current marriage, and to strive to make the current marriage a good and lasting one.

With respect to the phrase "husband of one wife" in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6, some argue that this means that a person has never been married more than once, and therefore that it excludes from the office of elder all men who have been divorced for whatever reason and also all whose wives have died and who have subsequently married someone else. But a better understanding of this passage is that it refers to the *present status* of a man, either to his character of being faithful to his wife, or else to the fact that he does not have more than one wife (see note on 1 Tim. 3:2–3). In either of these better interpretations, the verse does not prohibit all divorced men from being elders, but each case should be evaluated on an individual basis.

Since marriage is not an institution only for Jews and Christians but is an institution established by God at creation, it is for all people, believers and unbelievers alike, and is in fact universal in the human community. The standards expressed here for divorce and remarriage are therefore applicable to all people. The church, where it has opportunity, should encourage non-Christians as well as Christians to abide by God's high moral standards regarding divorce and remarriage. However, in cultures where

rampant divorce for all sorts of reasons is common and has been occurring for decades, individual Christians as well as churches should seek to support and minister to the many women and men and children who have been hurt by divorces in the past, as well as the casualties of divorces in the present.

The principles expressed in this article represent the most commonly held view among Protestants since the time of the Reformation (e.g., see the 17th-century Westminster Confession of Faith 24.5, 6). Other views are also held by some evangelicals, however. Some hold that the exception clauses in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 apply only to sexual immorality committed during the betrothal period (when a couple was legally pledged to be married), and do not apply to marriage proper, and therefore there are no legitimate grounds for divorce. Others argue that, where a divorce has occurred, for whatever reason, remarriage is never allowed. And others have argued that there should be some additional, but limited, grounds for divorce. But these views have not gained majority support among evangelical interpreters of the Bible.

Homosexuality

God's Original Design

In God's original design, human sexual conduct was to occur within the context of marriage between one man and one woman. The first chapter of the Bible says, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Differentiation of the human race into two complementary sexes ("male and female") is the first fact mentioned in connection with being "in the image of God." In Genesis 2, which describes in more detail the process summarized in 1:27, God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen. 2:18). Genesis then applies the example of Adam and Eve to all marriages: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). This "one flesh" sexual union was thus established as the pattern for marriage generally, and Jesus cites Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 as the normative pattern that God expects all marriages to follow (see Matt. 19:4–6). Furthermore Paul, as a good disciple of Jesus, likewise strongly echoes Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 in his two primary texts on homosexual practice, Romans 1:23–27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9. Jesus and Paul both assume the logic of sexual intercourse implied in Genesis: a sexual bond between a man and a woman requires two (and only two) different sexual halves ("a man" and "his wife") being brought together into a sexual whole ("one flesh").

This is further emphasized in the story of the creation of Eve from Adam's side:

> And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gen. 2:22–24).

The word "therefore" connects the making of Eve from a part of Adam's body with the "one flesh" sexual union between a man and a woman in marriage: it is the reunion of the two constituent parts of a

sexual whole. It is not another man who is the missing part or sexual complement of a man, but rather a woman. (Jesus emphasizes this connection between the two different sexes, "male and female," in Matt. 19:4–6 and Mark 10:6–8.)

Prohibited Sexual Relations

Consistent with the pattern in Genesis 1–2, sexual intercourse outside of the marriage relationship between one man and one woman is prohibited. For example, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14; reaffirmed by Jesus in Matt. 19:18; cf. Rom. 13:9; James 2:11). In addition, other specific kinds of sexual intercourse outside of marriage are also prohibited, such as prostitution (1 Cor. 6:15–18), incest (Lev. 20:11–21; 1 Cor. 5:1–2), and bestiality (Lev. 18:23; 20:15–16).

Homosexual conduct is also viewed as a sin (something contrary to God's will) in several passages of the Bible. Leviticus 18:22 says, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination [Hb. *to'ebah*, actions that are extremely displeasing to God]." Similarly, "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination" (Lev. 20:13; cf. Genesis 19; also Jude 7). These absolute Levitical prohibitions are grouped with other relevant sex proscriptions (incest, adultery, bestiality) and are considered first-tier sexual offenses that are grouped together in Leviticus 20:10–16.

In the NT, Paul speaks of homosexual conduct:

> For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error (Rom. 1:26–27).

The phrase "contrary to nature" means that homosexual conduct does not represent what God intended when he made men and women with physical bodies that have a "natural" way of interacting with each other and "natural" desires for each other. (See note on Rom. 1:26–27; cf. also Rom. 1:19–20, that the truth about God and his moral law is visible and apparent in the material creation.) Homosexual desires are "dishonorable" both because they are contrary to God's purpose and because they treat a person's biological sex as only half of what it is. While the logic of a heterosexual bond is that of bringing together the two (and only two) different and complementary sexual halves into a sexual whole, the logic of a homosexual bond is that another person of the *same* sex complements, and fills what is lacking in, that same sex, implying that each participant is only half of his or her own sex: two half males making a full male or two half females making a full female. In other words, the logic of sexual intercourse requires a sexual complement, and thus a same-sex bond is a self-devaluing of one's own gender inasmuch as one sees the need to complement structurally one's own sex with someone of the same sex.

In a long list of sins, Paul also includes "men who practice homosexuality" (1 Cor. 6:9).This phrase translates two different Greek terms: *malakos* means "soft" or "effeminate" and was commonly used in the Greco-Roman world to refer to the "passive" partner in homosexual acts, while *arsenokoitēs* is a combination of Gk. *arsēn* (meaning "man") and *koitē* (here meaning "sexual intercourse"). The term

arsenokoitēs was apparently coined by Paul from the Septuagint (Greek translation) of Leviticus 20:13, and means (in plural) "men who have intercourse with men." In 1 Timothy 1:10 Paul uses the same word *arsenokoitēs* in the midst of vices derived from "the law" (here, the second half of the Ten Commandments), which means that this verse also should be interpreted as an absolute prohibition of male-with-male intercourse, in keeping with Leviticus 18:22; 20:13. Early Jewish interpretation of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, and early Christian interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, also show that these verses were understood as absolute prohibitions against all types of homosexual conduct.

Does the Bible address the question of homosexual attitudes and desires? It must be remembered that God ultimately requires moral perfection, not only in human actions but also in attitudes of the heart. Therefore the Bible prohibits not only adultery but also a desire for adultery (Ex. 20:17; cf. Matt. 5:28), not only theft but also coveting (Ex. 20:17). This is because "the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Therefore Scripture teaches that any desire to break God's commandments is also viewed as wrong in God's sight. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). While an impulse to do what God expressly forbids is (by definition) an impulse contrary to God's will, the Bible recognizes that Christians will be "tempted" by their "own desire" (James 1:14) and encourages Christians in such circumstances to "remain steadfast" (James 1:12) and to "be doers of the word" (James 1:22). This implies not actively entertaining the wrongful impulse (cf. Matt. 5:28), and not dwelling on it so that it "gives birth to sin" (James 1:15).

It is not surprising, therefore, that not only homosexual conduct but also homosexual desires are viewed as contrary to God's will. Homosexual desires are viewed as "dishonorable passions" (Rom. 1:26), and Paul also says that homosexual partners are "consumed with passion for one another" (Rom. 1:27), giving a strong image of a powerful but destructive inward craving.

This is not to say that homosexual *desire* is as harmful as homosexual *conduct*. Though all sin is wrong and brings legal guilt before God (cf. James 2:10–11), a distinction between wrongful desires and wrongful actions can be made with regard to many areas of life. Hatred of another person is wrong in God's sight, but murdering the person is far more harmful. Coveting a neighbor's farm animals is wrong, but actually stealing them is much more harmful. And lustful desires for adultery are wrong, but actually committing adultery is far more harmful. Similarly, homosexual desires are wrong in God's sight, but actually committing homosexual acts is far more harmful.

The Bible's Solution regarding Homosexuality

As with every other sin, the Bible's solution to homosexuality is trusting in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, the imputation of righteousness, and the power to change. After talking about the "sexually immoral" and "adulterers" and "men who practice homosexuality" and "thieves" and "drunkards" (1 Cor. 6:9–10), Paul tells the Corinthian Christians, "And such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:11). Then he tells them, "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11; cf. Rom. 6:23; Phil. 2:13; 1 John 1:9). This implies that some former homosexuals in the church at Corinth had left their previous homosexual lifestyle and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, were seeking to live lives of sexual purity, whether in celibacy or in

faithful, heterosexual marriages.

It is important that the Christian community always show love and compassion toward those engaged in homosexual conduct, and also extend friendship toward them where opportunities arise, though not in a way that signals approval of homosexual practice. It is also important to extend hope for change, since many homosexuals will say that they long to establish a different pattern of life. However, a number of studies have concluded that long-term change from a homosexual lifestyle seldom occurs without a program of help and encouragement from others.

Objections

Numerous objections have been presented against the view that homosexuality is morally wrong. One objection is that some people are "born gay," that is, that many homosexuals do not choose their homosexual orientation but it is part of their genetic makeup from birth, and so homosexuals can never change, and for them homosexual behavior cannot be wrong. But, as noted above, Paul, in talking about "men who practice homosexuality" (1 Cor. 6:9), says to the Corinthian church, "And such were some of you" (1 Cor. 6:11), indicating that homosexuals can change and become former homosexuals. This does not mean that homosexual desires will automatically or necessarily be eradicated for those who come to Christ. Becoming a Christian does not mean that people will no longer experience intense sinful urges (sexual or otherwise). But genuine faith does produce the fruit of obedience and real, substantive change, and Paul indicates that this is precisely what happened with some who had practiced homosexuality in Corinth.

Some argue that science supports the argument that homosexuality is determined by one's biological makeup from before the time of birth. Studies have in fact shown some indirect, congenital influences on homosexual development that may increase the *likelihood* of homosexual development. But there are certain hereditary factors that give people a greater likelihood of developing all sorts of different sinful behavior patterns (such as frequent wrongful anger, violence, adultery, alcoholism, and so forth), and it would not be surprising to find that some people, from certain hereditary backgrounds, have a greater likelihood of developing homosexual desires and conduct. But this is far different from proving congenital *determinism* of homosexuality, that is, that some people are genetically incapable of making any other choice than to entertain homosexual desires and engage in homosexual conduct. Especially significant are studies of identical twins, where one has become a homosexual and the other has not, even though they have identical genetic makeup.

The moral teachings of God's Word, not people's inward desires, must be the final standard of right and wrong. It is important to recognize that (1) virtually all behavior is, at some level, biologically influenced, and that (2) no command of God is predicated for its validity on humans first losing all desire to violate the command in question.

As for environmental factors that have been shown to increase the likelihood of homosexual behavior, two of the most significant, particularly for male homosexuals, are the physical or emotional absence of a caring father during childhood years, and sexual abuse sometime during childhood or adolescence.

Another objection is to say that the biblical passages concerning homosexuality only prohibit certain

kinds of homosexual conduct, such as homosexual prostitution or pedophilia, or unfaithful homosexual relationships. (This is sometimes called the "exploitation argument": the Bible only prohibits exploitative forms of homosexuality.) But there is no legitimate evidence in the words of any of these verses, or their contexts, or in evidence from the ancient world, to prove that the verses were referring to anything less than all kinds of homosexual conduct by all kinds of people. Two biblical counterarguments against the "exploitation argument" may be briefly mentioned: (1) In Romans 1:23–27 Paul clearly echoes Genesis 1:27, indicating that Paul viewed any sexual relationship that did not conform to the creation paradigm of "male and female" to be a violation of God's will, irrespective of whether the relationship is loving. (2) Paul's absolute indictment against all forms of homosexuality is underscored by his mention of lesbian intercourse in Romans 1:26, since this form of intercourse in the ancient world was not typically characterized by sex with adolescents, slaves, or prostitutes.

Some have suggested that the Sodom and Gomorrah episode does not point to judgment on homosexual practice, but relates only to coercive homosexual practice. But Genesis 19:4–5 indicates that homosexual conduct was characteristic of the entire city and was a primary reason for God's judgment (cf. the note on Jude 7).

Some object that the phrase "contrary to nature" in Romans 1:26–27 shows that Paul is only talking about people who "naturally" feel desires toward a person of the opposite sex but who then practice homosexuality. Paul says, "For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another" (Rom. 1:26–27). According to this view, Paul is not saying anything about people who "naturally" feel desires for a person of the same sex, for such desires would not be "contrary to *that person's* nature." However, this is reading into the text a restriction that has no basis in the actual words that Paul wrote. He does not say "contrary to *their* nature," but "contrary to nature" (Gk. *para physin*), a phrase that is used several times in literature outside the Bible to speak of all kinds of homosexual conduct as something contrary to the natural order of the world. In other words, Paul is not saying in Romans 1:24–27 that some people switched their innate heterosexual urges for contrived homosexual urges, but rather that people exchanged or left behind sexual relations with a true sexual complement (someone of the other sex) to gratify their inward urges for sex with members of the same sex. Paul sees such people as choosing to follow their desires over God-ordained creation structures.

Finally, there is an objection from experience: some homosexual "couples" have faithful, fulfilling relationships, so why should these be thought immoral? But experience should not be used as a higher standard for moral right and wrong than the teaching of the Bible. In addition, many studies indicate that, particularly among male homosexuals, long-term one-partner relationships are uncommon, and the widespread pattern is many sexual partners, often numbering many hundreds over the years. An additional harmful result of homosexual conduct is often immense damage to the family structures of a society and also to physical health (e.g., various studies have shown a significant reduction in life expectancy for homosexual males compared to the general population).

Same-sex Marriage?

Proposals for governments to recognize "same-sex marriage" should be evaluated in light of the Bible's teaching that one role of civil government is to "praise those who do good" (1 Pet. 2:14). Government

recognition of a relationship as a "marriage" carries with it the *endorsement* and *encouragement* of that relationship by a society. Married couples enjoy many protections and benefits (legal, financial, and interpersonal) that society has granted in order to encourage marriage and signal that the institution of marriage brings benefits to society as a whole. So the question is really whether a society, through its laws, should give approval and encouragement to homosexual relationships that both the Bible and most cultures throughout history have considered to be morally wrong rather than "good," and that also bring significant harmful consequences. Governmental recognition of "same-sex marriage" would imply a requirement to allow homosexual couples to adopt and raise children, and this would rob many children of the opportunity to be raised in a home with both a father and a mother, which is by far the best environment for them. In addition, government recognition would likely soon carry with it governmental prohibitions against criticizing homosexual conduct.

Conclusion

Homosexual conduct of all kinds is consistently viewed as sin in the Bible, and recent reinterpretations of the Bible that have been raised as objections to that view do not give a satisfactory explanation of the words or the context of the relevant verses. Sexual intimacy is to be confined to marriage, and marriage is to be only between one man and one woman, following the pattern established by God in creation. The church should always act with love and compassion toward homosexuals, yet never affirm homosexual conduct as morally right. The gospel of Jesus Christ offers the "good news" of forgiveness of sins and real hope for a transformed life to homosexuals as well as to all sinners.

Civil Government

God Established Civil Government

God has established civil government for the good of all people: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. … [T]he one who is in authority … is God's servant for your good" (Rom. 13:1, 3, 4). This indicates that God has established an order of authority regarding civil government: those who are in authority have responsibility to judge right from wrong and to distinguish good from evil by rewarding good behavior and punishing wrongdoing. This means that those in authority should not use power in ways that are arbitrary or that merely serve their own personal advantage. Those who are not in authority are to "be subject" to those who are in authority.

Paul also indicates that God is sovereign over both evil governments and good ones. God not only raises nations up, he also brings them down: "He makes nations great, and he destroys them; he enlarges nations, and leads them away" (Job 12:23; cf. Ps. 75:7). In fact, he will sometimes use one nation to judge another (cf. Jer. 25:7–14). Isaiah 10:5–11 says that God raised up Assyria, which he used to judge all of the surrounding nations. But then he judged Assyria as well, at the appropriate time, using another nation. When God allows evil governments to persist, sometimes believers suffer greatly, but in such situations they also glorify God through their courage and faithfulness (cf. Dan. 3:16–23; Matt. 14:10–11; Acts 5:29, 40–42; 12:2; Heb. 11:35–38; Rev. 2:10; 12:11).

All citizens should obey the laws of the state (for exceptions, see below): Romans 13:2 says, "Whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment." In other words, those who reject the authority of a civil government reject God's authority as well. Romans 13:3–4 says,

> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

This passage also indicates the purpose of government: it is established by God in order to restrain evil, punish wrongdoers, and promote the order and well-being of society.

First Peter 2:13–17 articulates similar truths: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution" (v. 13), which includes persons in authority like "the emperor," or "governors," or, by implication, other officials who are sent "to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good" (v. 14). The reason Christians must obey in this way is because "this is the will of God" (v. 15), and, further, "that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people" (v. 15). This also means that Christians should honor those in authority, show them proper respect, and pray for them (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1–3).

Christian Influence on Governments

Since the moral standards of the Bible come from the God of all creation, who holds all people in all societies accountable to him, Christians should act upon opportunities given them to influence government to make laws consistent with the Bible's moral standards (cf. Dan. 4:27; Luke 3:18–19; Acts 24:24–25; also the prophetic warnings to pagan nations in Isaiah 13–23; Ezekiel 25–32; Amos 1–2; Obadiah; Jonah; Nahum; Habakkuk 2; Zephaniah 2). Influencing a government to make good laws is one way of obeying Jesus' command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39), for good laws bring many benefits to people. However, civil governments should not make laws enforcing allegiance to, or prohibiting the practice of, any particular religion, for Jesus divided the realms of responsibilities between the things that "are Caesar's" and the things that "are God's," thus establishing two distinct areas or spheres of authority (Matt. 22:21; cf. also Luke 9:52–55; 12:13–14; John 18:36).

When Obedience to Government Is Wrong

Christians should *not* obey the government, however, when obedience would mean disobeying a command of God. This is indicated by several passages showing approval of disobedience to governments. For example, when commanded not to preach the gospel, Peter says, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Another example is found in Daniel 3:13–27, where Nebuchadnezzar commanded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to worship the golden statue; they stood firm against the king: "we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Dan. 3:18). God rescued them from the fiery furnace, thus confirming his approval of their stand (Dan. 3:19–30). Other examples of obeying God through disobedience to civil governments include the Egyptian midwives (Ex. 1:17, 21), Esther (Est. 4:16); Daniel (Dan. 6:10); and the wise men (Matt. 2:8, 12).

Is Revolution or a War of Independence Ever Right?

Christians have differed over the question of whether God's people should ever support revolutions against evil governments or wars to gain independence from evil governments. Some Christians argue that Romans 13:1–5 prohibits this, especially where Paul says, "whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed." Others have argued that Paul has in mind here only the conduct of private individuals, but that lower officials who are under a wicked higher official are in a different situation. They argue that lower officials may in fact be obeying God by leading a revolution or fighting a civil war against wicked rulers, in order to protect those whom God has given into their charge, and that thus, in protecting their people, they are fulfilling their responsibility before God to be "not a terror to good conduct, but to bad" (Rom. 13:3). Biblical examples would be Moses against Pharaoh (Exodus 1–14), and some of the judges (Judg. 2:14–16; cf. Heb. 11:33).

Methods of Selecting Leaders for Government

Because the Bible speaks so frequently about kings, for many centuries it was assumed that only a monarchy fit the biblical pattern for civil government. People believed in the "divine right of kings," by which kings were thought to rule by God's ordination (an idea that some supported from Rom. 13:1–2), and the people were thought to be subject to their almost unlimited power. The common method of succession was hereditary monarchy, in which the king's oldest son would succeed him on the throne.

But over the course of centuries more careful examination of the Bible has brought a widespread recognition among Christians that the Bible does not endorse hereditary monarchy as the only proper form of government. When read in their overall context, the tragic narratives of the hereditary monarchies that followed after David, beginning with Solomon and then continuing in both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah (see 1–2 Kings), show a progressive turning of these kingdoms away from God and a decline in their circumstances until both Israel and Judah were carried away into exile in disgrace. Though there were a few good kings, most of the kings of Israel and Judah fulfilled Samuel's dire warnings about the ways in which kings would abuse their powers and eventually enslave the people (1 Sam. 8:10–18). And many of the pagan kings who opposed God's people were quite uniformly evil. The overall portrait of monarchies in the Bible is not a positive one (except for the future rule of Jesus, who will one day reign over a renewed world as "King of kings and Lord of lords," Rev. 19:16).

But what is the alternative to a hereditary monarchy? Several strands of biblical teaching combine to show the benefits of some sort of system by which (1) government gains legitimacy by the consent of the governed, (2) rulers are selected by the consent of those who are governed, and are accountable to them, and (3) the power of government is divided among several persons and groups in order to provide a check against the tendency of all sinful human beings to abuse power, especially great power. The arguments in favor of such a form of government are these:

1. All human beings share equally the status of being made "in the image of God" (see notes on Gen. 1:26; 1:27). This is a powerful concept that leads to the conclusion that no family should think it has by heredity a "right" to rule over other families and people, or to govern others without their consent.

2. If the government is to be "God's servant for your good" (Rom. 13:4), government should exist for the benefit of the people, not for the special benefit of the king and his family (cf. the negative example in 1 Sam. 8:10–18 in contrast with the good examples in 1 Sam. 12:3–5; Num. 16:15). But who can best judge what is best for the people of a nation? A good argument can be made that, over the long run, the people themselves are the best judge of what is good for them. To be sure, the people may err, but they are not likely to err as grievously as a non-accountable paternalist ruler, making decisions on their behalf, might be expected to do.

3. Scripture contains several positive examples of rulers seeking the consent of those whom they govern (cf. Ex. 4:29–31; 1 Sam. 7:5–6; 10:24; 2 Sam. 2:4; 1 Kings 1:39–40; 12:1; and, in the early church, cf. Acts 6:3).

4. The fact that "there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (Rom. 13:1) does not require a monarchy, for God can institute governments through a process by which the people are able to select their own leaders and keep a check on their powers.

Capital Punishment

The Bible places much importance on the sanctity of human life; therefore any theological argument for capital punishment—the legal execution of someone guilty of a heinous crime—must meet high standards of biblical support and practical justice. Since human beings are made in God's image and likeness, only God has the ultimate authority to specify if, and under what conditions, it is morally justified to take a human life.

The Covenant with Noah

After the flood, God commanded Noah and his children to be fruitful, to multiply, and to have dominion and stewardship over the earth and all of its creatures. Permission was given to kill animals for food (Gen. 9:3); but murdering a human being meant forfeiting one's own life, for God said, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:5–6). In this verse, "shedding blood" refers to the violent, unjustified taking of human life (cf. Gen. 37:22; Num. 35:33; 1 Kings 2:31; Ezek. 22:4).

This part of God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 9:1–17) is a crucial text related to capital punishment for two reasons: (1) the provisions of this covenant were not limited to one specific nation for one specific period of time, as the Mosaic laws were, but were given at the time of a new beginning for all of human society following the flood; and (2) the reason for the command regarding murder is one that remains perpetually valid: "for God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:6). The previous verse indicates that this command shows how God will execute justice on a murderer, namely, by requiring that other human beings, as God's representatives, put the murderer to death: "From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man" (Gen. 9:5).

This passage in Genesis explains what is wrong with murdering a human being and why the punishment for intentional murder should be execution: because human beings are made in the image of God. The severity of the crime dictates the severity of the punishment. This is consistent with an overarching

principle known as *lex talionis* (i.e., the law of retribution). Exodus 21:22–25 (see note) is one example: "if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." In contrast to the malicious practices of the nations surrounding God's people, the *lex talionis* was a civilizing influence in three ways (cf. Gen. 4:23–24). First, it prevented private vengeance, since the context of such laws showed that this was a principle reserved for judges. Second, it prevented excessive punishment by insuring that *only* an eye could be taken for damaging an eye. (For example, one could not *kill* another in return for blinding him.) Third, it prevented insufficient punishment by ensuring that social prejudice did not lead to treating some lives as less valuable than others. One could not require an eye for damaging an eye in one case but not another.

In biblical moral understanding, equally shared reflection of the divine image is what demands taking the life of the one who has wrongly taken the life of another. But the Bible never requires more than the life of the murderer; e.g., it never allows killing a whole village to avenge the murder of one person. According to the Bible, the value of human life does not come from anything that human beings control. It comes from reflecting something (or someone) other than themselves; it is something that all possess and that they can never lose.

Some interpreters disagree with this view. They argue that Genesis 9:6 does not *prescribe* capital punishment but merely *describes* what often results from living a life of violence. They claim that the statement "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" is only a prediction equivalent to the saying "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Against this interpretation is (1) the fact that Genesis 9:5 says *God himself* will require this "reckoning" for the taking of human life; (2) the reason given for taking human life is not to satisfy a subjective feeling but is rather to hold perpetrators accountable for destroying God's "own image"; and (3) subsequent laws show that God in fact commanded that human beings carry out the death penalty for various crimes (cf. Num. 35:16–21).

Many who oppose the death penalty subscribe to the so-called "seamless garment" argument. For them, the sanctity of human life means that killing another human being is never permissible, whether in abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, or war. Those who support the death penalty respond that specific teachings of the Bible, not an abstract theory (such as "never take a human life"), should determine the Christian position. And specific teachings of the Bible do give support to the principle of capital punishment. One of the strongest biblical refutations of the "seamless garment" theory is in Ezekiel 13:19 where God not only condemns "putting to death souls who should not die" but also "keeping alive souls who should not live." Someone who is "pro-life" on abortion and euthanasia can, therefore, at the same time consistently favor capital punishment. The principle remains the same in both cases: justice for and protection of the innocent, and punishment for the guilty in proportion to what they have done.

The Sixth Commandment

The sixth of the Ten Commandments forbids the unjustified taking of a person's life: "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). The esv footnote to this verse explains that the Hebrew term used (*ratsakh*) is somewhat broader than the contemporary English word "murder" when it says, "The Hebrew word also

covers causing human death through carelessness or negligence." The commandment does not, however, prohibit all killing. The verb *ratsakh* is never used, e.g., for killing in war. Another reason the sixth commandment cannot prohibit capital punishment is that God himself said in the very next chapter of Exodus that "if a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die" (Ex. 21:14). (However, cities of refuge were established for those guilty of accidental [unintentional] manslaughter [Ex. 21:13; cf. Joshua 20].)

In the OT it was God who prescribed the death penalty. Therefore capital punishment cannot be contrary to God's character or inconsistent with God's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). God's laws are always consistent with his moral character, and his moral character never changes (Ps. 102:27; Mal. 3:6; Heb. 13:8; James 1:17).

The laws God gave Moses at Sinai for governing Israel in the Promised Land included death penalties for several other crimes besides the intentional shedding of innocent human blood, which had already been prohibited under the Noahic covenant (Gen. 9:5–6). But these additional death penalties were *only* given to govern the theocracy of Israel and were never universally applied even in the OT. While the death penalty for murder is universally commanded based on an enduring theological principle (i.e., man being made in the image of God; Gen. 9:5–6), the other death penalties later included in the Mosaic law are not. Therefore these laws were specific to the particular history of Israel at that time, and they should not be treated as necessary patterns for civil governments today. (For many of these cases regarding worship of other gods, the NT parallel would be excommunication from the fellowship of the church.)

Methods of execution in the OT included stoning (Lev. 20:2, 27; 24:14; Deut. 21:21), hanging (Deut. 21:22–23; Josh. 8:29), burning (Lev. 20:14; 21:9), and the sword (Ex. 32:27–28). OT law also ensured that capital punishment could only be carried out based on the testimony of at least two witnesses (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6, 19). In some cases, the punishment was to be executed by the witnesses themselves (Deut. 13:6–10; 17:7), while in others it was to be inflicted by the congregation (Num. 15:32–36), the nearest of kin, or the avenger of blood (Deut. 19:11–12).

The NT on Capital Punishment

The most definitive NT text on capital punishment is Romans 13, where the apostle Paul discusses the nature of punishment and the role of civil magistrates. He writes, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. … Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:1–4). It is important to recall, however, that just three verses earlier Paul forbids personal revenge: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Rom. 12:19). Then in Romans 13, with no sense of inconsistency, Paul moves right on to explain that leaving punishment "to the wrath of God" means allowing punishment to come through the civil government, which is "the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (13:4). So, while personal retaliation is forbidden, civil authorities are to punish evildoers justly and dispassionately.

Both proponents and opponents of capital punishment point to "the sword" (Gk. *machaira*) in Romans 13:4 to support their view. Opponents note that "the sword" is sometimes used as a symbol or metaphor (i.e., the "sword of the Spirit," Eph. 6:17; the word of God is "sharper than any two-edged sword," Heb. 4:12). They understand "the sword" in Romans 13:4 to be only a symbol of governing authorities. Against this, proponents of capital punishment maintain that the image of "the sword" stands for governmental authority to use even lethal force if necessary. They note that even where "the sword" symbolizes authority, that symbol has no meaning without the reality backing it up. The NT also uses the same word for sword (Gk. *machaira*) on several occasions that clearly refer to the real use of lethal force, e.g., when Herod "killed James the brother of John with the sword" (Acts 12:2), and when it refers to martyrs who were "killed with the sword" (Heb. 11:37; cf. also Matt. 26:52; Acts 16:27; Rom. 8:35; Rev. 13:10).

The apostle Paul, who used the word "sword" in this text, showed that he knew that some crimes are worthy of death, saying, "If … I … have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death" (Acts 25:11). It is unlikely that Paul would have said this if he thought capital punishment was never justifiable. Even so, except for crimes of murder, neither God's command to Noah in Genesis 9:6 nor any NT statement makes it necessary to treat any other specific crime as so horrible that all societies everywhere must always apply capital punishment when someone commits it. Apparently that question is left for each society or government to seek to decide wisely and justly.

The two sides on the issue of capital punishment also differ over Jesus' command to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:38–39). Proponents of capital punishment think that Jesus only addressed personal conduct, not how governments carry out assigned duties, while opponents claim that Jesus addressed government duties as well. The story of the woman caught in the act of adultery (John 7:53–8:11) is not thought to be as relevant by either side, both because there is doubt about whether the text itself was originally part of John's Gospel (see note) and because Jesus' words in the story ("Let him who is without sin … be the first to throw a stone at her") do not pertain to the crime of murder.

Justice and the Role of Government

At the heart of the moral debate over capital punishment are often different views of justice and the role that is assigned to government in relation to it. Those favoring capital punishment usually stress the retributive view of justice (i.e., wrongdoing calls for proportional punishment). They argue that the Bible reveals that God has ordained human government to act as his agent in applying retributive justice to wrongdoers. Human government is "an *avenger* who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:4; cf. 1 Pet. 2:14). Thus capital punishment is seen as (1) an outpouring of divine justice in this present life, (2) a deterrent from personal vengeance (Rom. 12:19), and (3) a deterrent from further crimes (see Eccles. 8:11; Rom. 13:3–4). Those opposing capital punishment either define justice differently (e.g., as distributing benefits or restoring damages), or hold that government should be less concerned with retribution (treating people as they deserve) than with mercy (*not* treating people as badly as they deserve).

Finally, Christians who believe that capital punishment has biblical justification also hold that it must be carried out in a just manner. So, among other things, this means that holding people accountable for wrongdoing should be done in a way that requires: (1) clear evidence of guilt established by

eyewitnesses or irrefutable forensic evidence (cf. Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6, 19); (2) granting the accused due process without discrimination based on social status, beliefs, race, or economic class; (3) rendering judgment based on adequate proof of moral culpability; and (4) making sure that any punishment assigned is proportional to the crime.

War

Definition of War

War is a large-scale armed conflict between countries or between groups within a country aiming at changing or dividing established government. Throughout history, wars have frequently been started by rulers seeking to expand their territory and power, but wars can be started for a variety of economic, political, religious, or ethnic reasons.

Biblical Justifications for Some Wars

No recognized Christian group or Christian leader today argues that any government should engage in war to compel people to support the Christian religion. This is because of the recognition that Christian faith, by its nature, must be voluntary if it is to be genuine (note the invitations in various parts of the Bible that appeal to people's freedom to choose whether or not they will follow God: Ezek. 33:11; Matt. 11:28–30; Rev. 22:17). Jesus distinguished between "the things that are Caesar's" and "the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21), thus establishing that the civil government ("Caesar") and the church ("the things that are God's") have different responsibilities and different tasks, and that the government should not use its power to attempt to control people's religious faith. Jesus himself refused to use deadly force to advance his kingdom or compel allegiance to him (see Matt. 26:52–55; John 18:36).

However, God does give civil government the responsibility and the authority to use superior force, even deadly force, to protect its citizens from evil. This is because, until Jesus returns (Dan. 9:26; Matt. 24:6), there are some people so deeply committed to doing evil that they can be restrained, not by reason and persuasion, but only by superior force. Therefore, in the OT God says that rulers must "give justice to the weak" and must "deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Ps. 82:3–4). The NT maintains that the civil government has been established by God with responsibility for maintaining justice. This is why the government has a rightful duty to "bear the sword" (Rom. 13:4), to be "a terror" to bad conduct, and thus to be "God's servant" to do "good" for its citizens (Rom. 13:3–4). Part of this responsibility is acting as a "servant of God … who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer" (Rom. 13:4). Peter likewise affirms that civil government is sent "to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good" (1 Pet. 2:14). Therefore one of the primary duties of government is to protect its citizens, even through the use of force ("the sword") if that is necessary in order to restrain evil. This is the justification for police forces that protect citizens from any harm that would come from others within a nation. And this responsibility from God also provides justification for nations to engage in armed conflict ("to bear the sword") in order to protect their citizens from evildoers who would attack them from outside the nation, including a defense against armies sent by other nations when those armies and nations are "those who do evil" (1 Pet. 2:14) in the pursuit of such a war.

Several wars in the OT fall under this category of a war of defense against evil aggression (such as Abraham's war to rescue Lot in Gen. 14:1–16; Saul's war against the Ammonites in 1 Sam. 11:1–11; and Gideon's war to defend Israel against the Midianites in Judges 6–7). Therefore it should not be thought inconsistent in the OT for God to command people to go to war (see Deuteronomy 20, for example) and *also* to command his people, "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17). The Hebrew word translated "murder" (*ratsakh*) in the sixth commandment is used 49 times in the OT but is never used to refer to killing in war (for which other Hebrew words are used; see note on Deut. 5:17).

Over the ages, Christians have adopted three different views on the ethics of war: crusade, just war, and pacifism.

Crusade

The crusade ethic treats war as the most effective means for destroying all resistance to establishing some idealistic vision of social order: it does so by religious authority; it is led by a religious figure such as a prophet, pope, or imam; it accepts no compromise; it spares no prisoners; it sets no limits on force; it sends soldiers into battle with zeal; it ignores all odds; it demonizes opponents; it distinguishes only between friend or foe (not between combatants and noncombatants); it never surrenders; and it never ceases so long as opposition exists. But while God does order wars of crusade in the OT (such as Moses' war of vengeance against the Midianites in Numbers 31, and Joshua's conquest of Canaan in the book of Joshua; see The Destruction of the Canaanites), and while Jesus is pictured as leading a war of crusade when he returns to rule the earth on all levels (Rev. 19:11–21), the Bible never gives *human* rulers a choice of electing to fight wars of crusade on their own initiative.

Biblically approved use of the crusade ethic occurs only at God's initiative (see Num. 31:1–2), is led only by God himself (see Josh. 5:13–15), and occurs only in such a way that those called to participate can readily verify that this is done at the direct command of God (see Rev. 19:11–16). When Pope Urban II launched wars of crusade during the Middle Ages, he violated biblical moral boundaries in a way that has shamed the cause of Christ and the reputation of the church ever since.

Just War

The just war ethic argues that warfare is sometimes necessary in order to resist or reverse specific unjust actions taken by one government or nation against another, but it also insists that war is always regrettable, is always something to avoid if possible, and is never to be used to establish some new vision of a social order.

The just war ethical tradition arises from both biblical and classical sources. In the Bible, just war principles can be found in rules revealed for engaging enemies outside the territory of the Promised Land (Deut. 20:1–20), in God's judgment of war actions taken by the Gentile nations around Israel (Amos 1), and in the regard Jesus had for moral wisdom relating to the way kings go to war (Luke 14:31).

The NT church included many soldiers serving on active duty and saw nothing morally inconsistent with Christians serving as military professionals. The conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion, was

confirmed by the Holy Spirit with no question of his profession compromising his faith (Acts 10). John the Baptist responded to soldiers in a way that implied they were serving in a morally legitimate profession (Luke 3:14). And when Paul was imprisoned in Rome, many in the Praetorian guard became Christians (cf. Phil. 1:13). As a result, Christians soon came to fill the Roman "fortresses," military "camps," and army "companies" (see evidence provided by Tertullian in Apology 37; c. a.d. 200), and the first persecutions of the church arose because of the high number of Christians serving in the Roman army. While some early Christians opposed military service (cf. Tertullian and Origen), the majority tradition of the church has never considered military service to be inconsistent with biblical standards.

Over time, the just war ethic has developed a common set of criteria that can be used to decide if going to war in a specific situation is right. These include the following: (1) *just cause* (is the reason for going to war a morally right cause, such as defense of a nation? cf. Rev. 19:11); (2) *competent authority* (has the war been declared not simply by a renegade band within a nation but by a recognized, competent authority within the nation? cf. Rom. 13:1); (3) *comparative justice* (it should be clear that the actions of the enemy are morally wrong, and the motives and actions of one's own nation in going to war are, in comparison, morally right; cf. Rom. 13:3); (4) *right intention* (is the purpose of going to war to protect justice and righteousness rather than simply to rob and pillage and destroy another nation? cf. Prov. 21:2); (5) *last resort* (have all other reasonable means of resolving the conflict been exhausted? cf. Matt. 5:9; Rom. 12:18); (6) *probability of success* (is there a reasonable expectation that the war can be won? cf. Luke 14:31); (7) *proportionality of projected results* (will the good results that come from a victory in a war be significantly greater than the harm and loss that will inevitably come with pursuing the war? cf. Rom. 12:21 with 13:4); and (8) *right spirit* (is the war undertaken with great reluctance and sorrow at the harm that will come rather than simply with a "delight in war," as in Ps. 68:30?).

In addition to these criteria for deciding whether a specific war is "just," advocates of just war theory have also developed some moral restrictions on how a just war should be fought. These include the following: (1) *proportionality in the use of force* (no greater destruction should be caused than is needed to win the war; cf. Deut. 20:10–12); (2) *discrimination between combatants and noncombatants* (insofar as it is feasible in the successful pursuit of a war, is adequate care being taken to prevent harm to noncombatants? cf. Deut. 20:13–14, 19–20); (3) *avoidance of evil means* (will captured or defeated enemies be treated with justice and compassion, and are one's own soldiers being treated justly in captivity? cf. Ps. 34:14); and (4) *good faith* (is there a genuine desire for restoration of peace and eventually living in harmony with the attacking nation? cf. Matt. 5:43–44; Rom. 12:18).

If a war is just, it should not be viewed as morally wrong but still necessary, nor as morally neutral, but as something that is morally right, carried out (with sorrow and regret) in obedience to responsibilities given by God (Rom. 13:4). Those who serve in a just war should understand that such service is not sinful in God's sight but that they do this as "God's servant for your good" (Rom. 13:4; cf. Luke 3:14; John 15:13; also Num. 32:6, 20–23; Ps. 144:1).

Most nations throughout history, and most Christians in every age, have held that fighting in combat is a responsibility that should fall only to men, and that it is contrary to the very idea of womanhood, and shameful for a nation, to have women risk their lives as combatants in a war. The assumption that only men and not women will fight in battle is also a frequent pattern in the historical narratives and is affirmed by leaders and prophets in the OT (see Num. 1:2–3; Deut. 3:18–19; 20:7–8; 24:5; Josh. 1:14;

23:10; Judg. 4:8–10; 9:54; 1 Sam. 4:9; Neh. 4:13–14; Jer. 50:37; Nah. 3:13).

Pacifism

Since the time of Tertullian and Origen (2nd–3rd centuries a.d.), some Christians have advocated pacifism, the idea that participating in war is always wrong, or is always wrong at least for Christians. Arguments used to support pacifism are: (1) Jesus taught us to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39); (2) Jesus taught us that "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39); (3) Jesus refused to use the power of the sword to advance his kingdom (Matt. 26:52–53); (4) the use of military force shows lack of trust in God; and (5) violence always begets more violence and does not really solve the underlying problems.

Those who differ with pacifism respond to each of those arguments as follows: (1) Jesus' teaching on turning the other cheek was intended as a guide for individual conduct, not for the conduct of governments or soldiers or police in the service of governments (see note on Matt. 5:39). (2) The command to love one's neighbor is consistent with going to war to protect one's neighbor from an aggressor, as is evident from the fact that the OT commanded love for one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18) as well as directions for the conduct of war (Deuteronomy 20). It is also evident from the example of David, who loved his son Absalom but sent the army against him when Absalom sought to usurp the throne (2 Sam. 18:1–33). (3) It is never right to use military force to advance the gospel message, or compel adherence to Christianity, but that is different from the responsibility of government to protect its citizens. (4) The believer's trust in God must be defined by what Scripture says, including its teachings on God's appointment of civil government to use force to protect its citizens. Therefore one should trust God to work through the power of the sword exercised by government. (5) It is simply not true that wars never solve problems: war was necessary to defeat slavery in the nineteenth century in the United States and to defeat Hitler in World War II, as well as to defeat other tyrants throughout history. In addition, non-pacifist Christians also note (6) that although Jesus stopped Peter from using a sword to resist arrest on his way to the cross (Matt. 26:52), he did not consider it inconsistent with directions given hours earlier that same evening when he instructed his disciples to carry weapons for self-defense (Luke 22:35–36; see note); and if using deadly force is justified as required under individual circumstances, there can be no objection to using deadly force as required under civil community circumstances.

Lying and Telling the Truth

The God of the Bible is the God of truth, beauty, and goodness. As seen in the Ten Commandments ("You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," Ex. 20:16), God expects his people to adhere to his standard of truth. But is it ever permissible to tell a lie?

Telling the truth and the permissibility of lying have been perennial issues of concern for both Christian ethicists and for the individual Christian facing an ethical dilemma. For instance, if a killer inquires about the whereabouts of his next potential victim, is a Christian permitted to lie in order to protect the innocent? Is it acceptable to lie in order to achieve great good? May a Christian falsify documents in order to smuggle Bibles into a "closed" country?

The Sanctity of Truth and the Condemnation of Lying

The Bible clearly emphasizes the sanctity of truth. God "never lies" (Titus 1:2) and his people are to imitate him by being people "of the truth" (John 18:37). Jesus described himself as "the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Moreover, Jesus promises that "the truth will set you free" from the bondage of sin (John 8:32). Finally, one of the evidences of human depravity is that people "exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (Rom. 1:25).

By contrast, lying is condemned in Scripture: "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 12:22). The devil "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Paul tells Christians, "Do not lie to one another" (Col. 3:9). He also commands, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor" (Eph. 4:25) and says that believers should be "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). At the final judgment, those who are thrown in the lake of fire include "all liars" (Rev. 21:8). Telling the truth, therefore, is to characterize followers of Christ.

Does Scripture Sometimes Approve of Lying?

At the same time, however, Scripture records incidents that seem to approve certain examples of telling a lie. For instance, in Exodus 1, the midwives disobeyed the pharaoh's command to kill the male Hebrew children ("the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live," v. 17). When asked why they did not kill the male babies, they said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them" (v. 20). In other words, the midwives claimed that the births happened so quickly that they could not get to the mothers in time to make it appear that there had been a stillbirth. This was at best a half-truth (applying in only some cases), and the explanation that they "let the male children live" (v. 17) suggests that they were lying to the king. But at the beginning and end of the narrative, it says that "the midwives feared God" (vv. 17, 21).

Another example is the case of Rahab the prostitute, who hid two Hebrew spies (Joshua 2). When Joshua sent two men to evaluate the situation in Jericho, Rahab took them to her rooftop, where she hid them under stalks of flax (v. 6). When a messenger from the king insisted that Rahab turn the men over to the authorities, she replied, "True, the men came to me, but I do not know where they were from. And when the gate was about to be closed at dark, the men went out. I do not know where the men went" (vv. 4–5). Despite her lies, Rahab is commended in the so-called "hall of faith" in Hebrews 11:31 "because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies."

On the other hand, some interpreters argue that in neither case were the lies to be considered morally praiseworthy. Their lifesaving acts had a good motivation (to save lives) and good results, but those should be distinguished from the wrongful means that they chose to employ (i.e., telling a lie). In addition, some would argue that since Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute (Josh. 2:1), there is no indication that she had any knowledge of God's moral instructions to Israel. This makes it doubtful that every aspect of her conduct is intended to be read as an example for believers to imitate.

Is Lying Ever Permissible?

Several notable Christian theologians, including Augustine (a.d. 354–430), John Wesley (1703–1791), and John Murray (1898–1975), have taught that deliberate lying is never permissible. For instance, Augustine argued in his essay On Lying that telling a lie had the effect of eroding confidence in the truth and therefore weakened the Christian faith. Like every good theologian, he first defined his terms. A joke, even if involving factual falsehoods, is not a lie because everyone knows from the tone of the voice or the mood of the person telling it that it is meant to be taken not literally but humorously. Lying, strictly speaking, is seriously affirming as true something that one knows to be false. Augustine stated explicitly that one should never lie, even to prevent rape or to save a life. Lying, he argued, would ultimately undermine the gospel by destroying all certainty that one is telling the truth. If one cannot be trusted to speak truthfully about some things, how could one be believed when it comes to matters as important as the resurrection of Christ? Besides, Augustine observed, lying is a web that entangles a person. One lie requires another lie to cover it up, which requires yet another lie, and so on.

Others, such as Martin Luther (1483–1546) and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), have argued that, while Christians should be known for their commitment to the sanctity of truth, there are exceptions to the rule against lying. Present-day ethicists who identify themselves as hierarchialists maintain that Scripture teaches that some moral principles take precedence over others. Lying may be appropriate in cases where telling the truth conflicts with obeying a higher commandment of God. For instance, one may lie in order to save a life. This hierarchialist view does not represent a cavalier attitude toward lying but holds that one is sometimes faced with conflicting moral absolutes, and it takes this situation seriously and tries to find the solution that more fully expresses God's ideals and priorities. Thus, someone who tries to smuggle Bibles into another country probably believes that the Great Commission takes precedence over atheistic law (as in Acts 5:29, where the apostles said, "We must obey God rather than men").

While some hierarchialists hold that breaking a lower moral command to obey a higher one is what God requires, and is therefore not sinful, others hold that breaking any of God's commands is always sinful even though sometimes it is morally necessary. Against this position, it is argued that such a view cannot be reconciled with the life of Christ. If one is ever tempted with a situation in which all of his choices require him to disobey something in God's Word, and so commit sin, then Jesus must have been faced with a situation like that too, because he is the "one who in every respect has been tempted as we are" (Heb. 4:15). However, that would mean that Jesus actually disobeyed a moral command of God, and if disobeying any of God's moral laws is sin, then that contradicts the final phrase of verse 15 that says Jesus "in every respect has been tempted as we are, *yet without sin*." Therefore the life of Christ encourages believers to think that they will never face a situation in which they are forced to disobey one of God's commands in order to obey another one.

German theologian Helmut Thielicke (1908–1986) maintained that an individual or group may forfeit its right to be told the truth. In those cases, some would argue, truth telling is not obligatory. An example would be the deception and concealment involved in military contexts. In war, the "tacit agreement" of truthfulness has been made null and void. No one expects the enemy to speak truthfully about military strategy, prowess, or power. As a result, says Thielicke, the situation involves "mutual mistrust." These are the rules of the game, as it were. Lying is not wrong in these cases because the parties involved are not committed to mutual trust. Another example might be when someone intends to use truth as a weapon against an innocent individual. If, e.g., someone is holding innocent people

hostage at gunpoint, some would argue that the police are not obligated to tell the truth when negotiating with the hostage-taker. By harming others, the criminal has forfeited his claim to the truth.

In response, those who hold that it is always wrong to lie would say that there will always be another solution, often involving various ways of hiding facts but not lying (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13). They would argue that the obligation to speak truthfully is not annulled by the debased moral condition of those to whom one speaks, but is based on an obligation to always reflect the character of God (cf. Matt. 5:48; Eph. 5:1; Col. 3:9–10). And God himself "never lies" (Titus 1:2; cf. Heb. 6:18), not even to sinful unbelievers. Therefore God's people should not do so either.

Is It Permissible to Conceal Truth in Order to Mislead?

What about *actions* intended to conceal truth or to mislead others? While such actions are related to the issue of lying, they are still a distinct issue, and individual examples are more complex because the meaning of an action is often ambiguous. In addition, an examination of particular cases in the Bible reveals some instances where misleading actions are wrong (cf. 1 Sam. 14:2–6; 28:8; 1 Kings 22:30; Prov. 13:7b; 2 Cor. 11:15) and other situations where they seem to be right (cf. Josh. 8:1–21; 1 Sam. 16:1–3; 19:11–13; 21:13–15; Ps. 34:1; Prov. 13:7a; Matt. 6:17–18). In any case, careful thought about lying requires treating such actions as a distinct category.

Finally, whether or not one believes that God ever approves of false statements, there are surely conditions under which it is appropriate to tell someone less than one knows or believes. For example, candor—being totally frank, or saying exactly what is on one's mind—must be used judiciously. Charity should temper how one responds to another person. To say to the pastor bluntly, "Your sermon was terrible," would not be edifying, but destructive. Speaking the truth in love requires discernment and restraint. Tact is a Christian virtue. In any case, the obligation never to speak a falsehood does not imply that one has an obligation to tell everything that one knows. There are many times when silence is appropriate (cf. Matt. 26:63).

Charitable Truthfulness

In sum, followers of Christ are to live lives characterized by charitable truthfulness. Failure to speak the truth in love to, or about, one's neighbor should be resisted. Lying is a sin of which one should repent. Even those ethicists who argue that there may be rare occasions when it is appropriate to lie agree that the temptation to lie to protect one's ego or status is so great, that few in practice are able to limit their lying to appropriate cases. In an age in which "everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak" (Ps. 12:2), Christians should, by contrast, be known as those who speak the truth and whose words can always be trusted.

Racial Discrimination

The Unity of the Human Race: Evidence from Scripture

Racial discrimination has a long and sad history, but the Bible consistently views it as contrary to God's

moral will. The entire human race has descended from Adam and Eve (Gen. 1:26–28), and Eve is "the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20), that is, of all living human beings. This means that all human beings share equally in the exalted status of being made "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27). Furthermore, Paul says in Acts 17:26 that God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place." The biblical record clearly indicates there is only one fundamental race of human beings, all descended from a single set of parents.

The Unity of the Human Race: Evidence from Genetic Science

Recent genetic studies from the Human Genome Project give interesting confirmation to the very large degree of genetic similarity shared by all human beings and the extremely small degree of genetic dissimilarity distinguishing one people group from another. The best of contemporary science shows that the human genome sequence is almost exactly the same (99.9%) in all people. In fact,

> DNA studies do not indicate that separate classifiable subspecies (races) exist within modern humans. While different genes for physical traits such as skin and hair color can be identified between individuals, no consistent patterns of genes across the human genome exist to distinguish one race from another. There also is no genetic basis for divisions of human ethnicity. People who have lived in the same geographic region for many generations may have some alleles [possible forms in which a gene for a specific trait can occur] in common, but no allele will be found in all members of one population and in no members of any other.

Why then do people with different racial characteristics originate from different regions of the world? The human race, starting with Adam and Eve, has always included not only genetic variations of eye color, height, and facial appearance, but also of skin and hair color now associated with different racial groups. At some early point when people began migrating to various parts of the earth, some variations within the one human gene pool became geographically isolated from other variations, so that people living in what is now northern Europe came to look more like each other and different from people living in what is now Africa, or Asia, or North America.

Another interesting implication of this has to do with genetic inheritance of skin color. Modern genetic studies show that when a lighter-skin person has a child with a darker-skin person, none of their children will have skin darker than that of the darkest parent. This means that if the hereditary transfer of skin color has operated in the same way from the beginning of human history, then the genetic variety in skin color (which is a very tiny difference from the standpoint of human genetics) must have existed from the very beginning. This suggests that Adam and Eve's children (see Gen. 5:4) would have likely had different skin colors, and that Adam and Eve would have likely had different skin colors as well.

Interracial Marriage in the Bible

Given the biblical evidence regarding the unity of the human race, it is not surprising to find that the Bible includes examples of marriages between different ethnicities or "races" that are treated as

perfectly normal and good. For instance, Joseph (who was of Semitic origin, a descendant of Abraham) married Asenath (Gen. 41:50), the daughter of an Egyptian priest (who was African). From this marriage came Ephraim and Manasseh, two of the largest of the 12 tribes of Israel (Gen. 41:51–52). In addition, Moses married a "Cushite" woman, also an African woman from the region of modern Ethiopia and Sudan (Num. 12:1). Indeed, God punished Miriam and Aaron for criticizing this marriage (Num. 12:4–9). In addition, there are non-Jewish ancestors in the line of Jesus the Messiah. Matthew's genealogy mentions that Jesus' ancestry included Rahab, who was a Canaanite (Matt. 1:5), and Ruth, who was a Moabite (Ruth 1:4, 22; 2:2, 6, 21; 4:5, 10; Matt. 1:5).

There was some prohibition of marrying foreigners in the OT (see Deut. 7:3; Ezra 10:11), but as the verses in the previous paragraph show, this did not necessarily prohibit marrying people of a different ethnic group but only prohibited marrying outside of faith in the one true God (see Deut. 7:1–2; Ezra 9:1–2, 11, 14). The NT counterpart to this OT law has nothing to do with race or ethnic identity, but only teaches that believers should not marry unbelievers (cf. 1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14–18).

The Curse of Canaan

Sometimes in the history of the church an invalid and indeed shameful argument has been used to justify racial discrimination. The argument is based on a false interpretation of the curse uttered against Noah's grandson, Canaan: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers" (Gen. 9:25). It is simply not possible to connect this curse of Canaan's descendants with people of dark skin, or with the members of any contemporary portion of the human race. Genesis 10:15–19 shows that the descendants of Canaan actually moved to the region of modern Palestine, where they lived in Sodom and Gomorrah as well as other nearby cities. Therefore, Noah's curse on the descendants of Canaan was fulfilled initially when God, in the day of Abraham, destroyed the cities of the Jordan plain (Gen. 19:24), and then later when Israel, led by Joshua, conquered the land of Canaan and in the process destroyed what remained of the sinful Canaanite tribes (see Deut. 7:1–2). These groups were not connected to the people of Africa.

NT Teaching

Several NT teachings are relevant to the issue of racial prejudice and discrimination. The parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–27) was in part designed to expose the wrong of the ethnic prejudice that existed between Jews and Samaritans (the Samaritans were a mixed race of people—half Jewish, half Gentile). In Matthew 28:19 (cf. Acts 1:8), Jesus told his followers that they should "make disciples of all nations" (i.e., all ethnic groups), and Paul condemned racial discrimination in the church when he said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek … for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Paul also taught that the wonderful "mystery" revealed in God's plan for the church is that "the Gentiles are fellow heirs [with the Jews], members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). He taught that unity among multiple ethnic and racial groups in the church demonstrates in an amazing way "the manifold [Gk. *polypoikilos*, "having many facets, diversified, very many-sided"] wisdom of God" so that it is "made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:10). In other words, when the gospel brings Jews and Gentiles, and by implication people of every ethnic background, together in one church, it gives testimony, even to the

angels and demons in the spiritual realm, of how wonderful God's plan is to unite all different kinds of human beings in one body, the church of Jesus Christ.

It is therefore a terrible tragedy when Christians of any particular racial background exclude people of other racial or ethnic backgrounds from participating in certain local churches. Such thinking is completely contrary to what God intends. In the book of Revelation John's heavenly vision of the glorified church is described as:

> a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9–10).

If this is God's great plan from the beginning of time until the end, then surely the Christian church of today should be a living example of racial harmony, characterized by full inclusion of people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds united in serving Christ and his universal kingdom on earth.

Chapter 2

How to Think about Morality

As people in our contemporary culture wrestle with ethical decisions, they employ a wide variety of methods of moral reasoning. One obvious place to observe this is in the debates over social issues. One of the primary reasons why many of these debates remain unresolved is that often the participants apply different methods of moral reasoning.

Imagine that you are listening to a community panel discussion on the morality of physician-assisted suicide. The participants are (1) an eighty-year-old with terminal cancer and approximately six months to live; (2) the head of the local chapter of the Hemlock Society, an organization that advocates assisted suicide; (3) a physician who specializes as an oncologist, that is, a cancer specialist; (4) a Catholic priest who is an outspoken opponent of euthanasia; (5) an atheistic philosophy professor from the local college; (6) an attorney; and (7) a Protestant minister. Each one will use a different type of moral reasoning in presenting his or her respective position, and each will offer a brief opening statement to define and defend his or her position.

Participant 1: The Eighty-Year-Old with Terminal Cancer (Ethical Egoist)

All this moral discussion of assisted suicide really bothers me. You see, for me it all boils down to the fact that I am the patient, and what I want should be the thing that counts. It's my interests that really matter here, not whether euthanasia violates the Hippocratic Oath or the sixth commandment ("Thou shalt not murder") or the consequences of allowing euthanasia for the general society. I am the patient and the one most directly affected, and that's why it should be my decision. Whatever is in my best interest in terms of physician-assisted suicide should be okay.



Participant 2: The Head of the Local Chapter of Dignity in Dying (Deontologist)

I am in substantial agreement with our first participant, though for a different reason. I too support active euthanasia, or physician-assisted suicide, but from a slightly different perspective. One of the fundamental principles, or rights, that Western societies have affirmed for centuries is the right of individual autonomy and self-determination, that is, the right of people to make private choices concerning their lives without interference from the state. Surely matters of life and death for people are so private that they ought to have the freedom to do as they choose without undue interference from the authorities, as long as no one else is harmed. This is a fundamental right that is based on the principle of respect for persons and individual bodily integrity. I appeal to this fundamental moral principle in order to affirm my support for physician-assisted suicide.

Participant 3: The Physician Who Specializes as an Oncologist (Utilitarian)

In most cases I too support physician-assisted suicide, but for still different reasons than we have heard so far. You see, I hold that it is not principles that determine right and wrong, but the consequences produced by the actions in question. If a particular course of action or decision produces the best set of consequences, then it seems to me that it should be allowed. To put it another way, the action that produces the greatest balance of benefits over harms is the one that is the most moral. So, in the case of assisted suicide, I think that the first two participants have framed the question incorrectly. What is important to determine is whether assisted suicide would produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people. I can see that allowing physician-assisted suicide could produce a lot of good for the people involved. It would relieve the patient of needless suffering, stop the family's anxiety about their loved one's condition, end a needless drain of the family's financial resources, and allow everyone involved to get on with their lives. Now, there may be situations in which assisted suicide may produce more negative than positive consequences. In those cases it should not be allowed. We should be cautious in setting hard-and-fast rules that don't fully consider the consequences.

Participant 4: The Catholic Priest (Deontologist)

I am opposed to all physician-assisted suicide because of a principle that is foundational to our civilization. Even for those without any religious

inclination, the principle "Thou shalt not kill" is still one of the core values on which most civilized people agree. Now I also happen to believe that this principle comes from God, but a person does not have to believe in God to accept the importance of this moral rule. I hold that assisted suicide, especially when it progresses to euthanasia, involves killing an innocent person, and that is something our society should not allow, regardless of the person's desires. Underlying the moral rule "Thou shalt not kill" is the more important principle of respect for the dignity of a person. Now, again, I believe we should respect people because they are made in God's image, but you don't have to believe in God to accept such a basic moral principle. People have an innate tendency toward self-preservation, and that is one of the basic reasons it is immoral to take innocent life. Like my opponent at Dignity in Dying, I too hold a high place for principles, but I differ on how they are applied. For me, the principle of respect for persons does not mean that we should necessarily let them do whatever they want to do. What it does mean is that we should never take innocent life, because life is sacred, and when it shall end is not our prerogative.

Participant 5: The Atheist Philosophy Professor (Emotivist)

I hate to throw a monkey wrench into this whole discussion, but in my view, all of the participants so far are trying to do the impossible. So far each person has attempted to make some kind of determination of what is right or wrong in the case of active euthanasia. I don't think this is possible. They are really using the language of right and wrong to mask their own personal preferences. What I mean is that anytime a person says that something is right or wrong, all they are saying is that they either like or dislike the action or position under consideration. It is obvious that the elderly gentleman and the representative of the Hemlock Society are really saying that they personally approve of assisted suicide. It is equally obvious that the priest is really saying that he personally disapproves. We should be honest and admit that we're only talking about our preferences and that we're simply using moral language to give greater persuasive power to our argument.

Participant 6: The Local Attorney (Relativist)

I wouldn't go quite as far as my professor friend, but I do think he's moving in the right direction. I'm not prepared to say that there is no such thing as genuine right and wrong, but I do think that there is no universal, absolute standard of right and wrong. What is moral depends on the situation and on



what the cultural consensus of right and wrong is at that time. In the case of physician-assisted suicide, if the culture has reached a consensus that it should be allowed, then I see no reason why it shouldn't be. Conversely, if the culture is opposed to the practice, I see no good reason why assisted suicide should be forced on them. I know that in the Netherlands, for example, most believe that assisted suicide and euthanasia are both right, and that should be respected. We could say that it is right for them. But in the state of Utah where so many religious Mormons live, or in the Bible Belt that has so many conservative Christians, the culture will undoubtedly be against assisted suicide, and that should also be respected.

Participant 7: The Protestant Minister (Virtue Theorist)

I'd like to put a slightly different slant on the issue of assisted suicide. I believe that there's more to morality than simply making decisions when a person is faced with a moral quandary. There is more to the moral life than simply doing the right thing and making the correct decision. We cannot neglect the place of an individual's character, or virtue, when we consider ethical questions. In my view, the important questions have still not been asked. For example, what does a person's desire for physician-assisted suicide tell us about that individual's character? What does support for assisted suicide, or opposition to it, say about our society? Does it say that we as a society lack compassion for the suffering terminally ill, as proponents of assisted suicide suggest? Or does it say that we have lost some of our reverence for life and our commitment to care for the dying, as opponents of assisted suicide would suggest? No discussion about the morality of physician-assisted suicide should ignore important questions like these.

Each person on this panel has argued his position using a distinctive method of moral reasoning from a specific ethical system (each participant's method is noted in parentheses above). The positions represented are the main positions adopted by people when applying moral reasoning to the moral issues currently debated in society. As you witness the news media's coverage of various debates over ethical issues, watch for the various methods utilized by those engaged in the debates. If you watch carefully, you will likely detect the regular use of most of the systems discussed in this chapter.

The major types of moral reasoning can be grouped roughly into two primary categories. The first set of these categories are what are called *cognitive* and

noncognitive views of morality. Noncognitive views, such as emotivism, maintain that moral statements do not convey a truth-value—they are only expressions of approval or disapproval. Cognitive views of morality maintain that moral statements do indeed have truth-value. For example, take the moral claim "Truth telling is good." The cognitive views we will examine understand them as follows:

- Utilitarianism—truth telling maximizes the greatest good for the greatest number
- Deontological ethics—truth telling is a moral duty, based on reason, natural law, or God's commands
- Ethical egoism—truth telling maximizes one's self-interest
- Virtue ethics—truth telling is essential for human and societal flourishing

By contrast, the moral subjectivist would hold that "I feel truth telling is good." But the noncognitivist would see the claim that truth telling is good as, "truth telling—yea!"[1] For the noncognitivist, it is simply an expression of emotion about truth telling and doesn't communicate anything about a moral norm. Most of the views we will examine in this chapter are cognitive views because most people believe that moral statements convey something more than simply moral cheerleading for a particular view.

Cognitive views of morality can be grouped into two additional categories—those that view morality as *objective* or those that view it as *subjective*. Objective morality refers to moral statements and obligations that are true *regardless* of how one feels about them, whereas with subjective morality, the truth of the statement and obligation is *determined* by how one feels about them. In subjective views of morality, moral statements and obligations have been reduced to matters of subjective preference or opinion. I will argue that most people hold that at least some of our moral obligations are objective and that few would choose to live in a world in which morality was entirely a matter of personal preference.

Among objective views of morality, there are also two categories. The first includes those who see morality as something that is *created* by human beings. A second group includes those who see morality as something that *transcends* human nature—that is, morality is not a human creation but is *discovered* by human beings through a variety of means (e.g., reason, intuition, or divine revelation). Most of the ethical systems outlined in this chapter are distinctly human creations, such as utilitarianism, egoism, and relativism. But some view morality as something to be discerned, such as many forms of deontological ethics and some forms of virtue

ethics. However, neither deontological nor virtue ethics *necessarily* involve principles and virtues that arise from a transcendent source. The relevant principles/virtues can also be human creations. In fact, even religion-based forms of ethics can be human creations if they see their scripture as a solely human-generated work. So people who view the Bible as nothing more than the reflections of fallible human beings could hold to a moral theory based on the Bible but still see the principles and virtues as human creations.

Any ethical system involves both a personal and intellectual commitment to follow its dictates. Any view of morality commits a person, whether he or she knows it, to a certain worldview. It commits a person to a certain view of *metaphysics*, or the nature of reality, of which moral values are a part, especially for those that claim to have a transcendent source. It also commits a person to a certain view of *epistemology*, or theory of knowledge, because moral responsibility is linked to a person's knowledge of a particular moral system's rules. Questions of epistemology are especially important for moral systems that appeal to a transcendent source of moral authority because how a person discovers moral values is critical to the viability of such a moral system. Supporting a particular moral system also commits one to a certain view of *anthropology*, or view of human nature, because of the connection between one's ethics and a person's ability to live up to that ethical standard.

As I will suggest in chapter 3, Christian ethics is a blend of virtues and principles, and it employs some other types of moral reasoning in order to support the primary role of virtues and principles. It is one thing to use some of the moral theories discussed in this chapter as a supplement, for example, in order to be more persuasive in one's presentation. But it is a very different thing to appeal to any one of these systems (egoism, relativism, utilitarianism, etc.) as the *sole determinant of morality*. Most advocates of these systems intend them to be *the* system for grounding right and wrong.

Subjective and Objective Views of Morality

It is very common today for people to assert that someone's moral views are simply matters of subjective opinion, particularly in private moral matters such as sexual ethics. Moral statements are seen as categorically different from statements that can be empirically verified, such as matters of science. Subjective views see morality as applicable only to whoever holds them. And so for subjective morality, two diametrically opposed moral views can be right at the same time.

To make sure we all understand the difference between objective and subjective views of morality, we can distinguish between objective and subjective statements in general. Objective statements are either true or false *regardless* of how anyone feels about them. By contrast, subjective statements are true or false *depending* on how someone feels about them. We take objective statements as facts and subjective statements as opinions. The following exercise will help make this clear.[2] Which of the following statements are objective, and which are subjective?

1. My newborn baby is the cutest child in the entire city.
2. Abraham Lincoln was the sixteenth president of the United States.
3. Stage plays are more entertaining than movies.
4. Chocolate ice cream tastes better than vanilla.
5. Salads have fewer calories than cheesecake.
6. I (in my 60's) am able to run a sub-four-minute mile.
7. The earth is the center of the solar system.
8. The Los Angeles Dodgers will win the World Series this year.

Those were the easy ones, so let's see how you did. The first is clearly subjective, since it is likely my opinion only and almost certainly not shared by any other parents of newborns in my city. The second is objective, since that is true whether or not we believe it or like it. The third is subjective, simply a matter of opinion. So is the fourth, a matter of personal preference. The fifth is objective and true, since we can verify the calorie count for salad and cheesecake. The sixth is also objective but clearly is false. I have never run a mile under four minutes, and never will. The seventh is also objective. It is a statement that was accepted as true at one time but is now rejected as false. The eighth is also an objective statement, but we won't know if it will be true or false until the end of the baseball season.

Now it gets more complicated. Try these specifically moral statements. Are they objective or subjective statements?

1. Abortion, unless it is necessary to save the mother's life, is immoral.
2. Racial discrimination is morally wrong.
3. Sexual assault is morally acceptable.

What did you decide on (9)? I suspect that if you asked (9) to a group of your peers, you would get either a mixed opinion or the majority would regard it as a subjective statement. However, (9) is actually an objective statement, not simply

a matter of opinion. Someone might object and insist that since there is so much debate over abortion, it can't be a matter of objective truth. It's true that there's considerable debate over the morality of abortion, but that doesn't make that statement a subjective one. It simply means that there is disagreement about whether the statement is true.

So take a statement that should have much less, if any, disagreement. Perhaps (10) is easier to see as an objective statement because there is so little debate about racial discrimination being wrong. In fact, if someone held the view that racial discrimination was morally acceptable, I doubt we would conclude that the person simply has a different opinion on the subject. Rather, I suspect we would consider that person badly mistaken and conclude that they are wrong to hold such a view. Similarly, for (11), if someone held the view that sexual assault was morally appropriate, we would be horrified. I don't think anyone would suggest that the person holding that view simply has a different perspective on the issue; I suspect we would say they are wrong. As my colleague philosopher William Lane Craig put it, "Anyone who believes sexual assault is okay needs a therapist, not an argument!"

In the next section, we will make the case for morality being objective—it's a view known as *moral realism*. But for now, think about how passionately people in our culture argue about moral matters, such as abortion, immigration, protecting the environment, and the death penalty. The way we debate these issues suggests that we don't regard them as matters of subjective opinion. We rarely argue vehemently about subjective matters that are personal preferences only. That would be like arguing about a person's taste in ice cream, not to mention judging someone for their taste. We consider that pointless, if not insulting. By contrast, if morality is objective, we consider moral statements to be statements of fact, not opinion, and therefore things we can know. To return to the above examples, we *know* that racial discrimination is morally wrong, and we *know* that sexual assault is morally wrong. That's what it means to say that we can have moral knowledge and that morality is objective. Of course, we establish and verify moral knowledge differently than scientific knowledge, but that does not make matters of morality any less objective. Nor does moral disagreement make it any less objective; it simply means that for issues where there is passionate disagreement, there is a debate about what the objectively moral position actually is, and as a result one may have to hold his or her moral convictions more tentatively. Simply because someone is sincere in their moral beliefs does not make them right. Someone can be sincerely wrong.

The Case for Objective Morality

We've suggested so far that morality is something that is objective, not subjective. By moral objectivism, we mean that "there are moral truths not of our own making, moral claims that are true independently of what anyone, anywhere, happens to think of them."[3] From within a Christian worldview, which posits God as the ultimate source for morality, objective morality originates from a transcendent source, although there are accounts of objective morality that do not depend on belief in God. In other words, there is such a thing as an objective moral law that can be known and to which human beings are accountable.

Objective morality best accounts for the way we talk about moral matters. We typically use debate, argument, and reasons, sometimes passionately expressed to discuss moral issues, in a way that is entirely different from the way we talk about subjective matters like one's preference for ice cream or vacation spots. Philosopher Russ Shafer-Landau insists, "Were we convinced that there was no truth of the matter, most would see their continued disagreement as pointless; as pointless as, say, entering an intractable debate about whether red or orange was *really* the most beautiful color."[4] If morality is nothing more than an expression of our personal tastes and preferences, it is very difficult to make sense of the way we debate moral issues.

In addition, objective morality best accounts for the way we view *moral reformers* and *moral progress*. Martin Luther King Jr., with his civil rights leadership, called the United States to a moral standard of equality and dignity that he assumed was objective. In his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," he wrote of his appeal to a higher law, which he viewed theologically as the law of God, to which he was calling individuals and social structures to adhere to. He appealed to the conscience of the country with what he considered an objective moral standard of racial equality, which he expected people to accept even if they didn't believe his theological basis. The very idea of moral progress assumes an objective moral standard against which individuals and institutions can be measured, and if morality is nothing more than subjective opinion, then the whole notion of moral reformers makes little sense. All great moral reformers had to appeal to a transcendent, objective, and universal moral law that opposed the existing moral consensus of the culture. That's what Nelson Mandela did in overcoming apartheid in South Africa. That's what William Wilberforce did in leading the fight to abolish slavery in the British empire. That's what Abraham Lincoln appealed to in ending slavery in America. It's difficult to

refer to what they did as moral progress unless there is an objective moral law that can be known.

Closely related to this is that objective morality makes the best sense out of how we commonly view *moral mistakes*.[5] Take, for example, many of the tyrants of the past century, such as Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, or Idi Amin. By our judgment of them, we have concluded that they have made grave moral errors, both in their views and their actions. They have deviated from moral truths that exist objectively. Unless there is such a thing as moral truth that can be known, it is virtually impossible to make a moral assessment on the tyrants of history, which we have obviously done so already.

Objective morality offers the best account for the way we act as victims of injustice. When another person or institution victimizes someone, the victim tends to give up the notion of subjective morality pretty quickly. The person often becomes a rigid absolutist about the moral violation they experienced. When we are victims of injustice, we don't view what we experienced as the other person simply having a different perspective or position. We view ourselves as having been wronged. In fact, the very notion of injustice presumes objective morality, for without such a moral standard, to what could the person who feels wronged appeal?

Objective morality is not undermined by moral diversity in the world or in any given culture. Although the moral issues with the most contentious disagreement are the ones that garner the most news coverage, the reality is that there is a significant amount of moral agreement that is necessary for societies to function properly. In addition, in some of the sciences there are intractable disputes similar to some of the moral issues debated today. Ironically, most in the sciences believe that given enough time and resources, consensus will be reached on matters of scientific debate. But that is not the case for many debated moral issues. What explains that difference? In part, this has to do with the different types of verification appropriate to the disciplines of science and moral philosophy. Science is subject to empirical verification methods, while moral philosophy depends on good reasons, sound argument, and other types of reasoning that is different from empirical data. But as philosopher Russ Shafer-Landau insists, "If scientific disagreements don't undermine the objective status of science, then moral disagreements shouldn't undermine the objective status of morality."[6] Just because some things are the subject of intractable debate, that doesn't mean that they are not objective.

Finally, objective morality best accounts for the kind of moral world in which we live. We live in a world where we experience moral obligations, and judgments

when we fail to live up to them. Many of these moral obligations conflict with self-interest; losses come to those who keep those obligations. Further, if we fail to keep those obligations, we are generally subject to judgment and, at times, shame. And the greater these failures are, the more defective in character that person would be. Yet having those obligations only makes sense if, as philosopher George Mavrodes puts it, "Reality itself is committed to morality in some deep way. It makes sense only if there is moral demand on the world too, and only if reality will in the end satisfy that demand."[7] This suggests not only an objective morality, but that such a moral law originated with a transcendent source. Atheist philosopher J. L. Mackie concludes, "Moral properties constitute so odd a cluster of properties and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events without an all-powerful god to create them."[8]

Evolutionary Origins for Morality

Increasingly it is argued that morality may be objective, but instead of coming from a transcendent source, such as God, morality originates in evolutionary adaptation. That is, morality is simply the product of evolutionary processes that provide adaptive advantages to groups and societies. Philosopher Michael Ruse explains it this way:

> The position of the modern evolutionist . . . is that humans have an awareness of morality . . . because such an awareness is of biological worth. Morality is a biological adaptation no less than are hands and feet and teeth . . . Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, ethics is illusory. I appreciate that when somebody says 'Love thy neighbor as thyself,' they think they are referring above and beyond themselves. . . . Nevertheless, . . . such reference is truly without foundation. Morality is just an aid to survival and reproduction, . . . and any deeper meaning is illusory[9]

The view here is that moral behavior is advantageous to survival, particularly in a group. Traits such as cooperation, respect, civility, and toleration are deemed to make it easier to get along and survive, particularly in large groups. Instead of being "written on [our] hearts" (Rom. 2:15), morality is written on our genes.

However, many widely accepted moral values do not seem to have much adaptive value. Values such as altruism and self-sacrifice, especially the kind of

sacrifice that societies have long held up as heroic, such as giving up one's life for another (that person would actually be a loser in the evolutionary scheme of things), compassion, forgiveness, and unconditional love, can all be seen as putting both individuals and communities at a competitive disadvantage when it comes to survival and reproduction. The people and actions that we often view as the most heroic are the ones that involve the most self-sacrifice, and at times, involve giving up one's life for another. In fact, most of our deeply held moral obligations require setting aside of one's self-interest in order to adhere to moral values that have intrinsic worth, apart from any advantage gained for someone or a community.

Types of Moral Reasoning

Let's return to the panel discussion on physician-assisted suicide that began this chapter. Each participant approached the issue from one of the moral systems in use in the broader culture. The goal for this section is for you to be able to recognize the various types of moral reasoning when you encounter them, so that you can engage not only the moral position being taken but also the way that right and wrong are being determined. You should be able to describe the basis for morality in each system and give several clear examples of that type of reasoning at work.

Let's begin with the one view of morality we will examine that is considered *noncognitive*, emotivism. We will then proceed to normative ethical systems that are cognitive systems, in which the moral claims made by the system are considered to be meaningful statements that actually have truth-value.

Emotivism

Emotivism is a theory about metaethics, specifically, the language of morality. It is not considered a normative system because it does not aim at producing moral norms for governing behavior. The emotivist holds that moral language simply expresses a person's emotions about a subject. Hence, for the emotivist, moral language cannot be true or false. The emotivist considers ethical statements to be emotions masquerading as facts. Emotivism holds that moral statements are not the kinds of things that can be cognitively evaluated for truth-value.[10] It's not a normative ethical system like the others we will consider in this chapter.

Although they may seem alike, there is an essential difference between the moral subjectivist and the emotivist. For the subjectivist, moral judgments are



reports or statements of fact about the feelings and preferences of the person who says them, which can either be verified or falsified. That is, either that person has those feelings/preferences or they do not. For the emotivist, moral judgments are not facts at all, but emotional expressions about an action or person. The subjectivist will say, "Capital punishment is wrong!" This means, "I *feel* that capital punishment is wrong." For the emotivist, the same statement means, "Capital punishment, yuck! Boo!" Emotivism is thus a more sophisticated theory than subjectivism. Both share the idea that moral judgments are not objective statements and that objective moral facts are nonexistent.

A major philosophical development that contributed to emotivism was the rise of *logical positivism*.[11] Logical positivists claimed that only two types of statements that have truth-value are possible: (1) analytical statements, such as definitions, and (2) factual statements that are empirically verifiable. In other words, the only things that can be considered as facts are definitions and statements that can be empirically proven or disproven. According to the logical positivists, moral judgments are more than definitions and are not empirically verifiable; therefore, they cannot be factual statements. All they can be are statements that express and arouse emotion.

Therefore, for the emotivist, moral language has three purposes, the last two of which the emotivist would insist are improper.[12] First, it expresses emotions or feelings. This is the primary use of moral language. Second, it is imperative—that is, it is used to lend authority to a command to someone to do something. Third, it is persuasive; it is used to influence another's actions, primarily by bending another's will to fit one's own. Emotivism does give us something positive, a reminder that moral language is emotionally charged and can be used improperly to manipulate people under the guise of getting them to do the right thing. Unfortunately, because moral language is so emotionally charged, people often dismiss it today as too divisive or incapable of verification.

Critique of Emotivism

Emotivism as a moral theory can be criticized in three primary ways.[13] First, the verification theory of meaning, which is the foundation of logical positivism, has problems. Specifically, it fails its own test of meaning. Emotivism maintains that the only statements capable of having meaning are those that are empirically verifiable, but this underlying principle is itself not empirically verifiable. There is no good reason to limit meaningful statements to those that are verified empirically.



Second, emotivism is actually a theory of the use of moral language, not of its meaning.[14] The emotivist has jumped from a theory of use to a theory of meaning without any justification for that leap.

Third, emotivism cannot adequately account for the place of reason in ethics. Emotivism sets up a false dichotomy, as the following demonstrates:

a. Either there are moral facts like there are scientific facts, or
b. values are nothing more than expressions of our subjective feelings.

But there is another possibility; namely, moral truths are truths of reason, or a moral judgment is true if it is supported by better reasons than the alternatives. From a Christian worldview, we would also say that moral truths are also truths of revelation, both in general revelation in God's created world, and in the special revelation of the Bible. Good reasons often resolve moral disagreements, but for the emotivist, giving good reasons and using manipulation would essentially be the same thing. There is no good reason to assume that moral language is not also factual language, or that moral judgments are just expressions of emotion or preference rather than cognitive statements. It should not be surprising that ethical statements are not empirically verifiable, since right and wrong are not empirically observable qualities. But neither are they simply emotive expressions.

Teleological Ethics

A first category of cognitive ways of thinking about morality is what is called "teleological ethics." This term comes from the Greek word *telos*, which means the end, goal, or result. Teleological ethics determines what is moral by the end that the action achieves. This is a different kind of teleological ethic than we will see toward the end of the chapter when we get to virtue ethics and Aristotle. Aristotle constructed his ethic around the telos of a human being, that is, the end or goal for which human beings were designed, not the telos, or end, of any specific action.

There are two primary types of teleological ethics—utilitarianism and ethical egoism. It is easy to see how utilitarianism is a type of teleological ethics, since an action's morality depends on the outcome. Ethical egoism is also a form of teleological ethics, since it too is outcome based. However, for the ethical egoist, there is only one outcome that matters—how the action under consideration advances one's self-interest.

Jeremy Bentham

Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) was one of the founders of classic utilitarianism, alongside John Stuart Mill. He was trained as a philosopher and a lawyer, though he didn't practice law but was instead involved in legal reform. He wrote voluminously on a variety of subjects, ranging from morality to political philosophy to religion. He put forth his principle of utility as a means of assessing the merit of particular laws, especially those regarding prison reform. His principle of utility involved primary consideration of pain and pleasure, the two "sovereign masters" of nature. His view of happiness involved the maximization of pleasure and minimizing of pain, or achieving the greatest balance of pain over pleasure. In terms of moral theory, any action that produced a greater balance of pleasure over pain was good, sometimes called "hedonistic utilitarianism." His view of general morality was that actions and laws should be crafted to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a teleological system in which the morality of an act is determined by the result. In fact, sometimes utilitarianism and teleological ethics are used interchangeably. Utilitarianism commonly argues that the moral choice is the one that produces the greatest good for the greatest number of people, or the moral choice is the course of action that produces more good consequences than harmful ones. Thus, this type of moral reasoning is also called *consequentialism* because of its overriding emphasis on the consequences of an action.

Utilitarianism has its roots in the philosophies of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–73). Bentham held to what has been called a hedonistic utilitarianism, which maintains that the most moral acts are those that maximize pleasure and minimize pain.[15] Mill moved his approach away from hedonism and toward a more general concept of maximizing the general happiness or the greatest good for the greatest number.[16] A more contemporary expression is that of philosopher Peter Singer, who proposes what he calls "preference utilitarianism," a system that maximizes the preferences of individuals and groups.[17] When it was proposed, utilitarianism was a radical theory, since it divorced morality from divine revelation and from any view of nature. According to utilitarianism, moral behavior no longer required faithfulness to divine ordinances and rigid moral rules.

Utilitarian modes of moral reasoning are widely applied to many of the currently debated moral issues. Most of the public policy in various countries around the world is debated using utilitarian arguments. As was evident from Participant 3 in the euthanasia debate, a good deal of the discussion about assisted suicide is conducted on utilitarian grounds. If, on balance, assisted suicide provides more beneficial consequences for more people, then a utilitarian would consider it to be the most moral choice. Another example of utilitarianism is when a company considers closing plants or laying off workers to maintain their competitive position in the marketplace. While acknowledging that this will produce harm for some, the company sometimes justifies such measures by asserting that it is safeguarding the jobs of the rest of the employees. Keeping the company in business, management argues, will produce greater benefits than harms.

The Appeal of Utilitarianism

The appeal of utilitarianism rests on a number of factors. First, it is a relatively simple theory to apply. All one must do is weigh the anticipated good consequences of an action against its anticipated harmful ones and see if the bottom line produces a greater balance of benefits over harms. If it produces the most benefit, then it is the most moral course of action. Second, it avoids the rigidity of deontology, that is, it keeps morality from being reduced to abstract principles that must be strictly followed, regardless of consequences produced by them. Without question, deontological, principle-based systems can be legalistic and can sacrifice people at the expense of holding to one's principles. Third, it doesn't require special appeal to any religious authority for morality; rather, it claims to appeal to nonmoral criteria for determining the good. This makes it a logical choice in some increasingly secular cultures around the world, in which people are growing more skeptical of religiously based morality. Many people in society view the divorce of morality from religion as a good thing and see utilitarianism as a substitute for divisive moral systems based on religion. Fourth, most people know intuitively that the consequences of one's actions must be taken seriously. No matter how tenaciously one holds to principles, one must take the consequences of one's actions into account to have a fully functioning moral system. Utilitarianism enables one to do just that, since the consequences of an action determine its morality.

Utilitarianism may be divided into two primary schools known as *act utilitarianism* and *rule utilitarianism*. Act utilitarianism uses the consequences of any given course of action to determine its morality. In doing so, the act utilitarian treats each moral decision separately and weighs the consequences of each isolated act.



Rather than depending on a separate calculation of consequences each time one needs to make a moral decision, rule utilitarians have formulated moral rules to guide them in decision-making. The rule utilitarian formulates rules based on the likelihood of certain actions to produce a predictable set of consequences. For example, sexual assault would be an immoral act, not because of any virtue or principle that prohibits it, but because sexual assault, every time it occurs, produces more harmful consequences than beneficial ones. Thus rule utilitarians would insist that there should be a moral rule prohibiting sexual assault. The rule utilitarian could say the same about many other actions, such as truth telling, promise keeping, murder, fraud, and deceit. Thus a rule utilitarian appears very similar to a deontologist, yet they have entirely different foundations for their rules.

Critique of Utilitarianism

Although utilitarianism has appeal, especially in a secular society, it also has shortcomings. The most common charge against utilitarianism is that it cannot protect the rights of minorities, and sometimes it can even justify obvious injustices when the greater good is served. By definition, since utilitarianism seeks the greatest good for the greatest number, minorities of all types tend to fare badly. For example, in the pre–Civil War South, slavery was clearly justifiable from a utilitarian point of view. It provided cheap labor that made the South very prosperous and clearly benefited more people than it harmed. But no one today would justify slavery on any grounds, let alone utilitarian ones. The good consequences that it produced appear not only irrelevant but also callous toward the suffering endured by so many slaves. The reason that slavery was immoral has little to do with the balance of consequences. Rather, it has to do with a universal principle that directs us to safeguard the basic rights and dignity of people, ultimately because they are made in the image of God.

Also, utilitarianism can justify obvious injustices, such as contriving evidence against an innocent person to prevent widespread social unrest that would result in loss of life and substantial property damage. On strictly utilitarian grounds, framing an innocent person is not only justifiable but could even be morally obligatory in order to prevent significant harmful consequences. But most people have a deep intuitive sense that framing the innocent is wrong, regardless of the consequences.

Even if the utilitarian can escape the charge of justifying obvious injustices, this system has other problems. Not only are the consequences of actions difficult to predict and measure, but the notions of benefit and harm are not value neutral. What may benefit or harm one person may not benefit or harm another. It is not entirely accurate to say that the utilitarian uses nonmoral criteria to evaluate the

morality of an action. Here's an important question for the utilitarian: What constitutes a benefit or a harm? For example, why should we conclude that a murder victim has been harmed? What makes that harmful if his or her life is not sacred, possessing intrinsic human dignity? It's true that someone is harmed when murdered, but what makes it harmful is that it violates the principle of the dignity of persons. You could make a similar argument for other actions that produce harm, such as the above example of sexual assault. In many cases, one must appeal to principles to explain what makes a benefit so beneficial or a harm so harmful. In other words, the utilitarian must appeal to principles to determine what constitutes a good or harmful consequence. What makes an outcome harmful or beneficial thus depends on a prior commitment to principles. It seems that the utilitarian must "smuggle in" principles to give substance to the notions of harm and benefit.

Despite these problems with utilitarianism, it is important to take the consequences of actions and decisions seriously, since there may be times when an appeal to principles will not resolve a dilemma. In addition, a consideration of consequences may be a helpful way to articulate reasons that support a position on a specific moral issue to a diverse culture.

John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill (1806–73) was, with Jeremy Bentham, one of the ideological founders of utilitarianism and one of the most influential thinkers of his time. He was trained as a philosopher and economist, and throughout his life he wrote on subjects such as logic, metaphysics, political philosophy, and ethics. His utilitarian ethics had much in common with Bentham's, though it was not identical. He too held to a view of right and wrong that was tied to an action's consequences and sought to take morality out of the realm of religion and its theological grounding. But his view of utility was somewhat broader than Bentham's. Mill distinguished between pleasure and happiness, and further between types of pleasures. For Mill, an action is morally right if it produces a greater balance of good consequences over harmful ones. Like Bentham, he proposed a political philosophy that gave high regard to the individual but also gave attention to the common good. For example, he regarded property rights as important but not absolute. They could be altered if sufficient considerations of the common good warranted. This follows from his view that the good is what provides the greatest balance of good consequences to the greatest number. Both he and Bentham were social reformers who conceived of a



new way to think about morality and social policy. They were called radicals in their day and advocated a political philosophy that was oriented toward autonomy, individual rights, and the good of society as a whole.

Ethical Egoism

A second type of teleological ethical system is ethical egoism, the theory that the morality of an act is determined by one's self-interest. Actions that advance self-interest are moral, and those that do not are not moral. A common misunderstanding is that an ethical egoist is merely being egotistical. The ethical egoist simply uses self-interest to make moral decisions, which does not necessarily mean that the person is narcissistic.

In addition to Participant 1, the eighty-year-old who made the moral decision about assisted suicide based strictly on self-interest, many other contemporary examples illustrate the practice of ethical egoism. For instance, medical doctors frequently make treatment and testing decisions based on their potential exposure to medical malpractice suits. Physicians will sometimes administer tests or treatments that they believe are futile or harmful to their patient because denial of such treatments will put them at significant risk for being sued by the patient or family members. For the physician who is an ethical egoist, the right thing to do is whatever protects him or her from being sued, or whatever is in his or her self-interest, regardless of how it affects the patient.

Another example of ethical egoism is what we commonly call "whistle-blowing." This occurs when an employee's superiors ask the employee to do something that the employee believes is immoral, such as falsifying data, offering bribes, or deceiving customers or regulators. The employee may refuse to fulfill the request and instead may "blow the whistle" on the company, revealing the immoral and, at times, illegal practice that they have been asked to do. In most cases, however, whistle-blowers lose their jobs and are blacklisted from the industry, leaving them unable to support themselves and their families. In short, whistle-blowing often has devastating results for the employee. When deliberating about blowing the whistle, many employees become ethical egoists, using their own self-interest as the determining factor for what they should do.

Appeal to rational self-interest is used in the Bible as a way of motivating people to be obedient to God. For example, the covenant blessings and curses set forth



in Deuteronomy 27–30 promise Israel agricultural prosperity and military peace as consequences of obedience and threaten the opposite should the nation turn to idolatry and disobey God.[18] What is in Israel's *national self-interest* is clearly a motivation for doing the right things. Doing altruistic acts because of the good feelings we receive could be perceived as egoistic. It is one thing to occasionally appeal to rational self-interest as the Bible does, but quite another to claim that egoism is a sufficient ethical system, as do thoroughgoing ethical egoists.

In ethical egoism one's *only* moral duty is to one's own self-interest. This is not to say that a person should avoid actions that help others, since a person's interests and the interests of others can coincide. In addition, one may forego an immediate advantage to ensure long-term interests. Thomas Hobbes, the original ethical egoist, suggested that to prevent the pursuit of self-interest from destroying society, people should voluntarily give up some of their short-term freedom to pursue their interests so that each one's long-term interests might be protected.

Support for Ethical Egoism

The advocates of ethical egoism are defending a view of morality that self-interest is the sole determinant of what is moral. It is not necessarily a justification for hedonism or narcissism but a serious attempt to ground morality in self-interest. The principal arguments offered in support of ethical egoism are as follows:[19]

First, *egoism, not altruism, treats others with dignity.* Egoists see altruism as fundamentally demeaning to the recipient of charity. For egoists, charity treats the beneficiary as a dependent, not as an equal—simply as a hungry mouth to feed. Egoists maintain that people who are mutually pursuing their self-interest treat the other with a dignity that charity cannot. It is often assumed by egoists that individuals pursuing their self-interest exclusively will advance the general welfare. The argument of Adam Smith concerning the "invisible hand" in economics is thus extended to all of life. The general welfare of the community is a beneficial by-product of individuals acting in their self-interest, even though it's not the goal.

Second, *ethical egoism is the only moral system that respects the importance of the individual human life.* This is the argument of the most well-known spokesperson for egoism, the libertarian novelist-philosopher Ayn Rand.[20] Her argument is as follows: Since a person has only one life to live, this life is of supreme importance. By contrast, the ethic of altruism regards the life of the individual as something that one must be ready to sacrifice for the good of others. Egoism, which allows each person to view his own life as having ultimate value, does take the individual human seriously. Critics of egoism maintain that this argument portrays self-interest and

altruism as mutually exclusive opposites.[21] In Rand's view, altruism demands that one's interests have no value, when in reality one's self-interest can be balanced with a concern for others. When the argument is presented in this way, it is easy to see how egoism can have appeal, since the alternative is so unattractive. Very few people would choose a life in which they could never look out for their own interests. Nor would they want to live in a world in which altruism was rare.

Third, *egoism makes the best sense of our widely accepted moral duties.* The egoist accepts that people can genuinely look out for others yet tries to explain it as an outworking of self-interest. For example, doing harm to others is to be avoided so that others will be more inclined not to harm us. Truth telling is in our interest because people will trust us and be truthful with us. Likewise, keeping promises or entering into mutually beneficial arrangements or contracts is in our interest. Critics reply that this is only a general rule, since one might gain from harming another or lying or breaking promises or contracts. In fact, the critic will argue that this tension between moral obligation and self-interest is what constitutes most moral dilemmas.

Questions About Ethical Egoism

Ethical egoism has many critics, who advance a variety of criticisms. First, *egoism has no means to settle conflicts of interest between individuals and groups.* What happens when my self-interest conflicts with yours? All that the egoist can do to resolve the conflict is to reassert his basic premise of self-interest. To think that interests never conflict is naive. Yet this assumption seems to be necessary if ethical egoism is to be a viable system.

Second, *ethical egoism ultimately collapses into anarchy.* For example, Hobbes' system required an absolute monarch (whom he called *Leviathan*, the title of his work that explains this concept) to keep egoism from disintegrating into anarchy. Yet there were no guarantees that the monarch would not also pursue his own self-interest too. It takes great faith to believe that some kind of "invisible hand" mysteriously works all things out.[22] It should also be recognized that Adam Smith held to an *enlightened* self-interest, self-interest regulated by moral traits, such as compassion and justice, as the key to making markets work. Smith is actually an example of egoism requiring resources outside of self-interest for the system to work. To make egoism work, one must assume some sort of internal mechanism to control the pursuit of self-interest. The Bible teaches that depravity drives people toward selfishness, whereas common grace and the image of God counter that drive. For the believer, the resources also include the indwelling Holy Spirit to counteract self-interest run amok.



Third, *ethical egoism is often built on the false premise of psychological egoism,* that is, the notion that individuals are only capable of acting in their self-interest, and that genuine altruism does not exist. You should notice that if psychological egoism is true, then ethical egoism is unnecessary. That is, no one needs a moral system to tell them to act in their self-interest, if human beings are incapable of doing otherwise. The premise of psychological egoism can be questioned for two primary reasons. First, sometimes we simply act spontaneously without any concern for self-interest. For example, people who perform feats of heroism generally do them by instinct, without any thoughts of possible recognition. In addition, in our closest human relationships—namely, friendship, marriage, and parenthood—we often sacrifice our well-being and interests for those we love. The egoist will insist that on the surface your actions only look like altruism. The egoist insists that if you look at the deeper, unconscious motives, you find that your motives are entirely egoistic. At this point, however, egoism becomes an untestable theory. This reveals the deepest flaw of egoism, since the egoist has announced his determination to interpret people's behavior in a way that corresponds to his theory *no matter what they do.* Nothing that anyone could do could count as evidence against the theory. However, the argument could just as easily be turned around by saying that at the deepest, subconscious level, one's motives are altruistic, not egoistic. Further, this argument confuses a motive and a benefit. Just because someone receives a benefit from an altruistic act, it does not follow that it is the motive for doing the act. We would actually hope that people receive good feelings from doing altruistic things, even though that may not be the entire motive.

Fourth, ethical egoism as a sufficient system ignores the fact that the Bible calls people to a balance of self-interest and altruism. We are called to care for the needs of others because they are comparable to our own and because a significant part of being a disciple of Christ is following his altruistic example. Believers are called to be servants, and that invariably involves periodically putting others' needs ahead of our own and, in rare circumstances, can involve laying down one's life for another. It does not, however, obligate believers to neglect their legitimate self-interest. The Bible does not call believers to ignore self-interest in the way that ethical egoists claim it does. The claim that the believer "must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34) refers to denial of one's ownership of oneself, having turned that over to God. It does not mandate that one should not care at all for self-interest. One should remember that at times even Jesus separated from the crowds to seek solitude with his heavenly Father. Hence the Bible seems to suggest that self-interest has a legitimate place, but it needs to be balanced by a compassionate concern for the interests of others.

Thomas Hobbes

Hobbes lived in England for most of his life (1588–1679), absent only during a brief exile in France away from political turmoil in England. He was very interested in and heavily influenced by geometry and mechanistic psychology, and these disciplines played a significant part in the formation of his ethics. He is best known for his shortest work, *Leviathan*, which summarizes a good deal of his ethical and political theory.

His personal ethics are clearly based on the nature and constitution of a human being. He has an atomistic view of human nature in which, parallel with science, man is viewed as a small, isolated, individual machine. The good is defined in terms of the individual and the individual's self-interest. Hobbes assumed that aversions and appetites are constant. For example, he assumed that all people desire peace. This is one of his principal laws of nature. According to Hobbes, since people share desires such as freedom from the fear of death and the enjoyment of prosperity, universal goods must exist, the basis for a universal ethic.

Happiness for Hobbes derives from his notion of desire and the good. Happiness is not the repose of a satisfied mind, as in the classical definition of contemplation. Human beings are always in the process of attaining happiness but cannot finally attain it. Happiness is in the pursuit—that is, in the progress from one desire being satisfied to another. Hobbes called this "a perpetual and restless lust for power that ceaseth only in death" (from *Leviathan*, 1.11.2).

Because of this ever-increasing lust for power, we exist in a state of war, what Hobbes called the *state of nature*, or the war of all against all. His laws of nature are premised on the assumption that there is no security in the state of nature. Thus one is to desire peace so that all other desires can be met.

The laws of nature that exist are all related to furthering one's self-preservation. These laws establish covenant-keeping, liberty, justice, gratitude, modesty, equity, and mercy as the principal virtues. Hobbes called these laws of nature "immutable and eternal" and considered them binding.

Hobbes viewed society as a voluntary association, where free and equal individuals clash to maximize self-interest. The goal of government is to provide order to safeguard one's pursuit of self-interest. He inaugurated the idea of government by consent, but an absolute ruler, which he called Leviathan, was needed to protect man from others.

Deontological Ethics

Deontological systems of ethics are principle-based systems, in which actions are intrinsically right or wrong, dependent on adherence to the relevant moral principles or values. What distinguishes various types of deontological systems is the source of the principles that determine morality. In chapter 3 both the notion of divine commands and natural law will be discussed, and we will see that they are both important components of a Christian ethic. Nevertheless, there are deontological systems that are independent from religious grounding. Most notable of these is what is known as *ethical rationalism*, the moral theory of Immanuel Kant.[23]

Underlying his moral system are three critical assumptions. First, to have a valid moral system, one must have power to constrain people without being deterministic. In other words, reason must have the power to motivate action, but it must also leave one genuinely free not to do one's duty. In contrast to Hume, reason governs the passions, not vice versa.

Second, what is a valid duty in circumstance X is the same for all rational beings. This is his principle of fairness and is foundational to his central concept known as the *categorical imperative*. He does acknowledge relevant differences among people, but the point is that moral obligations do not vary based on the circumstances. Here Kant appears to be anticipating the utilitarians, such as Bentham and Mill, for whom morality depended on the consequences of an action, which depended largely on one's circumstances.

Third, people cannot change their moral obligations or duties merely by changing their desires. Moral imperatives based on desire are what he called hypothetical imperatives. A true moral imperative is what he called categorical, since it is not based on some desire.

Kant's system revolved around the notion of the good will. This is his first proposition on the nature of morality. The good will is seen as being the key to being worthy of happiness. In this notion, he reversed the emphasis of the classical Greek philosophers that virtue would essentially bring one well-being. For Kant, happiness followed if one was morally worthy of possessing it. The good will is capable of acting from motives other than the desire to be well off. It recognizes that one's duty is inherently good apart from any consequences that it produced. Kant reasoned that since one cannot control all the consequences, moral worth cannot depend on things that are beyond the control of the individual making the moral decision. The good will is the will that acts for the sake of duty. One's duty can be contrary to one's inclination but does not have to be. For Kant, being moral is more than acting according to one's inclinations.



Actions are determined either by desire, or by inclination, or by what Kant calls a *maxim*. A maxim is the plan of action where an individual in circumstance X does act A to bring about result R. But the result is not what gives the act worth because one does not control all the results of one's actions. Therefore, the question is raised, "What is it about the maxim that makes the will good?"

The good will is the only unconditional good. The good will is one that acts from duty alone. The value of an act done from duty is not in its consequences. So it must be from its maxim. But what distinguishes the good maxim from the bad? The good maxim must be able to motivate every rational being in the specified circumstance. Thus it must have something that is the "same for all." This is the form of the law, or its ability to be universalized. In other words, all beings can act on the maxim without making it impossible for any to act on it. So, what Kant called the categorical imperative is not based on circumstances.

Within his concept of the good will is the idea of the contradiction of the will. This assumes that if everyone did it, no one would ultimately be able to do it. In his test for universalizability, he asked, "Would it be fair, or could we live with it, if everyone did this?" The categorical imperative is often applied in a bit different way, by asking, "Could we live with the state of affairs if everyone did *not* do the things that Kant suggested to be universal maxims?" For example, if everyone violated the duty to tell the truth, could we live with the kind of society that would inevitably result from this? Kant calls this the principle of universalizability.

To put it another way, he might ask, "Are you ready for your action to be regarded as the equivalent of a law of nature?" Thus we are constrained to do something because we respect the law that can be universalized, and we feel a sense of duty as a result. Duty and inclination are not necessarily opposed, but a moral act is one done out of duty, not simply because one wants to do it. Moral maxims must be categorical, that is, they must be binding and independent of one's desires. This categorical imperative actually has four different formulations, which are listed below:

1. Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.
2. Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature.
3. Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only. From this formulation the fundamental principle of respect for persons is derived. (This is one of the most significant legacies of the ethics of Kant.)

4. Do no action according to any maxim that would be inconsistent with its being universal, and thus act only so that the will through its maxims could regard itself at the same time as universally law-giving. This is what he calls his principle of autonomy. Since we derive the principles from our own rational nature, we are autonomous and self-determined, and thus by our actions we "legislate" morality. Moral constraint is thus possible without individuals losing their genuine freedom of moral choice.

To summarize, no will is morally good because it does what it wants to do. A motive other than the passions must exist: respect for law. Free from determination, the rational will acts on the basis of respect for law. But since not all are purely rational beings, human beings *ought* to act under the constraint of the categorical imperative. The moral purpose of reason is to illuminate us to our "ought," independent of sensation. The highest good for Kant is both happiness and being worthy of it. That is achieved by adherence to duty.

Kant's categorical imperative in particular and his ethical system in general have come under considerable criticism on three primary points. First, Kant appears to have been overly optimistic about the ability of reason to formulate universal absolutes. Kant held that rational persons using their faculties could reason themselves to precisely the same moral rules. This seems to run counter to the degree of moral diversity that exists in the world today. Such diversity cannot be accounted for simply in terms of rationality, which suggests that there are other factors besides reason that contribute to moral norms. Kant is widely considered the apex of modernity with its virtual worship of reason, a project that has been widely regarded to have failed. Despite its other shortcomings, postmodernism has rightly called the supremacy of unaided reason into question, here because the wide variety of moral values and how they are weighted calls into question the adequacy of reason alone to formulate universal principles.[24]

A second line of criticism of Kant comes from the results of the categorical imperative. According to Kant, when properly applied, the categorical imperative provides absolute moral rules, which is the goal. That is, it produces an exceptionless moral system—there are never exceptions to Kantian formulated moral rules. Kant himself suggests that even when confronted with the need to lie in order to protect an innocent person who is about to be killed, one still has an unqualified duty to tell the truth. Yet this seems problematic and illustrates one of the tensions of absolutist deontological moral systems in general—they cannot deal with scenarios when principles conflict. I will discuss this in chapter 3 in connection

with divine command theories of ethics and resolve it by suggesting that there are occasions when principles need to be weighted and ranked. This runs counter to a Kantian deontology, which presumes that there is never a conflict in one's moral duty if properly ascertained. For a deontological system to avoid being excessively rigid and unbending, it makes more sense to hold to *prima facie* (literally, "at first glance") principles that have periodic exceptions to them when they come into conflict with other principles.[25] This is not an absolutist deontological system, nor is it Kant's formulation, but it seems to fit our intuitions about our duty when moral rules conflict.

A final criticism of Kant is that his categorical imperative is only a procedural morality and does not offer any guidance in terms of the content of morality. That is, it is a necessary part of formulating moral rules but not sufficient to tell us what the rules ought to be. One can properly devise consistent absolutes, but the categorical imperative cannot tell us why those absolutes may be considered right or wrong. For example, Kant's procedure can tell us that we ought to have a rule against actions such as deception or adultery, but it can't tell us why specifically those things are wrong.[26] A procedural notion such as the categorical imperative cannot provide much to clarify the material content of morality.

Immanuel Kant

Widely regarded as one of the greatest philosophical minds and contributors to ethics, Kant lived during the height of the Enlightenment (1724–1804). He was raised in Prussia and educated at the University of Königsberg, where he later spent most of his teaching career. He wrote voluminously about metaphysics, logic, epistemology, philosophy of religion, and ethics and enjoyed an outstanding reputation throughout Europe during his lifetime.

Kant devised a principle-based ethic, centered not on a religious system but on reason alone. In doing so, he represents the epitome of Enlightenment ethics. His system was not dependent on divine revelation, either special or natural. Also, it was not based on any particular view of human nature, since nature could be interpreted in many different ways. Insisting that a valid moral system must be independent of empirical observation, his ethics were in part a response to the ethics of David Hume, his contemporary.

Relativism

Ethical relativism became popular as a result of the findings of cultural anthropologists at the turn of the twentieth century, who observed that different cultures have widely varying moral codes and concepts of right and wrong. Its early key advocates include anthropologists, such as William Graham Sumner, Ruth Benedict, and Melville Herskovits, and philosopher John Ladd.[27]

As these scholars studied different cultures, they discovered the lack of a uniform concept of right and wrong. For example, some cultures practice polygamy, while others practice monogamy. Some cultures consider it a moral obligation to give one of their children to an infertile couple. Some cultures, such as certain Eskimo groups, practice euthanasia and infanticide in ways that seem ghastly and immoral to many other cultures. Among the Auca Indians of South America, treachery was considered the highest virtue. In fact, after sharing the Christian message with the Aucas, the missionaries were shocked to learn that the Aucas saw Judas as the hero of the gospel, not Jesus. In colonial India, the indigenous people burned widows following the death of their husbands, which was a widely practiced custom considered to be morally legitimate. What the natives of Polynesia considered as taboo astonished Captain Cook's sailors: despite the fact that the women had much freedom in the area of sexual relations, the natives considered it taboo to eat a meal with someone of the opposite sex. Today, female circumcision, a practice many Westerners refer to as mutilation, is practiced widely in Africa and the Middle East. These illustrations offer only a sample of the ways people have conceived and practiced morality.

In response to these observations, scholars drew new conclusions about the nature of morality. In view of such moral diversity, they suggested that it was impossible to believe in universal moral values that transcend time and culture. Such moral diversity called into question ethical systems that posited absolute, unchanging moral principles that could be universally applied. Rather than being universal, morality was seen as relative to the cultural consensus.

Different Forms of Relativism

Some anthropologists, however, merely pointed out the differences between the moral codes of various cultures. In chapter 1, we called this "descriptive ethics," which is not a normative discipline at all. That is, it is only a descriptive enterprise, and there is no attempt to draw normative ethical principles out of their observations. They looked at the diversity of ethical standards and concluded that different cultures in the world have widely differing standards of right and wrong. But many

other anthropologists espoused a normative form of relativism called *cultural relativism*. This is the primary form of relativism; it molds the culture, determines the values, and sets the moral norms. So the cultural consensus determines morality for that culture. Consequently, there are no objective, universal moral principles that are binding for all cultures and times.

As a result, any practice that is the cultural norm is moral for that culture. Someone from another culture cannot make a judgment on that practice, since there are no norms that transcend culture. For example, since female circumcision is the norm for particular cultures, that makes it moral in those cultures. Someone from outside that culture cannot make a criticism or negative assessment of such a practice, since that person is outside the culture. It is often said: "It's a Middle Eastern thing (or substitute another culture)—you wouldn't understand." And since you couldn't understand, you can't make a judgment on the practice. Cultural relativism is sometimes referred to as *conventionalism*, which maintains that cultural acceptance determines the validity of moral norms. While morality may need cultural acceptance to function properly, it is quite another thing to insist that cultural acceptance *determines* the validity of its values.

A second form of relativism practiced today is *moral subjectivism*, which says that morality is determined by the individual's own tastes and preferences. Expressed in its popular form, ethical subjectivism says, "What's right for me is right, and what's right for you is right," even if the person is referring to two diametrically opposed actions. One could say, "Being faithful to one's spouse is right for some people, but open marriage is right for others." This view of morality is often applied to sexual morality where one's moral code for sexual behavior is considered a private matter and where one can subjectively and individually determine what is right. It's not hard to see how cultural relativism could reduce to subjectivism; as the size of the relevant culture shrinks, it ultimately ends up as a culture of one person—hence subjectivism.

One of the most significant challenges to doing business in other parts of the world comes from cultural relativism. Imagine yourself as a business executive responsible for expanding your firm into international markets. As a result of different ethical standards of doing business, you will be faced with the temptation to offer bribes to high government officials to secure access to the market for your product. Although bribes are considered immoral and illegal in much of the West, your clients in this new market will expect them as a normal part of doing business. What will you do? Will you adhere to what you consider to be a universal standard that does not permit bribery? Or will you adopt the philosophy, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do," and justify offering bribes because that is acceptable in that culture?

Imagine now that you are a project manager for a large construction company that is expanding its business into the developing world, where safety and environmental standards are significantly different than in the United States. By adopting the country's safety standards, your company can save a great deal of money, but it presents safety hazards for some of your employees. Do you build according to higher safety standards, or do you simply follow the less strict codes of the foreign country and increase your company's profits? All kinds of things once considered immoral can now be justified if one becomes a relativist and uses culturally acceptable standards.

David Hume

David Hume was born and raised in Scotland (1711–76) and was not an academic philosopher by profession. He was a historian and wrote a history of Great Britain in addition to his numerous philosophical works. Yet he is known for his philosophy. Among his treatises in philosophy, he attempted a complete philosophical system in *A Treatise of Human Nature*.[28] He wrote about metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, philosophy of religion, political philosophy, and ethics. He was popular in literary circles during his lifetime, although he received much criticism for his philosophical works.

Hume's ethics extend from his overall worldview, which is known as empiricism—that is, the only matters of fact are those discernible by the senses. Thus moral facts and moral sense as perceptible objects do not exist. The rules of morality are not derived by reason. Moral distinctions are independent of reason, and for Hume reason is only the slave of the passions.[29]

In fact, according to Hume, reason is inert when it comes to determining the morality of an action. Hume compared vice and virtue with sounds, colors, heat, and cold. They are not qualities in objects but perceptions in the mind. Morals have to do with sense, not reason. Reason can only determine means to accomplishing ends. Reason only serves the passions, and they are not subject to reason. Reason is also powerless to incite action necessary to actually do the good.

Reducing morality to matters of sentiment is at the heart of Hume's project. The reason his theory is important is that it is widely followed today. Morality is becoming increasingly subjective and is losing its propositional nature as people in our culture insist that judgments of right and wrong are merely individual subjective feelings or opinion.



The Appeal of Relativism

Despite its philosophical shortcomings, ethical relativism does have appeal, particularly to the popular culture. The first appeal of relativism is based on the important idea that morality does not develop in a sociological vacuum. Some of our values are formed either in reaction to or affirmation of the social conditions of the time. Unfortunately, these values can be mistaken for absolute standards when in reality they are little more than cultural biases dressed up in moral language. Slavery during the Civil War era aptly illustrates this. Although it was clearly immoral for human beings to own and mistreat other human beings, many Southerners attempted to justify slavery, sometimes on biblical grounds. Created to supply cheap labor in the agricultural South, slavery was deemed moral, and the right to own slaves was regarded as an absolute right. In reality, slavery was merely a cultural creation that was regarded as an absolute moral right.

A second appeal of relativism comes from the way it is presented. Frequently relativism is presented as though it and its opposite, complete absolutism, are the only two valid alternatives. The absolutist is perceived as rigidly holding to absolute moral principles and does not allow for any exceptions, regardless of the circumstances. This is clearly not an attractive or realistic position to hold. If relativism is presented as the only alternative to this kind of absolutism, it is not difficult to see why people would prefer relativism. One can hold to objective moral principles and not be a complete absolutist, that is, one can be what is called a *prima facie* absolutist. While recognizing the importance of unchanging, objective, moral principles, the *prima facie* absolutist allows for periodic exceptions to general principles. On selected issues, most people who hold to the importance of principles would admit exceptions. For example, many people would agree that in the rare cases when a pregnancy presents imminent danger to a woman's life, it is justifiable to end the pregnancy. Similarly, if someone breaks into my house with a loaded gun and asks where my wife is, I am not obligated to tell him the truth.

A third appeal of relativism comes from the emphasis on cultural diversity that was mentioned above. This trend emphasizes tolerance for the distinctives of other cultures, including its moral values, which are at the core of any culture. In the name of appreciating cultural diversity, one accepts the values of a culture as normative within that culture. Then it becomes more difficult to make value judgments about a culture for fear of creating offense and appearing intolerant. Yet most people realize that limits must be drawn somewhere and that some standards must transcend culture if society is to arbitrate between competing cultural values.

This has deeper philosophical roots in a postmodern view of truth, knowledge, and morality. Postmodernism insists that all knowledge is received through one's cultural lenses. As a result, it is impossible to have an objective view of truth. And since there can be no such thing as objective truth, making any kind of claim for similarly objective and universal moral norms is considered futile by the postmodernists. It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of postmodern thinking on the resurgence of relativism in the culture today. The postmodernist's radical skepticism concerning the reality of truth and knowledge exacts a heavy price when it comes to morality. The postmodernist's conclusion that moral values are simply human conventions that reflect one's cultural lenses and relationships of power renders morality as little more than a subjective enterprise in a futile search for a consensus. At best the postmodernist can embrace cultural relativism in recognition of the social agreement on a particular set of values that is useful only for that social group.

The postmodernist's view of truth, knowledge, and morality has also been vigorously challenged by a variety of critics. Some of the critics are religious thinkers, but many simply recognize the flaws in the postmodern worldview without approaching it from any particular religious perspective. Two primary criticisms have been raised of postmodernism.[30] The first is to insist that just because one sees the world through a particular set of lenses (or biases), it does not mean that he or she is incapable of rationality or objectivity. It may make being rational and objective more difficult, but it does not make it impossible. If bias actually made it impossible to objectively assess reasons and evidence for a view, then we would be left in the odd position of not being able to objectively teach or investigate anything that we believed in. Nor would we be able to teach what we opposed!

A second problem with postmodernism as a worldview is that it is self-refuting. Either the postmodernist thinker presents his or her views as being true and rational, and thereby sensible and worth adopting, which denies the central premises of postmodernism, or the postmodernist advocate does not offer his or her position as true, which does not provide any compelling reasons for accepting it over other worldviews.

Challenges for Relativism

In spite of its appeal and widespread use in the popular culture, relativism has significant philosophical shortcomings. First, in terms of the observations of the cultural anthropologists who developed relativism, the degree of moral diversity is overstated and the degree of moral consensus is understated. A good deal more

moral consensus exists among cultures than was first believed. Anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn has noted the following:

> Every society has some version of the Golden Rule. While some societies say a man may have four wives, no culture says he may simply take any woman he wants. All societies have laws protecting human life, all condemn stealing, all honor courage, and all say that engaging in sexual acts with anyone is not permitted. It's as if many different orchestras are performing the same musical piece but adapting the harmonics to fit their own instruments.[31]

A second criticism of relativism is related to the first. Many of the observations of moral diversity were differences in moral practices. For example, take the historical tradition of some tribes of Eskimos to practice a form of euthanasia. One can argue that the principle being followed is the same as that in the West—that of respect for one's elders. But the way in which that norm is applied is very different, based on their religious view that a person goes to the eternal state in the condition in which he or she dies. Under that view, they would consider allowing a person to die in a hospital, full of tubes and technologies and in a frail, chronically diseased condition, a terrible wrong. It seems clear that diversity in practice does not necessarily equal diversity in underlying values or principles. Much less moral diversity exists at the level of principles than many anthropologists think they have observed. A person who holds to objective moral values can easily account for many, though not all, varieties in practices from the perspective of the underlying principles.

A third challenge to relativism is that cultural relativism as a normative system cannot be drawn from the observations of the cultural relativist. Cultural relativism as a moral system does not follow simply from the empirical data of moral diversity among cultures. Just because different cultures have different moral standards—even if the degree of moral diversity is not overstated—it does not follow that there is no such thing as absolute values that transcend culture.

A fourth challenge to relativism is that it provides no way to arbitrate among competing cultural value claims. This is important as many countries recognize the high degree of cultural diversity in their populations and therefore the inevitable clash of cultures. For example, as the Middle Eastern population of Europe continues to grow, creating cultural enclaves in Western European countries, clashes of cultures are becoming more common, sometimes leading to violence. The archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Church of England, made the controversial suggestion that European countries should accommodate Islamic moral codes and

allow Islamic law to have its place in the law of the various European countries.[32] The relativist can offer very little to resolve these kinds of conflicts since the relativist can neither condemn either group nor umpire their competing claims.

The fifth and most serious charge against relativism is an extension of the fourth. The relativist cannot morally evaluate any clearly oppressive culture or, more specifically, any obvious tyrant. Cultures that relegate women to the status of second-class citizens cannot be evaluated by the relativist, since morality is dependent on the cultural context. Similarly, the relativist cannot pass judgment on someone like Hitler, who oppresses a minority with the permission, if not approval, of the masses, since no moral absolute that transcends culture exists to which the relativist can appeal as a basis for that judgment.

A final objection to relativism is the charge that its central premise, namely that moral absolutes do not exist, is a self-defeating statement, since the premise itself is an absolute. However, the relativist could respond that the premise is only a formal absolute, not a material one—that is, it is a statement that describes the procedure of relativism, not a moral principle that is absolute. While that distinction is correct, the relativist still has a moral absolute that makes the system self-defeating, namely, the absolute of tolerance and respect for the values of other cultures. The relativist could hardly tolerate any culture that had intolerance as one of its central virtues.

Plato

Plato (ca. 426–347 BC) came from a wealthy, aristocratic family that allowed him the luxury of study. His background likely contributed to his somewhat negative appraisal of democracy. He was a close associate of Socrates. Accordingly, Socrates plays a role in most of Plato's writings and a prominent role in some of Plato's writings on ethics. At some time during the 370s he founded the Academy, a place of higher education where he taught through his well-known method of dialogue and questioning. Aristotle was a member of the Academy during the final twenty years of Plato's life.

Most of Plato's writings consist of his "dialogues," which actually bear more resemblance to monologues. He wrote roughly twenty-five of these dialogues, and the most well-known and widely read of these is *The Republic*. In this work he presents much of his ethical theory, although many of the other dialogues contain material that deals with ethics.

The emphasis in Plato's thought is not on rights, moral principles, or consequences but on questions of the soul. His moral philosophy is not concerned with whether certain actions are right or wrong but with whether one is a good person. What we today call "virtue theory" dominated classical ethics, and Plato was the consummate virtue theorist. He and other Greek moral theorists thought that they could know the good person, that is, the right way to live one's life in general. They were more concerned with one's character and virtue than with any action-based theory of ethics. For Plato, life was parallel to a craft or skill—that is, the right way to live life was parallel to a right way to perform a craft or skill.

Virtue Ethics

All the normative theories examined thus far have been *action-oriented* ethical systems. The exception to this is emotivism, which is a theory about moral language rather than a theory that attempts to provide moral direction. Most ethical theories in modern times have focused on doing the right action or making the right decision when confronted by a moral dilemma. Many of the major debates in ethics have revolved around the basis for determining what is the right action, whether consequences or principles provide that basis, and whether the right action is universal or relative.

Virtue theory, which is also called aretaic ethics (from the Greek term *arete*, "virtue"), holds that morality is more than simply doing the right thing. The foundational moral claims made by the virtue theorist concern the moral agent (the person doing the action), not simply the act that the agent performs. Dating back to Plato and Aristotle, the tradition of virtue theory is a long one, including the Epicureans, the Stoics, the New Testament Gospels, and Thomas Aquinas. With the collapse of the medieval worldview during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, one of the unfortunate casualties was Aquinas' emphasis on Aristotelian virtue theory. The current renewal of interest in virtue ethics can be traced back to the moral philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe, in her critique of action based ethics.[33]

Some virtue theorists hold that virtue theory can independently provide an adequate system of ethics. Others hold that virtues and moral rules or principles are interdependent, but exactly how they fit together is a point of debate. In the face of both natural law and divine commands, it is difficult to see how the Christian could not embrace some sort of deontological ethics. But it is equally difficult to see

how the Christian could ignore virtue theory in favor of act-based ethics, given the emphasis in the New Testament on developing the character of Christ, which would seem to precede action. As will be argued in chapter 3, the virtues are logically prior to principles in that the virtues emerge out of God's character, and that moral rules and principles are those that are consistent with the outworking of God's virtue.

Some of the main differences between virtue ethics and act-oriented ethics are an emphasis on being rather than doing, an emphasis on who a person should become more than what a person should do, the importance of following people with exemplary behavior instead of following moral rules, an emphasis on a person's motive in place of action, and a stress on developing character more than simply obeying rules. Virtue theory is an ethic of character, not duty. These emphases are certainly consistent with the biblical emphasis on becoming more like Christ in character. One could also argue that act-oriented systems do not adequately produce moral people, not to mention spiritually mature people. It would seem, at the least, that some component of virtue theory is needed to supplement act-oriented systems. Given the biblical emphasis, it would appear that act-oriented ethics alone give a person an overly narrow view of the moral life.

Aristotle

Aristotle continued in the Platonic tradition of the virtuous person but spelled out the specific virtues and a psychology of moral behavior in much more detail. He spent much of his life (384–322 BC) in the political world because his father was the physician to Amyntas II, King of Macedon. Aristotle assumed leadership in the Academy of Plato after Plato's forced suicide and remained there until 342 BC, when he accepted the invitation to become the personal mentor for Alexander the Great. After this three-year assignment, he established schools in the different areas of Greece in which he resided.

Aristotle wrote voluminously, both on the popular level and the more sophisticated scientific and philosophical level. He wrote on a wide variety of subjects, including logic, physics, psychology, natural history, and philosophy. The core of his philosophical writings included works on metaphysics, ethics, and politics. He considered ethics and political philosophy to be inseparable, and thus his *Politics* is a logical extension of his three works on ethics, namely, the *Nicomachean Ethics* (his most well-developed ethical treatise), the *Eudemian Ethics*, and the *Magna Moralia*.



The Appeal of Virtue Ethics

Advocates of virtue ethics have pointed out some of the shortcomings of act-oriented ethics.[34] First, act-oriented ethics reduce ethics to solving moral dilemmas and difficult cases that most people encounter infrequently. Virtue ethics advocates suggest that this is a minimalist view of morality that pushes ethics to the extremes of life. The real substance of the moral life, the day-to-day decisions that people must make, is diminished. Virtue ethics maintains that until someone develops the requisite virtues, they will likely not experience, or even be aware of, moral dilemmas. Virtue ethicist Edmund Pincoffs puts it this way: "The adult of good moral character must indeed be able to handle difficult situations when they arise and to reason about problems unforeseeable . . . but to reason well, *he must already be an adult of good moral character.* . . . Unless he has these qualities, moral dilemmas will not arise for him."[35] Virtue ethics impacts moral education since it involves more than simply adherence to abstract moral principles and has the inculcation of character at its core. As Pincoffs points out, "Is moral education best understood as teaching children how to make moral decisions? . . . There are no moral problems for the child whose character is yet to be formed."[36]

Second, virtue ethics advocates point out that the moral life involves attitudes and motives as well as actions. It is difficult to say that two people who perform the same right action with opposite attitudes are both equally worthy of praise. Act-oriented ethics focuses on the act and tends to minimize the dispositions and character of the moral agent. Thus act-oriented ethics offers a truncated view of the moral life, particularly for the Christian, who is commanded to develop virtuous character. One of the primary aspects of the moral life emphasized in Scripture is to cultivate good character (Gal. 5:22–23).

Third, act-based systems provide little motivation for doing the right thing.[37] This is especially true of the apex of action-based morality, the system of Kant, which holds that the will should perform its moral duty simply for the sake of duty. According to most virtue ethics advocates, action-oriented ethics are largely negative prohibitions that involve hair-splitting distinctions that do not usually move people to action.

Finally, act-based ethics overemphasize individual autonomy, or the ability of people to arrive at their moral duties by reason or revelation alone.[38] Since virtues are usually developed in some sort of a relationship or community, virtue theory gives proper emphasis to the communal context of ethics.



The Golden Mean

Aristotle's specific virtues derive from his concept of the *mean*. He is perhaps best known for this way of describing the virtues, popularly known as the "golden mean." A virtue is the mean between two extremes of behavior or emotion, usually between the extremes of excess and deficiency. For example, Aristotle describes courage as the mean between rashness (an excess) and cowardice (a deficiency), and temperance as the mean between overindulgence (an excess) and self-denial (a deficiency). Other virtues include liberality, honor, gentleness, friendliness, and truthfulness. The ethic of the mean is an ethic of moderation that produces happiness. The mean is not merely the middle but a mean that is relative to a person's circumstances.

Questions about Virtue Ethics

One of the questions often posed to advocates of virtue ethics is, "what exactly is a virtue?" Virtues are defined as "trained behavioral dispositions that result in habitual acts of moral goodness."[39] That is, the evidence of a person's character comes from the habit of acting in morally good ways, and that it takes training, education, and discipline in virtue in order for it to become habitual. It's important to recognize that the only way virtues are made evident is by a person's actions. Actions do matter, but to take moral acts as the only aspect of morality that matters is a reductive view of the moral life. People are called not only to act in accord with God's moral standard. They are also called to develop the character traits of Jesus. A Christian virtue ethic, with Jesus as the ideal virtuous person, is a critical starting point for a virtue ethic.

For some virtue ethics systems, the question of "What makes a virtue a virtue?" can be difficult to answer. For some systems, it may seem that the virtues are suspended in philosophical midair, without any grounding. It can be challenging for some virtue ethics systems to avoid a certain relativism about what constitute a virtue, since what may be virtuous in some cultures would not be in others. That's not the case for a Christian-based virtue ethic that is based on the character of God, incarnated in the life of Jesus, who is the ideal virtuous person. As exemplified in the life of Jesus, the virtues are both clear and universal, though the application of some virtues might look a bit different in different cultural settings. Thus the life of virtue is not necessarily grounded in the Aristotelian notion of the purpose of a



human person being to utilize reason to achieve happiness. Virtue was considered an essential aspect of the pursuit of happiness and thus necessary for the good life. In a Christian worldview, virtue is equally essential to the good life, which consists of faithfully following Jesus. It is inconceivable that someone could follow Jesus well and not place high importance on emulating his character traits.

The moral life, then, consists of doing the right thing with the right motive and attitudes. It is insufficient to do the right thing for the right reason if the underlying attitude is absent. Virtues are an integral element of the good life and especially of being like Christ. Therefore, a complementary view of virtues and principles, in which both are important, appears to be more consistent with Scripture. The virtues are logically prior to principles, insofar as God's character expresses itself in virtues, and moral rules and principles then are those that are consistent with the outworking of God's virtues.

Virtue ethics sometimes comes under criticism for its apparent inability to make decisions when faced with moral dilemmas. Even if those dilemmas do not occur regularly, any moral system must be able to address them adequately. Virtue ethics approaches moral dilemmas differently than most action-oriented systems. Instead of asking, "what is the right thing to do?" virtue ethics asks, "what does this decision reveal about my character?" For example, if faced with a decision to end an unwanted pregnancy, in addition to the question of the right action, the person would also wrestle with how each alternative—to end the pregnancy, keep the baby, or put the baby up for adoption—reflects his or her character. In the midst of this dilemma, one may find that considerations of character and virtue may be considerably more compelling than the weighing of moral principles, consequences, or self-interest that is characteristic of action-oriented ethical systems. It may also be that consideration of virtue alone may not resolve the dilemma and appealing to principles might be necessary. Further, in a broken, fallen world, it should not be a surprise if virtues conflict on occasion, in the same way that moral dilemmas occur when God's commands conflict or when moral principles conflict. We will look at that issue in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Most of the moral systems described and critiqued in this chapter are widely embraced in contemporary culture. As you encounter public debates on moral issues, observe which methods of moral reasoning those in the debate employ. The shortcomings of these systems illustrate the need for a method of moral reasoning



that is based on general revelation, natural law, or special revelation. The Bible does employ different types of moral reasoning, but nowhere does it suggest that any of the systems mentioned in this chapter are all-sufficient. Blending divine command, natural law, and virtue, the biblical emphasis seems to be a combination of virtue theory and deontological ethics with periodic appeal to egoism and utilitarianism to supplement the primary emphasis on virtues and principles.

Chapter Review

1. Which of the moral theories presented in this chapter are action-oriented theories? Which one is *not* a normative ethical theory?
2. How does virtue theory differ from other action-oriented moral theories?
3. What other philosophical commitments must be made as a result of one's moral theory?
4. Ethical egoism determines right and wrong on what basis? Give some examples of ethical egoism in use in the culture at present.
5. What is the Bible's view of the pursuit of one's self-interest?
6. What are the primary arguments that support ethical egoism? What are some of its shortcomings?
7. What makes ethical egoism an arbitrary system? Do you agree?
8. What does psychological egoism refer to? How is it different from ethical egoism?
9. What does it mean that utilitarianism is a "teleological system"?
10. Who are the philosophers who systematized utilitarianism?
11. How does utilitarianism determine right and wrong? Give some examples of utilitarianism being used in public policy today.
12. Distinguish between act and rule utilitarianism.
13. Summarize some of the shortcomings of utilitarianism.
14. Which philosopher popularized a nonreligious form of deontological ethics?
15. Explain the categorical imperative.
16. What is the principle of universalizability?
17. What is meant by emotivism?
18. For the emotivist, what are moral judgments really about?
19. What are the shortcomings of emotivism?
20. How did the observations of moral diversity contribute to the popularity of relativism?



21. What is the definition of cultural relativism? How is that different from moral subjectivism?
22. How does international business raise the issue of relativism?
23. What is the connection between multiculturalism and relativism?
24. What is a *prima facie* absolutist?
25. What is the appeal of relativism? What are its shortcomings?
26. What is the relationship between virtues and principles? How are the correspondence and complementary views of this different?

For Further Reading

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Should Christians Be Encouraged to Arm Themselves?

Article by John Piper

As chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary, I want to send a different message to our students, and to the readers of Desiring God, than Jerry Falwell, Jr. sent to the students of Liberty University in a campus chapel service on December 4, 2015.

For the sake of the safety of his campus, and in view of terrorist activity, President Falwell encouraged the students to get permits to carry guns. After implying that he had a gun in his back pocket, he said, "I just want to take this opportunity to encourage all of you to get your permit. We offer a free course. And let's teach them a lesson if they ever show up here." He clarified on December 9 that the policy at Liberty now includes permission to carry guns in the dormitories.

Falwell and I exchanged several emails, and he was gracious enough to talk to me on the phone so I could get as much clarity as possible. I want it to be clear that our disagreement is between Christian brothers who are able to express appreciation for each other's ministries person to person.

My main concern in this article is with the appeal to students that stirs them up to have the mindset: *Let's all get guns and teach them a lesson if they come here.* The concern is the forging of a disposition in Christians to use lethal force, not as policemen or soldiers, but as ordinary Christians in relation to harmful adversaries.

The issue is not primarily about when and if a Christian may ever use force in self-defense, or the defense of one's family or friends. There are significant situational ambiguities in the answer to that question. *The issue is about the whole tenor and focus and demeanor and heart-attitude of the Christian life*. Does it accord with the New Testament to encourage the attitude that says, "I have the power to kill you in my pocket, so don't mess with me"? My answer is, No.

Here are nine considerations that lead me to this conclusion.

1. The apostle Paul called Christians not to avenge ourselves, but to leave it to the wrath of God, and instead to return good for evil. And then he said that God gave the sword (the gun) into the hand of governmental rulers to express that wrath in the pursuit of justice in this world.

The movement from Romans 12:17–21, laying out the mindset of the Christian toward his enemies, to Romans 13:1–4, laying out the rights and duties of government, is crucial. God intends to reveal his *justice* in the common grace of police and military (Romans 13:1–4). And he intends to reveal *the supreme worth of his Son and his salvation* in the special grace of a Christian people who have the miraculous power to entrust themselves to his care while suffering unjustly.

> Romans 12:17–21:
>
> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the

> Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
>
> Romans 13:1–4:
>
> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.
>
> "Pray for grace to suffer well and show that your treasure is in heaven, not self-preservation."

To be sure there are ambiguities in the way Christian mercy and civic justice intersect. But neither can be absorbed into the other. Any exaltation, or Christianization, of the sword that silences Romans 12:19–20 has lost its way.

For example, any claim that in a democracy the citizens *are* the government, and therefore may assume the role of the sword-bearing ruler in Romans 13, is elevating political extrapolation over biblical revelation. When Paul says, "[The ruler] does not bear the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4), he does not mean that Christian citizens should all carry swords so the enemy doesn't get any bright ideas.

2. The apostle Peter teaches us that Christians will often find themselves in societies where we should expect and accept unjust mistreatment without retaliation.

Before we fire back our objections and exceptions to this truth, let us do our best to hear and embrace and be transformed in our self-protecting hearts by these texts from 1 Peter.

> This is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. (2:19)
>
> If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. (2:20)
>
> Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless. (3:9)
>
> If you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. (3:14)
>
> It is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. (3:17)
>
> Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (4:13)
>
> If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed. (4:14)
>
> If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

(4:16)

> Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (4:19)

Few messages are more needed among American Christians today than 1 Peter 4:12: "Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you." Fiery trials are not strange. And the trials in view are hostilities from unbelievers, as the next verse shows: "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings" (1 Peter 4:13). These trials are normal. That may not be American experience, but it is biblical truth.

Peter's aim for Christians as "sojourners and exiles" on the earth is not that we put our hope in the self-protecting rights of the second amendment, but in the revelation of Jesus Christ in glory (1 Peter 1:7, 13; 2:11; 4:13; 5:1). His aim is that we suffer well and show that our treasure is in heaven, not in self-preservation.

3. Jesus promised that violent hostility will come; and the whole tenor of his counsel was how to handle it with suffering and testimony, not with armed defense.

> "They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be your opportunity to bear witness. . . . You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives." (Luke 21:12–13, 16–19)

> "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28)

> "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. . . . Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved." (Matthew 10:16–18; 21–22)

What is the moment of life-threatening danger for? Is it for showing how powerful and preemptive we have been? Is it to show our shrewdness — that we have a gun in our back pocket and we can show you something? That is a response learned from Jason Bourne, not Jesus and the Bible. That response appeals to everything earthly in us, and requires no miracle of the new birth. It is as common and as easy as eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Jesus says that the moment of life-threatening danger "will be your opportunity to bear witness" (Luke 21:13). It will be a moment for fearless stepping into heaven (Matthew 10:28). A moment for enduring to the end and being saved (Matthew 10:22).

If we teach our students that they should carry guns, and then challenge them, "Let's teach them a lesson if they ever show up here," do we really think that when the opportunity to lay down their lives comes, they will do

what Jim Elliot and his friends did in Ecuador, and refuse to fire their pistols at their killers, while the spears plunged through their chests?

4. Jesus set the stage for a life of sojourning in this world where we bear witness that this world is not our home, and not our kingdom, by renouncing the establishment or the advancement of our Christian cause with the sword.

> Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world." (John 18:36)
>
> Jesus said to [Peter], "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword." (Matthew 26:52)
>
> "Finding our security in concealed weapons will cause no one to ask a reason for the hope that is in us."

To be sure, there are many ambiguities about being exiles on this earth with our citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20), while at the same time being called to serve in the structures of society (1 Peter 2:13). But no book of the Bible wrestles with this more directly than 1 Peter, and the overwhelming thrust of that book is this: As you suffer patiently and even joyfully for your faith, do so much good that people will ask a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15).

I think I can say with complete confidence that the identification of Christian security with concealed weapons will cause no one to ask a reason for the hope that is in us. They will know perfectly well where our hope is. It's in our pocket.

5. Jesus strikes the note that the dominant (not the only) way Christians will show the supreme value of our treasure in heaven is by being so freed from the love of this world and so satisfied with the hope of glory that we are able to love our enemies and not return evil for evil, even as we expect to be wronged in this world.

> "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matthew 5:38–39)
>
> "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:44–45)
>
> "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:11–12)

The point of Matthew 5:11–12 is that Christians are freed to rejoice in persecution because our hearts have been so changed that we are more satisfied in the hope of heaven than in the hope of self-defense. This is the root of

turning the other cheek and loving the enemy. The steadfast love of the Lord is better than life (Psalm 63:3). Or as Paul put it, "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:7–8).

Jesus struck the note that the way his disciples demonstrate most forcefully the supreme value of knowing him is by "letting goods and kindred go, this mortal life also," and calling it "gain" (Philippians 1:21).

6. The early church, as we see her in Acts, expected and endured persecution without armed resistance, but rather with joyful suffering, prayer, and the word of God.

> "Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:29–31)
>
> When they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. (Acts 5:40–41)
>
> Saul approved of his [Stephen's] execution. And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. (Acts 8:1–3; see Acts 9:1–2; 12:1–5)

In all the dangers Paul faced in the book of Acts, there is not a hint that he ever planned to carry or use a weapon for his defense against his adversaries. He was willing to appeal to the authorities in Philippi (Acts 16:37) and Jerusalem (Acts 22:25). But he never used a weapon to defend himself against persecution.

7. When Jesus told the apostles to buy a sword, he was not telling them to use it to escape the very thing he promised they should endure to the death.

> [Jesus] said to them, "When I sent you out with no moneybag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?" They said, "Nothing." He said to them, "But now let the one who has a moneybag take it, and likewise a knapsack. And let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors.' For what is written about me has its fulfillment." And they said, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." And he said to them, "It is enough [that's plenty]." (Luke 22:35–38)

I do not think that Jesus meant in verse 36 that his disciples were to henceforth be an armed band of preachers ready to use violence to defend themselves from persecution. Jerry Falwell, Jr. said in his clarifying remarks on December 9,

> It just boggles my mind that anybody would be against what Jesus told his disciples in Luke 22:36. He told them if they had to sell their coat to buy a sword to do it because he knew danger was coming, and he wanted them to defend themselves.

> "Be satisfied in the sure hope of heaven, not the shaky hope of self-defense."

If that is the correct interpretation of this text, my question is, "Why did none of his disciples in the New Testament ever do that — or commend that?" The probable answer is that Jesus did not mean for them to think in terms of armed defense for the rest of their ministry. Jesus's abrupt words, at the end of the paragraph, when the disciples produced two swords, were not, "Well, you need to get nine more." He said, "It is enough!" or "That's plenty!" This may well signify that the disciples have given a mistaken literal meaning to a figurative intention. Darrell Bock concludes,

> Two events [are] commentary on this verse [36]: Jesus' rebuke of the use of a sword against the high priest's servant (22:49–51) and the church's nonviolent response to persecution in the Book of Acts (4:25–31; 8:1–3; 9:1–2; 12:1–5). In fact, Acts 4:25–31 shows the church armed only with prayer and faith in God. Luke 22:36 sees the sword as only a symbol of preparation for pressure, since Jesus' rebuke of a literal interpretation (22:38) shows that a symbol is meant (Fitzmyer 1985: 1432; Marshall 1978: 825). It points to readiness and self-sufficiency, not revenge (Nolland 1993b: 1076). (*Luke*, volume 2, page 1,747)

What seems plain to me is that the uncertainty of this text (which I share) should not be used to silence the others I have cited.

8. A natural instinct is to boil this issue down to the question, "Can I shoot my wife's assailant?"

My answer is sevenfold.

1) This instinct is understandable. But it seems to me that the New Testament resists this kind of ethical reduction, and does not satisfy our demand for a yes or no on that question. We don't like this kind of ambiguity, but I can't escape it. There is, as I have tried to show, a pervasive thrust in the New Testament pushing us toward blessing and doing good to those who hate, curse, and abuse us (Luke 6:27–28). And there is no direct dealing with the situation of using lethal force to save family and friend, except in regards to police and military. This is remarkable when you think about it, since I cannot help but think this precise situation presented itself, since we read that Saul drug men and women bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1–2).

2) Our primary aim in life is to show that Christ is more precious than life. So when presented with this threat to my wife or daughter or friend, my heart should incline toward doing good in a way that would accomplish this great aim. There are hundreds of variables in every crisis that might affect how that happens.

3) Jesus died to keep that assailant from sinning against my family. That is, Jesus's personal strategy for overcoming crimes was to overcome sinful inclinations by giving his life to pay debts and change hearts. It is no small thing that Peter based non-retaliatory suffering from unjust treatment on the atoning work of Christ as exemplary: "To this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

4) I realize that even to call the police when threatened — which, in general, it seems right to do in view of Romans 13:1–4 — may come from a heart that is out of step with the mind of Christ. If one's heart is controlled mainly by fear, or anger, or revenge, that sinful disposition may be expressed by using the police as well as taking up arms yourself.

5) I live in the inner city of Minneapolis, and I would personally counsel a Christian not to have a firearm

available for such circumstances.

6) I do not know what I would do before this situation presents itself with all its innumerable variations of factors. And I would be very slow to condemn a person who chose differently from me.

7) Back to the first point, it seems to me that the New Testament does not aim to make this clear for us. Its aim is a radically transformed heart that lives with its treasure in another world, longs to show Jesus to be more satisfying than life, trusts in the help of God in every situation, and desires the salvation of our enemies.

9. Even though the Lord ordains for us to use ordinary means of providing for life (work to earn; plant and harvest; take food, drink, sleep, and medicine; save for future needs; provide governments with police and military forces for society), nevertheless, the unique calling of the church is to live in such reliance on heavenly protection and heavenly reward that the world will ask about our *hope* (1 Peter 3:15), not about the ingenuity of our armed defenses.

> God is our refuge and strength. (Psalm 46:1)
>
> My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)
>
> "You will be hated by all for my name's sake. But not a hair of your head will perish." (Luke 21:17–18)
>
> "Our primary aim in life is to show that Christ is more precious than life."

Once more let me say that God ordains the use of the sword by the state in upholding justice (1 Peter 2:13–17; Romans 13:1–4). Therefore, this article is not a position paper on governmental policy regarding ISIS. Nor is it about the policies of how police should be enlisted to protect private institutions.

This article is about the people whom the Bible calls "refugees and exiles" on earth; namely, Christians. It's about the fact that our weapons are not material, but spiritual (2 Corinthians 10:4). It is an argument that the overwhelming focus and thrust of the New Testament is that Christians are sent into the world — religious and nonreligious — "as lambs in the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3). And that exhorting the lambs to carry concealed weapons with which to shoot the wolves does not advance the countercultural, self-sacrificing, soul-saving cause of Christ.

John Piper, Guns, and Civic Responsibility

A few weeks ago, Jerry Falwell Jr. made headlines by encouraging the students of Liberty University to acquire permits to carry guns on campus so that they could, if necessary, "end those Muslims before they walked in." This rather artless way of expressing himself led to immediate worries about religious hostility and even possible genocide, though Mr. Falwell later clarified (and the original context made clear) that he meant that students could kill Islamic terrorists in the event that attacks were made on the campus. This qualification is very important, though many Christians were still significantly, and perhaps understandably, bothered by the idea of college students carrying weapons on campus. Addressing complicated problems of security in locales populated by individuals of mixed maturity and ability will always be difficult. Yet even beneath these considerations, it seems the most basic question on many Christians' minds is whether a believer has the right to use deadly force in the event of a life-threatening emergency. This is the question that is most-popularly asked among amateur political commentators, and it has an immense popular resonance. We also see its importance and relevance because it is the aspect of the question that John Piper chose to address yesterday. In doing so, he highlighted a number of basic areas of confusion which seem to persistently afflict American Evangelicals.

Before going into my own critique, I should state that I am much more sympathetic towards Pastor Piper's larger theological outlook than I am Mr. Falwell's. In general, I do not enjoy the idea of siding with Falwell over Piper. Even on this question of the use of force, I must confess to finding Pr. Piper's tone and cautious manner of self-expression appealing. It was with eager anticipation that I read Pr. Piper's article, and I was very hopeful that he would offer a strong corrective to Mr. Falwell's rhetoric. As I began reading the article I was encouraged, but I was unable to finish it without running aground of serious confusions and grave errors. I believe that these are both theological and pastoral, making a seriously damaging combination that will not only fail to correct Mr. Falwell, but will simultaneously strengthen his error among most Evangelicals while creating an opposite error to reckon with as well.

John Piper's Concern

We must be careful in framing this interaction with Pr. Piper. Most of his essay is commendable, and he claims at the beginning to limit his argument to the larger disposition of the Christian, specifically his feelings about violence. Pr. Piper says,

> My main concern in this article is with the appeal to students that stirs them up to have the mindset: Let's all get guns and teach them a lesson if they come here. The concern is the forging of a disposition in Christians to use lethal force, not as policemen or soldiers, but as ordinary Christians in relation to harmful adversaries.
>
> The issue is not primarily about when and if a Christian may ever use force in self-defense, or the defense of one's family or friends. There are significant situational ambiguities in the answer to that question. The issue is about the whole tenor and focus and demeanor and heart-attitude of the Christian life. Does it accord with the New Testament to encourage the attitude that says, "I have the power to kill you in my pocket, so don't mess with me"? My answer is, No.

This is a good way to approach the issue and a very important one for the average pastor to be able to consider. An eagerness to shed blood is anti-biblical and a real temptation in our contemporary culture. But Pr. Piper's

declaration that he is not "primarily" interested in self-defense falls flat when he goes on to directly address self-defense and tie it in to a larger theological framework of sacrifice and exile.

It should be acknowledged that Pr. Piper is not attempting to bind the conscience: he admits that some of his views are tentative and uncertain, and he allows for other good men to disagree with him. Still, he maintains that he would positively counsel *against* gun ownership, and his entire argument rests upon the fact that his prudence is informed by his understanding of the work of Christ. Thus, speaking as a respected pastor and theologian, Piper's personal advice has moral weight, and it can reasonably help or hurt those who take it. It is also set forth as a ramification of the proper understanding of the atonement, and so it intentionally grounds itself in a basic element of the faith.

The matter of self-defense is most prominent in Piper's 8th point, in which he fields the hypothetical of a home invasion; but he weaves in the rejection of self-defense into points 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 9. So self-defense is not a mere side note at all, but rather a test case by which the larger edifice stands or falls. By the time of the most shocking statements in point 8, the reader feels compelled to accept the extreme scenario or see it as the ultimate *reductio ad absurdum* which disproves the whole essay. As such, it is an appropriate point of critique.

Piper's Reluctance to Use Deadly Force to Defend His Family

The most shocking part of Pr. Piper's essay is, as we have said, his 8th point. He offers up a common situational dilemma faced by Christians looking into the question of the appropriate use of force. He says, "A natural instinct is to boil this issue down to the question, 'Can I shoot my wife's assailant?'" He then goes on to give 7 aspects to an answer which amounts to an unclear and qualified negative. We won't quote these answers in full (you should read them for yourself), but they amount to an argument that bearing witness to Jesus precludes the use of deadly force. Piper asserts that the New Testament intentionally complicates the answer to this question: "the New Testament resists this kind of ethical reduction" and "the New Testament does not aim to make this clear for us. Its aim is a radically transformed heart that lives with its treasure in another world, longs to show Jesus to be more satisfying than life, trusts in the help of God in every situation, and desires the salvation of our enemies." So, while Piper wants to stop short of giving a biblical prohibition against self-defense, he clearly suggests that the New Testament militates against it.

Guns, in particular, fall under a special exclusion. Piper says, "I live in the inner city of Minneapolis, and I would personally counsel a Christian not to have a firearm available for such circumstances." Given that this appears in a rebuttal to Falwell, it seems natural to assume that this is a climactic point of Piper's presentation. Guns are the ultimate symbol of anti-gospel, and therefore mature Christians should consider forswearing them entirely.

Guns are the current point of visceral reaction, whether for or against, in our culture, and so one can easily read this section of Piper's argument without asking basic questions. But in order to get a clear theory of violence as such, we need to dig deeper. Why are guns put in a unique category? Wouldn't any weapon, or indeed, any use of force also need to come under scrutiny? Can one really read Pr. Piper's essay and conclude that a Christian is justified in defending his family with a knife or a baseball bat, but not a gun? I cannot see how that logic would hold. After all, Piper has said that Christians must "expect and accept unjust treatment without retaliation" and that Christians should reject "armed defense." In order to live lives in exile, we must be "freed from the love of this world and so satisfied with the hope of glory that we are able to love our enemies and not return evil for evil, even as we expect to be wronged in this world." And all of these statements then go on to serve as the theological basis for discouraging the use of deadly force in defense of our family. This cannot be limited to guns. It must either prohibit all violent force, no matter the instrument, or it must be interpreted in a different

fashion entirely, thus distinguishing between the use of force for the advancement of the kingdom and the more natural use of force to defend life. To put it rather simplistically, Pr. Piper's casuistry rests upon Anabaptistic assumptions about the relationship between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of this world. The classic Reformation view is quite different, which is why it has always allowed for the civil use of force in the service of a just cause.

3 More Points of Critique

In addition to this overview, I would like to point out three more areas of serious weakness in Pr. Piper's argument. I do this, not to pile on, but to show that the disagreement, while between brothers in Christ, is actually of a very serious nature. The points in which we disagree highlight deep and potentially irreconcilable theological outlooks.

First, Piper's argument is biblicistic and dependent upon a specific understanding of the relationship between the New Testament and the Old. Notice this line under his 8th point:

> There is, as I have tried to show, a pervasive thrust in the New Testament pushing us toward blessing and doing good to those who hate, curse, and abuse us (Luke 6:27–28). And there is no direct dealing with the situation of using lethal force to save family & friend.

His argument assumes at least two things. It assumes that we need a direct biblical teaching on a matter in order to know whether it is morally permissible or not. In the case of self-defense and the defense of those entrusted to our guardianship, it would seem that the natural law would answer this question sufficiently. Do the good and avoid the evil. Preserve the lives of those dependent upon you, especially if there are lawful means available to you. In America, citizens are constitutionally permitted to bear arms, and they are allowed to use deadly force in order to protect their lives, especially in their homes.

Beyond natural-law reasoning, however, the Old Testament would seem to supply ample teaching on this matter. Consider, for example, Exodus 22:2: "If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed." Moses himself killed an Egyptian in order to save the life of an oppressed Israelite (Ex. 2:12), and while this killing is often condemned by over-pious commentators, the proto-martyr Stephen justifies Moses and condemns faithless Israel (Acts 7:24–25). All of this reasoning is simply an application of the 6th Commandment, though, whose duties are faithfully explained by the Westminster Larger Catechism:

> 135A. The duties required in the sixth commandment are all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; **by just defence thereof against violence**, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labour, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behaviour; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; **comforting and succouring the distressed and protecting and defending the innocent.**

Notice how the catechism is able, unlike Piper, to admonish against intemperate passions while also allowing for just defense against violence.

Secondly, Pastor Piper confuses self-sacrifice with the protection of others. He says that "our primary aim in life is to show that Christ is more precious than life," but in the context he's speaking not only of one's care of their own life, but also of how a person cares about the lives of others. Piper is answering a question about how a man should care for his wife, and by extension his children, by pointing the man towards self-sacrifice and martyrdom. But self-sacrifice is not the issue in question, and the man is not actually justified in sacrificing other people in the name of his own love for Christ. One does not love their neighbor by imposing martyrdom upon their neighbor during times of crisis.

Remember, the hypothetical question that Piper's theological outlook is seeking to answer is, "Can I shoot my wife's assailant?" This is a very different question from the question, "Should a missionary sacrifice himself in the face of angry tribesmen?" In the situation of a wife's assailant, there is a pre-existing relationship of husband and wife, and the "assailant" is a generic attacker, a stand-in for any scenario of attack. Thus, the husband is not asking whether he should evangelize by the sword or advance the spiritual kingdom of Christ through force. The husband is instead asking the very basic question, "Can I save my wife if she is in immediate danger?" This question has nothing to do with temperament, revenge, or political strategies. It is a question of moral duty, specifically the moral duty of the head of the family towards those under his domestic jurisdiction.

Husbands stand in a very particular relationship with their wives. They have pledged to provide for them and to protect them, and they also, in the words of the Westminster Larger Catechism, have the duties of "superiors" towards "inferiors." This is an implication of the 5th Commandment:

> 129A. It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love, pray for, and bless their inferiors; to instruct, counsel, and admonish them; countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well; and discountenancing, reproving, and chastising such as do ill; **protecting, and providing for them all things necessary for soul and body**: and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God, honour to themselves, and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them.

While the husband or father is not a civil magistrate in proper terms, he does hold a sort of office and jurisdiction with regard to his family. The universal view of Christendom is that the family is the oldest of the three estates and indeed the source of both the state and the visible church. As such, it is pre-political, which is why just polities allow the family basic political recognition and rights, the chief of which is self-defense.

There is actually a parallel between a father not protecting his wife and children and a magistrate not protecting his citizenry. The parallel shows, again, that Pr. Piper's logic is actually Anabaptistic, though he himself allows for the magistrate to use force. As he fails to recognize that the family has analogous, though limited, political authority, he misses this important parallel which would disprove his argument. His missing this point also illustrates the importance of rightly understanding the relation between the spiritual kingdom of Christ and the creational and temporal order. Classical Protestants would rightly recoil at the idea that Christ's kingdom overturned the civil arena, but they have much more difficulty expanding this logic to all of the temporal order. The principles, however, are the same.

Thirdly, Pastor Piper's essay is actually a very confusing piece of argument. Many commentators, in their eagerness to find a contrast to Jerry Falwell Jr.'s clumsy rhetoric, have praised Piper's response as "careful" and "nuanced." But it is actually neither. Nuance does not mean "hard to understand." Nuance does not even mean that a person points out all of the difficulties and complications inherent in a question. It may begin by doing this, but nuance, properly understood, concludes with an explanation of these difficulties and complications

which then adds *clarity* to the conversation. Pr. Piper's answers do not do this, and he admits this: "We don't like this kind of ambiguity, but I can't escape it." Earlier, he has also conceded that he does not understand what Jesus was teaching by the "two swords" in Luke 22:36. Instead of encouraging us to work carefully to find an answer, Piper wants us to believe that this is a problem text upon which we cannot have reasonable certainty and thus should exclude from consideration. [1]

Piper also adds to this confusion by tying the rejection of force, even self-defense, to a certain theology of the atonement. He says, "Jesus died to keep that assailant from sinning against my family." Here again is an opaque rather than nuanced statement. What does it actually mean? Piper explains, "Jesus' personal strategy for overcoming crimes was to overcome sinful inclinations by giving his life to pay debts and change hearts." This is, however, a conflation of the forensic and the transformative effects of the Cross, and it assumes that the Cross is a "personal strategy" for "crimes." But is there such a thing as a *personal* strategy for fighting crime? Wouldn't this actually require that Jesus was giving us a new politics *as such*, again teaching an Anabaptist rather than Protestant view of Christian ethics? But Piper does not consistently affirm such a thing, and thus he leaves readers to create a consistency where there is none.

Piper then concludes that the New Testament is itself intentionally complicating questions of ethics and moral duties, making us choose between natural goods and higher, spiritual, goods. He grounds this claim, again, in a theology of exile, saying that the gospel calls us to live "as lambs in the midst of wolves." He again doesn't consider the various ways in which this verse may or may not apply to the question of defending one's family from an attacker, preferring to rely on pacifistically loaded assumptions. But if being a "lamb" does not preclude a Christian from joining the military or the police—if it does not preclude politics as such—then why should it preclude home defense?

Conclusion

Having pointed out the philosophical, theological, and exegetical problems in Pastor Piper's essay, we will conclude on the pastoral level. Quite simply, Piper's argument is disastrous pastoral theology. Imagine the child in the above scenario. His father has had the option to save his mother's life but declined to do so in the name of the gospel. Is the child likely to be inspired by the power and majesty of grace? Or is he more likely to be gravely wounded himself, believing his father to have failed to love him and his mother? Is he more likely to grow up and embrace Christianity or to walk away from the faith in moral disgust?

Following this, is Piper's unclear trumpet call likely to persuade a general audience to reject Jerry Falwell Jr.'s bombastic rhetoric? It would seem very unlikely. Instead, Piper's inability to answer a basic moral question will be taken as evidence that Falwell's position, while perhaps in need of better expression, is therefore obviously right, and Piper's desire to rein in the violent passions will fail in the face of his attempted application of his principles. In short, if Piper's internal state leads him to such a confused and dangerous conclusion, then the natural assumption is that it must be very wrong.

I do not think that Pastor Piper is as bad as his argument would have many believe. I believe that he correctly understands the situation's severity and the Christian's call to abhor worldly thinking towards violence. But his logic is badly confused, as he fails to distinguish between the spiritual and temporal realms, misunderstands the civic role of the family, and conflates the question of preservation of life with vengeance and bloodlust in general. Thus, he is unable to offer any sort of corrective and may actually give a cure that is worse than the disease. It is our hope that this need not be the final word on Pastor Piper, and that he will see the inconsistencies in his own approach and abandon his approach's more extreme aspects.

Much more should be said on the general question of the Christian's relationship to guns, especially in our current culture. Terrorism and mass shootings are also extremely relevant, and Christians should work to build a coherent philosophy of civic duty. This is best done by building upon the jurisprudential work of the Protestant Reformers, especially the more sophisticated work of the 17th to 19th centuries. We cannot unpack this work now, but we hope that TCI's historical resources help provide a guidepost to beginning this important task.

Notes:

1. This text does have a tortured history, of course, with the most fantastic interpretation coming from Pope Boniface VIII in *Unam Sanctam*, in which he claims that it teaches the subordination of the civil magistrate to the clergy. For all its history, however, the text is not grammatically ambiguous. The challenge comes precisely in that it contradicts a certain assumed theology of violence. But if the situation in view is simply self-defense in a civil, not spiritual, manner, then the difficulty vanishes.

John, get your gun...

(NOTE: "Johnny" is a diminutive of "John." After titling this piece, it occurred to me that using the title "Johnny get your gun" would be seen as disrespectful, so I've changed it to "John, get your gun." I respect John Piper and apologize for a title that didn't show proper respect for him.)

The Reformed church has been all atwitter over John Piper's response to Jerry Falwell encouraging the students of his Baptist college to get a gun and help protect the campus against armed attack. John tells his readers that he talked with Jerry before writing him up. Then, he frames his response to Jerry this way:

> The issue is about the whole tenor and focus and demeanor and heart-attitude of the Christian life. Does it accord with the New Testament to encourage the attitude that says, "I have the power to kill you in my pocket, so don't mess with me"? My answer is, No.

Of course, this is an uncharitable summary of President Falwell's position since no one carrying a gun on Liberty's campus is primarily concerned about himself. Christians don't carry guns because they don't want to be killed themselves, but because they want to be faithful to defend others—particularly women and children. This is our calling as Christian men. We defend the innocent and defenseless. It would have been more kind for John to phrase it this way: "I have the power to defend my sisters in Christ here in my holster, so don't mess with them!"

I haven't read any of the responses to John's anti-gun piece except Doug Wilson's. Doug makes a good point when he begins his defense of John this way...

> Now this all comes from John Piper being so d___n controversial. John is a friend, but if I have said it to him once I have said it to him a hundred times, "John, you shouldn't be so controversial. You should try to be more mild and soft-spoken. Try to imitate my mellow groove."

Of course Doug is joking. Friends of John know that John is not "controversial," but "mild and soft-spoken," and one might say John invented the pastoral "mellow groove." What Doug wrote is funny precisely because John is non-controversial and non-confrontational. I've walked through a major public conflict with John and talked with him about another conflict he gave himself to, but conflict does not define his life and ministry. Quite the opposite, as Doug points out.

This fact commends John's piece against guns because it shows John's consistency. Pacifism is his lifestyle and it has nothing to do with guns. John writes against guns out of his lifetime commitment to, as he thinks of it, turning the other cheek. This is the "heart-attitude" he believes honors our Lord, so his condemnation of Christians who carry guns is natural. It should be noted John's condemnation isn't

universal, since near the end he writes, "I would be very slow to condemn a person who chose differently from me."

John and Doug Wilson are of a generation quite different from those younger than us because John, Doug, and I each had to make a choice whether to serve in the military or take a draft deferment. We came of age during the Viet Nam War, so this issue of guns has never been hypothetical to us. Either we registered for the draft or, like my cousin Robert DeWalt, we refused to register and went to federal prison. If we registered, we then decided whether to claim "conscientious objector" status. Finally, if we registered and did not claim conscientious objector (CO) status, we then decided whether to serve or to take an end run by losing lots of weight (the path chosen by one of my work colleagues at Tyndale House), going to college or seminary, or claiming some other deferment.

Doug served. He was a submariner in the Navy and this explains a lot of Doug's gifts for ministry, especially his loyalty to fellow (pastoral) combatants and his innate understanding that true pastoral ministry is never risk averse and never chooses peace over protecting the sheep and God's Truth.

So far as I know, John didn't serve and I'm guessing he registered with the Selective Service without claiming CO status.

I registered with the Selective Service, but claimed CO status because I was a pacifist. My pacifist convictions didn't start when I registered, but a few years earlier through a set of circumstances I won't bother to explain, here. Even those circumstances, though, came out of a family context.

Dad was raised Presbyterian. His doctrinal commitments were typical of Reformed Protestants. He warned his sons not to get our theology from C. S. Lewis, directing us to Charles Hodge. Yet, when it came to the Viet Nam War, he was against it and minced no words in opposing his *alma mater's* mandatory ROTC program. I remember his column in *Eternity* calling out his friend, Hudson Armerding (President of Wheaton and himself a former Navy man) for requiring Wheaton's male students to take ROTC courses.

Growing up, we were not allowed to play with guns of any sort, including water pistols, nor were we permitted to play with kids on our block who themselves played with toy guns. My Dad was neither an Anabaptist nor a pacifist. Yet he was similar to John Piper in thinking Christians should have nothing to do with guns.

Doug Wilson and I are the same age. We had draft lottery numbers, but it was the tail end of the Viet Nam War so neither of us were in any danger of killing or dying there. John is older, though, and that made all the difference. Men his age—many men his age—went to Viet Nam and died.

A few years after registering as a CO because of my pacifist commitments (my father-in-law, Ken Taylor, remained a pacifist all his life), I repented of my pacifism and have regretted my claim of CO status ever since. It happened this way.

One night I was visiting my sister, Deborah, who was teaching in the inner city in Chicago. As we walked down the stairs behind the three story apartment house where she lived, a man who rented the apartment directly beneath her came out on the staircase and began harassing Deborah. I was on the

landing below them and turned around to help. The man was getting aggressive and I warned him to stop and leave my sister alone. He paid no attention and grew increasingly hostile. I began climbing the stairs toward him and warned him again, more severely this time. At that moment, this thought went through my brain: if this man lays a finger on my dear sister, I will attack him. In fact, I will kill him if that's what is required to assure the safety of dear Deborah.

At that same moment I realized I was no longer a pacifist and it came to me that God made me a man for such a moment as this. Since then I've only grown in my commitment to this newfound duty of my sex.

A few years later I was at a conference listening to Chuck Colson and found his phrasing very helpful. He said the Christian man values God's gift of life so highly that he's willing to kill and to die in defense of it.

Well said.

The Christian man loves life and so he's willing to die in defense of his wife and children, his fatherland, and his neighbor. Better love has no man than this—that a man gives up his life for his friend. Does it matter whether the attacker is an aggressive man in the flat below and his hatred is directed towards my sister or a jihadist sent by Islam to kill the students of Liberty or Bethlehem Baptist colleges?

Not at all. Love requires laying down our life for our wife, mother, aged father, son, daughter; or for our defenseless sister in Christ walking across the quad to each lunch in the cafeteria.

So what about Jesus' command to turn the other cheek?

Three responses: first, it's one thing to choose to allow a predator to kill me and not defend myself. I have this freedom and many Christians have chosen to die a martyr's death. God has received glory from each precious drop of blood they have shed. May I be faithful to give up my life if I am the one under attack, and not my wife, my grandchildren, or God's people including nursing mothers in the cry room. Turning the other cheek when we are the only one under attack gives us no right to abdicate our responsibility to defend the aged, women, children, and the flock of God. As men, we are to confess our sex by following our fathers Abram and Job in breaking the jaw of the wicked and yanking his prey from his bloody mouth. We are to confess our sex by giving up our lives in defense of our bride just as Jesus Christ gave Himself up for His Bride, the Church.

Second, I'm quite certain John does not consider the command to turn the other cheek an absolute. In the same sermon in which Jesus commands us to turn the other cheek, He also tells us not to take oaths:

> Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, "you shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord." But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is "the city of the great king." Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, "Yes, yes" or "No, no"; anything beyond these is of evil. (Matthew 5:33-37)

And again:

> You have heard that it was said, "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you. (Matthew 5:38-42)

In his interpretation and application of these commands from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, I'm sure John is no consistent anabaptist. Surely he's taken vows at his ordination and wedding ceremony. Also that he locks the doors of his house, his car, and the doors of Bethlehem Baptist Church. Also that he doesn't give his shirt and coat to every beggar he runs into. Yet I'm also sure John is a man of his word and I know he is generous to those in need.

Finally, although I have no direct knowledge of it, I'm also pretty sure John goes to church surrounded by men who are carrying guns and are trained and committed to using those guns to protect the women and children of Bethlehem Baptist Church.

That's as it should be. There's likely no megachurch in our country (except perhaps a Mennonite congregation in Lancaster, Pennsylvania) whose insurance carrier does not require the church to hire men to patrol their premises when women and children are present. So every large church now has security officers or off-duty police officers carrying guns who are ready to use them in protection of the women and children of the church.

Why I Disagree with John Piper on Christians and Concealed Weapons

By Bob Thune | December 23, 2015

I wish to offer a rejoinder to John Piper's assertion that Christians should not carry concealed weapons. In a recent post at Desiring God, Piper wrote: "Exhorting the lambs to carry concealed weapons with which to shoot the wolves does not advance the counter-cultural, self-sacrificing, soul-saving cause of Christ."

His post takes direct aim at Jerry Falwell Jr, who recently urged students at Liberty University to procure their concealed-carry permits and "teach [terrorists] a lesson if they ever show up here." I don't know Jerry Falwell, and I'm sure we wouldn't agree on everything. But here's how he explained the context behind his statement:

As the president of this university community of nearly 15,000 students and 7,000 faculty and staff, I take very seriously my responsibility to keep you safe in an increasingly dangerous world. That's why in 2011 I asked our Board of Trustees to consider a concealed carry policy. It wasn't because of Islamic terrorism, it was because what happened (just) up the road at Virginia Tech. More than 30 innocent students and faculty were murdered viciously and none of them had the ability to protect themselves. The day that happened, I thought we needed to do something different here at Liberty… [We have] 950 here now with concealed carry permits, and after I made those remarks on Friday we had 240 sign up for a course tomorrow night.

I find this eminently reasonable. Here's a Christian leader, responsible for the safety of thousands of people, urging responsible citizens to act *within their legal rights* to obtain gun permits in light of a tragic instance of campus violence. Piper sees this as out of step with the New Testament. I see it as profoundly in line with the Christian responsibility to love our neighbors as ourselves. If an active shooter showed up on campus with intent to harm, the loving thing to do would be to take him out before he killed dozens of people.

There's certainly room for freedom of conscience on this issue. Christians will have differing convictions on the use of lethal force. But the case Piper makes against lethal force is a weak one, and its weaknesses need to be highlighted in order to move the conversation forward. In an age of terrorism where churches and schools are soft targets, Christians need to think more critically about this important matter.

Piper offers nine considerations in support of his thesis. I will advance **three critiques** that reveal some weaknesses and inadequacies I perceive in Piper's viewpoint. And I hope to offer all of them in a tone that conveys the eminent respect and esteem I have for Dr. Piper.

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1) Piper fails to substantiate his assertion that Romans 13 does not apply to private citizens in a democracy.

Piper writes: *[Any] claim that in a democracy the citizens are the government, and therefore may assume the role of the sword-bearing ruler in Romans 13, is elevating political extrapolation over biblical revelation. When Paul says, "The ruler does not bear the sword in vain" (Romans 13:4), he does not mean that Christian citizens should all carry swords so the enemy doesn't get any bright ideas.*

What does Paul mean, then? Certainly he doesn't mean that Caesar must personally carry a sword and execute

all justice by his own hand. By "the ruler," we understand Paul to be speaking symbolically of every civil magistrate, and by "the sword," we understand him to be speaking symbolically of all the various forms of justice that the civil authorities enforce.

Therefore, it is not "political extrapolation" to say that governments may wield fighter jets instead of swords. And neither is it political extrapolation to say that citizens in a democracy may bear arms. This is called biblical application. Romans 13 allows citizens to carry and use weapons *as long as their government allows it*.

Piper draws a distinction between "policemen or soldiers" using lethal force and "ordinary Christians" using lethal force. But he fails to reckon with the reality that in the United States, a Christian citizen who legally uses deadly force to stop an attacker *is a legitimate extension of the government's sword-wielding power*. If God has given the ruler the right to bear the sword… and if the ruler extends to private citizens that right… then where exactly is the extrapolation?

2) Piper fails to meaningfully differentiate persecution from acts of terrorism.

Acts of terrorism ***can*** be persecution (for instance, when ISIS militants behead someone for their faith in Christ). But not every terrorist attack equates to biblical persecution. The Christian response to persecution is to patiently endure and prayerfully turn the other cheek (1 Peter 2:19, Matthew 5:44-45). The Christian response to terrorism is to stop the terrorist from killing human beings who are made in God's image. I agree with Piper that Christians should not carry concealed weapons for the purposes of (in the order of his arguments) 1. avenging ourselves, 2. retaliating for unjust treatment, 3. handling hostility, 4. advancing the Christian cause by force, 5. returning evil for evil, or 6. resisting persecution. As a friend of mine observed, "If you used a gun for any of those reasons, you'd be in violation of the law anyway."

Piper marshals these arguments in order to build a case about "the whole tenor and focus and demeanor and heart-attitude of the Christian life." He seems to be saying that a Christian demeanor of mercy and humility and godliness is incommensurate with "a disposition to use lethal force." But it seems to me that this argument proves too much. If it's impossible to have a Christian demeanor and still be willing to use lethal force, does this not preclude Christians from being police officers or serving in the military?

Piper leans heavily on the book of 1 Peter, where Christians are urged to endure unjust suffering. But contextually, *that persecution was coming from the government itself*. If at some point in the future our government turns with hostility upon Christians and uses the "power of the sword" against us (as did Nero in the first century), then certainly we must bear that suffering without retaliation. Many of our Christian brothers and sisters are doing this right now throughout the world. But it's a stretch to say: therefore, Christians should lay down while a radicalized terrorist shoots innocent people.

3) Piper makes arbitrary distinctions in his application of texts like Romans 13.

Piper asserts that there is, in the Bible, "no direct dealing with the situation of using lethal force to save family and friend, ***except in regards to police and military***." But can he point to the chapter and verse where the Bible deals with police and military using lethal force? No. Because there isn't one. The assertion that police and military may use lethal force is an *application of texts like Romans 13.* And so is the assertion that a private citizen may use lethal force! A police officer and a private citizen who use lethal force to stop an attacker are both doing so *legally*, as an extension of the state's authority, and with the expectation that they will have to answer for their actions. If Piper is OK with a Christian police officer using lethal force in a case of imminent

danger, then he should also be OK with Christian students at Liberty University doing the same.

Throughout his article, Piper draws lines between police and military using lethal force and private citizens using lethal force. But this distinction is not present in the biblical text. It is a distinction in *application*. And it is, I assert, an arbitrary one.

Piper's primary concern is with the **spirit** of Jerry Falwell Jr's remarks – specifically, with the statement, "Let's teach [terrorists] a lesson if they ever show up here." I agree that that specific statement is unnecessarily provocative. And I think Dr. Piper could have written a very thoughtful blog post taking issue with it. Unfortunately, he has done more than that. He has taken a theological position against Christians carrying concealed weapons. And I find that theological position, as argued by Piper, to have some significant weaknesses.

On December 9, 2007, an armed attacker with a semiautomatic rifle and 1400 rounds of ammunition began a shooting rampage at New Life Church in Colorado Springs. He killed two teenagers in the parking lot and then moved toward the building where about 700 people were gathered. His murderous advance was stopped by church security team member Jeanne Assam, who shot him with her concealed handgun. Her quick and decisive action likely saved dozens of lives. I would not deem Ms. Assam more Christlike if she had prayerfully set down her weapon and "accepted unjust mistreatment without retaliation." And I suspect the students at Liberty University would not either.

desiringGod

Where Does Child Killing Come From? Sanctity of Life Sunday

January 25, 1998 by John Piper Scripture: James 4:1-10 Topic: Abortion Series: Worship God

> What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? 6 But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." 7 Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

Abortion Is About God

At the end of this Sanctity of Human Life week, and three days after the 25th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision Roe vs. Wade, which struck down all state laws in our land regulating abortion and made abortion on demand the law of the land and confirmed an individualistic, unencumbered view of human liberty that has allowed the killing of 35 million children, I want to say this morning that abortion is mainly about God. Abortion is about God, the Creator of the universe, the Giver and Sustainer of all life, the Judge of the living and the dead, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the Redeemer and Forgiver of all who trust him. Abortion is about God.

To leave God out of the picture of abortion is to trivialize it. All things are trivial without God. God is the ultimate reality over the universe. All other reality is derivative and dependent and has no ultimate meaning at all without reference to God the ultimate reality. In him we live and move and have our being. If we leave him out of account, we know nothing of any lasting significance about ourselves or the world. Therefore the message that I have to give is that abortion is about God. And therefore it is not trivial. Motherhood is about God, therefore (and only therefore) it is not trivial. Fatherhood is about God, and therefore it is not trivial. Sexual relations are about God, and therefore they are not trivial. Children - inside the womb and outside the womb - are about God, and therefore they are not trivial.

Abortion is about God. The most important things to say about abortion are how it relates to God and how God relates to it. So let me mention four ways that abortion is about God. The first two I deal with briefly not because they are less important, but because they tend to be more commonly dealt with, and John Ensor has dealt with them beautifully this weekend. The fourth I bring in because of the turmoil our President is in at this moment and how it relates to abortion. But the third is from our text and will receive more of our attention.

1. Abortion is about God because the child in the womb is created by God in the image of God.

The reason Genesis 9:6 is important here is that it shows that the words of Genesis 1:27 (that God created male and female in his own image) is true of all humans who follow after the first man and woman. God says to Noah, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." In other words, every member of the human race is in the image of God. And, as John Ensor showed in his seminar yesterday, the Bible treats the unborn in the same way it treats babies that have been born (Genesis 25:22; compare Luke 1:44 and 2:12; Psalm 139:13).

To be made in the image of God means at least that the aim of God in making us in the womb is that we might image forth God. Images of reality exist to image forth that reality. We are images of divine reality. Our meaning on earth is to image forth that divine reality. That is why we exist. To attack the human being in the womb and kill him or her is to assault God. God is making the child. God is weaving a unique image of his divine glory with the purpose of imaging forth that glory in the world. Killing the child is an attack on God's glory and is treason against the Ruler of the universe. So, fundamentally and most importantly, abortion is about God because children are made by God in the image of God for the glory of God.

2. Abortion is about God because only God can forgive the sin of killing unborn children.

This is why John Ensor's book, Experiencing God's Forgiveness, is so important. The ultimate evil of abortion is not that it kills children or that it damages women - which it does. The ultimate evil is that it assaults and demeans God. Now that is what the gospel of Jesus Christ is about. How God planned and brought about a plan to forgive people who have committed the ultimate outrage of discounting his glory and treating it as less valuable than their own private preferences.

The apostle Paul says in Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That is the essence of sin: falling short of the glory of God, exchanging it for the preference of our own plan. But then verses 24-25 say that those who trust in God are "justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith." In short, what this means is that God is the only being in the universe who can forgive the sin of abortion and actually "justify" or set right the relationship between himself and us sinners who have so grievously offended him. He sets it right by the death of his Son in our place so that all the wrath that we deserve for the sin of abortion - and every other sin - is put on Jesus, and he dies in our place and we are acquitted and given eternal life and joy at the cost of the Son of God.

Abortion is about God, because only God can forgive the sin of killing unborn children. He can and he does, and it is the greatest, most freeing news in all the world. "Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

3. Abortion is about God because the root cause of abortion is a failure to be satisfied in God as our supreme love.

Let's see where this comes from in the Bible. If you start reading in James 4 and stop after verse 2a, what you would have is a simple, psychological, trivial analysis of where child-killing comes from. An analysis without God. Let's read this analysis:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust [or: desire] and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.

The issue of murder in this text is rooted in unsatisfied desires. "You desire and do not have; so you commit murder." We could spend a long time here examining all the desires and longings that an unplanned pregnancy threatens: a pleased boyfriend or husband, education, financial solvency, career, freedom from morning sickness and diapers and runny noses and the terrible twos and sleepless nights and homework help and sports and band and drama and transportation and teenage moodiness and college expenses. You desire all these things and all this freedom, but along comes a baby, and

your desires are threatened, and you are tempted to get rid of the troublemaker, the baby. That's where abortion comes from.

I say that would be a trivial analysis. Because God is left out. But in James 4 God is not left out. In fact, he is brought in with a shocking image. Behind verses 2b-3 he sees a transaction between people and God. "You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive because you ask with wrong motives so that you may spend it on your pleasures." So he pictures people wanting something (or someone) that satisfies, and then coming to God not because he satisfies, but only to ask him for the means to get something else, and then leaving God behind to go get satisfied with this other thing.

And then he names that bluntly in verse 4: "You adulteresses!" (A good literal translation.) Where did that come from? It came from the situation he just described. We have a great and loving husband, God. But we are in love with another man or another thing, and do not find God satisfying. But we can't afford this paramour. So we go (believe it or not!) to our husband, our God - this is prayer - and we ask him for the means to get this other lover. That's why James shouts, "Adulteresses!" to both women and men.

This gives the sense of the next words in verse 4: "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." If you don't find God and his ways and promises satisfying, and you turn to the world as your real love, then you put emotion between you and God and bring down the wrath of God. Why? Well, it should be obvious, but James goes on to tell us in verse 5: "Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose [when it says]: "He jealously desires the Spirit* which He has made to dwell in us"?

I think this means: God is jealous for your affection and admiration. He has created you so that he might be your supreme love and satisfaction. "In his presence is fullness of joy; at his right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). So when James says that killing comes from unsatisfied desires, he is not giving a trivial psychological analysis of the problem. He means: killing comes from rejecting God as our highest treasure and our ultimate satisfaction and our supreme love.

If we found in God what God really is, if we were not willfully blind and rebellious against him as our all-supplying portion in this life and the next, we would not abort our children. The root cause of abortion is the failure to be satisfied in God as our supreme love. And, for all the great legal work that needs to be done to protect human life, the greatest work that needs to be done is to spread a passion - a satisfaction - for the supremacy of God in all things. That's our calling.

There is at least one more way that abortion is about God.
4. The political and cultural events that will make abortion unthinkable and illegal are in the hands of God.

Beware of thinking and praying toward an impeachment of President Clinton because of his most recent turmoil. That may be the right thing to do. But our puny wisdom is not worthy of running the world. If he is impeached and convicted and forced out of office, Al Gore will become the president of the United States. That will make his chances of being elected president in the next election much higher as an incumbent.

And where was Al Gore Thursday on the anniversary of Roe v. Wade? At an abortion-rights gathering, not a pro-life gathering. Richard Neuhaus points out that it is very likely that the next president will appoint four new Justices to the Supreme Court. That means that an impeachment and conviction of President Clinton would probably put a radically pro-choice president in office for the next ten years, namely Al Gore. But if Clinton has to limp to the end of his presidency in disgrace, history may take a very different turn. We don't know.

I only point this out to remind you that God is in heaven and rules over the affairs of men, and is much wiser than we are in running the world. It behooves us to pray for God's wise and just and merciful plan to unfold rather than to assume that our shortsighted guesses are the best. When Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, became proud and defied the living God, Daniel 4:31-32 says,

A voice came from heaven, saying, "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, and you will be driven away from mankind, and your dwelling place will be with the beasts of the field. You will be given grass to eat like cattle, and seven periods of time will pass over you until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes."

This is still true. God will rule over who is chosen for the Supreme Court in the next several years and we do well to join him in his wise and just and sovereign rule of the world by praying for his kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth the way the angels do it in heaven, and by voting and acting in accord with God's will revealed in Scripture.

Summary

The sum of the matter is this: Abortion has to do with God. 1) Because the child in the womb is created by God in the image of God for the glory of God. 2) Because only God can forgive the sin of killing unborn children. 3) Because the root cause of abortion is a failure to be satisfied in God as our supreme love. 4) And because the political and cultural events that will make abortion unthinkable and illegal are in the hands of God.

How then shall we spread a passion for the supremacy of God among abortion providers at Midwest and Meadowbrook in our neighborhood, so that they will find their satisfaction in God and turn from violence toward women and children? That is our question and our prayer.



John Piper (@JohnPiper) is founder and teacher of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is author of more than 50 books.

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Redemption for the Scars

Posted By Kendra Dahl On August 6, 2013 @ 12:01 AM In Articles of Interest,Christian Living,Testimony | 15 Comments

My hands trembled as I held the directions, struggling to read them. I was 16. Active member of the youth group. A Christian school kid. I had no idea how to take a pregnancy test.

Slowly, meticulously, I did what the directions commanded. My trembling sunk into a quiet, terrifying calm. I replaced the cap on the test, set it carefully on the bathroom counter, and slid to the ground, my back to the door, waiting for confirmation of what I already knew: I was pregnant.



[1]

Despite what I knew to be true, I only debated briefly. I knew abortion was sinful and wrong. But then again, so was sex before marriage. It was a little too late to be worried about sin. All I knew was that in three weeks I would move to a new town and start a new school. I would go to cheerleading camp and be a normal high school junior full of promise and potential. I would never look back.

It wasn't that simple, of course. The blood haunted me for weeks, whispering my secrets in the dark corners of the laundry room. And while soiled clothes could be washed clean, the dark stains remained on my heart—invisible scars carved into the deep crevices of my soul—and no amount of scrubbing would help.

Oh, but I tried. I tried purity vows and youth group and missions trips. I tried college ministry and Christian community and being the nice girl. And when all of that proved futile, I threw my hands in the air and gave into flashing lights and loud music and blurred memories.

Eventually I found myself in another bathroom, holding another positive pregnancy test. My mind raced: memories of the gray walls and the nurse's face and sad-eyed women waiting. Memories of the blood. I knew I couldn't do it again, so I wondered, *was there redemption here? If I chose differently this time, would it reach back into the past? Would it make the scars hurt less? Would they disappear now? Would a new life replace the one forfeited years before?*

I was 22 when my daughter was born, and I sought in her the redemption I craved. I determined to be a strong, independent single mother and prove to the world that I was better than my tainted history. But my daughter could not erase the pain of years past, and despite the strength I feigned, I crumbled under the weight of my sin and the pressure of trying to prove I was good enough.

Gracious Rescue

Praise God that in his mercy he rescued me from myself. He graciously confronted me with the depths of my sinfulness and the weight of his holiness. He softened my heart to repent of my sin and receive the promise of forgiveness found only in Jesus. He lifted my eyes to see Christ bear the full weight of my sin and shame, offering in exchange my freedom from condemnation and the right to be his beloved daughter.

God in his sweet grace makes all things new. I devoured Scripture, hungry to learn the truth that I had missed all those years in church. My daughter and I were welcomed as family into a community of believers. I married a wonderful, godly man who determined to love and lead me and become a father to my daughter.

You Have to Pay for That

Shortly into our marriage, my husband and I learned that I was pregnant. We were thrilled, which actually felt quite strange. It was a road I had walked before, and yet this time I was excited.

A week later, I miscarried.

I didn't know how to process the pain of that loss. It was an experience eerily similar to the one I had chosen at 16, but this time it was completely out of my control. And the lies that still raged in my heart convinced me that it was fitting. Why wouldn't God take away the baby I finally wanted? I deserved that. It was time to pay for the sins of my past.

Sinful Woman

One of the most scandalous claims Jesus made while walking the earth was his ability to forgive sins. In one account, a prostitute interrupted Jesus dining with a Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50). Despite the woman's reputation and public shame, Jesus welcomed her acts of repentance and assured her, "Your sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). Onlookers were shocked: "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" (Luke 7:49) Luke recorded a similar question earlier: "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21)

The people were right—God alone can forgive sins. But they were blind to a crucial truth—Jesus is the very Son of God. And with that authority he could make such an audacious claim to forgive sins.

But those watching knew that a holy, just God cannot simply forgive sins—they must be paid for. And they knew that God had instituted the means through which forgiveness was possible: the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). So when Jesus granted this egregiously sinful woman forgiveness while giving no instructions or provisions for her atonement, the people were baffled.

Sin must be paid for, yes—but Jesus knew something the onlookers didn't: there would be blood. And it would be his.

In his book *The Prodigal God* [2], Tim Keller elaborates on this truth:

> Jesus was stripped naked of his robe and dignity so that we could be clothed with a dignity and standing we don't deserve. On the cross Jesus was treated as an outcast so that we could be brought into God's family freely by grace. There Jesus drank the cup of eternal justice so that we might have the cup of the Father's joy. There was no other way for the heavenly Father to bring us in, except at the expense of our true elder brother.

Is It Enough?

The instinct to strive for self-atonement runs deeply in us all. Grace by faith alone is hard to accept and even harder to remember, especially when we're continually confronted by the sin that so easily entangles. And for those of us whose invisible scars are so often blinding, we are left asking, *Is it enough? I know you paid for it, Lord, but do you see these scars? Don't I need to pay for it too?*

I didn't know that question still dominated my heart. But I was working so hard to be a submissive wife, to be a good mom, to be a good Christian. I thought I understood grace, but I was still desperately trying to be good enough. God graciously used a miscarriage to level me. He confronted my scars head-on and then he lifted my eyes once again to see his Son—his very Son whose nail-scarred hands paid for my sin in full.

A mother doesn't need scars like mine to look to her performance to prove her worth and find acceptance. We are all desperate sinners standing before a holy God, and we are painfully aware that we do not measure up.

Sisters, we stand confidently before God because of Jesus, our great high priest, who "entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11-12). The precious blood of Christ has purchased our acceptance and approval. It is enough! Nothing —nothing!—can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). Regardless of the scars of our past—on our best days of mothering and on our worst—there is no condemnation for us in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Wounds That Heal

So many of us in the church bear invisible scars. And while over time they may fade into the background, they still bleed for some. They are a constant source of turmoil as we face haunting memories and fight to believe that there is enough redemption even for us.

Jesus has scars, too. We cannot work hard enough to make ours disappear, but we can rest from all our striving and remember this: by his wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

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HEALTH

THE LAST CHILDREN OF DOWN SYNDROME

Prenatal testing is changing who gets born and who doesn't. This is just the beginning.

By Sarah Zhang

DECEMBER 2020 ISSUE SHARE SAVED STORIES SAVE

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Photographs by Julia Sellmann

Every few weeks or so, Grete Fält-Hansen gets a call from a stranger asking a question for the first time: What is it like to raise a child with Down syndrome?

Sometimes the caller is a pregnant woman, deciding whether to have an abortion. Sometimes a husband and wife are on the line, the two of them in agonizing disagreement. Once, Fält-Hansen remembers, it was a couple who had waited for their prenatal screening to come back normal before announcing the pregnancy to friends and family. "We wanted to wait," they'd told their loved ones, "because if it had Down syndrome, we would have had an abortion." They called Fält-Hansen after their daughter was born—with slanted eyes, a flattened nose, and, most unmistakable, the extra copy of chromosome 21 that defines Down syndrome. They were afraid their friends and family would now think they didn't love their daughter—so heavy are the moral judgments that accompany wanting or not wanting to bring a child with a disability into the world.

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All of these people get in touch with Fält-Hansen, a 54-year-old schoolteacher, because she heads Landsforeningen Downs Syndrom, or the National Down Syndrome Association, in Denmark, and because she herself has an 18-year-old son, Karl Emil, with Down syndrome. Karl Emil was diagnosed after he was born. She remembers how fragile he felt in her arms and how she worried about his health, but mostly, she remembers, "I thought he was *so* cute." Two years after he was born, in 2004, Denmark became one of the first countries in the world to offer prenatal Down syndrome screening to every pregnant woman, regardless of age or other risk factors. Nearly all expecting mothers choose to take the test; of those who get a Down syndrome diagnosis, more than 95 percent choose to abort.

Denmark is not on its surface particularly hostile to disability. People with Down syndrome are entitled to health care, education, even money for the special shoes that fit their wider, more flexible feet. If you ask Danes about the syndrome, they're likely to bring up Morten and Peter, two friends with Down syndrome who starred in popular TV programs where they cracked jokes and dissected soccer games. Yet a gulf seems to separate the publicly expressed attitudes and private decisions. Since universal screening was introduced, the number of children born with Down syndrome has fallen sharply. In 2019, only 18 were born in the entire country. (About 6,000

children with Down syndrome are born in the U.S. each year.)

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Fält-Hansen is in the strange position of leading an organization likely to have fewer and fewer new members. The goal of her conversations with expecting parents, she says, is not to sway them against abortion; she fully supports a woman's right to choose. These conversations are meant to fill in the texture of daily life missing both from the well-meaning cliché that "people with Down syndrome are always happy" and from the litany of possible symptoms provided by doctors upon diagnosis: intellectual disability, low muscle tone, heart defects, gastrointestinal defects, immune disorders, arthritis, obesity, leukemia, dementia. She might explain that, yes, Karl Emil can read. His notebooks are full of poetry written in his careful, sturdy handwriting. He needed physical and speech therapy when he was young. He loves music—his gold-rimmed glasses are modeled after his favorite Danish pop star's. He gets cranky sometimes, like all teens do.

One phone call might stretch into several; some people even come to meet her son. In the end, some join the association with their child. Others, she never hears from again.

These parents come to Fält-Hansen because they are faced with a choice—one made possible by technology that peers at the DNA of unborn children. Down syndrome is frequently called the "canary in the coal mine" for selective reproduction. It was one of the first genetic conditions to be routinely

screened for in utero, and it remains the most morally troubling because it is among the least severe. It is very much compatible with life—even a long, happy life.





Elea Aarsø, 6, shown with her father and her sister (and in the opening image), is the youngest of five children. Her parents opted out of the prenatal screening for Down syndrome because, though they support the right to abortion, they knew they would have the baby either way. (Julia Sellmann)

The forces of scientific progress are now marching toward ever more testing to detect ever more genetic conditions. Recent advances in genetics provoke anxieties about a future where parents choose what kind of child to have, or not have. But that hypothetical future is already here. It's been here for an entire generation.

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Read: ‘I am a man with Down syndrome and my life is worth living’



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Fält-Hansen says the calls she receives are about information, helping parents make a truly informed decision. But they are also moments of seeking, of asking fundamental questions about parenthood. Do you ever wonder, I asked her, about the families who end up choosing an abortion? Do you feel like you failed to prove that your life—and your child’s life—is worth choosing? She told me she doesn’t think about it this way anymore. But in the beginning, she said, she did worry: “What if they don’t like my son?”

• • •

In January, I took a train from Copenhagen south to the small town of Vordingborg, where Grete, Karl Emil, and his 30-year-old sister, Ann Katrine Kristensen, met me at the station. The three of them formed a phalanx of dark coats waving hello. The weather was typical of January—cold, gray, blustery—but Karl Emil pulled me over to the ice-cream shop, where he wanted to tell me he knew the employees. His favorite ice-cream flavor, he said, was licorice. “That’s very Danish!” I said. Grete and Ann Katrine translated. Then he zagged over to a men’s clothing store and struck up a conversation with the clerk, who had just seen Karl Emil interviewed on a Danish children’s program with his girlfriend, Chloe. “You didn’t tell me you had a girlfriend,” the clerk teased. Karl Emil laughed, mischievous and proud.

We sat down at a café, and Grete gave her phone to Karl Emil to busy himself with while we spoke in English. He took selfies; his mother, sister, and I began to talk about Down syndrome and the country’s prenatal-screening program.

At one point, Grete was reminded of a documentary that had sparked an outcry in Denmark. She reclaimed her phone to look up the title: *Død Over Downs* ("Death to Down Syndrome"). When Karl Emil read over her shoulder, his face crumpled. He curled into the corner and refused to look at us. He had understood, obviously, and the distress was plain on his face.

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Grete looked up at me: "He reacts because he can read."

"He must be aware of the debate?" I asked, which felt perverse to even say. *So he's aware there are people who don't want people like him to be born?* Yes, she said; her family has always been open with him. As a kid, he was proud of having Down syndrome. It was one of the things that made him uniquely Karl Emil. But as a teenager, he became annoyed and embarrassed. He could tell he was different. "He actually asked me, at some point, if it was because of Down syndrome that he sometimes didn't understand things," Grete said. "I just told him honestly: Yes." As he's gotten older, she said, he's made his peace with it. This arc felt familiar. It's the arc of growing up, in which our self-assuredness as young children gets upended in the storms of adolescence, but eventually, hopefully, we come to accept who we are.

Suddenly, a new power was thrust into the hands

of ordinary people—the power to decide what kind of life is worth bringing into the world.

The decisions parents make after prenatal testing are private and individual ones. But when the decisions so overwhelmingly swing one way—to abort—it does seem to reflect something more: an entire society's judgment about the lives of people with Down syndrome. That's what I saw reflected in Karl Emil's face.

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Denmark is unusual for the universality of its screening program and the comprehensiveness of its data, but the pattern of high abortion rates after a Down syndrome diagnosis holds true across Western Europe and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in the United States. In wealthy countries, it seems to be at once the best and the worst time for Down syndrome. Better health care has more than doubled life expectancy. Better access to education means most children with Down syndrome will learn to read and write. Few people speak publicly about wanting to "eliminate" Down syndrome. Yet individual choices are adding up to something very close to that.



Karl Emil Fält-Hansen, who is 18, lives with his family in the small town of Vordingborg, Denmark. (Julia Sellmann)

In the 1980s, as prenatal screening for Down syndrome became common, the anthropologist Rayna Rapp described the parents on the frontier of reproductive technology as "moral pioneers." Suddenly, a new power was thrust into the hands of ordinary people—the power to decide what kind of life is worth bringing into the world.

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The medical field has also been grappling with its ability to offer this power. "If no one with Down syndrome had ever existed or ever would exist—is that a terrible thing? I don't know," says Laura Hercher, a genetic counselor and the director of student research at Sarah Lawrence College. If you take the health complications linked to Down syndrome, such as increased likelihood of early-onset Alzheimer's, leukemia, and heart defects, she told me, "I don't think anyone would argue that those are good things."

But she went on. "If our world didn't have people with special needs and these vulnerabilities," she asked, "would we be missing a part of our humanity?"

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Sixty-one years ago, the first known prenatal test for a genetic disorder in the world took place in Copenhagen. The patient was a 27-year-old woman who was a carrier for hemophilia, a rare and severe bleeding disorder that is passed from mothers to sons. She had already given birth to one infant boy, who lived for just five hours. The obstetrician who delivered the baby, Fritz Fuchs, told her to come back if she ever became pregnant again. And in 1959, according to the published case study, she did come back, saying she couldn't go through with her pregnancy if she was carrying another son.

Fuchs had been thinking about what to do. Along with a cytologist named Povl Riis, he'd been experimenting with using fetal cells floating in the yellow

amniotic fluid that fills the womb to determine a baby's sex. A boy would have a 50 percent risk of inheriting hemophilia; a girl would have almost no risk. But first they needed some amniotic fluid. Fuchs eased a long needle into the woman's abdomen; Riis studied the cells under a microscope. It was a girl.

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The woman gave birth to a daughter a few months later. If the baby had been a boy, though, she was prepared to have an abortion—which was legal under Danish law at the time on "eugenic grounds" for fetuses at risk for severe mental or physical illness, according to Riis and Fuchs's paper describing the case. They acknowledged the possible danger of sticking a needle in the abdomen of a pregnant woman, but wrote that it was justified "because the method seems to be useful in preventive eugenics."

That word, *eugenics*, today evokes images that are specific and heinous: forced sterilization of the "feebleminded" in early-20th-century America, which in turn inspired the racial hygiene of the Nazis, who gassed or otherwise killed tens of thousands of people with disabilities, many of them children. But eugenics was once a mainstream scientific pursuit, and eugenicists believed that they were bettering humanity. Denmark, too, drew inspiration from the U.S., and it passed a sterilization law in 1929. Over the next 21 years, 5,940 people were sterilized in Denmark, the majority because they were "mentally retarded." Those who resisted sterilization were threatened with institutionalization.

Eugenics in Denmark never became as systematic and violent as it did in Germany, but the policies came out of similar underlying goals: improving the health of a nation by preventing the birth of those deemed to be burdens on society. The term *eugenics* eventually fell out of favor, but in the 1970s, when Denmark began offering prenatal testing for Down syndrome to mothers over the age of 35, it was discussed in the context of saving money—as in, the testing cost was less than that of institutionalizing a child with a disability for life. The stated purpose was "to prevent birth of children with severe, lifelong disability."

That language too has long since changed; in 1994, the stated purpose of the testing became "to offer women a choice." Activists like Fält-Hansen have also pushed back against the subtle and not-so-subtle ways that the medical system encourages women to choose abortion. Some Danish parents told me that doctors automatically assumed they would want to schedule an abortion, as if there was really no other option. This is no longer the case, says Puk Sandager, a fetal-medicine specialist at Aarhus University Hospital. Ten years ago, doctors—especially older doctors—were more likely to expect parents to terminate, she told me. "And now we do not expect anything." The National Down Syndrome Association has also worked with doctors to alter the language they use with patients—"probability" instead of "risk," "chromosome aberration" instead of "chromosome error." And, of course, hospitals now connect expecting parents with people like Fält-Hansen to have those conversations about what it's like to raise a child with Down syndrome.

Pepper Stetler: The gap between my daughter and her peers is growing

Perhaps all of this has had some effect, though it's hard to say. The number of babies born to parents who chose to continue a pregnancy after a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome in Denmark has ranged from zero to 13 a year

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since universal screening was introduced. In 2019, there were seven. (Eleven other babies were born to parents who either declined the test or got a false negative, making the total number of babies born with Down syndrome last year 18.)

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Why so few? “Looking at it from the outside, a country like Denmark, if you want to raise a child with Down syndrome, this is a good environment,” says Stina Lou, an anthropologist who has studied how parents make decisions after a prenatal diagnosis of a fetal anomaly. Since 2011, she has embedded in the fetal-medicine unit at Aarhus University Hospital, one of the largest hospitals in Denmark, where she has shadowed Sandager and other doctors.

Under the 2004 guidelines, all pregnant women in Denmark are offered a combined screening in the first trimester, which includes blood tests and an ultrasound. These data points, along with maternal age, are used to calculate the odds of Down syndrome. The high-probability patients are offered a more invasive diagnostic test using DNA either from the fetal cells floating in the amniotic fluid (amniocentesis) or from placental tissue (chorionic villus sampling). Both require sticking a needle or catheter into the womb and come with a small risk of miscarriage. More recently, hospitals have started offering noninvasive prenatal testing, which uses fragments of fetal DNA floating in the mother’s blood. That option has not become popular in Denmark, though, probably because the invasive tests can pick up a suite of genetic disorders in addition to Down syndrome. More diseases ruled out, more peace

of mind.

But Lou was interested in the times when the tests did not provide peace of mind, when they in fact provided the opposite. In a study of 21 women who chose abortion after a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome, she found that they had tended to base their decisions on worst-case scenarios. An extra copy of chromosome 21 can cause a variety of symptoms, the severity of which is not known until birth or even later. Most people with Down syndrome learn to read and write. Others are nonverbal. Some do not have heart defects. Others spend months or even years in and out of the hospital to fix a heart valve. Most have healthy digestive systems. Others lack the nerve endings needed to anticipate bowel movements, necessitating more surgeries, possibly even a stoma bag or diapers. The women who chose abortion feared the worst possible outcomes. Some even grieved the possibility of aborting a child who might have had a mild form of Down syndrome. But in the end, Lou told me, "the uncertainty just becomes too much."

Stina Lou, an anthropologist, studies the decisions prospective parents make after a prenatal diagnosis of an anomaly. (Julia Sellmann)

This emphasis on uncertainty came up when I spoke with David Wasserman, a bioethicist at the U.S. National Institutes of Health who, along with his collaborator Adrienne Asch, has written some of the most pointed critiques of selective abortion. (Asch died in 2013.) They argued that prenatal testing has the effect of reducing an unborn child to a single aspect—Down syndrome, for example—and making parents judge the child's life on that alone. Wasserman told me he didn't think that most parents who make these decisions are seeking perfection. Rather, he said, "there's profound risk aversion."

It's hard to know for sure whether the people in Lou's study decided to abort for the reasons they gave or if these were retrospective justifications. But when Lou subsequently interviewed parents who had made the unusual choice to continue a pregnancy after a Down syndrome diagnosis, she found them more willing to embrace uncertainty.

Parents of children with Down syndrome have described to me the initial process of mourning the child they thought they would have: the child whom

they were going to walk down the aisle, who was going to graduate from college, who was going to become president. None of this is guaranteed with any kid, of course, but while most parents go through a slow realignment of expectations over the years, prenatal testing was a rapid plummet into disappointment—all those dreams, however unrealistic, evaporating at once. And then the doctors present you with a long list of medical conditions associated with Down syndrome. Think about it this way, Karl Emil's sister, Ann Katrine, said: "If you handed any expecting parent a whole list of everything their child could possibly encounter during their entire life span—illnesses and stuff like that—then anyone would be scared."

"Nobody would have a baby," Grete said.

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A PECULIAR EFFECT of Denmark's universal-screening program and high abortion rate for Down syndrome is that a fair number of babies born with Down syndrome are born to parents who essentially got a false negative. Their first-trimester screening results said their odds were very low—so low that they needed no invasive follow-up testing. They simply went on with what they thought was an ordinary pregnancy. In other words, like the couple Grete once counseled, these are parents who might have chosen to abort, had they known.

The day after I met Grete, I attended a meeting of the local Copenhagen Down syndrome group. The woman who invited me, Louise Aarsø, had a then-5-year-old daughter with Down syndrome, Elea. Aarsø and her husband had made the unusual choice to opt out of screening. Though they support the right to abortion, they knew they would want to have the baby either way. At the meeting, two of the seven other families told me their prenatal

screening had suggested extremely low odds. At birth, they were surprised. A few others said they had chosen to continue the pregnancy despite a high probability for Down syndrome. Ulla Hartmann, whose son Ditlev was 18, noted that he was born before the national screening program began. "We're very thankful we didn't know, because we had two twin boys when I got pregnant with Ditlev and I really don't think we would have been, 'Okay, let's take this challenge when we have these monkeys up in the curtains,'" she told me. "But you grow with the challenge."

Daniel Christensen was one of the parents who had been told the odds of Down syndrome were very low, something like 1 in 1,500. He and his wife didn't have to make a choice, and when he thinks back on it, he said, "what scares me the most is actually how little we knew about Down syndrome." What would the basis of their choice have been? Their son August is 4 now, with a twin sister, who Christensen half-jokingly said was "almost normal." The other parents laughed. "Nobody's normal," he said.

Then the woman to my right spoke; she asked me not to use her name. She wore a green blouse, and her blond hair was pulled into a ponytail. When we all turned to her, I noticed that she had begun to tear up. "Now I'm moved from all the stories; I'm a little …" She paused to catch her breath. "My answer is not that beautiful." The Down syndrome odds for her son, she said, were 1 in 969.

"You remember the exact number?" I asked.

"Yeah, I do. I went back to the papers." The probability was low enough that she didn't think about it after he was born. "On the one hand I saw the problems. And on the other hand he was perfect." It took four months for

him to get diagnosed with Down syndrome. He is 6 now, and he cannot speak. It frustrates him, she said. He fights with his brother and sister. He bites because he cannot express himself. "This has just been *so many times*, and you never feel safe." Her experience is not representative of all children with Down syndrome; lack of impulse control is common, but violence is not. Her point, though, was that the image of a happy-go-lucky child so often featured in the media is not always representative either. She wouldn't have chosen this life: "We would have asked for an abortion if we knew."

Another parent chimed in, and the conversation hopscotched to a related topic and then another until it had moved on entirely. At the end of the meeting, as others stood and gathered their coats, I turned to the woman again because I was still shocked that she was willing to say what she'd said. Her admission seemed to violate an unspoken code of motherhood.

Of course, she said, "it's shameful if I say these things." She loves her child, because how can a mother not? "But you love a person that hits you, bites you? If you have a husband that bites you, you can say goodbye … but if you have a child that hits you, you can't do anything. You can't just say, 'I don't want to be in a relationship.' Because it's your child." To have a child is to begin a relationship that you cannot sever. It is supposed to be unconditional, which is perhaps what most troubles us about selective abortion—it's an admission that the relationship can in fact be conditional.

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Parenting is a plunge into the unknown and the uncontrollable. It is beautiful in this way, but also daunting.

In the cold, scientific realm of biology, reproduction begins with a random

genetic shuffling—an act of fate, if you were to be less cold, more poetic. The 23 pairs of chromosomes in our cells line up so that the DNA we inherited from our mother and father can be remixed and divided into sets of 23 single chromosomes. Each egg or sperm gets one such set. In women, this chromosomal division begins, remarkably, when they themselves are fetuses in *their* mother's womb. The chromosomes freeze in place for 20, 30, even 40-plus years as the fetus becomes a baby, a girl, a woman. The cycle finishes only when the egg is fertilized. During the intervening years, the proteins holding chromosomes together can degrade, resulting in eggs with too many or too few chromosomes. This is the biological mechanism behind most cases of Down syndrome—95 percent of people born with an extra copy of chromosome 21 inherited it from their mother. And this is why the syndrome is often, though not always, linked to the age of the mother.

A Danish woman who chose abortion after a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome said she was disappointed to find so little in the media about women who had made the same decision. (Julia Sellmann)

In the interviews I've conducted, and in interviews Lou and researchers across the U.S. have conducted, the choice of what to do after a prenatal test fell disproportionately on mothers. There were fathers who agonized over the choice too, but mothers usually bore most of the burden. There is a feminist explanation (my body, my choice) and a less feminist one (family is still primarily the domain of women), but it's true either way. And in making these decisions, many of the women seemed to anticipate the judgment they would face.

Lou told me she had wanted to interview women who chose abortion after a Down syndrome diagnosis because they're a silent majority. They are rarely interviewed in the media, and rarely willing to be interviewed. Danes are quite open about abortion—astonishingly so to my American ears—but abortions for a fetal anomaly, and especially Down syndrome, are different. They still carry a stigma. "I think it's because we as a society like to think of ourselves as inclusive," Lou said. "We are a rich society, and we think it's important that different types of people should be here." And for some of the women who end up choosing abortion, "their own self-understanding is a little shaken, because they have to accept they aren't the kind of person like they thought," she said. They were not the type of person who would choose

to have a child with a disability.

For the women in Lou's study, ending a pregnancy after a prenatal diagnosis was very different from ending an unwanted pregnancy. These were almost all wanted pregnancies, in some cases very much wanted pregnancies following long struggles with infertility. The decision to abort was not taken lightly. One Danish woman I'll call "L" told me how terrible it was to feel her baby inside her once she'd made the decision to terminate. In the hospital bed, she began sobbing so hard, the staff had difficulty sedating her. The depth of her emotions surprised her, because she was so sure of her decision. The abortion was two years ago, and she doesn't think about it much anymore. But recounting it on the phone, she began crying again.

She was disappointed to find so little in the media about the experiences of women like her. "It felt right for me, and I have no regrets at all," she told me, but it also feels like "you're doing something wrong." L is a filmmaker, and she wanted to make a documentary about choosing abortion after a Down syndrome diagnosis. She even thought she would share her own story. But she hadn't been able to find a couple willing to be in this documentary, and she wasn't ready to put herself out there alone.

When Rayna Rapp, the anthropologist who coined the term *moral pioneers*, interviewed parents undergoing prenatal testing in New York in the 1980s and '90s, she noticed a certain preoccupation among certain women. Her subjects represented a reasonably diverse slice of the city, but middle-class white women especially seemed fixated on the idea of "selfishness." The women she interviewed were among the first in their families to forgo homemaking for paid work; they had not just jobs but *careers* that were central to their identity. With birth control, they were having fewer children

and having them later. They had more reproductive autonomy than women had ever had in human history. (Rapp herself came to this research after having an abortion because of Down syndrome when she became pregnant as a 36-year-old professor.) "Medical technology transforms their 'choices' on an individual level, allowing them, like their male partners, to imagine voluntary limits to their commitments to their children," Rapp wrote in her book *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus*.

> "I have guilt for not being the kind of person who could parent this particular type of special need," one woman said. "Guilt, guilt, guilt."

But exercising those "voluntary limits" on motherhood—choosing not to have a child with a disability out of fear for how it might affect one's career, for example—becomes judged as "selfishness." Medical technology can offer women a choice, but it does not instantly transform the society around them. It does not dismantle the expectation that women are the primary caregivers or erase the ideal of a good mother as one who places no limits on her devotion to her children.

The centrality of choice to feminism also brings it into uncomfortable conflict with the disability-rights movement. Anti-abortion-rights activists in the U.S.

have seized on this to introduce bills banning selective abortion for Down syndrome in several states. Feminist disability scholars have attempted to resolve the conflict by arguing that the choice is not a real choice at all. "The decision to abort a fetus with a disability even because it 'just seems too difficult' must be respected," Marsha Saxton, the director of research at the World Institute on Disability, wrote in 1998. But Saxton calls it a choice made "under duress," arguing that a woman faced with this decision is still constrained today—by popular misconceptions that make life with a disability out to be worse than it actually is and by a society that is hostile to people with disabilities.

Pasquale Toscano and Alexis Doyle: Selective-abortion bans treat disability as a tragedy

And when fewer people with disabilities are born, it becomes harder for the ones who *are* born to live a good life, argues Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, a bioethicist and professor emerita at Emory University. Fewer people with disabilities means fewer services, fewer therapies, fewer resources. But she also recognizes how this logic pins the entire weight of an inclusive society on individual women.

Sally Dybkjær Andersson, age 6, is one of very few children in Denmark with Down syndrome. Since universal prenatal screening was introduced in 2004, the number of children in the country born with the syndrome has fallen sharply. In 2019, it was just 18. (Julia Sellmann)

No wonder, then, that "choice" can feel like a burden. In one small study of women in the U.S. who chose abortion after a diagnosis of a fetal anomaly, two-thirds said they'd hoped—or even prayed—for a miscarriage instead. It's not that they wanted their husbands, their doctors, or their lawmakers to tell them what to do, but they recognized that choice comes with responsibility and invites judgment. "I have guilt for not being the kind of person who could parent this particular type of special need," said one woman in the study. "Guilt, guilt, guilt."

The introduction of a choice reshapes the terrain on which we all stand. To opt out of testing is to become someone who *chose* to opt out. To test and end a pregnancy because of Down syndrome is to become someone who *chose* not to have a child with a disability. To test and continue the pregnancy after a

Down syndrome diagnosis is to become someone who *chose* to have a child with a disability. Each choice puts you behind one demarcating line or another. There is no neutral ground, except perhaps in hoping that the test comes back negative and you never have to choose what's next.

What kind of choice is this, if what you hope is to not have to choose at all?

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Down syndrome is unlikely to ever disappear from the world completely. As women wait longer to have children, the incidence of pregnancies with an extra copy of chromosome 21 is going up. Prenatal testing can also in rare cases be wrong, and some parents will choose not to abort or not to test at all. Others will not have access to abortion.

In the United States—which has no national health-care system, no government mandate to offer prenatal screening—the best estimate for the termination rate after a diagnosis of Down syndrome is 67 percent. But that number conceals stark differences within the country. One study found higher rates of termination in the West and Northeast and among mothers who are highly educated. "On the Upper East Side of Manhattan, it's going to be completely different than in Alabama," said Laura Hercher, the genetic counselor.

How do you choose between one embryo with a slightly elevated risk of schizophrenia and another with a moderate risk of breast cancer?

These differences worry Hercher. If only the wealthy can afford to routinely screen out certain genetic conditions, then those conditions can become proxies of class. They can become, in other words, *other people's problems*. Hercher worries about an empathy gap in a world where the well-off feel insulated from sickness and disability.

For those with the money, the possibilities of genetic selection are expanding. The leading edge is preimplantation genetic testing (PGT) of embryos created through in vitro fertilization, which altogether can cost tens of thousands of dollars. Labs now offer testing for a menu of genetic conditions—most of them rare and severe conditions such as Tay-Sachs disease, cystic fibrosis, and phenylketonuria—allowing parents to select healthy embryos for implantation in the womb. Scientists have also started trying to understand more common conditions that are influenced by hundreds or even thousands of genes: diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, cancer, and—much more controversially—mental illness and autism. In late 2018, Genomic Prediction, a company in New Jersey, began offering to screen embryos for risk of hundreds of conditions, including schizophrenia and intellectual disability, though it has since quietly backtracked on the latter. The one test customers keep asking for, the company's chief scientific officer told me, is for autism. The science isn't there yet, but the demand is.

The politics of prenatal testing for Down syndrome and abortion are currently yoked together by necessity: The only intervention offered for a prenatal test that finds Down syndrome is an abortion. But modern reproduction is opening up more ways for parents to choose what kind of child to have. PGT is one example. Sperm banks, too, now offer detailed donor profiles delineating eye color, hair color, education; they also screen donors for genetic disorders. Several parents have sued sperm banks after discovering that their

donor may have undesirable genes, in cases where their children developed conditions such as autism or a degenerative nerve disease. In September, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled that one such case, in which a sperm donor had hidden his history of mental illness, could move forward. The "deceptive trade practices" of a sperm bank that misrepresented its donor-screening process, the court ruled, could "essentially amount to ordinary consumer fraud."

August Bryde Christensen, who is 4, was born after his parents were told that the odds of Down syndrome were extremely low. His father says he's relieved they didn't know. (Julia Sellmann)

Garland-Thomson calls this commercialization of reproduction "velvet eugenics"—*velvet* for the soft, subtle way it encourages the eradication of disability. Like the Velvet Revolution from which she takes the term, it's accomplished without overt violence. But it also takes on another connotation as human reproduction becomes more and more subject to consumer choice: *velvet*, as in quality, high-caliber, premium-tier. Wouldn't you want only the best for your baby—one you're already spending tens of thousands of dollars on IVF to conceive? "It turns people into products," Garland-Thomson says.

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None of this suggests that testing should be entirely abandoned. Most parents choosing genetic testing are seeking to spare their children real physical suffering. Tay-Sachs disease, for example, is caused by mutations in the *HEXA* gene, which causes the destruction of neurons in the brain and spinal cord. At about three to six months old, babies begin losing motor skills, then their vision and hearing. They develop seizures and paralysis. Most do not live past childhood. There is no cure.

In the world of genetic testing, Tay-Sachs is a success story. It has been nearly eliminated through a combination of prenatal testing of fetuses; preimplantation testing of embryos; and, in the Ashkenazi Jewish population, where the mutation is especially prevalent, carrier screening to discourage marriages between people who might together pass on the mutation. The flip side of this success is that having a baby with the disease is no longer simple misfortune because nothing could have been done. It can be seen instead as a failure of personal responsibility.

Fertility doctors have spoken to me passionately about expanding access to IVF for parents who are fertile but who might use embryo screening to prevent passing on serious diseases. In a world where IVF becomes less expensive and less hard on a woman's body, this might very well become the responsible thing to do. And if you're already going through all this to screen for one disease, why not avail yourself of the whole menu of tests? The hypothetical that Karl Emil's sister imagined, in which a child's every risk is laid out, feels closer than ever. How do you choose between one embryo with a slightly elevated risk of schizophrenia and another with a moderate risk of breast cancer?

Not surprisingly, those advocating for preimplantation genetic testing prefer to keep the conversation focused on monogenic diseases, where single gene mutations have severe health effects. Talk of minimizing the risk of conditions like diabetes and mental illness—which are also heavily influenced by environment—quickly turns to designer babies. "Why do we want to go there?" says David Sable, a former IVF doctor who is now a venture capitalist specializing in life sciences. "Start with the most scientifically straightforward, the monogenic diseases—cystic fibrosis, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia—where you could define very specifically what the benefit is."

What about Down syndrome, then, I asked, which can be much less severe than those diseases but is routinely screened for anyway? His answer surprised me, considering that he has spent much of his career working with labs that count chromosomes: "The concept of counting chromosomes as a definitive indicator of the truth—I think we're going to look back on that and say, 'Oh my God, we were so misguided.'" Consider the sex chromosomes, he said. "We've locked ourselves into this male-female binary that we enforced with XX and XY." But it's not nearly so neat. Babies born XX can have male reproductive organs; those born XY can have female reproductive organs. And others can be born with an unusual number of sex chromosomes like X, XXY, XYY, XXYY, XXXX, the effects of which range widely in severity. Some might never know there's anything unusual in their chromosomes at all.

When Rayna Rapp was researching prenatal testing back in the '80s and '90s, she came across multiple sets of parents who chose to abort a fetus with a sex-chromosome anomaly out of fear that it could lead to homosexuality—never mind that there is no known link. They also worried that a boy who didn't conform to XY wouldn't be masculine enough. Reading about their anxieties 30 years later, I could sense how much the ground had moved under our feet. Of course, some parents might still have the same fears, but today the boundaries of "normal" for gender and sexuality encompass much more than the narrow band of three decades ago. A child who is neither XX nor XY can fit into today's world much more easily than in a rigidly gender-binary one.

Both sex-chromosome anomalies and Down syndrome were early targets of prenatal testing—not because they are the most dangerous conditions but because they were the easiest to test for. It's just counting chromosomes. As science moves past this relatively rudimentary technique, Sable mused, "the term *Down syndrome* is probably going to go away at some point, because we may find that having that third 21 chromosome maybe does not carry a predictable level of suffering or altered function." Indeed, most pregnancies with a third copy of chromosome 21 end as miscarriages. Only about 20 percent survive to birth, and the people who are born have a wide range of intellectual disabilities and physical ailments. How can an extra chromosome 21 be incompatible with life in some cases and in other cases result in a boy, like one I met, who can read and write and perform wicked juggling tricks with his diabolo? Clearly, something more than just an extra chromosome is going on.

As genetic testing has become more widespread, it has revealed just how many other genetic anomalies many of us live with—not only extra or missing chromosomes, but whole chunks of chromosome getting deleted, chunks duplicated, chunks stuck onto a different chromosome altogether, mutations that should be deadly but that show up in the healthy adult in front of you. Every person carries a set of mutations unique to them. This is why new and rare genetic diseases are so hard to diagnose—if you compare a person's DNA with a reference genome, you come up with hundreds of thousands of differences, most of them utterly irrelevant to the disease. What, then, is normal? Genetic testing, as a medical service, is used to enforce the boundaries of "normal" by screening out the anomalous, but seeing all the anomalies that are compatible with life might actually expand our understanding of normal. "It's expanded mine," Sable told me.

Grete Fält-Hansen and her son, Karl Emil, have met many expecting parents who are deciding what to do after a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome. (Julia Sellmann)

Sable offered this up as a general observation. He didn't think he was qualified to speculate on what this meant for the future of Down syndrome screening, but I found this conversation about genetics unexpectedly resonant with something parents had told me. David Perry, a writer in Minnesota whose 13-year-old son has Down syndrome, said he disliked how people with Down syndrome are portrayed as angelic and cute; he found it flattening and dehumanizing. He pointed instead to the way the neurodiversity movement has worked to bring autism and ADHD into the realm of normal neurological variation. "We need more kinds of normal," another father, Johannes Dybkjær Andersson, a musician and creative director in Copenhagen, said. "That's a good thing, when people show up in our lives"—as his daughter, Sally, did six years ago—"and they are just normal in a totally different way." Her brain processes the world differently than his does. She is unfiltered and open. Many parents have told me how this quality can be awkward or disruptive at times, but it can also break the stifling bounds of social propriety.

Stephanie Meredith, the director of the National Center for Prenatal and Postnatal Resources at the University of Kentucky, told me of the time her 20-year-old son saw his sister collide with another player on the basketball court. She hit the ground so hard that an audible crack went through the gym. Before Meredith could react, her son had already leapt from the bleachers and picked his sister up. "He wasn't worried about the rules; he wasn't worried about decorum. It was just responding and taking care of her," Meredith told me. She had recently been asked a simple but probing question: What was she most proud of about her son that was not an achievement or a milestone? The incident on the basketball court was one that came to mind. "It doesn't have to do with accomplishment," she said. "It has to do with caring about another human being."

That question had stayed with Meredith—and it stayed with me—because of how subtly yet powerfully it reframes what parents should value in their children: not grades or basketball trophies or college-acceptance letters or any of the things parents usually brag about. By doing so, it opens the door to a world less obsessed with achievement. Meredith pointed out that Down syndrome is defined and diagnosed by a medical system made up of people who have to be highly successful to get there, who likely base part of their identity on their intelligence. This is the system giving parents the tools to decide what kind of children to have. Might it be biased on the question of whose lives have value?

• • •

When Mary Wasserman gave birth to her son, Michael, in 1961, kids with Down syndrome in America were still routinely sent to state institutions. She remembers the doctor announcing, "It's a mongoloid idiot"—the term used before chromosome counting became common—and telling her "it" should go to the state institution right away. Wasserman had volunteered for a week at such an institution in high school, and she would never forget the sights, the sounds, the *smells*. The children were soiled, uncared for, unnurtured. In defiance of her doctor, she took Michael home.

The early years were not easy for Wasserman, who was a divorced mother for much of Michael's childhood. She worked to support them both. There weren't really any formal day cares then, and the women who ran informal ones out of their homes didn't want Michael. "The other mothers were not comfortable," one of them told her after his first week. Others rejected him outright. She hired private babysitters, but Michael didn't have playmates. It wasn't until he was 8, when a school for kids with disabilities opened nearby, that Michael went to school for the first time.

Michael is 59 now. The life of a child born with Down syndrome today is very different. State institutions closed down after exposés of the unsanitary and cruel conditions that Wasserman had glimpsed as a high-school student. After children with disabilities go home from the hospital today, they have access to a bevy of speech, physical, and occupational therapies from the government—usually at no cost to families. Public schools are required to provide equal access to education for kids with disabilities. In 1990, the Americans With Disabilities Act prohibited discrimination in employment, public transportation, day cares, and other businesses. Inclusion has made people with disabilities a visible and normal part of society; instead of being hidden away in institutions, they live among everyone else. Thanks to the activism of parents like Wasserman, all of these changes have taken place in her son's lifetime.

Does she wish Michael had had the opportunities that kids have now? "Well," she says, "I think maybe in some ways it was easier for us." Of course the therapies would have helped Michael. But there's more pressure on kids and parents today. She wasn't shuttling Michael to appointments or fighting with the school to get him included in general classes or helping him apply to the college programs that have now proliferated for students with intellectual

disabilities. “It was less stressful for us than it is today,” she says. Raising a child with a disability has become a lot more intensive—not unlike raising any child.

I can’t count how many times, in the course of reporting this story, people remarked to me, “You know, people with Down syndrome work and go to college now!” This is an important corrective to the low expectations that persist and a poignant reminder of how a transforming society has transformed the lives of people with Down syndrome. But it also does not capture the full range of experiences, especially for people whose disabilities are more serious and those whose families do not have money and connections. Jobs and college are achievements worth celebrating—like any kid’s milestones—but I’ve wondered why we so often need to point to achievements for evidence that the lives of people with Down syndrome are meaningful.

When I had asked Grete Fält-Hansen what it was like to open up her life to parents trying to decide what to do after a prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome, I suppose I was asking her what it was like to open up her life to the judgment of those parents—and also of me, a journalist, who was here asking the same questions. As she told me, she had worried at first that people might not like her son. But she understands now how different each family’s circumstances can be and how difficult the choice can be. “I feel sad about thinking about pregnant women and the fathers, that they are met with this choice. It’s almost impossible,” she said. “Therefore, I don’t judge them.”

Karl Emil had grown bored while we talked in English. He tugged on Grete’s hair and smiled sheepishly to remind us that he was still there, that the stakes of our conversation were very real and very human.

THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

7 Things Christians Should Know About Torture

December 9, 2014 by Joe Carter

A new report by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on the CIA's use of torture of suspected terrorists finds the agency repeatedly lied about brutal techniques that were both ineffective and illegal. The report also highlights examples of the extreme abuse, neglect, and torture of prisoners by CIA interrogators. As *Time* magazine notes,

Aspects of the detention and interrogation of al Qaeda suspects, according to the report, included: a detainee becoming unconscious during the simulated drowning technique known as waterboarding, requiring medical attention as he regurgitated air and water; a detainee dying from exposure to extreme cold shackled to the floor in what government observers later described as a dungeon; detainees' injuries being allowed to deteriorate as part of interrogation; and psychological effects from interrogation including hallucinations, paranoia, self-harm and self-mutilation. The report also finds the CIA at times lost detainees and discovered them only after days of neglect.

Since the terrorist attacks on 9/11, Christians in Americans have mostly remained silent about the use of torture or assumed it was a legitimate and warranted tactic in the "war on terror." A few Christians have given it serious thought, though, and continue to debate its use and morality. Many still disagree on whether torture is always wrong or whether there are certain extraordinary circumstances under which it is an exception to the rule that we cannot justify doing evil that good may come (cf. Romans 3:8).

My own personal view is similar to that of Southern Baptist ethicist Kenneth Magnuson, who has observed,

[E]ven if it is possible to defend torture theoretically, it is far from certain that it can be used justly in practice. Whether it could be contained to the few cases in which it may be justifiable; whether an adequate system of accountability could be set in place to prevent abuses; whether the interrogator is capable of extracting the information with the least coercion necessary (without turning quickly to torture because it is deemed to be justified); and whether it is possible to know for certain that the suspect indeed has relevant information; these are but a few concerns.

Based on this criteria, the report shows that the CIA's program was not justifiable, did not include an adequate system of accountability to prevent abuses, and did not extract information with the least coercion necessary. For these reasons, the CIA's actions were both immoral and violated the standards and laws recognized by the U.S. regarding the treatment of prisoners.

But this report should be the beginning, rather than the end, of the discussion on the morality and legality of torture. To aid in future discussions, I'd like to highlight seven things I believe all Christians should know about torture:

1. **Torture is clearly defined** — Despite the claims of many supporters of the CIA's methods and techniques, torture is not a murky or ill-defined concept. The legal definition of torture to which the U.S. subscribes can be found in the UN Convention Against Torture:

For the purposes of this Convention, torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

By this standard the CIA has admitted that they have engaged in torture. (At the end of this article I've also included other definitions of torture adopted by the U.S.)

2. **Many "enhanced interrogation techniques" fit the definition of torture** — A list of enhanced interrogation techniques that the CIA has admitted to using are:

1. The Attention Grab: The interrogator forcefully grabs the shirt front of the prisoner and shakes him.

2. Attention Slap: An open-handed slap aimed at causing pain and triggering fear.

3. The Belly Slap: A hard open-handed slap to the stomach. The aim is to cause pain, but not internal injury. Doctors consulted advised against using a punch, which could cause lasting internal damage.

4. Long Time Standing: This technique is described as among the most effective. Prisoners are forced to stand, handcuffed and with their feet shackled to an eye bolt in the floor for more than 40 hours. Exhaustion and sleep deprivation are effective in yielding confessions.

5. The Cold Cell: The prisoner is left to stand naked in a cell kept near 50 degrees. Throughout the time in the cell the prisoner is doused with cold water.

6. Water Boarding: The prisoner is bound to an inclined board, feet raised and head slightly below the feet. Cellophane is wrapped over the prisoner's face and water is poured over him. Unavoidably, the gag reflex kicks in and a terrifying fear of drowning.

The last three indisputably fit the definition of torture under all seven references.

3. **Waterboarding is torture** – Waterboarding has been used as a form of torture since the Middle Ages. Oxford scholar Cecil Roth writes in his book The Spanish Inquisition:

The water-torture was more ingenious, and more fiendish. The prisoner was fastened almost naked on a sort of trestle with sharp-edged rungs and kept in position with an iron band, his head lower than his feet, and his limbs bound to the side-pieces with agonizing tightness. The mouth was then forced open and a strip of linen inserted into the gullet. Through this, water was poured from a jar (*jarra*), obstructing the throat and nostrils and producing a state of semi-suffocation. The process was repeated time after time, as many as eight *jarras* being applied.

The U.S. military has also always considered waterboarding to be torture. During the U.S. Army Trials of

Japanese War Criminals Conducted in Yokohama, Japan, Yukio Asano was charged with "Violation of the Laws and Customs of War: 1. Did willfully and unlawfully mistreat and torture PWs." Among the specifications listed were "beating using hands, fists, club; kicking; water torture; burning using cigarettes; strapping on a stretcher head downward." Asano was convicted of a war crime for waterboarding American prisoners.

Many critics claim that waterboarding of prisoners cannot be considered torture since the technique has been used in training in the U.S. Navy's Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape (SERE) school. The waterboarding done in SERE, however, has been frequently criticized within the Department of Defense.

Also, as Malcolm Nance, counter-terrorism and terrorism intelligence consultant for the U.S. government's Special Operations and a former Navy SERE school instructor, said in *Small Wars Journal*, there is a profound difference between waterboarding in training and what was done by the CIA:

The carnival-like he-said, she-said of the legality of Enhanced Interrogation Techniques has become a form of doublespeak worthy of Catch-22 . Having been subjected to them all, I know these techniques, if in fact they are actually being used, are not dangerous when applied in training for short periods. However, when performed with even moderate intensity over an extended time on an unsuspecting prisoner – it is torture, without doubt.

The CIA's own Inspector General says that what his agency did and what is done in SERE training are completely different:

A footnote in the recently released 2004 CIA Office of Inspector General's review of the government's interrogation program appears to undermine a key legal justification that allowed the spy agency to use the controversial technique of waterboarding against suspected terrorist detainees.

A central legal—and polemic—argument for use of waterboarding has been the fact that some U.S. soldiers are subjected to the procedure during training. In 2002, the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel wrote a memo approving the technique, based in part on the fact that it had produced no long-term ill effects on soldiers who had undergone waterboarding during training. Those memos were later withdrawn by the DOJ.

But the latest review shows the waterboarding technique used on suspected terrorists was different in technique and duration from that administered to U.S. soldiers.

The OIG report says that experts' initial analysis of waterboarding "was probably misrepresented at the time," according to the CIA's Office of Medical Services, because "the SERE [survival, evasion, resistance, and escape program] waterboard experience is so different from the subsequent agency usage as to make it almost irrelevant."

As a consequence, the OIG found, "according to [the Office of Medical Services], there was no a priori reason to believe that applying the waterboard with the frequency and intensity with which it was used by the psychologist/interrogators was either efficacious or medically safe."

4. **The U.S. military opposes torture, including waterboarding** — Waterboarding has always been defined as torture by American courts and military tribunals.

Sen. John McCain, who was tortured while a prisoner in Vietnam, has said waterboarding is torture and adds, " People who have worn the uniform and had the experience know that this is a terrible and odious practice and should never be condoned in the U.S. We are a better nation than that. Charles Krulak, former commandant of the Marine Corps, and Joseph Hoar, former commander in chief of U.S. Central Command, say that waterboarding is torture and note that such methods "have nurtured the recuperative power of the enemy." John Hutson, former Judge Advocate General of the Navy, says "Waterboarding was devised in the Spanish Inquisition. Next to the rack and thumbscrews, it's the most iconic example of torture."

As Phillip Carter notes, "If there really were tactical or operational reasons for us to continue waterboarding, you might expect the military to favor it."

And yet the JAGs and the military oppose the technique in the strongest terms. They oppose it because they recognize it's not particularly effective, and because they have to worry about our soldiers being subject to such treatment if captured. Most of all, they oppose it because they recognize the value of clarity for maintaining the discipline of America's military. As one of us has written, "[T]here are few slopes more slippery than that from small war crimes to large ones. Any wartime action, no matter how heinous, can always be justified by some battlefield exigency."

By claiming that waterboarding is not torture, we are saying that it is *not* a violation of the Geneva Convention. That means that our enemies are legally justified in using this "interrogation" technique on American service members. This fact was recognized by 29 former high-ranking military officers in a letter sent to Sen. John Warner about their opposition to the redefinition of the Geneva Convention statutes:

We have abided by this standard in our own conduct for a simple reason: the same standard serves to Protect American servicemen and women when they engage in conflicts covered by Common Article 3. Preserving the integrity of this standard has become increasingly important in recent years when our adversaries often are not nation-states. Congress acted in 1997 to further this goal by criminalizing Violations of Common Article 3 in the War Crimes Act, enabling us to hold accountable those who abuse our captured personnel, no matter the nature of the armed conflict.

If any agency of the U.S. government is excused from compliance with these standards, or if we seek to redefine what Common Article 3 requires, we should not imagine that our enemies will take notice of the Technical distinctions when they hold U.S. prisoners captive. If degradation, humiliation, physical and mental brutalization of prisoners is decriminalized or considered permissible under a restrictive interpretation of Common Article 3, we will forfeit all credible objections should such barbaric practices be inflicted upon American prisoners.

This is not just a theoretical concern. We have people deployed right now in theaters where Common Article 3 is the only source of legal protection should they be captured. If we allow that standard to be eroded, we put their safety at greater risk.

The counter to this is that Al Qaeda does not follow the Geneva Convention. While this is true, it is a shortsighted critique. As Sen. McCain says, "I doubt they will be the last enemy America will fight, and we should not undermine today our defense of international prohibitions against torture and inhumane treatment of prisoners of war that we will need to rely on in the future."

5. **Mental torture is as serious as physical torture** — The claim that certain techniques cause only "mental" harm misunderstands the nature of torture. John McCain, a man who became intimately familiar with such

treatment, explains the power of mental torture:

[T]here has been considerable press attention to a tactic called "waterboarding," where a prisoner is restrained and blindfolded while an interrogator pours water on his face and into his mouth–causing the prisoner to believe he is being drowned. He isn't, of course; there is no intention to injure him physically. But if you gave people who have suffered abuse as prisoners a choice between a beating and a mock execution, many, including me, would choose a beating. The effects of most beatings heal. The memory of an execution will haunt someone for a very long time and damage his or her psyche in ways that may never heal. In my view, to make someone believe that you are killing him by drowning is no different than holding a pistol to his head and firing a blank. I believe that it is torture, very exquisite torture.

6. **Torture is an ineffective interrogation technique** — While it makes no difference to the moral calculus, it is important to note that torture has never been proven to be effective.

In testimony presented to the Senate Judiciary committee, FBI interrogator Ali Soufansaid:

The issue that I am here to discuss today – interrogation methods used to question terrorists – is not, and should not be, a partisan matter. We all share a commitment to using the best interrogation method possible that serves our national security interests and fits squarely within the framework of our nation's principles.

From my experience – and I speak as someone who has personally interrogated many terrorists and elicited important actionable intelligence– I strongly believe that it is a mistake to use what has become known as the "enhanced interrogation techniques," a position shared by many professional operatives, including the CIA officers who were present at the initial phases of the Abu Zubaydah interrogation.

These techniques, from an operational perspective, are ineffective, slow and unreliable, and as a result harmful to our efforts to defeat al Qaeda.

The recent report also notes that, based on the CIA's own records,

The CIA's use of its enhanced interrogation techniques was not an effective means of acquiring intelligence or gaining cooperation from detainees. . . While being subjected to the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques and afterwards, multiple CIA detainees fabricated information, resulting in faulty intelligence. Detainees provided fabricated information on critical intelligence issues, including the terrorist threats which the CIA identified as its highest priorities.

7. **Torture harms the torturers too** — The damage done by using such torture techniques is not only done to the prisoner. The *New York Times* notes how the torture disturbed some CIA personnel:

The torture of prisoners at times was so extreme that some C.I.A. personnel tried to put a halt to the techniques, but were told by senior agency officials to continue the interrogation sessions.

The Senate report quotes a series of August 2002 cables from a C.I.A. facility in Thailand, where the agency's first prisoner was held. Within days of the Justice Department's approval to begin waterboarding the prisoner, Abu Zubaydah, the sessions became so extreme that some C.I.A. officers were "to the point of tears and choking up," and several said they would elect to be transferred out of the facility if the brutal interrogations continued.

Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay, author of *Achilles In Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, found that dehumanizing the enemy during the Vietnam war caused psychological damage to American troops:

Restoring honor to the enemy is an essential step in recovery from combat PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). While other things are obviously needed as well, the veteran's self-respect never fully recovers so long as he is unable to see the enemy as worthy. In the words of one of our patients, a war against subhuman vermin "has no honor." This in true even in victory; in defeat, the dishonoring makes life unendurable. (pg. 115)

In our attempts to dehumanize our enemy we end up becoming less than human ourselves. It would be a Pyrrhic victory to save civilization and lose our humanity

As political scientist Glenn Tinder once wrote, the human being is both fallen and exalted, sacred and yet morally degraded. These two aspects of humanity cannot be separated. A fact, Tinder admits, that is "hard for common sense to grasp." Indeed, it is almost impossible to grasp when we try to apply this concept to our enemies. We often fall for one of two extremes.

The "liberal" (read: pacifist) position, for example, tends to be overly empathetic, refusing to use any force at all against an enemy since it can been seen as a failure to "humanize" our foes. But this is just one of the ways in which we can err. The "conservative" position, which seeks retribution and dehumanizes our opponents in order to distance them from ourselves, can be just as dangerous, particularly for those who must carry out this war.

We must never hesitate to defend our culture, our future, and our lives against those who seek to destroy us. The pacifist's solution of laying down our arms in the face of such an enemy is suicidal. The conservative position, which is willing to face up to and address the evil of terrorism, provides a more adequate approach.

Yet the conservative position must never forget that the evil comes not just from the actions of "subhuman vermin" but from the heart of a fallen, sacred yet degraded, human being. If we are to preserve our own humanity we must not forget that our enemy differs from us in degree, not in kind.

Addendum: *Legal Definitions of Torture*

Part 1, Article 1 and the US Reservations of the UN Convention Against Torture: The term "torture" means **any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession**, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

2. The US Reservations for the UN Convention Against Torture: In order to constitute torture, an act must be **specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering** and that mental pain or suffering refers to prolonged mental harm caused by or resulting from (1) the intentional infliction or threatened infliction of severe physical pain or suffering; (2) the administration or application, or threatened administration or application, of mind altering substances or other procedures calculated to disrupt

profoundly the senses or the personality; (3) the threat of imminent death; or (4) the threat that another person will imminently be subjected to death, severe physical pain or suffering, or the administration or application of mind altering substances or other procedures calculated to disrupt profoundly the senses or personality.

3. Article 32 of the Fourth Geneva Convention: any measure of such a character as **to cause the physical suffering** or extermination **of protected persons in their hands** . This prohibition applies not only to murder, torture, corporal punishments, mutilation and medical or scientific experiments not necessitated by the medical treatment of a protected person, but also to **any other measures of brutality whether applied by civilian or military agents.**

4. Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention: torture or inhuman treatment, including biological experiments, **willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health**

5. 18 United States Code Title 18, §2340(2) "torture" means an act committed by a person acting under the color of law specifically intended to inflict severe physical or mental pain or suffering (other than pain or suffering incidental to lawful sanctions) upon another person within his custody or physical control
(2)"severe mental pain or suffering" means the prolonged mental harm caused by or resulting from—
(A) the intentional infliction or threatened infliction of severe physical pain or suffering;
(B) the administration or application, or threatened administration or application, of mind-altering substances or other procedures calculated to disrupt profoundly the senses or the personality;
(C) the threat of imminent death; or
(D) the threat that another person will imminently be subjected to death, severe physical pain or suffering, or the administration or application of mind-altering substances or other procedures calculated to disrupt profoundly the senses or personality;

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Yes, Christians Can Support Torture

https://thefederalist.com/2014/12/17/yes-christians-can-support-torture/

Majorities of Christians support the use of torture in some instances. And they're not bad Christians for doing so.

In a recent post cited by Patheos, nondenominational pastor Brian Zahnd brashly proclaims "You Cannot Be Christian and Support Torture."

> There is no possibility of compromise. The support of torture is off the table for a Christian. I suppose you can be some version of a 'patriot' and support the use of torture, but you cannot be any version of Christian and support torture. So choose one: A torture-endorsing patriot or a Jesus-following Christian. But don't lie to yourself that you can be both. You cannot.
>
> …Any thoughtful person, no matter their religion or non-religion, knows that you cannot support torturing people and still claim to be a follower of the one who commanded his disciples to love their enemies. The only way around this is to invent a false Jesus who supports the use of torture. (The Biblical term for this invented false Jesus is "antichrist.")
>
> Those who argue for the use of torture do so because they are convinced it is pragmatic for national security. But Christians are not called to be pragmatists or even safe. Christians are called by Jesus to imitate a God who is kind and merciful to the wicked.

Zahnd edited this piece. He states in a "PS" that he originally wrote, "You cannot be a Christian and support torture." He took out "a" probably because he received a lot of backlash, and rightly so. So he qualified it: "You cannot be Christian and support torture. . . . Can you support torture and go to heaven? Maybe. Can you support torture and be Christlike? No."

Zahnd can try to disingenuously snake his way out of his own wording, but it's obvious he's calling people's Christianity into question, and that's what he meant when he initially wrote the post. But even with the qualifier, he is judging 79 percent of evangelicals in America and 78 percent of Catholics (along with 68 percent of all Americans, according to a recent poll)—who say torture can be justified. Yes, not only white evangelicals say torture is justified. *White Catholics* do, too—a fact overlooked in many articles written about the 2009 Pew survey.

So, can torture ever be morally justified? Or are Christians who support torture simply sellouts to security, as Zahnd says, and possibly doomed to hell?

I think Zahnd and others who make similar judgments are wrong. Torture in some forms and in some circumstances—conducted by the police and military officials—can be morally justified because (1) torture is not *necessarily* morally worse than killing (i.e., the death penalty); (2) the terrorist has forfeited his right to life and his dignity by his own evil actions; and (3) the innocent lives that can be saved are of higher value than any moral claims by the terrorist who has committed atrocities.

Is Torture Worse Than Death?

Torture is the infliction of severe pain on a defenseless person for the purpose of breaking his or her will.

Authoritarian regimes want to break people's wills to gain or maintain power. Their motives are not to gain important information to save lives, and the torture they conduct is typically prolonged, lasting days, weeks, and even years. This is a maximalist kind of torture imposed on soldiers and even innocent citizens who should not be subjected to such treatment, and it has no place in civilized societies. This is the kind of torture that can be worse than death. It is so devastating, so damaging to both the body and the psyche that the person being tortured loses his self-identity and ability to function as a healthy and completely autonomous human being even after he has been released.

Prolonged torture designed to crush the spirit of an individual is different from interrogation techniques, even ones that inflict pain. Whether these are classified as torture has been hotly debated since the Central Intelligence Agency report on enhanced interrogation techniques was released. However you classify them, the purpose of the techniques is to gain information to save lives, not to exercise power over the powerless.

Interrogative torture is minimal, acute, and designed to gain necessary information to protect society. Some might not feel comfortable using the term torture, but for the sake of this post, I will. It is sometimes morally justified to use pain to break a terrorist's will *in order to save lives*. Interrogative torture is not prolonged, maximal, pleasurable, vengeful, or punitive, and it does not have long-term debilitating consequences that completely disrupt a person's ability to function normally.

This kind of torture is a "lesser evil" than death. While torture does involve the exercise of control over another human being for a time, it does not end their autonomy as death does. When someone is dead, they have no autonomy, no hope of life, and no dignity. They're dead. However, when a person is tortured in a minimal way, they have not completely lost all autonomy—even in the moment of intense pain. They can still give up information and end the interrogation, or they can remain silent and suffer. There will come a time when the pain will end, when they will regain their autonomy, and they will continue their lives. There is no such hope for a dead person.

It simply does not follow that torturing someone is morally worse than killing them—not in all circumstances. The harm that results from interrogative torture is clearly a lesser moral evil than the harm that comes from killing someone. While a torture victim is physically powerless, they still maintain enough mental faculties to give information and to stop the interrogation. Again, the person who is dead has no such ability. Killing someone takes away his life and autonomy, but torture—while it takes away a person's autonomy for time—does not take away a life.

Torture Violates Human Dignity?

A primary argument against torture is the same that is leveled against the death penalty—that it violates a terrorist's human dignity. Some would argue that execution does not violate human dignity, but it would be difficult to argue that capital punishment in the Bible took human dignity into consideration. In the Old Testament, God commanded that people be killed by stoning for various crimes. These included breaking the Sabbath, homosexuality, adultery, and children rebelling against their parents.

> If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and worship other gods' (gods that neither you nor your ancestors have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to them or listen to them. Show them no pity. Do not spare them or shield them. You must certainly put them to death. Your hand must be the first in putting them to death, and then the hands of all the people. Stone them to death, because they tried to turn you

> away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. (Deuteronomy 13:6-10)

Stoning was not an immediate death. While sometimes it happened quickly, oftentimes its object would suffer terrible pain, humiliation, and anguish as he bled to death on the street with rocks raining down. The criminal's dignity was irrelevant. It was irrelevant because he—in the eyes of the law and God—had lost his own sense of dignity. And stoning wasn't the only method used. The Talmud describes pouring molten lead down the throat of the condemned, beheading, and strangulations—all for crimes such as practicing magic, worshipping idols, or eating something unclean. Throughout Christian history, cruel and unusual punishment as we would define it has been exercised without a thought to the guilty person's "dignity."

Yet this is an objection many Christians make in opposing torture. *Federalist* contributor Rachel Lu makes this point when she says that no matter what a person has done, he maintains his dignity, and other people have no right to violate it.

> We should never allow ourselves to forget that enemy combatants are still human beings. Most of them probably aren't very *good* human beings, and undoubtedly some are moral monsters. They are not citizens of our nation, nor are they prisoners of war in the proper sense. Still, they are human. This means that they possess that intrinsic dignity and worth that is proper to *all* human life. Seeing the moral significance of that basic reality is perhaps the most important line that divides a humane and rational society from a terrorist organization or a brutal dictatorship.

The assumption here is that human dignity can never be lost or forfeited. It is part of who we are, and no one has the right to take it away from us. We have the right to life, to our dignity, to our autonomy. In other words, our dignity is absolute in an ontological sense.

While Lu is correct that no human being has the right to take our dignity from us, our dignity is not absolute—it is *conditional* to our being because we are moral creatures. Unlike our finitude, which is absolute, as well as our physical mortality, our dignity depends on our moral character, our values, our choices, our actions. It exists in relation to God's law and his righteousness.

Criminals Forfeit Their Dignity

When we make evil choices—especially in the context of murdering people—we forfeit our dignity and autonomy. *Our own choices* have diminished our dignity, and it cannot be called up to save us from receiving the punishment we deserve—or the consequences that come with our own actions. This is why it is just to take away a criminal's freedom when he commits a heinous crime. Criminals have forfeited their right to be free, and they have abandoned their own sense of worth and value by taking another's life. They have made that choice. They have done that to themselves.

Thomas Aquinas makes this point quite clearly in his defense of killing criminals:

> By sinning man departs from the order of reason, and consequently falls away from the dignity of his manhood, in so far as he is naturally free, and exists for himself, and he falls into the slavish state of the beasts, by being disposed of according as he is useful to others. This is expressed in Ps. 48:21: 'Man, when he was in honor, did not understand; he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them,' and Prov. 11:29: 'The fool shall serve the wise.' Hence, although it be evil in itself to kill a man so long as he preserve his dignity, yet it may be

> good to kill a man who has sinned, even as it is to kill a beast. For a bad man is worse than a beast, and is more harmful, as the Philosopher states (Polit. i, 1 and Ethic. vii, 6).

"A bad man is worse than a beast, and is more harmful." Aquinas' words are definitely in line with how God treats criminals in Scripture. Human dignity is not seen as an absolute, but as conditional. This makes it morally justifiable to kill people who have violated the law—man's law and God's law. Since interrogative torture is not worse than killing, and killing is morally justified because human dignity has already been lost, interrogative torture is morally justifiable.

If killing were not morally justifiable on the basis of human dignity, God would be a monster. But he isn't. Why? Because of human guilt. Even though the Bible says, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," God orders Joshua to "go in and clean house, and don't leave anything breathing! Don't leave a donkey, child, woman, old man or old woman breathing. Wipe out Jericho!" He can order this because those people had violated God's law and in so doing had forfeited their rights and lost all sense of dignity. Even as we struggle with the fairness of this from our limited human perspective, the fact that this occurs in Scripture cannot be denied. The justification for it lies in the guilt of the people being punished. If killing were not morally justifiable—and if human dignity were intrinsic to our being no matter what we do—then hell itself would be a profound injustice because people would be tortured for eternity with their dignity intact. How can this be reconciled with the absolutist view of human dignity?

If it is morally justifiable to stone acriminal to death, which is punitive (or even kill someone out of self-defense or to save a life that is threatened), would it not follow that it would be morally justified to *torture* a criminal to get information out of him in order to save a life? If we choose not to torture someone so we can save a life, then we are placing the dignity of the criminal over the life and dignity of the innocent person who is about to die—something the Bible doesn't do. The Bible does not recognize the autonomy and dignity of the evildoer. God didn't, for the foreign nations who were not covered by his covenant. The theocracy of Israel didn't, which is why people were stoned to death for adultery and other crimes. And it is why, now in the new dispensation, the government (though not the church) is to wield the sword and "violate" the autonomy of the guilty, and we're to recognize the state's authority when it does:

> Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. **For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.** Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. (Romans 13, emphasis added)

Government Rightly Uses Force to Protect Society

While the new dispensation fulfills the old in the Church, it does not make these old laws invalid. In Matthew 5:18, Jesus says: "For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." Christians are no longer under the Mosaic Law, but this does not mean there are no longer temporal punishments delivered by the government—a government that God means will use force to protect society, not to be a charitable institution.

The Bible makes it clear that those who live by the sword will die by the sword. If you kill, you forfeit your right to life. You have become, as Aquinas said, worse than a beast.

This doesn't mean the government can do anything it likes to criminals just because they're guilty. It is not our right to exercise power for the sake of power. If we are forced to use interrogative torture, we do it to save lives, not to abuse the criminal for the sake of empowerment or even punishment. And this action is to be done, not by individuals, but by the government, which has been given the authority of the sword by God himself.

People like Zahnd who speak of God's forgiveness and mercy and the many commandments in Scripture for God's people to turn the other cheek and love their enemies make the mistake of applying these commandments meant for individuals also to the government. While it is a Christian's duty to love and forgive, it is the state's duty to punish criminals—even to put them to death.

The good news is that there is hope even for the evildoer. If there is repentance, there is forgiveness, there is restoration of dignity. This is the hope of the Gospel and the promise of Christ who died for our sins. If you put your faith in him, he is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse you of all unrighteounsess. But for those who commit evil, who live by the sword, they will surely die by it. And those who refuse to show mercy will suffer at the master's hand: As Jesus said of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18, "In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. 'This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.'"

Guilt and Innocence Matter

While forgiveness and mercy are a matter for individuals, it is the role of the government to protect and punish. When it comes to protection, innocent lives that can be saved are of higher value than any moral claims by the terrorist who has and will commit atrocities. Guilt and innocence matters. If government officials have a known terrorist in custody, and it is certain that he has information needed to save lives, it is morally justified for them to use interrogative torture to get the information necessary to protect innocent life.

Once again, I turn to Aquinas. In defense of the death penalty, he wrote that the reason it is necessary to kill a criminal is not simply to punish him, but to protect society "to safeguard the common good." When the good are "protected and saved by the slaying of the wicked, then the latter may be lawfully put to death."

If, according to Aquinas, the good can be saved through killing the wicked, then it would seem to follow that the good can be saved through interrogative torture, which is a lesser evil than killing. If we're willing to kill in war to protect our homeland, why are we not willing to inflict temporary pain on a terrorist to save lives? The people who are killed on the battlefield will never walk again, they will never feel the sun on their faces, or eat a hot meal, or touch another human being. The terrorist who has been tortured will—and those he has threatened will, too.

The Catechism of the Council of Trent expounds on this theme when it says that lawful slaying to "protect the innocent" is just use of civil power. "The just use of this power, far from involving the crime of murder, is an act of paramount obedience to this Commandment which prohibits murder [Thou shalt not kill]. The end of the Commandment is the preservation and security of human life. Now the punishments inflicted by the civil authority, which is the legitimate avenger of crime, naturally tend to this end, since they give security to life by repressing outrage and violence. Hence these words of David: In the morning I put to death all the wicked of the land, that I might cut off all the workers of iniquity from the city of the Lord."

John Yoo, who was instrumental in setting up the Guantanamo Bay detention center, said in an interview in 2007 that there are situations when torture is justified:

> Death is worse than torture, but everyone except pacifists thinks there are circumstances in which war is justified. War means killing people. If we are entitled to kill people, we must be entitled to injure them. I don't see how it can be reasonable to have an absolute prohibition on torture when you don't have an absolute prohibition on killing. Reasonable people will disagree about when torture is justified. But that, in some circumstances, it is justified seems to me to be just moral common sense. How could it be better that 10,000 or 50,000 or a million people die than that one person be injured?

Peter Levine, a professor at Tufts University, says that Yoo asks a serious question, and while he tries to respond it, he's not satisfied with any of his answers.

> We have a good reason to safeguard the rights of captives: our own government can take *us* prisoner. If we lose habeas corpus for suspected terrorists, we can lose it for ourselves. That is certainly a concern, but it doesn't excuse acts of war on foreign lands that may cause individuals to suffer worse than they would under torture. A pacifist replies: War is never acceptable. But what about in 1940? Or 1861? Or 1776? If war is ever justified, then we will sometimes kill people. And if killing is worse than torturing, why should we ban the latter–especially if it proves an efficient means of preventing casualties?

Levine, like most of us, doesn't feel comfortable with torture, but the argument that it can be effective in saving lives is compelling. Some call this pure utilitarianism, but if you can kill to protect society, and some forms of torture are not as bad as killing, then does it not follow that it is morally justified to use torture to save lives?

One of the problems we have in this debate is the tendency to make no distinction between the guilty and the innocent. Someone says he would never advocate torture to save the innocent. But is that realistic or even honest? What if a bomb is about to go off in your child's school? The authorities have captured a terrorist who has information on where the bomb is. They know he has this information, and they're running out of time. Would you allow your child to die in order to save the dignity of a terrorist? Some say they would, but is the value of a criminal's dignity—dignity he doesn't value himself as he's abandoned it—more valuable than your child's life?

Will the Torturer Lose His Soul?

The issue here is not over using power for power's sake, which is often the case with torture. It is acting for a higher moral purpose. Dietrich Bonhoeffer certainly understood this dilemma when he participated in a plot to assassinate Hitler. You can read the heaviness of his choices in the following passage:

> We have been silent witnesses of evil deeds. We have become cunning and learned the arts of obfuscation and equivocal speech. Experience has rendered us suspicious of human beings, and often we have failed to speak to them a true and open word. Unbearable conflicts have worn us down or even made us cynical. Are we still of any use? We will not need geniuses, cynics, people who have contempt for others, or cunning tacticians, but simple, uncomplicated, and honest human beings. Will our inner strength to resist what has been forced on us have remained strong enough, and our honesty with ourselves blunt enough, to find our way back to simplicity and honesty?

Choosing between two evils is never easy, but it is a situation created, not by those trying to find resolution, but by the criminal who has chosen evil over good. Some argue that torture necessarily dehumanizes the one carrying it out. This is an interesting admission, especially when these same people say that a criminal doesn't dehumanize himself by his own evil deeds—that he doesn't forfeit his dignity. How can a torturer dehumanize himself by inflicting pain if a murderer doesn't dehumanize himself by killing others? It seems that our immoral actions do affect us, do diminish us, do reduce us, as Aquinas said, to a level lower than beasts—both for the torturer and the murderer.

Leaders in law enforcement have been known to say that they would never want someone on their force who can carry out torture and not be affected by it—precisely because it does have a dehumanizing effect. These concerns are valid. Indeed, if someone were to torture and not be affected by it, he would be a sociopath and dangerous in society. No one is saying employing torture techniques will leave a person *unaffected*. Bonheoffer was certainly affected by his role in the conspiracy to kill Hitler, but does this mean he was necessarily dehumanized? Not when the motive and the purpose is a higher good—to defend the defenseless, to save lives.

Most everyone would say that if they randomly killed someone, they would be psychologically and spiritually harmed. But if they killed someone who was trying to rape or kill their daughter, they would find peace with it because they will have known it was necessary to protect the one they loved. Context and motive make all the difference. They would be affected, of course. There would be no delight, no pride, no joy. There would be grief and pain, but there would be a measure of calm and acceptance that what had to be done was done to save a life—to defend the defenseless and protect the good. This is why it is important that when we consider these kinds of measures—measures that have been forced upon us as we live in a barbaric world where the wicked terrorize the innocent—that we remain true to our purpose and only resort to these extremes when there is no other choice.

What About Due Process?

How do we work through these difficult issues legally? Do we want our government to have the power to interrogate people it considers guilty without accountability and due process? First of all, a terrorist is not an American citizen and does not have the rights of due process given to American citizens (or they shouldn't). The Geneva Convention says prisoners of war are "Members of other militias and members of other volunteer corps, including those of organized resistance movements, belonging to a Party to the conflict and operating in or outside their own territory, even if this territory is occupied, provided that such militias or volunteer corps, including such organized resistance movements, fulfill the following conditions: (a) that of being commanded by a person responsible for his subordinates; (b) that of having a fixed distinctive sign recognizable at a distance; (c) that of carrying arms openly; (d) that of conducting their operations in accordance with the laws and customs of war."

Terrorists don't meet b, c, and d. They do not wear uniforms. They hide among civilians and innocents. Their arms are usually concealed. They don't conform to the laws and customs of war but target innocent people.

Second, it would be unwise to have torture legalized and institutionalized because such license would be dangerous left unchecked in the hands of the powerful state. Alan Dershowitz, a Harvard University law professor, offers a reasonable solution.

> I think every president would at least consider the option of torture if confronted with an actual ticking bomb. President Clinton said he would consider torture and President George W. Bush actually authorized the use of waterboarding, even in non-ticking bomb situations. Bush denied

> that waterboarding and other forms of extreme interrogation measures he approved were torture, but they would seem to fit any reasonable definition of that term.
> If I'm right, and if every president would, in fact, consider opting for the torture of one terrorist rather than permitting thousands of innocent Americans to be blown up, then the following question must be asked: Would it be better or worse for a law to be passed requiring the president to secure a warrant before (or, in a real emergency, during or right after) he could employ this drastic measure? Such a law would implicitly legitimate torture in extreme situations, and that's a bad thing, but it would also create visibility and accountability, which is a good thing.

A danger of torture warrants is that there would be no check on how often they are given, and the result would be that torture would become more normal. That's certainly a risk. The only other option is to keep all forms of torture and enhanced interrogation illegal and let those who find themselves faced with the ticking time bomb scenario or something similar fall on the mercy of society and the courts. If this is, indeed, the only solution, I hope the courts and the public will show leniency, since torture is morally justified in extreme circumstances and those men and women who are caught between two evils but who humbly act according to conscience—even when it is contrary to the law—will be shown the respect and gratitude they deserve.

THE ETHICS & RELIGIOUS LIBERTY COMMISSION OF THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

Should Caesar torture Jesus?

December 18, 2014 by ERLC

In a recent article (7 Things Christians Should Know About Torture), I wrote that the recent Senate Report on the C.I.A.'s interrogation techniques should be the beginning, rather than the end, of the discussion on the morality and legality of torture. Since then I've been encouraged by the attempts to examine the issue (though I've been mostly disheartened by the outcomes supported).

For example, in a recent article in *The Federalist*, D.C. McAllister argues that "Yes, Christians Can Support Torture." One of her primary claims is that,

> If government officials have a known terrorist in custody, and it is certain that he has information needed to save lives, it is morally justified for them to use interrogative torture to get the information necessary to protect innocent life.

Her formulation of the issue is helpfully clarifying, though the use of the term "known terrorist" is unnecessarily limiting. Are we only justified in using interrogative torture when the person is "known" to be a terrorist? What if we know they have information necessary to protect innocent life but they cannot legitimately be labeled a "terrorist"?

A set of more applicable terms for discussion about national self-defense and the use of force would be "culpable aggressor" and "culpable bystander." We can define a culpable aggressor as a person who is performing or is planning to carry out a culpable act for which they are criminally responsible, and for which the actor lacks a moral justification or excuse. An example would be a kidnapper who is planning to take a child hostage. A culpable bystander is a person who has knowledge about an act of culpable aggression and is morally obligated to reveal that information so that the harm may be ended or prevented. An example would be someone who knows a kidnapping is soon to take place.

Let's substitute "culpable bystander" for "known terrorist" and label McAllister's position the "Torture Claim":

> If government officials have a culpable bystander in custody, and it is certain that he has information needed to save lives, it is morally justified for them to use interrogative torture to get the information necessary to protect innocent life.

This is a reasonably well-formulated version of a position many Americans hold in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, so let's use it to examine our moral intuitions about interrogative torture.

Let's begin with a thought experiment. In our representative case, government officials have a culpable bystander in custody, and are certain he has information needed to save lives, specifically, information about a

plot to assassinate a nation's highest political leader.

According to supporters of the Torture Claim, such as McAllister, it is morally justified for the government officials to use interrogative torture to get the information necessary since it will protect innocent life. But if we accept the Torture Claim, we have to accept all relevant conclusions that can be drawn from similar representative cases.

Consider, for instance, the following logically sound conclusion that can be derived from a straightforward application of the Torture Claim:

1. Intelligence sources within the Roman Empire suspect an assassination attempt is being plotted against Caesar Augustus.

2. They have heard the followers of Jesus claim he is a God, and that he would thus have access to knowledge about potential assassination plots against Caesar even if he were not involved. (The incarnate Jesus would *not* have to be omniscient to have access to the knowledge of the Father. From a reading of Matthew 4, we can reasonably assume such knowledge would be given to him if he were to ask.)

3. Access to such information is enough to make Jesus a culpable bystander, so he is taking into custody.

4. If Jesus refuses to reveal the plot against Caesar, the Romans will use interrogative torture to get the information necessary to protect innocent life.

The inevitable conclusion for Christians who support the Torture Claim is that the Romans would be morally justified in torturing Jesus.

We can also conclude that the German government would have been justified in torturing Dietrich Bonhoeffer to uncover details about a plot to kill Adolph Hitler; that Saddam Hussein would have been justified in torturing women to foil a plot against himself; and that the KGB would have been justified in torturing hundreds of people to defend the Soviet Empire. All are reasonable conclusions to be drawn from the moral claim.

Please understand that I'm not making an *argumentum ad consequentiam*; my position is not that the Torture Claim is moral or immoral based on whether it leads to desirable or undesirable consequences. My assertion is interrogative torture is immoral for a variety of other reasons and that this thought experiment merely illuminates our moral intuitions about the issue.

We can gain insight into our own moral perspective by examining the issue outside of our narrow, U.S.-centric focus. Americans who defend the Torture Claim likely do not object to torturous interrogation if our culpable bystander has access to knowledge about an assassination attempt on a U.S. President by al-Qaeda. But moral rules aren't culturally specific. Our rule has to apply to all relevant situations, and not only to threats against countries we admire, such as the United States.

If it is morally justified for the government to use interrogative torture to get the information necessary to protect innocent life, then it would be morally justified for Caesar to torture Christ.

For Christians to have an honest discussion about the morality of interrogative torture, this is the conclusion on which we should begin the debate.

7

The Crowd and the Victim

It is no coincidence that the words *woke* and *mob* are so often and easily paired. A mob is the natural habitat for the woke. It exemplifies each of the three distorted binaries considered: it is impersonal, unreasonable, and power-hungry.

The crowd has a pull on every human being. French literary, cultural, and religious theorist René Girard illuminates this human tendency in recounting the denial of Christ by St. Peter. Having promised Christ that he would never deny him, St. Peter finds himself in the midst of an angry mob eager to condemn Christ. A young woman identifies St. Peter as an outsider, a Galilean, and asks if he is a follower of Jesus. So strong is the pull to be within the circle of united voices that Peter denies Christ three times. The cock then crows, startling him out of his hypnotic groupthink trance.

Girard explains mobs and scapegoats by finding a pattern throughout history of human behavior that begins with what he terms *mimesis*. Mimesis is the anthropological observation that human beings imitate each other. This can be beneficial and necessary for human development, as when a toddler learns words and speech by mimicking what

she sees and hears. As we grow, we might strive to emulate a parent, an older sibling, or a hero.

We also mimic each other in our desires and in our dislikes. "Man is the creature who does not know what to desire, and he turns to others in order to make up his mind. We desire what others desire because we imitate their desires."[1] We want what we see others wanting, and we see much of this psychology in marketing and consumption. For example, a house that languishes on the real estate market without offers begins to be seen as less desirable to us because we see it as less desirable to others. Conversely, a house perceived to be highly sought-after tends to increase its desirability in our estimation, as well as in the estimation of others, leading to a snowball effect and bidding wars.

According to Girard, this pattern of mimesis inclines humans toward conflict, and we start to see one another as rivals and competitors. This is a two-step process. First, the objects desired create a rivalry, especially over things that can't be shared. This is one way of understanding why the Ten Commandments focus so directly and repeatedly on covetousness. Second, the rivalry moves from the objects of desire to the desiring subjects, even to the point of leaving the objects behind or destroying them: "I'll do anything to keep you from getting this!" The rivalry becomes so consuming that the subjects start to care less about getting the

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1 René Girard, "Generative Scapegoating," in Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, p. 122.

previously desired thing, or person, so much as keeping it / him / her from the other.

When conflicts arise, we are prone to align ourselves with the perceived stronger side. Faced with the threat of violence, the crowd tends to gather against the same opponent in search of a scapegoat upon whom to project their guilt and direct their need for blame and violence. In joining others against a common enemy, a sense of solidarity is experienced within the group. Gossip is a microcosm of this tendency. We feel a sensation of bonding with the person with whom we gossip at the expense of the person who is targeted. On a broader scale, we see scapegoating made manifest in racism, or political partisanship, or mass genocide.

This ancient and human phenomenon is why mythology and religions are characterized by scapegoats and the ritualistic sacrifices meant to appease the gods. The victim carries a dual significance—it bears guilt, but it can also be sacralized because of the sense of solidarity it creates in the scapegoaters. In killing the scapegoat, the crowd achieves a sense of peace. However, the catharsis of killing or banishing can only bring temporary peace because the underlying mimetic rivalry system hasn't been touched, leaving intact the perpetuation of the violent cycle without true healing.

This is a (fallen) natural process that happens unconsciously. Girard scholar Alex Lessard noted to me in an email discussion, "The injustice of the scapegoating mechanism is revealed economically throughout the Bible. For example, through Job's innocence versus the advice of his wife and 'friends,' and in Jesus's intervention in the stoning of the adulteress. There is a gradual introduction and spread of

consciousness of the unjust working of the whole worldly system."

But it is not until the death of Christ, who is perfect innocence and perfect victim, that the injustice of the cycle of scapegoating is truly exposed. Rather than giving satisfaction to the crowd, his innocence is known and affirmed to the point that his disciples give their lives in defense of this truth. Guilt cannot be found in him, so his death prompts us to contend with our own guilt. God identifies with the victim, not the scapegoaters. He requests forgiveness for them, for they know not what they do, and he is the victim who takes on all sin and guilt in order to wash the world clean with his blood. Through his death and resurrection, and by the workings of the Holy Spirit, we are freed from the cycle of sacred violence.

The Victim-Mob

In another counterfeit perversion of Christianity, the woke elevate and glorify not the one true victim, by whose blood we are united, but the woke mob. The scapegoat they target is ultimately the Logos. The Logos is the Greek word for "reason," "word," or "plan." Jesus Christ, in being the Word made flesh, is the communication of the mind of God which orders and gives meaning and form to the world. The Logos stands in opposition to the ruling characteristics of the woke because he is the mind (*reason*) of God communicated through the *person* of Jesus Christ who is the author and *authority* over all.

Increasingly, the woke proclaim themselves not just in defiance of moral law but as victims of it. Moral law, which is a manifestation of the Logos, becomes a perpetrator with the woke mob as its victim. Emily Keglor, in an interview for the leftist Christian periodical *Sojourners*, epitomizes this idea of moral order as oppression: "The church in America continues to perpetrate spiritual and physical violence against queer and trans people. Standing at the intersection of queerness and Christian faith — and speaking with clarity and conviction for full affirmation and celebration — is key to reducing the continued religious trauma that institutional Christianity seeks to wield. That word of liberation is transformative not only for the LGBTQ+ community but for all communities imprisoned by the bonds of cissexism."[2]

In its perversion of Christianity, the woke elevate and glorify not the one true victim, by whose blood we are made innocent, but the gods of the woke mob by whose victimhood we are made guilty. Woke ideology encourages the behavior of the mob but takes the posture of the scapegoat. In order to accept the serpent's promise that "ye shall be as gods," they have to claim victimhood as their own.

But it is a victimhood not for the sake of unity but for the sake of division. It is a long-held understanding in theology that evil is parasitic. It does not have being but rather is a deprivation of being and so can only exist by distorting the good. Its nature is to consume and destroy the good it invades. Evil wants to do this with Christ.

2 Paola Fuentes Gleghorn, "10 Christian Women Shaping the Church in 2020," *Sojourners*, March 5, 2020, https://sojo.net/articles/10-christian-women-shaping-church-2020.

Though the victim gods can attack Christ and his Church, they cannot defeat him. The innocent victim is the ultimate victor. No matter how powerful they become, the one thing they cannot grasp for themselves is Christ's innocence.

This leads the woke ideologues to prowl after the next best thing: innocence in this world. Innocence in this world is a signpost pointing to Christ, forcing the beholder to examine himself. Understanding this makes some sense of the bizarre way in which woke movements want to consume and destroy innocence. The city of man wants the glory of God for itself.

In their failure to make themselves innocent, they have two strategies to deflect from personal guilt. The first is by maintaining the status of victim in order to emphasize the guilt of the other. Raising the moral status of victimhood increases the incentive to publicize grievances and makes the aggrieved more prone to highlight their victim identity. Of the moral stature assumed by victims today, sociologists Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning state, "Their adversaries are privileged and blameworthy, but they themselves are pitiable and blameless."[3]

The second strategy to deflect from their guilt is by attacking innocence directly, as it stands as an existential judgment of us all. As discussed previously, innocence is not possible if persons are defined by evil. For the woke, it is imperative to disabuse people of the illusion of innocence.

3 B. Campbell and J. Manning, "Microaggression and moral cultures," *Comparative Sociology*, 13, 2014, pp. 707–8.

Prowling for Innocence

We see this second strategy in the effort to sexualize children at younger and younger ages, and in the corruption and hyper sexualization of women, all in the name of liberation.

Innocence, in the world of critical theory, is dominance. We see this most clearly in children. Their innocence is a threat to woke ideology. Protecting childhood innocence generally means shielding them from adult sexuality, sexual perversions, violence. But shielding them from these things has two ramifications: it allows them to maintain that traditional sexual behavior between one man and one woman in marriage is the norm, and therefore the preferred and dominant way of being. Sexuality that veers from these norms then is said to be marginalized by them. This leads to the second ramification: children being sheltered from perversion discourages children who might be inclined toward such things from acting out on their desires for fear of being shamed or seeming weird.

When the definition of the person is structured around oppression, then everyone must be implicated. Gangs require initiations, especially murderous ones, because complicity is a powerful tool: You are in this tribe now, united in the blood of guilt. Complicity distorts our reason, perverts our objectivity, and leaves us with misplaced, irrational loyalties. Until the gang member is complicit, he is a threat.

In 2019, Catholic writer Sohrab Ahmari put a spotlight on drag queen story hour as a cultural moment which demanded Christians stand up and say "no!" Debates ensued, and some fellow conservative interlocutors tended to focus

on free speech laws, missing the deeper point. The brazenness of the ideology behind this burgeoning effort in public libraries was another stake in the ground declaring the new moral goal of society: disrupting the natural instincts of innocent children by training them to undo their gender binaries and reconstruct them to think in terms of gender fluidity. It was not about carving out free speech—it was about revolutionizing thought.

Multiple videos appeared of men dressed as women teaching children to turn their backs, bend over, and shake their bottoms.[4] In the videos, woke parents smile and nod to their kids. Some children laugh, others look nervous or uncomfortable. To the woke, that discomfort is their innate, bigoted instincts which the trans activists are here to reprogram.

The merger of drag queens and library story hours originated in San Francisco in 2015 but have spread across the states and across the pond. The stated effort of drag queen story hour is teaching children to be tolerant. The less stated, but still open, goal is that trans activism in libraries can help a child who might be inclined to some sort of other sexual identity become open to her options. The even less-stated but fundamental goal is, unsurprisingly, to disrupt the oppressive power dominance of heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

It is not just trans activism that is trending; local libraries are also helping kids walk the grooming plank. In 2020,

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4 For those who wish to see some of these clips, you can find them here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkZujRnHWNA. One should be warned of how disturbing these videos are, but watching them is important, as it shows the perversion of this evil.

a Maryland public library hosted their second lesbian pole dancer's "teens-only" sex ed class for twelve- to seventeen-year-olds—no parents allowed. The host, Bianca Palmisano, is openly into BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, masochism) and has also expressed support and a desire to normalize among the youth such things as "polyamorous relationships, homosexuality, prostitution, drug use, swingers, anal sex, etcetera."[5] All the while, woke parents sit outside waiting to hear what twelve-year-old Ashleigh learned about pole dancing and sadism at the library. The slow march through the institution is robustly inclusive of the library system.

Gender Dysphoria

Another highly disturbing way the woke attack innocence is through the incorporation of children into the social contagion of gender dysphoria. In her book *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*, Abigail Shrier writes of the heartbreaking explosion of girls transitioning now seemingly out of nowhere. A young girl who, at another time, would have been considered a tomboy is now told she is trans. "Teens and tweens today are everywhere pressed to locate themselves on a gender spectrum and within a sexual taxonomy—long before they have finished the sexual development that would otherwise guide discovery of who they are or what they desire."[6]

5 Doug Mainwaring, "Rural public library will again host lesbian pole-dancer's 'teens only' sex ed class," *LifeSiteNews*, January 6, 2020, https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/rural-public-library-will-again-host-lesbian-pole-dancers-teens-only-sex-ed-class.

6 Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Regnery, 2020).

Shrier came to discover that this is an epidemic that has exploded over the past decade. Historically, trans teens were overwhelmingly boys, but now girls with no childhood history of gender dysphoria discover with their friend groups that they want to be trans and push for surgeries and hormones. Progressive parents tend to be supportive. Parents who express hesitation are regularly declared to be transphobic by their children and their children's friends. In many places, there are laws banning conversion therapy, so therapists are prohibited from helping a child become comfortable in her biological gender, even if the therapist can tell there are other mental or emotional issues that are being masked by the desire to transition.

Shrier discovered that correlating with this rise in young female dysphoria is a mental health crisis that seems to be linked in part to the prevalence of social media and the harsh way it affects girls. Shrier says, "And because of all sorts of things in the culture that have allowed transgender identification to really rise in cultural value, this is one thing that young girls have latched onto as an explanation for what's wrong with them: 'Oh it must be gender dysphoria.'"[7]

In an interview with writer Spencer Klavan, Abilash Gopal, an MD who worked in adolescent psychiatric hospitals, states that almost all the trans kids have behavior problems. "They're trying to get attention, other kids don't like them, they don't feel attractive, they're not successful

7 Abigail Shrier, "Abigail Shrier: Transgenderism's 'IRREVERSIBLE DAMAGE,'" on the Dennis Prager Show, YouTube video, June 30, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-23nuQrE_qA.

academically." Gopal continues, "But this gives them the mantle of victimhood. And suddenly, all these resources, all this attention is showered upon them. And they also don't have to grow up. Literally, that's what taking hormone suppressants is."[8] Hormone suppressants block puberty hormones, which is why the transactivist wisdom is to transition prepubescent children rather than wait.

Klavan observes that Gopal is an extreme exception in his field. In both the medical field and in public schools, it is verboten to express any concern about the wisdom of giving hormone suppressants (and later surgery) to prepubescents. Any child who expresses a desire to transition is to be given a gender plan and their parents are only informed if the school has an assurance that they will be supportive. Similarly, in his research, Klavan found that there is an intense code of silence enforced by extreme bullying for any trans person who de-transitions or speaks out against transitioning from experience.[9]

Shrier, in her research, tells of a kindergarten classroom where teachers tell the kids that their sex was randomly decided at birth; consequently, it is now the children's mission to find what their gender actually is and that anyone who might question this process is abusive. "This is all done under the guise of anti-bullying, which means that child's parents cannot opt their children out. It is mandatory. . . . The pretext is that in order to protect children, you need

8 Spencer Klavan, "Children and Transgenderism," *The American Mind*, April 16, 2020, https://americanmind.org/essays/children-and-transgenderism/.

9 Ibid.

to indoctrinate the entire student population in gender confusion."[10]

Helping Kids Fly Their Freak Flag

Messages are seeded in multiple ways and through various channels to reorient children and fulfill what the revolutionaries deemed the necessary liberation of the therapeutic self. Children's movies, which once were stories of battles and bravery, true love and defeating evil, now have developed an almost universal theme of daring to embrace your inner unconventionality. While this sort of lesson might have its place, the prevalence and ubiquity of this modern morality tale, like the freeing of the therapeutic self, is for the sake of an agenda of powerful people: to encourage kids to find meaning in tapping into their inner freak—the freakier the better.

In the children's movie *Frozen*, Elsa has a secret that makes her different. Her concerned parents take her to see the wise trolls who declare that she was "born this way." She hides her secret, keeping herself in a metaphorical closet. Characters sing about how "love is an open door," reinforcing the in-the-closet theme. When the more traditional people in the village discover that she is different, they condemn her, confirming to the audience that the true villains in life are the dominant oppressors upholding normativity. Elsa moves

10 Allison Schuster, "Speaker: Most Parents Have No Idea Their Kids' Schools Are Pushing Insane Transgender Ideology," *The Federalist*, July 28, 2020, https://thefederalist.com/2020/07/28/speaker-most-parents-have-no-idea-their-kids-schools-are-pushing-insane-transgender-ideology/.

to the mountains and transforms herself into a fabulous queen of her own universe, and in the triumphant coming-out anthem "Let It Go," she sings about how she no longer has to be the good girl, "No right, no wrong, no rules for me . . . I'm free!"

To give another example, when the movie *Trolls* came out (not to be confused with the wise trolls who counsel Elsa in *Frozen*), one woke writer breathlessly reviewed it to be the "gayest movie ever." "There were trolls covered in glitter and sparkles, reflecting light off them like little disco balls. Don't forget the troll that literally [poops] cupcakes. Or, there's that moment when Poppy and her troll friends turn into a rainbow wig to help a sad Bergen girl. And what song do they decide to sing? The 'I'm Coming Out' song, complete with stellar dance moves, a jumpsuit and high platform shoes. Hello Drag Queens! Dreamworks couldn't have been more subtle if they tried. There was no holding back the rainbows emanating from our theater last night."[11]

This is not fever-pitch culture war paranoid hysteria; it is the work of an unabashed ideology hoping to evangelize and indoctrinate the young into its dogmas and practices. It has been happening for years; they are just no longer as concerned about concealing it.

11 "Trolls: The gayest movie this year," *writing living breathing* (blog), accessed October 16, 2020, https://writinglivingbreathing.wordpress.com/2016/11/06/trolls-the-gayest-movie-this-year/.

Grooming Girls

In 2017 (and rebooted in 2019), *Teen Vogue*, a magazine aimed at girls aged twelve to seventeen, came out with a "Guide to Anal Sex" full of tips and encouragement and a message that there is nothing wrong with sodomy (not that they referred to it as that) and in fact it could be a lot of fun. Some cautions were included such as, "If you regularly engage in anal sex, particularly with gay or bisexual men who are not monogamous, you might also consider taking PrEP."[12] PrEP is a drug intended to enable sex with HIV-positive people by making HIV transmission less likely—but still not completely "safe." The article was full of nauseating tips and a warning that fecal matter might be involved. The writer quickly assured the kids not to worry! That is just part of the fun.

This same magazine has also featured an article singing the praises of Karl Marx as a revolutionary who fought for the working class against the oppressive rich and inspired movements in Soviet Russia, China, Cuba, etc. There is no mention of the millions of corpses that resulted from his diabolical ideas, his raging racism, misogyny, and obsession with destruction. Instead, it is capitalism that is claimed to be violent, and the readers are encouraged to understand the revolutionary spirit and discern how they can apply it to today.[13]

12 Gigi Engle, "Anal Sex: Safety, How tos, Tips, and More," *Teen Vogue*, November 12, 2019, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/anal-sex-what-you-need-to-know.

13 Adryan Corcione, "Who Is Karl Marx: Meet the Anti-Capitalist Scholar," *Teen Vogue*, May 10, 2018, https://www.teenvogue.com/story/who-is-karl-marx.

Middle school girls are learning from such sources as *Teen Vogue* and putting these lessons into action. An acquaintance of mine was horrified to discover from her daughter that anal sex had become normal, and somewhat expected, at her middle school. There are too many examples of grooming girls: from Planned Parenthood protecting child predators to the entire ethos of the brand Pink, a lingerie shop targeting teens and owned by one of Jeffrey Epstein's former close associates. From *The Atlantic*: "Pink features bright colors, like candy, and includes pajamas, swimwear, skin care, and accessories, as well as underwear. In 2013, Pink launched a marketing campaign called 'Bright Young Things,' which drew attention to lacy underwear emblazoned with I DARE YOU across the rear, beach towels and tote bags that read KISS ME, and a T-shirt with a low neckline that read ENJOY THE VIEW. Most disturbing: a pink-and-orange thong with CALL ME printed on the crotch."[14]

Like so much of marketing to girls, the real audience is bad men. No wonder the trans and androgyny movements holds such sway for teens. For a girl who is inundated with the putrefying rot of the sexual revolution, it might start to look appealing to divest herself of her sexuality altogether.

The evil is difficult to wrap our minds around, but we had better. The architects of the Frankfurt School could not have fathomed how effective their plan would be to attack every aspect of the family, including the youngest members.

[14] Moira Donegan, "The Jeffrey Epstein-Victoria's Secret Connection," *The Atlantic*, August 6, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/08/victorias-secret-epstein/595507/.

The Sacred Cow

The ultimate attack on innocence in this world is waged on the clearest exemplar of innocence: a baby. It is no coincidence that the most visible icon of women's liberation is a place where innocence goes to die, quite literally. Against the ethos of family stands the preeminent billion-dollar industry of Planned Parenthood, innocuously referred to as a vehicle for "family planning." Its influence permeates every hot-pink-hatted progressive march. It is the place where rupture comes to us most intimately. It is where we go to be severed from our kin, from our biology, from an acknowledgment of our existential need. It is where we go to pretend that sex, the most intimate physical act of knowing, is one that creates no ties and requires no intimacy.

Abortion is the sacrament and greatest symbol of woke religion because in one act, it destroys each icon of the family: the child, the father, and the mother. All three are corrupted and made to become contrary to their nature. Man is able to impregnate woman but obligated to neither the woman nor the "product of conception" (in the sterile vernacular of the abortion industry). Meanwhile, woman is also liberated from any bond to man or to their child inside. In this dystopian vision of humanity, each of us is an island, autonomous and adrift—void of duty and hardened to love. Woman and child, united in one body, walk into Planned Parenthood and emerge dismantled and shattered: one literally, the other symbolically and spiritually. Another tie is severed, and she is deeply and profoundly alone.

With a death toll around fifty-six million per year worldwide, there is hardly anyone who has not been in some proximity or connection to abortion. Anyone who knows someone who carries this in her past knows it to be a lifelong struggle of sadness and guilt. Depression and regret are common. But we are not supposed to talk about that. The disconnect with the abortion messaging could not be starker. Women are told to "shout their abortions" with pride. Abortion is the sacred cow of the new left, and for good reason. It is like Advil holding back the symptoms of a tumor. It is a mask, a backstop, a cardboard façade. The reality is that there is no possible world in which everyone's will can run rampant without that world becoming violent. Sermons about consent won't resolve it.

Women, who are called to be icons of innocence, are particularly targeted as such by the ideology. We see this in the bizarre trend of women using public nudity to protest against pro-life laws. It is difficult to make sense of this form of protest until we realize that the publicly nude woman is an icon of rebellion, a forsaking of innocence.

When legislators in Utah passed a law to ban all abortions in 2020 (with the exceptions of incest or the life of the mother), the satanic temple spoke out against the law, claiming it violated their religious freedom. They saw abortion as a sacred satanic ritual. On their website, they walk women through how to perform the sacred abortion rituals, including staring at themselves in the mirror and reciting their sacred tenets, such as tenet III: "One's body is inviolable, subject to one's own will alone." And reciting their personal affirmation, "By my body, my blood, By my will it is

done."[15] Here again we see the demonic inversion of Christianity, with its diabolical mockery of Christ's generous gift of his sacred body and blood in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, not to mention the rebellion against one of the tenets of the Lord's Prayer: not *thy* will, but *my* will be done.

Evil has sought to attack Christ and his holy innocence from the very beginning of his life. While we should meditate on all aspects of Christ's life, his infancy is where he is particularly remembered and celebrated in the cultural imagination. Far from a saccharine sentimental story for Christmas, we should remember that though he enters the world simply, it is still in the shadow of the cross and King Herod's slaughter of the innocents.

Childlike

It is not just the innocence of children but the innocence of all people that woke ideology attacks. Through Christ, we are made anew and called to be spiritual adults, but with the innocence of children. We are to be childlike, though not childish. Our fundamental identity is children of a loving father, with the characteristics that such love implies: trust, a desire to follow, an easy eagerness to be forgiven and a swift sorrow for our transgressions, a confidence in the depth of his love for us, and a natural reverence for him.

The dogmas of the ideology serve to strip us of this fundamental reality of our humanity that speaks to us of our

15 "Satanic Abortions are Protected by Religious Liberty Laws," The Satanic Temple, accessed October 23, 2020, https://announcement.thesatanictemple.com/rrr-campaign41280784.

being children of God: embodied, with a nature, and created. The reduction of the person, the rejection of nature and the elevation of the will, the flattening of authority—all of this contributes to, and happens by way of, the destruction of the family. The plot has been largely successful, but it does not have the last word.

Part III

Indoctrination

8

The Sexual Revolution

In his 1936 book *Sex and Culture*, J. D. Unwin published the results of his extensive research studying eighty-six societies and civilizations to see if there is a relationship between sexual freedom and the flourishing of cultures. Unwin, a social anthropologist from Oxford, measured flourishing in terms of art, architecture, agriculture, engineering, literature, and so forth. He divided his inquiry into multiple categories, including restraint before and after marriage. The single most influential factor in determining the flourishing of a society, Unwin discovered, was whether prenuptial chastity was a strict social norm or not; when this was combined with absolute monogamy, the society flourished all the more.

Of this finding, Unwin scholar Kirk Durston notes, "Rationalist cultures that retained this combination for at least three generations exceeded all other cultures in every area, including literature, art, science, architecture, engineering, and agriculture."[1]

[1] Kirk Durstan, "Why Sexual Morality May be Far more Important than You Ever Thought," *Quest* (blog), accessed October 25, 2020, https://www.kirkdurston.com/blog/unwin?rq=sexual%20morality.

Unwin found that if there were a societal change in the norms regarding sexual restraint, either toward more sexual freedom or toward greater sexual restraint, the full effect of the change was not realized until the third generation. Change takes root slowly in the first generation, becomes more normalized in the second, and by the third, realizes its full effect on the society. At that point, when total sexual liberty is embraced, the society "is characterized by people who have little interest in much else other than their own wants and needs. At this level, the culture is usually conquered or taken over by another culture with greater social energy."[2]

Unwin discovered that there is a deep correlation between prenuptial chastity and absolute monogamy, deism, and rational thinking. When the first was abandoned, the remaining disappeared within three generations.

Generations are generally considered to cover a span of twenty to thirty years. Let us say thirty. If we consider the sexual revolution to have begun in the mid-1960s when it erupted (though it was seeded and simmering decades prior), then we are at the end of the second generation and entering the third. According to Unwin's findings, short of a dramatic pivot, we are entering the beginning of societal collapse.

The revolutionaries, from Marx to Marcuse, seemed to know this with remarkable prescience. Their plan to demolish the family, though it sounds like the rantings of a madman, has turned out to be the most obvious and yet insidious tactic in their playbook. Like a long-term game of Jenga,

2 Ibid.

pull at one stabilizing piece of the tower and the entire thing collapses in on itself.

Religion and the nuclear family stood as the biggest hurdles in the way of the revolution. How were they to dismantle such a basic human institution that fulfilled fundamental human desires? For a sincere Christian family striving to serve God and one another, family life could prove to be greatly rewarding and happy, albeit simple and unsung. Even if told that they were in an oppressive institution, many would still be content in their roles as loving wives, devoted husbands, or religious, shunning the call to resentment and revolution.

This posed a problem, but one which the architects of revolution in America were prepared to face. Weakening the sexual mores of culture is at the heart of dismantling the family by way of the father initially, though it can, and often does, begin by way of the woman as well. Through sexual coarseness, the father becomes weak and devoid of moral authority, the wife becomes devalued and resentful, and the children grow cynical and rebellious. Everyone becomes wounded.

Convincing people that they are defined by pain and evil is a lot simpler if they know the depths of pain and evil personally. Woundedness is exploited and exacerbated for the sake of making tribal loyalties more militant and resentment more calcified. In making family life painful, we did not eliminate our need for one, we just relocated it. The result is a people not only suspicious of the good but trained to defensively recoil from it, and who subsequently go out in a futile search for a facsimile of it.

The Early Signs of Destruction

The destruction was apparent early on, but there were political reasons to ignore it. In the 1960s, sociologist and future senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan was hard at work developing policy for President Johnson's war on poverty. While analyzing statistics and social patterns, Moynihan noticed that the metrics of success for black communities was diminishing significantly rather than improving in the wake of civil rights successes. Some of this was attributable to lingering racism and the effects of years of injustice. But fundamentally, Moynihan determined the problem was the disintegration of the family and that the nation needed to rally behind a common purpose of saving and supporting the stability of black family life. The trend of black male employment and welfare enrollment had begun to diverge pointedly—the former going down sharply as the latter rose. With declining opportunities for employment and the ability to support their families, Moynihan surmised that men would become alienated from the meaningful role of fatherhood, leading to sharp increases in divorce, out-of-wedlock births, and fatherless communities.

The reality he discovered, as supported by all indices, was that the post-war trend for black urban families was toward disintegration, rendering poverty and pathologies that much more intractable. President Johnson was compelled by the report to give a speech at Howard University, where he declared this issue was "the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights." The president went on to ascribe causation as multi-varied and called for greater social aid,

realizing that the breakdown of the family would lead to untold damage. Generations of children and communities across the country would be crippled.

Though Johnson viewed this as his greatest civil rights speech, he was attacked in its wake. Civil servants and government bureaucrats muttered about the report's "subtle racism."[3] The message was clear: the system was to be blamed and blamed entirely. To imply that there was any degree of solution to be found in encouraging and maintaining traditional family structures was too bourgeois to tolerate. Writing for the *New York Times* decades later, Nicholas Kristoff said, "Liberals brutally denounced Moynihan as a racist. He himself had grown up in a single-mother household and worked as a shoeshine boy at the corner of Broadway and 43rd Street in Manhattan, yet he was accused of being aloof and patronizing, and of 'blaming the victim.'" Kristoff quotes Floyd McKissick, then a prominent civil rights leader, as saying, "My major criticism of the report is that it assumes that middle-class American values are the correct values for everyone in America."[4]

While the traditional family is written off as a remedy, more sinister solutions to poverty take root. The foundress of Planned Parenthood, Margaret Sanger, was a notorious racist and did not hide the fact that birth control and

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3 Kay S. Hymnowitz, "The Black Family: 40 Years of Lies," *City Journal*, Summer 2005, https://www.city-journal.org/html/black-family-40-years-lies-12872.html.

4 Nicholas Kristof, "When Liberals Blew It," *The New York Times*, March 11, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/12/opinion/when-liberals-blew-it.html.

abortion were essential to eliminating the African American population. Within the last decade, Ruth Bader Ginsburg famously described the Roe v. Wade decision as being intended to control population growth, "particularly growth in populations that we don't want to have too many of."[5]

In the early 1990s, the attorney for Roe, Ron Weddington, had urged then president-elect Bill Clinton that he needed a better educated, healthier, wealthier population in order to reform the country. To that end, he advised Clinton to "start immediately to eliminate the barely educated, unhealthy and poor segment of our country [through abortion.] . . . There, I've said it. It's what we all know is true, but we only whisper it."[6] The thirty million abortions at that time in the United States had, according to Weddington's measure, made the country much better, but at the cost of not just the lives lost but also the devastation of our cultural understanding of sex and responsibility. If the first duty of parenthood—allowing the child to live—has been eliminated, we can be sure every other human duty can be as well.

Sex without Meaning

The sexual revolution relies on this separation of sex from babies. It is not only conservative culture warriors who recognize this. In the first episode of the popular television

5 Kevin D. Williamson, "We Only Whisper It," *National Review*, September 24, 2014, https://www.nationalreview.com/2014/09/we-only-whisper-it-kevin-d-williamson/.

6 "How To Eliminate the Poor," *New Oxford Review*, October 2006, https://www.newoxfordreview.org/documents/how-to-eliminate-the-poor/.

show *Mad Men*, the character of Peggy is introduced to working-woman life on her first day at the office when veteran working woman Joan takes her to a doctor so she can be put on the Pill. The message was clear: separating sex from responsibility was the first step in becoming a modern woman. Peggy was now available for meaningless sex with men.

In order to mean nothing, sex has to remove constraints on the parties engaged in it. Any constraint would be an intolerable curb on the will. Our denial of the obvious connection between pregnancy and babies has resulted in much of the chaos and violence that plagues society today. Relationships between the sexes clearly exhibit this chaos, and violence is both the effect and the sustenance of this perverse ideology.

While *Mad Men* was a nuanced show, its standpoint was undeniably supportive of the advent of total sexual autonomy for women. But what has been the real-life legacy of this movement? Recently, the advice column over at *The Cut* published a letter that is some version of a complaint I've heard from numerous women. The woman writing in for advice described having been on nearly forty first dates in the past couple of years. At first, she thought casual dating was exactly what she needed. She tried casual relationships with various men, most of whom she shared chemistry with, but she realized that these relationships just made her feel badly about herself. "I was always so painfully aware of the fact that the only reason these guys were talking to me was because I was letting them sleep with me. . . . I felt like a sex doll. That might have been improved if the sex had been

good, but it was mediocre at best. I tried to ignore the feelings and spice up the sex, but nothing worked."[7]

The lived reality of many women in today's dating swamp is that they are reduced to a tool for men's masturbation. The "remedy" of using the man in return seems less like empowerment and more like an infernal competition to see who can be made more miserable. It makes perfect sense that no one wants to introduce a baby into such a dismal dating scene. A baby requires all sorts of responsibility, sacrifice, devotion, permanence. That is to say, a baby requires real love, a love that the modern dating scene might try to mimic but cannot embody.

The promise of the sexual revolution was that sex can be meaningless. Indeed, it has to be meaningless to preserve our autonomy. If it has intrinsic meaning, independent of whatever we desire it to mean, then suddenly the threat of duties and responsibilities begins to infringe upon our autonomy.

This revolution has thrown human relationships into chaos from the inside out, most tragically the relationship between parent and child. A baby is a glaring, obtrusive manifestation of meaning interjected into our autonomy.

To maintain the illusion of sexual autonomy requires us to be at war with the science of basic human embryology, as well as our very selves: our bodies, minds, and emotions. This leaves women confused by the disconnect between the illusion and the reality. "This is casual, so why do I feel

[7] Heather Havrilesky, "I Can't Do Casual," *The Cut*, May 15, 2019, https://www.thecut.com/2019/05/ask-polly-i-cant-do-casual.html.

intimately bonded to him? This is casual, so why do I feel used? This is casual, so why is a baby coming?"

A funny thing happens when we contort our thinking in a way that denies basic reality: people sometimes accidentally reason their way backward into the truth. This is what we saw when Alyssa Milano, in response to laws limiting the availability of abortion in 2019, called for sexual restraint in the form of a sex strike—the intended implication being that if men want sex, they'd better give us abortion, in case we were to get pregnant. The less intended implication was that were abortion not available, pregnancy and parenthood could be controlled through people practicing sexual restraint.

Another feminist tweet that went viral around the same time called for men to be responsible for both the women they have sex with and the children who might follow: "If abortion is illegal then men abandoning their child should also be illegal. If this was a permanent decision for me then it is for you as a father also."[8]

Both of these feminist declarations concede that because of the nature of sexual intimacy, and without the backstop of abortion, we all might have to realize our duties toward one another and our responsibilities to those to come. Not only does abortion fail to empower women, it exonerates men.

In his 2020 Netflix comedy special *Sticks and Stones*, Dave Chappelle pinpointed this dynamic with a darkly humorous bit that if women can unilaterally decide to have an abortion, then men can unilaterally decide not to provide for the child by skirting the burden of child support. His

[8] Ricky Spanish (@5headshawtyyy), Twitter, May 12, 2019.

justification? "My money, my choice." He ended by saying that if women can kill a baby, then men should at least be able to abandon a baby. As the horror of the logic played out in the audience's mind, he muttered, "And if *I'm* wrong then perhaps *we're* wrong."

With the camouflage of abortion under threat, the lie of the sexually autonomous lifestyle and the deep injustice it has imposed on men, women, and children is exposed. We can somewhat cover up the emotional and psychological toll of casual sex, but we can't quite cover up a baby unless we get rid of it. As Anthony Esolen writes, "If the child lives, the mother's life will not be the same, because if we accept the principles that allow the child to live, none of our lives can be the same. There is no way to guarantee a world safe for the unborn child that is also a world of total sexual and economic autonomy. In any world in which autonomy is the highest ideal, the child—that incarnate sign of our dependence and existential poverty—must go."[9]

We might look at the modern dating world and ask ourselves if this lifestyle of delusion that we are fighting so hard to preserve is worth protecting at the price of innocent human lives. We cannot protect both.

The revolution was marketed as a reaction to a puritanical repression and hatred of the flesh. Setting aside the question of whether that was a fair presentation of the reality that preceded it, what we didn't anticipate was that the hedonism it ushered in is just a new type of hatred and distortion of

[9] Anthony Esolen, "When Reason Does Not Suffice: Why Our Culture Still Accepts Abortion," *Public Discourse*, April 3, 2019, https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2019/04/50665/.

our flesh. We see this in the hatred of the flesh of posterity in the case of our unborn children but also in the ways we treat our own bodies. Without a deep and meaningful personal connection, without a core of love, we end up exaggerating and disfiguring the shell. A society that sees sex as meaningless obsesses over its particulars. We become, in the extreme, beasts and blow-up dolls prowling and posing.

But between the puritan and the hedonist there is also the way of the realist, for whom sex is neither bad nor meaningless but good and healthy and imbued with significance. The sexual realist knows that an act of total gift of self encompasses each lover's future, so he preserves sex for a context of deep love and permanence. The realist knows that if sex has no meaning, then neither does he, and that in asking us to sacrifice nothing, sexual autonomy costs us everything.

The New Woman

How has this harmful lifestyle been so effectively sold to us? In part, it has been glamorously packaged and presented for years through popular culture. It is well-trodden ground, but over the last few decades, TV shows notoriously went from family centric to anti-family—even in seemingly innocuous ways. The character of Rachel in the show *Friends* is introduced to the audience having just left her fiancé at the altar. He was a heel, but the real message conveyed throughout the series was that she created her own "family" of adorable urban friendships colored by easy sex and winsome jokes about the porn habits of the lovable male characters. Running away from marriage was a theme repeated in the movie

The Runaway Bride and sitcoms like *Suddenly Susan*, which also began with the premise of the main female character walking away from a fiancé to begin her single life in the city.

Probably the most iconic show depicting the new normal for women was the wildly popular *Sex and the City*. The show was like an irresistible cotton candy sales pitch to women. As it had an outsized influence on women's fashion, so too did it influence their behavior. Inevitably, there was a vast gulf between how Carrie's life seemed and how it translated into reality for her fans. Casual hook-ups after a night of drinking cosmos is decidedly less glamorous in real life. The material aspiration encouraged by the show was imprudent for all but an elite few. Even fewer can sustain the licentious sexuality without lasting physical and emotional wounds. The cultural physics of a growing hookup culture result in an increasing number of men who are coarse and entitled and women who feel used and discarded.

Sophisticated moderns think of *Leave it to Beaver* as a contrived reflection of a societally imposed and ultimately unfulfilling domesticity. But *Sex and the City* was the *Leave it to Beaver* of the sexual revolution: a glossy representation at odds with the sad reality on the ground. Our new conception of the good life for women as highly ambitious sexual libertines created a generation of Stepford single girls pantomiming a life of glamor that is as hollow as it is harmful.

The show's stepchild, *Girls*, was in many ways a response to this inauthenticity. While *Sex and the City* presented the appeal and glamor of the revolution, *Girls* contended squarely with the ugliness of it. But while reflecting the real sadness and complexity that stems from a hookup culture, *Girls*

reassured women that this is just the cost of their empowerment and an effect of their oppression. It acknowledged the reality on the ground and supplied revolution-friendly contextualization. Your wounds are real, as are your flaws, and sometimes your life is a train wreck, *Girls* seemed to affirm. The show acknowledged these things in a way *Sex and the City* had not. However, the acknowledgment was meant to lead not to a questioning of the suppositions which had led the women there but for the sake of normalizing the dysfunction through the authentic acknowledgment of it, and a call to respond to it with even more radical feminism. *Sex and the City* painted a fantasy, *Girls* at least called out the fantasy. But instead of turning back toward the light, they said to embrace the nihilism of their reality. It was a surrender rather than a call to something higher and better.

The Injustice of Identity Politics

The great sadness of woke ideology is the destructive harm left in its wake and the circular way in which even the harm causes us to further cling to the ideology. The effort to undermine and disrupt the natural cohesive threads of culture created generations of people wounded and seeking justice. But rather than addressing those wounds, woke ideology seeks to exploit them, using them to further their destruction by stoking their rage.

A strange but very human side of suffering is that we can react to it in exactly the wrong ways. There is a post-traumatic tendency to become peevish in our tragedy, quick to take offense by a good-willed but clumsily worded message of

sympathy, or to look askance at another's inadequate effort to relate. We can hold our traumas tightly, perpetually nursing them, and in so doing elevate ourselves to a special status where only we, who've suffered mightily, might enter. Our trauma can become both trophy and weapon.

One stark example among many in recent years was the feminist reaction to the accusations against Justice Brett Kavanaugh. The litany of personal testimonies of abuse recounted in response to the Kavanaugh hearings was heart-wrenching. In Christine Blasey Ford, survivors of abuse saw an everywoman wounded, wronged, and fearful. In Brett Kavanaugh, they saw their abuser, and in his skin color, his privilege. Emblematic of this phenomenon of identification was a *Washington Post* article titled "We are all Christine Ford. Or Brett Kavanaugh."[10]

The problem is, well, no. We are not. This is exactly the wrong way to think and speak if we're concerned with justice. A person's painful experience, grievous as it may be, tells us exactly nothing about Kavanaugh or the accuracy of Ford's accusation.

If we were to hear hundreds of stories of men recounting having endured false and defamatory accusations, would we then have had to side with Kavanaugh? Of course not. Other people's experiences are not evidence of an unrelated individual's guilt. Other people's experiences are just that.

[10] Christine Emba, "We Are All Christine Ford. Or Brett Kavanaugh," *The Washington Post*, September 29, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/we-are-all-christine-ford-or-brett-kavanaugh/2018/09/29/d19253ec-c36c-11e8-b338-a3289f6cb742_story.html..

If we want to talk about personal stories for the sake of growing in empathy or identifying and remedying a pattern of abuse in our society, then we can do that, but it needs to be outside of such contexts. It's a grave miscarriage of justice to apply a statistic or societal pattern to an individual in an effort to heap condemnation upon him.

A thought experiment: An African-American man from an inner city with a high crime rate is accused of a crime by a woman. There's no evidence and no corroboration, but there's a sincere-sounding accusation and compelling statistics of this type of crime from other men who fit his profile. He has flashes of anger as he defends himself. Soon stories start flooding social and other media from other women about their traumatic experiences with men from inner-city backgrounds who sound a lot like this particular man. They claim they see in this man a representation of their own assailant. They see themselves and their pain in the accuser. He represents to them the scourge of inner-city aggression. To not condemn him, they say, would be a slap in their faces and would reveal an unconscionable contempt for what they've endured. They storm the courthouse shouting stories of their pain and demanding this man bear the shame of it.

Would these stories at all be relevant to the question of his guilt or innocence? Wouldn't we be horrified if the African-American man were condemned, even if just in the court of public opinion, based not on the evidence of an allegation but rather on the mere fact of an accusation, compounded with sympathetic testimonies of people recounting their traumatic experiences with similarly profiled assailants? Wouldn't we find it sad but irrelevant that they'd had awful

things happen to them, but also view it as quite prejudicial that their pain was being trotted out in order to convince people to rebuke this particular man whom they'd never known?

"But! But!" one might protest. "That would be offensive because black men have a privilege deficit!" That might be true, but first and foremost it's offensive because a basic principle of justice is that we don't determine an individual's guilt based on group identity, be it through societal patterns, statistics, or others' enumeration of their painful stories. We don't remedy irrational discrimination with more irrational discrimination.

Concerning the Kavanaugh hearings, a *New York Times* article evidenced the rage-fueled identity politics at the core of the response: "After a confirmation process where women all but slit their wrists, letting their stories of sexual trauma run like rivers of blood through the Capitol, the Senate still voted to confirm Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. . . . Meanwhile, Senator Collins subjected us to a slow funeral dirge about due process and some other nonsense I couldn't even hear through my rage headache as she announced on Friday she would vote to confirm Judge Kavanaugh. Her mostly male colleagues applauded her."[11]

In other words, the experiences of women who are wholly unconnected to this accusation were sufficiently relevant, due process is nonsense, and Senator Susan Collins's reasonable

[11] Alexis Grenell, "White Women, Come Get Your People," *The New York Times*, October 6, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/06/opinion/lisa-murkowski-susan-collins-kavanaugh.html.

words should be dismissed because of the sex of those who applauded her. Identity politics will not tolerate reason.

To associate justice for the individual with the collective is to abandon justice entirely. Justice doesn't praise or condemn people or evaluate their honesty or complicity based on being part of a group, or by having a certain skin color, or by belonging to a certain economic class, or by being a woman or a man. If we're concerned about justice, we need to apply just principles, otherwise the price of being woke is that our eyes are wide open but our minds are fast asleep.

That Kavanaugh was confirmed wasn't a slap in the face of all survivors of assault. He wasn't confirmed because sexual assault doesn't matter or because Collins was anti-woman. He was confirmed because by any standard of justice, one person's uncorroborated accusation unaccompanied by evidence ought to be insufficient to destroy or derail another person of any color, sex, or background.

If we want our stories of pain, no matter how numerous and severe, to become evidence of another's guilt, then what we want isn't justice but vengeance. What we want isn't a societal remedy but a scapegoat. And what we are guided by looks less like principle and more like fanaticism.

Without a universal principle, "justice" becomes preference dependent on historical interpretation from a perspective that is ahistorical. It requires unjust means to achieve the desired end. It also seeks to provide cover for wounds rather than addressing the wound itself. In fact, so many of the wounds which lead people to this tribalism are rooted in circumstances both celebrated and encouraged by woke culture: the dissolution of the family as the primary cell of

human society, the rejection of sexual mores that served to protect the health and integrity of the dynamics between men and women, and the uncompromising support for abortion which has left millions of women with a depth and pain of remorse that they are not allowed to acknowledge. They are wounds and scars inflicted on a society in denial of the fundamental reality of the embodied human person.

Gnosticism

We long to have dominion over our bodies, to let our wills triumph over them. We imagine we might be freer by considering the body to be a meaningless cage that we can manipulate in defiance of any real meaning imbued by it. Behind the door of many modern errors hides the old heresy of Gnosticism.

The denial of an intelligible human nature leads to a distinct chaos of people at war with their own bodies. In order to say that I can be *anything*, I have to in fact mean *nothing*, for to be *something* always excludes being something else. And this is ultimately the point of queer theory—to disrupt normativity and to deconstruct bodily reality. James Lindsay writes that the goal "is to create a single sex/gender/sexual identity that more or less describes everyone (or, everyone good, according to queer Theory) as queer. . . . Queer Theory isn't necessarily explicitly trying to create one 'right' sex/gender/sexual identity for everyone so much as it is trying to remove any meaning or significance from any stable sex/

gender/sexual identity category at all, leaving queer identity as the default."[12]

In 1993, Pope St. John Paul II wrote, "A freedom which claims to be absolute ends up treating the human body as raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design."[13] The effort to detach ourselves from the meaning of our bodies is exhibited in trans-activism, in the meaninglessness of sex, and also in the elimination of the significance of male and female difference. One or the other must go: we either give up our identity as autonomous willing agents or we give up our identity as being intimately tied to our biology.

It is difficult to consistently deny objective bodily meaning, and its denial leads to all sorts of monstrosities. The implications of a denial of bodily meaning were of great concern to St. John Paul II, who was familiar with the violations of the body carried out under the banner of the reductive materialism of socialism. In concentration camps, in addition to the horrors of genocide, prisoners were also experimented on in the name of science. Various types of bacteria were injected into their bodies causing anything from painful open sores to infection and agonizing death.

As we enter into this third generation of the sexual revolution, the unraveling Unwin warned us about, and the irrational denial of bodily reality, can be seen starkly.

In 2018, the best picture Oscar award went to a film about a woman having intercourse with a fish. Too much can be

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12 James Lindsay, "Authentic," *New Discourses*, June 25, 2020, https://newdiscourses.com/tftw-authentic/.

13 Pope St. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, p. 48.

made of any one cultural moment, but this one seemed fitting. You can almost hear the sexual wokeness in the writing sessions: "I see your 'throuple' and I raise you amphibian sex!" Onward to the next frontier.

The movie was aptly titled *The Shape of Water*, which is clever of course because water has no shape. It is ever-fluid, ever-changing—the perfect mascot for an ideology that rejects any restrictions of nature and instead bends its knee to unbridled desire. This war is finally a war on the body, on form, on a nature imbued with purposes and norms.

It is not that we no longer believe there is a human good, it is that we've convinced ourselves that our highest good is the fulfillment of our individual desires as the expression of our autonomy. It is a highest good without any definition or meaning. But autonomy divorced from nature sets up a power struggle of competing wills which has violence as its end.

This elevation of personal autonomy forces us to relegate questions of how we ought to live, questions which affect us most deeply, into the sphere of private opinion. We take our desires for connection, love, and sex, and rather than treat them with moral seriousness, we move stupidly through the materialist paths presented to us with our autonomy in our wallets.

In the marketplace of persons, everything is a negotiation. Someone's currency might be money, power, sex appeal. We commodify persons through casual sex, halftime shows, porn, prostitution, slavery, and they are all of one piece, varying in degree but not in kind. We have trained ourselves and each other that a person is a thing to be used according

to our desire. Something I can buy is something I can own and have the right to do with as I wish. And something I have a potential right to becomes something I can rationalize taking. The rule of desire over time becomes too formidable for the paper-thin buffer of consent.

This is a cesspool in which all participants become bored, miserable, and eventually experience various levels of abuse. We seem to be waking up to the fact that we are drowning. A person is not meant to endlessly tread water; eventually he must acknowledge that he is exhausted and getting nowhere before the despair of his situation overcomes him.

In a recent *New York Times* piece, a woman makes her case for becoming a secular celibate. In thinking through her decision, she speculates, "Maybe it is also an empowerment thing, that I don't need attention from a man at all, that I have myself. All of my sleepless nights staying up crying, wondering if he's ever going to call me again, if he still likes me, do I have worth outside of my vagina — all these doubts just left when I quit dealing with men. I have never been happier."[14]

Her rejection of the opposite sex tracks along with other recent trends from people who are shrugging off what little value they see left in the marketplace of sexual exchange. Love and happiness seem to many like the leftover mist from a children's story. Pleasure becomes more elusive the more common and loveless its pursuit is, and no one in today's autonomy really needs someone else for that anyway. In this

14 Sanam Yar, "I Quit Dating Entirely," *The New York Times*, January 20, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/20/style/no-sex-celibacy.html.

context, rejection of the other sex seems entirely reasonable. Even fashion is increasingly becoming asexual or androgynous. In the ever-fluid battle of the sexes, not only do we reject the other, but we eventually reject ourselves.

In its impulse, it is an act of self-preservation. We tell ourselves, "This is better, I am relieved, and in comparison to that old exhausting norm of treading water in place, this feels like the good life." But life spent alone clinging to a raft, while less exhausting, is still unfulfilling.

When something is true, we can arrive at it from multiple angles. Conversely, when something is wrong, we might perceive some aspect of its wrongness in all sorts of ways. But like so many reactions today, ours tend to be more escape than solution.

This model of will and domination cannot contain, nor can it traverse, the vast ocean that is real human love. Instead we become increasingly mechanized, smaller and more atomized, swiping, blinking into screens, robotic and battery operated. The end result of the will unbound by nature is not a superhuman but a subhuman.

We are drawn to water; it has long been a symbol for mystery, life, rebirth. But we are not amphibians. Understandably, many are reaching for a raft, rejecting the water entirely. But if we squint past our present, we might see that there is another way of being, that we need not reject the water and wander the desert, nor cling endlessly to a raft. We might see that there is a seaside and a ship and another way of living altogether. A life not without struggle but with the struggle to be beautifully embodied and intimately human—to be a man, to be a woman—and to reject as misery the carnival pantomime of either.

9

Thought and Speech Control

When Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt attended the trial of Adolph Eichmann, the architect of the Holocaust, she expected to see in him some incarnation of evil. Instead, what she found was more disconcerting: he seemed ordinary, even banal. There was nothing about him that would lead an observer to detect the monstrous and demonic atrocities which he had orchestrated. She did discern something else in him. "It was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think."[1] Eichmann seemed to Arendt to be shallow, following ideas to their logical end without examining or questioning their premises.

Arendt did not intend her characterization to be interpreted as commentary upon Eichmann's IQ. Nor did she mean to suggest that he was not capable of critical thinking. Commenting on Arendt's experience, Jack Kerwick notes, "Rather, her point was that Eichmann showed no will to think beyond the clichés—the memes, bumper sticker slogans, and hashtags—of his day. . . . It is crucial for the

1 Jack Kerwick, "The Great UnReason of 2020: The 'Curious, but Quite Authentic, Inability to Think,'" *FrontPage*, May 7, 2020, https://cms.frontpagemag.com/fpm/2020/05/great-unreason-2020-curious-quite-authentic-jack-kerwick.

reader to recognize that the phenomenon that she witnessed in Eichmann she knew was one that is endemic to human beings generally."[2]

What we are left with is the dreadful realization that there was nothing unique at all about Eichmann. The ability to think critically is an essential component in preparing ourselves to resist evil-doing. Relinquishing this distinctively human aspect of our nature leaves us susceptible to the whims of a mob, or of a ruler, or of our own inclinations. Sloganeering is essential to propaganda and ideology; as such, it is a powerful tool when coupled with a decline in critical thinking.

Critical Thinking vs Critical Theory

As the sociologist Unwin discovered, there is at least a correlative relationship between increased sexual freedom and the devolution of thought. The second characteristic of woke ideology shows us that the connection between the elevation of the will and the rejection of reason is more than merely correlative. If we want the fact of our willing something to be sufficient to justify our pursuit of it, then we will have to suspend thinking critically about our actions.

The rejection of reason and nature has taken root as well through the replacement of critical thinking with critical theory. The latter has been the engine of academic thought for decades, and its methods pervade every discipline and subject.

2 Ibid.

Critical thinking, in the classical liberal tradition, relies on the reality that we are rational animals, able to use our abilities to observe the world, discern universal principles, and make normative evaluations. We can determine, generally, what *ought* to be from what *is* and develop, challenge, and refine arguments by evaluating the premises and logic involved. Through intellectual rigor, we can more fully own our ideas and evaluate the validity and veracity of the ideas of others with the goal of arriving at truth.

Essential to critical thinking is the discipline to understand the best opposing arguments to one's position. St. Thomas Aquinas exemplified this in the *Summa Theologica*. The Angelic Doctor first poses a question and then raises the strongest arguments against the answer he will ultimately give. Even after giving his *sed contra*, Aquinas makes the best of each objection in light of his understanding. Thus, only after carefully and thoroughly considering every worthy opposing position does he show the reader how each argument in opposition bears some fatal flaw.

In modern parlance, we call this *steel manning*. Whereas *straw manning* is the fallacy of arguing against the weakest position of your opponent, *steel manning* is arguing against the best possible opposing argument, even beyond what they present themselves.

Implicit in the rigor of critical thinking is the preeminence it gives to the search for truth and an acknowledgment that our desire to be right can tend to corrupt the integrity of that search.

In contrast, the purpose of critical theory is to support the ideology of cultural Marxism and churn out activists

rather than to arrive at truth. To engage in critical theory is to filter all humanity through the lens of power for the sake of reversing the power dynamic of the dominant oppressor class. Power, not truth, is preeminent for the critical theorist. That many of us do not realize the distinction between these two methods leads to a lot of frustration. The great strength of the critical thinker is that she eagerly invites criticism. The great weapon of the theorists is that they eagerly provide criticism but never invite it. One side thinks the norm is still critical thought, but the ideologues know we are engaged, not in discourse, but in a power play.

This way of dismantling critical thought has been, and continues to be, enacted through the enshrining of critical theory within the majority of Western education. By applying a filter of suspicion to every field of study, no work of art, historical event, or reasoned argument can be seen objectively. There is always a power dynamic to uncover and to dismantle. Everything becomes political.

This is not a small matter relegated to the ivory tower with merely academic ramifications. Hannah Arendt saw that shallow sloganeering and an unwillingness to think can lead ordinary people to otherwise unimaginable monstrosities. In the riots of 2020, we saw it exhibited in the inability of Progressives to effectively and unequivocally denounce the violence and destruction. If truth is a function of power, unjust actions become far more palatable if they can be understood to be advantageous to the right cause.

Compelled Speech, Compelled Thought

For the woke, the person with the oppressed positionality has greater insight and a right to silence the person in the position of dominance. An example of this is the common refrain that if you do not have a uterus, you cannot speak about abortion. This used to be considered an *ad hominem* fallacy—dismissing an argument based on the identity of the arguer. For example, it would be an *ad hominem* to say a white abolitionist cannot speak against slavery, or that a woman cannot say that men should not watch pornography, or that a celibate person cannot say that marital infidelity is bad.

According to the woke, it is not the weight of the argument but the skin color, gender, or sexuality of the speaker which determines the rightness or wrongness of the speech. And even then, having the oppressed identity only gives credence to the argument if the speaker espouses the correct ideology. A white man who defends woke ideology need not defer to a black woman who rejects it.

Multiple messages emerged in the aftermath of the horrific videos of a police officer with a knee on George Floyd's neck. "Listen more; talk less" was a common one. White people were urged to "take a seat and *listen*." These messages were not surprising, and considered on their own, there is certainly value in listening to a community that has experienced harms particular to them.

But this time they were accompanied by a new, and contradictory, rallying cry. Rather than telling white people to just be silent and listen, the additional message was that

white silence is violence. No longer is it enough to be not racist, now is the time to be vocally anti-racist. That both messages (be silent and silence is violence) were repeatedly proffered even while contradicting one another is reflective of the chaotic discord in which we all live. The movement wants those with white privilege to repent *but also to remain unforgiven*. The privileged must express sorrow and shame in the face of their privilege, while also cowering in silence on account of their privilege. The combination of the reigning admonitions that "words are violence" and "silence is violence" leaves only one remaining possibility: compulsory ideologically-approved speech.

The norm shifted from giving people the benefit of the doubt unless they prove us wrong to assuming everyone with white skin is racist and the best they can do is to publicly ally themselves with the Black Lives Matter ideology.

"Black lives matter" is a true and good statement, one that no decent person can deny. Black lives matter because of our common humanity and the dignity of the person made in the image of God. But the movement of Black Lives Matter is explicitly and aggressively neo-marxist. From their statement of beliefs page: "We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement. . . . We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking."[3] To propose that the solution for the plight of people of color is to advance queer theory and

[3] https://blacklivesmatter.com/what-we-believe/. Access date 07/01/20. Was subsequently removed some months later.

disrupt the family unit is, frankly, insanity. But affirmation of this movement's platform is the new benchmark required to assert our anti-racism *bona fides*.

Black Lives Matter cofounder Patrisse Cullors said in a video from 2015 that she and her fellow organizers are "trained Marxists."[4] In his book *How to Be an Antiracist*, author Ibram X. Kendi claims capitalism is essentially racist, and racism is essentially capitalist. He writes, "They were birthed together from the same unnatural causes, and they shall one day die together from unnatural causes."[5] In order to not be racist now, we, apparently, must embrace alternative sexual lifestyles, support disrupting the nuclear family, and endorse socialism.

Disciplining Heretics

The lurch toward militancy in 2020 America means a person is far less free to question these ideological tenets and tactics. When a UCLA professor refused to cancel finals for students of color after the George Floyd videos, he was doxed by students and put on a mandatory leave of absence.[6] Pro

[4] Yaron Steinbuch, "Black Lives Matter co-founder describes herself as 'trained Marxist,'" New York Post, June 25, 2020, https://nypost.com/2020/06/25/blm-co-founder-describes-herself-as-trained-marxist/.

[5] Kendi X Abrams, *How to Be an Antiracist* (Independently published, 2020), p. 163.

[6] James Varney, "Professor suspended for refusing to give some special treatment in wake of Floyd's death, defended," *The Washington Times*, June 10, 2020, https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/jun/10/gordon-klein-ucla-professor-suspended-doling-speci/.

soccer player Aleksander Katai was released from his team not for anything he did but because his wife criticized the BLM movement on social media.[7] A former Canadian cabinet minister lost three jobs after saying that he didn't think Canada was a racist country.[8]

Even among religious groups, the dogmas of the woke are growing sacrosanct. Such was the case for a Florida State University student, Jack Denton, who discovered that free speech did not apply to criticism of BLM. In a private group chat of Catholic Student Union members, when links were sent around by fellow Catholics in support BLM, Denton let the group know that they support things that are anti-Catholic, such as transgenderism and abortion. When some students took offense, he wrote to his fellow Catholics, "If I stay silent while my brothers and sisters may be supporting an organization that promotes grave evils, I have sinned through my silence. I love you all, and I want us all to be aware of the truth."[9]

7 Sam McEvoy, "LA Galaxy release midfielder Aleksander Katai following 'racist' posts made by his wife on social media that called for protestors to be 'killed' during Black Lives Matter Movement," *Daily Mail*, June 5, 2020, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/sportsnews/article-8392937/LA-Galaxy-release-Aleksandar-Katai-following-racist-posts-wife-social-media.html.

8 Peter Zimonjic, "Stockwell Day exits CBC commentary role, corporate posts after comments about racism in Canada," *CBC*, June 3, 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/stockwell-day-systemic-racism-canada-1.5597550.

9 Allie Langhofer, "A Student Punished for Privately Sharing Religious Views," *Alliance Defending Freedom*, July 14, 2020, https://adflegal.org/blog/student-punished-privately-sharing-religious-views?fbclid=IwAR2KYI4bKJsr0qnpe58H9oHzcSElJcTDVATpGxBu4ZGxkHJ_3CUucOhykIQ.

It could have ended there, but one student leaked his comment to the student government association, of which Denton served as student senate president. A fellow student senator claimed Denton's words showed an intent to hurt other students emotionally and physically. Some senators claimed they felt unsafe with him as a result. A vote to remove him came in with a majority in favor of his removal but which fell short of the necessary two-thirds majority.

A Change.org petition for his removal was circulated saying Denton was transphobic and racist. Senators who had voted against Denton's removal were pressured by their fellow students to change their votes, lest they too be accused of transphobia and racism. Denton, who had served with distinction and was seemingly well-regarded by the others before this, was removed after a revote.

In a private Catholic group chat, Denton respectfully gave salient information about basic Catholic moral teaching and was deemed to be beyond the pale. His replacement, Ahmed Omar Daraldik, was discovered to have made expletive laden, derogatory, anti-semitic remarks on social media posts. Daraldik was not removed, nor was cause for his removal taken to a vote.

Denton's case has been taken up by the Alliance Defending Freedom non-profit. While a US district judge ruled that Denton should not be reinstated, FSU's internal court system ruled in favor of the exercise of free speech and has since reinstated him. Though the outcome was just, Denton discovered in the process what many others have—that Catholic teaching can now be classified as unsafe hate speech. But even if one cowers at such tactics and parrots progressive

talking points, there is no guarantee that she will find satisfaction with the militant woke. Privilege will always make a person suspect. Celebrated author and race counselor Robin D'Angelo writes, "I believe that white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color. I define a white progressive as any white person who thinks he or she is not racist, or is less racist, or in the 'choir,' or already 'gets it.'"[10]

DiAngelo goes on to say that we must insist white Progressives engage in ongoing self-examination of their internalized racism and receive training in anti-racist education and doctrines. Even at the end of this lifelong endeavor, if a white Progressive is told that she is a racist, any defense she gives against such a charge will only be further proof of its veracity. Denial of racism is proof of racism. It is a lifelong futile effort of self-flagellation without redemption.

Not only is there no hope on a personal level, there is no real reconciliation among groups either. A white person who promises ongoing examination of her privilege and commits to lifelong activism might be accepted for now (though still remaining an oppressor for life), but the privileged group as a whole cannot be. No group will ever be monolithic; there will always be disparate voices. As long as there are voices who do not give dogmatic assent to the woke, there will be no reconciliation among groups. But reconciliation was never the endgame anyway.

10 Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Beacon Press, 2018), introduction.

Concept Creep and Microaggressions

Musa al-Gharbi, a sociologist at Columbia University, has written compellingly about our evolving understanding of racism. In the past, accusations of racism were reserved for overtly racist acts, bigoted views, or racial animus. Such acts and expressions of prejudice are far less common now, as well as far less acceptable. Both of these developments, al-Gharbi notes, are unquestionably positive, but he notes another development alongside this progress: our concept of what we consider racist is ever-expanding. "As a function of the increased social capital at stake when accusations of racism are made, and the diminishing opportunities to leverage that capital by 'calling out' obvious cases of racism, . . . it is now possible to qualify as 'racist' on the basis of things like microaggressions and implicit attitudes."[11]

A screaming match over accusations of racism at a New York City education council meeting illustrates this concept creep well. The meeting was already contentious due to a disagreement over academic screenings. Some council members insisted on terminating them to better integrate schools, while others argued that screenings enabled teachers to teach to similarly positioned academic levels, resulting in more effective classrooms. All members were advocating for better school integration but differed on how best to implement it.

11 Musa al-Gharbi, "who gets to define what's 'racist?'" *contexts* (blog), May 15, 2020, https://contexts.org/blog/who-gets-to-define-whats-racist/.

One woke white woman, the group's past president, Robin Broshi, accused another council member, Thomas Wrocklage, of being guilty of racism. His transgression? At a prior meeting, he had been holding the nephew of a visiting friend (who happened to be black), and the sight of a white man holding a black child was too much for Broshi to tolerate. She erupted, "It *hurts* people when they see a white man bouncing a brown baby on their lap and they don't know the context! That is harmful! It makes people cry!"[12]

An open letter signed by dozens of parents was sent to the council president complaining that "a white man displayed a black baby on his lap on more than one occasion." The open letter claimed that any person of color would have suffered emotional injury witnessing this scene which was "shocking, disgusting, offensive, and racially incendiary."[13] The council president was threatened with removal for not controlling Wrocklage's racism. Broshi upbraided him, demanding that he read Ibram Kendi.

The woke have a supply and demand problem. The demand to uncover racism is at an all-time high while the supply of racial transgressions is at a low, creating a fervor and hysteria to convince people to see racism where it is not. Robin DiAngelo evidences this: "I am often asked if I

12 John Sexton, "NYC Education Council Meeting Erupts With Accusations Of Racism (Update)," *Hot Air*, July 6, 2020, https://hotair.com/archives/john-s-2/2020/07/06/nyc-education-council-meeting-erupts-accusations-racism/.

13 Conor Friedersdorf, "Anit-racist Argument Are Tearing People Apart," *The Atlantic*, August 20, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/08/meta-arguments-about-anti-racism/615424/.

think the younger generation is less racist. No, I don't. In some ways, racism's adaptations over time are more sinister than concrete rules such as Jim Crow." Further, DiAngelo notes, "The simplistic idea that racism is limited to individual intentional acts committed by unkind people is at the root of virtually all white defensiveness on this topic."[14]

Progress, according to DiAngelo, is not enacted by just laws and reductions in acts of racism, because there still lies within each white person's heart a whole host of unproveable racial animus. In her unfalsifiable dogmas, just laws and just behavior do not reflect improved race relations, they only obscure the more sinister racism beneath the surface.

It is undoubtable that racism has existed in widespread ways, and it is equally undoubtable that it remains a problem today; acts of racial injustice remind us of that brutal reality. But stoking a perception that it has morphed into something invisible and omnipresent is destructive in two ways. First, with a veneer compassion, white Progressives are cementing a perception that people of color are less able to move forward in life and have less agency than white people. Misplaced pity insinuates inferiority. Secondly, this thinking directly reifies and amplifies racial animus. Obsessing over race relations by constantly searching for the slightest transgression, even invisible and unconscious transgressions, places entire societies on edge and brainwashes people to see nothing but race in every daily interaction they have, a sure

14 Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Beacon Press, 2018), p. 50.

recipe for stoking racial tensions; people will see things that aren't there, misread intentions, and assume the worst.

Musa al-Gharbi writes that a recent metanalysis on microaggressions found little empirical substantiation for the claims of harm that are advanced in critical race theory literature. Yet the harm caused by heightened perceptions of racism, discrimination, racialized violence, and racial inequality were demonstrated by an abundance of research: "There are very well-established and highly-adverse impacts on the psychological (and even physical) well-being of people of color when they perceive more racism, racial inequality, and discrimination. That is, we have not (yet) been able to empirically verify that microaggressions are typically harmful, nor have we been able to effectively measure the extent of that harm. . . . However, we have ample reason to believe that sensitizing people to better perceive and to take greater offense at these 'slights' actually would cause harm."[15]

Loving the Sin, Hating the Sinner

One common refrain from the Right is that the notion of Progressive tolerance seems to consistently contain a double standard of "tolerance for me but not for thee." Consider the demand for tolerance of any sexual deviation versus the militant cancelling and intolerance extended to advocates of traditional sexual morality. To any student of Marcuse, the

[15] Musa al-Gharbi, "who gets to define what's 'racist?'" *contexts* (blog), May 15, 2020, https://contexts.org/blog/who-gets-to-define-whats-racist/.

one-sidedness is not a partisan blind spot; rather, this double standard is by design. It is a feature, not a flaw.

The word *tolerance* signifies something neutral—a certain detachment from one's own beliefs in order to get along peacefully with those who hold other beliefs. A tolerant society on its face seems like it should be one in which all people try to live and let live, with plenty of space for disagreement. If that were all it was, then we could expect it to be extended in all directions without partiality, except perhaps in extreme cases. But we sense this is not the entire picture.

The cultural imperative of tolerance was always a sophisticated Trojan horse that leads to an attack against truth. Society was groomed to embrace moral relativism through the exhortation to be tolerant and the accusation of judgementalism.

Before most people on the right were deemed bigots, the more common accusation directed at cultural conservatives was that they were "judgmental." This epithet was deployed in the culture wars early and often to great effect, especially on a weakening and waning mainstream Christianity. Many were understandably fazed by it—after all, Christianity preaches mercy, and the image of a finger-wagging Christian scold is unattractive. Most of us can easily imagine this church lady either because we've seen those *Saturday Night Live* skits and a thousand other examples of that archetype in movies or because we have encountered such a person to some degree in real life. But there is a too-quickly dismissed distinction as old as the Church that says we can judge an act but not the heart of the actor, otherwise known as "hate the sin, love the sinner." For centuries, Christians were told

to refrain from judging our neighbor's heart, even if he had clearly done something wrong. Perhaps he was reacting to a deep wound, or he was misled or confused or suffering in some way that mitigates his culpability. We cannot know the exact state of another's soul at any given time, and that state often changes over time. Nor is it our business to know who they are now, or what they became after the act.

But somewhere along the road of thinning theology and increasingly demagogic secularism, modern Christianity absorbed and internalized the message that "do not judge" in particular is synonymous with "do not acknowledge that acts can be right or wrong" in general. So successful has been the effort to brand morally normative statements as judgmental that many shepherds have become cowardly and their flock apathetic.

Nowhere is this more pronounced than with the hot-button issues surrounding sexuality. An especially effective tactic has been to redefine love and hate around support or opposition to sexual mores. "Love" today demands the rejection of sexual moral norms. The effect has been exactly the opposite of what we might have supposed. By no longer judging the *acts* of men, we have morphed into people who can *only* judge the *hearts* of men. We love the sin and hate the sinner—which is a much more insidiously judgmental posture.

Once an objective moral measure is abandoned, we are left only to measure the subjective intent of another person. One way this manifests itself is in the implications of trans ideology. After the unsexing of public bathrooms, the next barrier is unsexing all gendered spaces. There is no longer a

principle available to object to boys in girls' locker rooms, including shared showers, at public schools. In practice, how will we distinguish between the sincere boy with gender dysphoria and the insincere boy who might be a predator, or at least taking advantage of the situation? Without drawing the line at the very clear measure that holds a boy to be a boy no matter what he thinks or says, we are left with the very unclear measure of reading souls. Is this boy really a girl trapped in a boy's body and therefore not a threat to the biological girls in the locker room? Or is this boy perhaps confused but with typically male drives? Or maybe is he dissembling and predatory? This same issue will repeat itself in women's shelters, prisons, dormitories, and on and on. Without an objective standard, we have to guess at intent.

The acceptance and spread of relativism leads to the inevitable consequence of tolerance becoming a one-way street. Identity politics is a chief beneficiary and proponent of this campaign to brand proponents of an objective morality as judgmental. The incoherence baked into moral relativism made mutual tolerance unsustainable. At some point, what at first is viewed as a legal right to be tolerated eventually demands to be affirmed as a moral right to be embraced. Any view which makes exclusive claims on truth that does not cater to this newly perceived moral right cannot be tolerated. Traditional morality will not be debated; rather, the intent of those who advocate for it must be demonized.

Repressive Tolerance

In his influential essay "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse rejects the ideals of free speech and mutual toleration and instead writes of the imperative to discriminate against anyone on the wrong side of revolution. "The hierarchical structure of society is inherently violent toward the progress of society. Therefore, any violence introduced by the repressed in the name of progress is not the introduction of violence but the just reaction to a violent system."[16] Not only is intolerance to the revolution's enemies justified, it is necessary, even just.

Tolerance, Marcuse would go on to say, cannot be maintained equally because it works to the benefit of the powerful and encourages the oppressed to feel a false level of equality. Though this might seem unjust in practice, Marcuse assured those he was radicalizing that it was necessary for the sake of historical progress. He continues, "Since when is history made in accordance with ethical standards? To start applying them at this point where the oppressed rebel against the oppressors, the have-nots against the haves is serving the cause of actual violence by weakening the protest against it.[17]

The influence of Marcuse and the Frankfurt School is alive and well within the contemporary woke movement. In guiding the manner in which social justice should be implemented in schools, race counselors Özlem Sensoy and DiAngelo outline an example of how to employ repressive

16 Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse.org, accessed November 11, 2020, https://www.marcuse.org/herbert/publications/1960s/1965-repressive-tolerance-fulltext.html.

17 Ibid.

tolerance tactics while teaching anti-bullying lessons about sexual identities in a classroom. At the end of a presentation, a hypothetical situation is raised as an instructive on how to apply discrimination for the sake of the ideology. In the hypothetical, a student raises her hand and states that she has a moral disagreement with a certain sexual lifestyle choice and believes she should not be required to express acceptance of it. The instructor allows her to finish and thanks her for sharing her perspective, then moves on to the next comment. According to Sensoy and DiAngelo, this is an incorrect way of handling the situation, as it allows the classroom to be subjected to oppressive dominant narratives and microaggressions. Instead, the dominant voice expressing traditional sexual norms must be silenced:

> When—in service to "fairness"—instructors give equal time to dominant narratives, we reinforce problematic discursive effects by legitimizing the idea that the conversation is equalizing only when it also includes dominant voices. This is why we have come to deny equal time to all narratives in our classrooms. Our intentions in doing so are to correct the existing power imbalances by turning down the volume on dominant narratives; to make space for dominant narratives in order to be "fair" assumes that these imbalances don't already exist or that equality of airtime is all that is needed to correct them. Because of this, we believe that restricting dominant narratives is actually more equalizing.[18]

18 Ozlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, "Respect Differences? Chal-

A free exchange of ideas was never a woke goal. A principled application of justice was never the intention.

This is how radicals, including Marcuse, endorsed the terrorism tactics of the Weather Underground bombings. It is easy to see the connection here to our current cancel culture, as well as the vandalism and rioting that is considered unquestionable when done by a members of an oppressed group. As Ibram X. Kendi writes, "The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination."[19]

Understanding the tactic of repressive tolerance helps make sense of articles like the *Washington Post* piece entitled "Why Can't We Hate Men?" In it the author tells men that based on their biology, "don't run for office. Don't be in charge of anything. Step away from the power. We got this. And please know that your crocodile tears won't be wiped away by us anymore. We have every right to hate you. You have done us wrong. #BecausePatriarchy. It is long past time to play hard for Team Feminism. And win."[20]

It is also why the Toronto head of Black Lives Matter felt perfectly within her bounds to write a racist screed, using an alternative gender-neutral spelling for "human"

lenging the Common Guidelines in Social Justice Educatio," *Democracy and Education*, Vol. 22, no. 1, https://robindiangelo.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Challenging-the-Common-Guidelines-in-Social-Justice-Education.pdf.

19 Ibram X. Kendi, "Ibram X. Kendi defines what it means to be an antiracist," Penguin, June 9, 2020, https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2020/june/ibram-x-kendi-definition-of-antiracist/.

20 Suzanna Danuta Walters, "Why Can't We Hate Men?" *The Washington Post*, June 8, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-cant-we-hate-men/2018/06/08/f1a3a8e0-6451-11e8-a69c-b944de66d9e7_story.html.

in a now-deleted post, "Whiteness is not humxness. In fact, white skin is sub-humxn. All phenotypes exist within the black family and white [people] are a genetic defect of blackness."[21]

The goal is not a humanizing equality for all under the eyes of the law but a power reversal.

Cult Behavior

While the mob is the natural habitat for the woke, the movement adopts the psychological tactics of a cult. It is true that a great many on the Left remain reasonable and able to see things from other viewpoints, but the deeper into the ideology one gets, the more illiberal and closed-off one tends to become.

There are well-trodden comparisons between the woke and fundamentalist religions: rejection of critical thinking, demand for total adherence to dogmas, ritualistic shaming, and rejection of transgressors. Human beings have instincts to religiosity, and in the void left by our dismissal of God, we tend to erect false and harsh gods out of ourselves.

We want to be part of a great drama or a grand narrative that gives meaning to our lives, our sufferings, our daily efforts. Postmodern woke culture strips us of grand narratives and fractures each narrative into personal preference with no connection to ultimate meaning. We have narratives, but they are narratives of futility. People who look at

21 Alex Griswold, "Black Lives Mattr Leader: White People are 'Sub-Human,' 'Genetic Defects,'" *Mediaite*, February 13, 2017, https://www.mediaite.com/online/black-lives-matter-leader-white-people-are-sub-human-genetic-defects/.

this honestly tend to find the nihilism too much to bear. Others distract themselves from the meaninglessness with bread and circuses. Others carve out a sort of religion from their politics, but it is a religion united not by a grand narrative but by a common enemy. It is the cyclical finding and denouncing of a scapegoat without ever arriving at the Innocent Victim.

The woke will not take lightly their being defined as a religion, much less as a cult. But indoctrination into ideology often adopts cult-like tactics in its evangelization. Now we will consider some characteristics of cults and how they are incorporated by the woke.

Unquestionable dogmas

Critical thinking is discouraged. The replacement of critical thinking with critical theory abandons as a value any questioning of its tenets and expresses a hostility to reason, discourse, and free thought. Unfalsifiable and inarguable dogma reign.

Adherents can never be good enough

You must confess your privilege, become formed in woke doctrines through reeducation, and commit to a lifelong effort to resist your original sin of whiteness (an ultimately impossible task). Author James Lindsay writes, "You must be an ally but accept that you will always do your allyship wrong."[22]

[22] James Lindsay, "The Cult Dynamics of Wokeness," *New Discourses*, June 6, 2020, https://newdiscourses.com/2020/06/cult-dynamics-wokeness/.

Isolation from people outside the group, even family and friends

There is no more classically liberal ethos than freedom of thought and discussion. A cult follower rejects such discussion and, threatened by opposing ideas, replaces discussion with denunciation and "call-outs." Opposition to woke dogmas are deemed hurtful and harmful, and a sign of evil in the other. Fissures in families and old friendships erupt and calcify. This was typified by numerous articles published about friendships and even marriages ending because the woke writer could no longer accept being in relationship with a Trump supporter.

Morally bad behavior is justified for some but intolerable for others

This is perhaps one of the most salient hallmarks of the transition into cult-like behavior. It is not merely that there is moral corruption among adherents, which can and does happen in any group; it is, rather, that the belief in the ideology is the justifying principle that exonerates behavior that otherwise would be deemed repugnant. Looting, vandalism, and violence against cult transgressors is excused or justified when done for the sake of the ideology.

Attacks, shuns, and delegitimizes those who stray from dogma

This is evidenced in cancel culture. To be woke is to see the pervasive evil in every aspect of the world. What deviates from woke doctrine is problematic. Evangelizing happens through shaming.

Harbors persecution complexes and catastrophic thinking

The basis of the ideology is that persecution and oppression are everywhere, even in small and inadvertent ways such as microaggressions, and that such microaggressions are a type of violence. This encourages paranoia and hyper-reactivity.

Sloganeering to avoid serious reflection or questioning

Critical thinking, in the classical liberal tradition, is the activity of the truly free man. Critical theory in the neo-Marxist tradition is the activity of the controlled and controlling man. The beliefs that we arrive at through free and considered analysis we own deeply. If thought is not derived from such internal processes, then it must be imposed externally. Stripped of a meaningful and robust concept of nature, reason, and the human person, woke ideology is a house of cards that requires allegiance through intimidation and power. As Hannah Arendt discovered in observing the trial of Eichmann, the ideologue is characterized by the curious inability to think. Once indoctrinated, thought is replaced by party cliches, propaganda, and sloganeering.

Woke ideology is like a filter sewn onto the mind's eye by which one sifts all knowledge and every human dynamic. It is not unlike a perversion of the C. S. Lewis quote, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." With Christ, we begin to see everything in this world as signs and shadows of his perfect goodness. Through woke ideology, we begin to see everything as signs and shadows of oppression.

10

Education Activism

In his 1932 book *Toward Soviet America*, William Z. Foster, the national chairman of the American Communist Party, left little doubt of the party's goal for American education. "Among the elementary measures the American Soviet government will adopt to further the cultural revolution are . . . [a] National Department of Education . . . the studies will be revolutionized, being cleansed of religious, patriotic, and other features of the bourgeois ideology. The students will be taught the basis of Marxian dialectical materialism, internationalism and the general ethics of the new Socialist society."[1]

Around the same time, John Dewey, perhaps the most influential figure in modern American education, was facilitating the Frankfurt School's move to Columbia University. Dewey, a socialist and staunch atheist, had made a pilgrimage to Soviet Russia in 1928. Upon his return to the States, he wrote a book of his admiration for, and desire to replicate, the way in which their education system was used as

1 William Z. Foster, "Toward Soviet America," Marxists.org, accessed November 14, 2020, https://www.marxists.org/archive/foster/1932/toward/06.htm.

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An Alternative Script for Same-Sex Attraction

November 20, 2013 by Nick Roen | Topics: Church Issues



"There is nothing wrong with living a gay lifestyle. In fact, if you repress who you are, you will never live a happy, fulfilled life. Be true to yourself!"

This is the overwhelming message of society regarding homosexuality. Mark Yarhouse refers to this as "the gay script," the blueprint for how homosexuals are to live. "Embrace who you are," a swelling number shout, "and you will find happiness!"

I disagree, but I must confess that there is a part of me that finds this script appealing. As long as I can remember, I have experienced exclusive same-sex attraction (SSA). Despite counseling and countless prayers, God has not seen fit to change my orientation.

So, if I am honest with myself, I would like the freedom to act on what seems to be basic and natural desires for intimacy, companionship, and love. After all, many of my straight friends find fulfillment and joy in finding a mate — why shouldn't I?

More Than Prohibitions

Many Christians answer this question by appealing to the prohibitions of Scripture. They point to the Bible's clear teaching that homosexual activity is sinful because it goes against the grain of the created order (Genesis 2:18, 23–24), and is therefore outside the boundaries God has set for acceptable sexual expression (Romans 1:27; 1 Corinthians 6:9–10).

Christians are right to appeal to the authority of the Bible for the manner in which we should conduct our lives (2 Timothy 3:16). However, if prohibition is the only message that those with homosexual desires (Christian and non-Christian) hear from the church, then our message is incomplete.

Saying Yes to Something Better

What the church needs is an alternative script. And it must be a holistic script that accounts for the real emotions and desires of those with SSA. We can't live a life of only saying, "No!" to our desires. We need to be able to say "Yes!" to something greater, something better.

The most basic — and the most glorious — thing that I have said "Yes!" to is Jesus. The joys of following Jesus are everlasting and complete (Psalm 16:11; Mark 10:29) and make the temporary promises of sin seem woefully

lacking. However, following Jesus does not make my yearnings for human intimacy and companionship magically disappear. What does Christianity have to say to those areas?

Areas of Church Life to Cultivate

We must take this question seriously if we want the church to be a welcoming, appealing place where those who struggle with SSA can thrive. Here are three areas of church life that are particularly important to cultivate.

1. Our Self-Identity

The way we talk about those with homosexual desires matters if we want them to feel welcome in the church. Do we talk as if it is "us" and "them"? Have we made "being gay" such an atrocity that "those people" are out of the reach of grace?

The reality is that it is not "those people" that we are talking about. We are within the church, among the many people who experience broken sexuality but have the righteousness of Jesus credited to our account. We belong in the Body just as much as any other sinner who trusts Jesus. The church must be a place where those wrestling with SSA feel welcome, included, and safe to work out our salvation in the Lord.

2. Our Theology of Singleness

If we are going to ask those who struggle with SSA to reject their longings for as long as the Lord wills, then we must have a strong theology of singleness that does not present it as simply a transitional stage on the way to marriage. It seems that in many churches, marriage is assumed for everyone, and when it doesn't happen for certain people, they are left wondering if the church is a place where they can truly belong.

This is not how the Bible views singleness. Jesus says that those who can accept singleness for the Kingdom should (Matthew 19:12), and Paul speaks shockingly highly of singleness in 1 Corinthians 7:8. Indeed, singleness can be a wonderful thing that mirrors our relationship with Jesus in a way that marriage cannot.

Singleness should be celebrated, not downplayed. As Peter Hubbard writes in *Love into Light*, "Single Christians living in purity and community are billboards for the sufficiency of Jesus." Which leads to a third area.

3. Our Depth in Community

Where can an SSA struggler fulfill longings for real relationships and close companionship in God-glorifying ways? In rich Christian community. Eve Tushnet talks about Christian community this way:

> If we took friendship seriously as a potential site of devotion and sacrifice, far fewer people would feel neglected and unwanted. If we considered lay community life ("intentional communities") more seriously, and if we expanded our concept of family and welcomed single people into familial homes (for a season or for life), many more people could have the experience of living in a realistic familial love in which we all come first at times, and nobody is just there as support personnel.

What if this was the main message that those with SSA received from the church? What if they heard not simply, "Don't have that relationship!" but, "You are welcome in the church, and in all these relationships, and we will seek to support you in your walk of faith with community, loving relationships, and hospitality?" That is the beginning of a wonderful alternative script.

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Is It Sin to Experience Same-Sex Attraction?

December 17, 2013 by Nick Roen | Topics: Homosexuality



There is no way around it. Dealing with same-sex attraction is messy.

There are many issues that, at least on the surface, do not seem clear. Take this question, for example: *Is same-sex attraction (SSA) itself sinful, and if so, how should we deal with it?*

Here is my humble attempt at an answer.

Taking Our Cues from the Bible

First, note briefly three biblical observations:

1. The Bible explicitly says that impenitent homosexual acts, not homosexual desires, keep a person from inheriting the kingdom of God. "Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 6:9–10).

2. The Bible does not seem to explicitly mention same-sex attraction. It is possible that the "dishonorable passions" in Romans 1:26 could be dealing with SSA, but it's unclear whether this is a reference to simply experiencing an attraction, or following the attraction into active lusting.

3. Our passions may be disordered by the fall of this creation, and yet be distinct from active sinning. Paul said, "the creation was subjected to futility . . . [and will one day] be set free from its bondage to corruption" (Romans 8:20–21). Even Spirit-filled believers groan under this "futility" and "corruption," including "dishonorable passions." "We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:23).

Given the above three realities, it seems right to say that while homosexual practice is active sinning, the experience of same-sex attraction need not involve active sinning. John Piper says it like this:

> It would be right to say that same-sex desires are sinful in the sense that they are disordered by sin and exist contrary to God's revealed will. But to be caused by sin and rooted in sin *does not* make a sinful desire equal to sinning. Sinning is what happens when rebellion against God expresses itself through our disorders ("Let Marriage Be Held In Honor," emphasis added)

In other words, although SSA is a disordered desire, owing to the fall and thus rooted in sin and broken by sin, nevertheless experiencing SSA is not in itself an act of sinning.

I mean at least two things when I say that experiencing SSA is not in itself an act of sinning.

Orientation in General

First, experiencing a general orientation is not a sin.

In our sin nature, all of us are disordered sexually. My sexuality is disordered in that I experience a homosexual orientation. What I mean is that my sexual desires are exclusively "oriented" toward the same (homo) sex. This is true of me whether or not I am experiencing a specific attraction at any given moment. As I sit here writing, I am not experiencing an attraction to another man, but I am still exclusively attracted to men. So at this moment, though I have a homosexual orientation, I do not believe I am sinning in this regard.

A Specific Attraction

Second, experiencing a specific same-sex attraction is not necessarily a sin.

Let's say that I experience an attraction to another man. I don't go looking for it, but it rises up spontaneously within me. At this point, my attraction falls into the category of temptation, and I can do one of two things. I can fight the desire in the same manner that anyone who is tempted with pride, jealousy, or fear would, and kill it before I sin. Or I can follow the desire into lust of the mind and eventually the flesh, which is a volitional sin.

When I look at another male and experience the butterflies of attraction, I must lay the desire for inappropriate activity with him at the feet of Jesus, and turn toward the superior promises of reward found in pursuing righteousness. If I do this, even though I have experienced the disordered groan of a broken creation, I have not sinned.

A Word of Caution

However, a word of caution might be helpful here.

There clearly is a biblical category for being tempted without sinning. Jesus was tempted in every respect, yet remained without sin (Hebrews 4:15), and James 1:14–15 distinguishes between temptation that leads to sin, and sin itself. However, it seems impossible to determine when exactly we have crossed the line from temptation into sin.

For example, how long can I experience the desire before I fight it, and still be blameless? Two seconds? Ten seconds? Half a second? Because Jesus is God, he never crossed the line between temptation and sin — though he knew the agony. But because I am finite and fallen, I cannot definitively discern this line.

Therefore, even though it is possible to be tempted without sinning, it seems wise to agree with David when he says, "Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults" (Psalm 19:12). I always want to

say to the Lord, "If there was any sin in the way I handled that temptation, I am sorry. Keep me from it in the future."

Until That Day

In summary, SSA is the result of a broken creation, and in that sense it is "sinful" or "dishonorable" (Romans 1:26). It is an effect of the fall. However, experiencing SSA is not the same as sinning. Rather, same-sex attractions should be treated like any temptation to sin. They should be fought with blood-earnestness in a way that recognizes the deceitfulness of the heart and the finitude of the mind.

When I do this — when I fight temptation, turn to Jesus, trust his promises, and rely on his Spirit — God is pleased. He is not mainly displeased because I need to fight, but pleased because I am fighting.

This is good news for all of us who experience all manner of temptations! May this fact lead us, no matter our particular groaning, to rest in Jesus more deeply, fight temptation more fiercely, and look forward to the day when our fight of faith will result in "praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7).

More from Desiring God on same-sex attraction:

- An Alternative Script for Same-Sex Attraction (Nick Roen)
- Same-Sex Attraction and the Inevitability of Change (John Piper)
- Homosexuality and the Modern Church (Robert Gagnon)
- From Radical Lesbian to Redeemed Christian (Rosaria Champagne Butterfield)

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Orienting on Homosexual Orientation

July 17, 2014 by Nick Roen | Topics: Homosexuality



I remember a particular conversation I had one evening with a good friend about my struggle with same-sex attraction (SSA). He asked me, "Attractions are messy, complicated realities. How do you deal with them toward other guys?"

The real issue underneath this question is how those who experience SSA should orient on their orientation. Should a homosexual orientation be embraced, but not acted upon? Is it neutral? Or is it of such a nature that it must be fought against *in toto*? The answer to these questions requires careful thought and nuance if the discussion is going to be helpful for those living within the complicated reality of a homosexual orientation.

What Is Orientation Anyway?

A good place to start would be to define sexual orientation. However, this proves to be a difficult task. Sexual orientation is fundamentally something that is experienced, and since no two people are the same, there may be as many experiences with sexual orientation as there are people.

Speaking from my own experience, I have found resonance with this particular statement from the American Psychological Association. According to the APA, sexual orientation is "an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes." Notice the nuance that is involved here. For many, sexual orientation does not simply refer to sexual desires. Rather, it refers to which

sex an individual is *oriented* toward emotionally and physically. In other words, sexual orientation isn't so much about the verb "sex" as it is the noun "sex" or "gender." Which sex is a person oriented toward?

Also, notice the word "attraction." Attraction is an ambiguous word because it happens in a variety of ways. We might be attracted to someone's personality or character. We could be attracted to a certain lifestyle or pattern of behavior. We might feel an attraction that includes the desire to be emotionally connected with an individual. Or we might be physically or sexually attracted to a certain someone.

Distinguishing Kind and Degree

Therefore, the question becomes, "Which type of attractions can rightly be said to be a part of a sexual orientation?" My answer is both sexual and non-sexual attractions. But why is that? After all, these non-sexual attractions are felt all the time within platonic friendships, right? That is true. The distinction that must be made is between "kind" and "degree." For many, there is a specific kind of attraction that is experienced, and a certain degree of attraction that is experienced.

So when I say that I experience a homosexual orientation, I mean that there is a "kind" of attraction that is exclusive to my orientation; namely, I am exclusively *sexually* attracted to the same sex. In addition, I also mean that I experience other *non-sexual* attractions to the same sex with a "degree" of intensity that I do not toward the opposite sex. Therefore, when I experience an "attraction" to a man as the term is commonly used, the *kind* of sexual attraction and the *degree* of non-sexual attraction are both in play. In this way, the non-sexual attraction is linked to my sexuality in a way that is experientially impossible to separate.

A Complex Relationship

We intuitively know this to be true, though we rarely think about attraction in these terms. Let me illustrate through a common experience. When I was in college my best friend and I did everything together. We were emotionally invested in one another, and supported one another in our walks with Christ. Then, one fateful day, he met his future wife and our friendship took a serious hit. Now, not only was he physically attracted to her in ways (kind) that he never was toward me, but he was also attracted to her in other "whole person" ways with an intensity (degree) that he did not feel toward me or any other man. This led him to spend considerably less time with me, and more time with her. In all of these sexual and non-sexual attractions, he experienced his sexual orientation.

Let me summarize:

1. For many, sexual orientation is the experience of a pattern of attractions toward one or both sexes.
2. These attractions include sexual and non-sexual attractions.
3. Sexual attractions are the "kind" of attractions that are experienced exclusively within a sexual orientation. Non-sexual attractions can also be experienced to an exclusive "degree" that also makes them a part of a sexual orientation.
4. Therefore, both sexual and non-sexual attractions are often inseparably linked to sexual orientation.

Now, back to the original question of how someone with SSA should deal with his or her experience of orientation. In my opinion, the different aspects of attraction should be addressed separately.

The question should now become, "What type of desires are these different types of attractions causing to rise up inside a person's heart?"

Kill Same-Sex Sexual Desires

It seems clear that a sexual attraction, if left unchecked, will lead to a sexual desire. With regard to this type of desire, the answer is simple: "Kill it!" Same-sex sexual desires are disordered and broken, owing to our sinful natures that we possess as fallen humans. The Bible refers to our sinful nature as "the flesh," and we are told, "if you live according to the flesh, you will die" (Romans 8:13). Indeed, if these evil desires are not killed at the moment of conception, they will give birth to active sinning which leads to death (James 1:15).

Whenever my flesh asserts itself in this manner, my only option is to fight by turning from temptation toward the promises of superior satisfaction in Jesus. When it comes to same-sex sexual desires, the way forward is to make war!

What about Non-Sexual Desires?

But what of the exclusively intense non-sexual attractions that are often experienced within a homosexual orientation? What is someone to do with those?

Again, the question should be, "What type of desires is this non-sexual attraction producing in the heart?" Often, these attractions lead to desires to be a good friend, love someone with acts of service and hospitality, and point them to Christ. These desires are not inherently disordered, and therefore do not necessarily need to be rejected altogether.

However, it becomes tricky because the sexual and non-sexual attractions are often experienced simultaneously and therefore it becomes difficult to sort out the desires that accompany them. This leaves us with two options. The first is to flee all attractions altogether and to never pursue any sort of friendship with anyone toward whom an attraction is experienced. For an SSA man, this option would put all friendships with guys in a state of flux depending on whether or not a certain type of attraction has occurred or not. This does not seem preferable.

In Community, with Prayer, by the Spirit

The alternative would be to prayerfully sort through the types of attractions and accompanying desires, and to deal with them accordingly. Whenever a sexual desire is experienced, kill it as fast as possible. But when a non-sexual attraction leads to a good, God-glorifying desire toward intimate friendship and service, there is the potential to proceed in a wholesome way.

This is important because oftentimes when those of us who struggle with SSA hear people tell us to fight all of our attractions, it feels like a death sentence of loneliness, void of any real intimacy. However, if we began to talk about orientation in the above terms, this would not be the case.

Yes, it will require wisdom, prayer, and careful distinctions. But we can't afford oversimplifications in this discussion. The stakes are simply too high.

Related resources:

- Why Homosexuality Is Not Like Other Sins

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Same-Sex Attraction and the Wait for Change

January 29, 2014 by Nick Roen | Topics: Homosexuality



Few concepts are more foreign to our culture than waiting. Now you can take a picture of a check with your phone and deposit it instantly into your bank account without even leaving your Lay-Z-Boy. "Instant," it seems, has become the new "relatively quick."

This has been highlighted in my own life as I have wrestled with the issue of change in regard to my same-sex attraction (SSA). When I began counseling several years ago, I thought that if I followed a set of prescribed steps, then my attractions would switch from males to females. However, after seven months of hard work, I began to become disillusioned and depressed because that didn't happen. Why wasn't change happening like I thought it would?

Then one day it hit me. I realized that heterosexuality is not my ultimate goal — holiness is. And my holiness is not ultimately contingent on the reversal of my attractions. Once this became clear, I began to view change differently.

Change Not Promised

The reversal of my orientation is a type of change that is not guaranteed in this life. God never promised me that he would remove my SSA. I am reminded of Paul praying three times to the Lord in 2 Corinthians 12 that the thorn in his flesh would be taken away. And what did God say? "My grace is enough" (2 Corinthians 12:9). God decides which thorns stay and which thorns he will remove, for his glory. Even though SSA is a

particularly painful thorn to bear, I have no guarantee one way or the other.

In fact, promising orientation change can be quite harmful. In reality, there is no set of prescribed steps that will definitively lead to a reversal in attraction, and this type of thinking can make orientation change into an idol that must be achieved or all is lost. If my hope rested in becoming straight, then I would have no ground for hope at all.

This Change Guaranteed

However, make no mistake, change is guaranteed. What happens when I dethrone heterosexuality as my ultimate goal and replace it with holiness? What happens when I cling to Jesus, trust the promises in his word, and fight the fight of faith by his Spirit? I change! This (often painfully) slow process is called *sanctification*, and sanctification is a type of change that is inevitable for all true Christians.

And here's the thing: my sanctification here on earth may or may not include a change in my attractions. In conforming me into the image of Christ, God may see fit to leave my orientation unchanged until the day I die, for the purpose of my ultimate holiness. My SSA might be one of the "thorns" that he leaves to increase my faith and display his power and grace in my life.

Groaning, Waiting, Hoping

This is where waiting comes in. I want to be "fixed" now, to stop warring against my flesh and become like Christ. The waiting is so hard! Thankfully, the Bible tells me how to deal with the waiting. As I experience the groanings in this body, I have great grounds for hope.

I hope in my full, final, ultimate adoption as a son of God, which will include the redemption of my body (Romans 8:23). And I need to hope because it isn't here yet. After all, "hope that is seen [present right now, immediately, *instantly*) is no hope at all. For who hopes for what he sees?" (Romans 8:24).

Indeed, instead of "fix me now," the Bible gives me this: "But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Romans 8:25). No matter how acutely I feel the brokenness of my body, and my already-but-not-yet adoption as a son of God through Christ, I must wait for my full redemption with patience — even when I can deposit a check from my La-Z-Boy.

In discussing the hollow promise of orientation change, Wesley Hill, who experiences SSA, says this: "Suffice it to say, I think the real spiritual and theological danger of this kind of 'victorious Christian living' talk is an *avoidance* of the 'state of being on the way.' It's an expectation that the kingdom of God should be here fully now, without our having to endure its slow, mysterious, paradoxical unfolding until the return of Christ."

So instead of snapping a picture of my check, I need to be content with being in the car "on the way" to the bank.

Worth the Wait

Believe me, it is really hard. But the reality is that "on the way" is where I experience God. For now, it's in the pain and the groaning and the fighting for contentment that God reveals himself, and changes me, and strips away my idols, and gives me more of him, and prepares me for an eternity of enjoying him without the pain.

It's on the ride in the car that I see the beautiful countryside, and the majestic mountains, and the stunning

sunset that I wouldn't have seen if I were magically transported to my final destination, breathtaking as that final destination will be. The waiting is where I am sanctified, conformed into the image of Jesus, and readied for delighting in him when I see him face to face (2 Corinthians 3:18).

My orientation may not change in this life, but complete sanctification is coming (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24). It isn't here yet. But that, I think, I can wait for.

More from Desiring God on same-sex attraction:

- An Alternative Script for Same-Sex Attraction (Nick Roen)
- The Idol Behind Same-Sex Desires (Sam Allberry)
- Same-Sex Attraction and the Inevitability of Change (John Piper)

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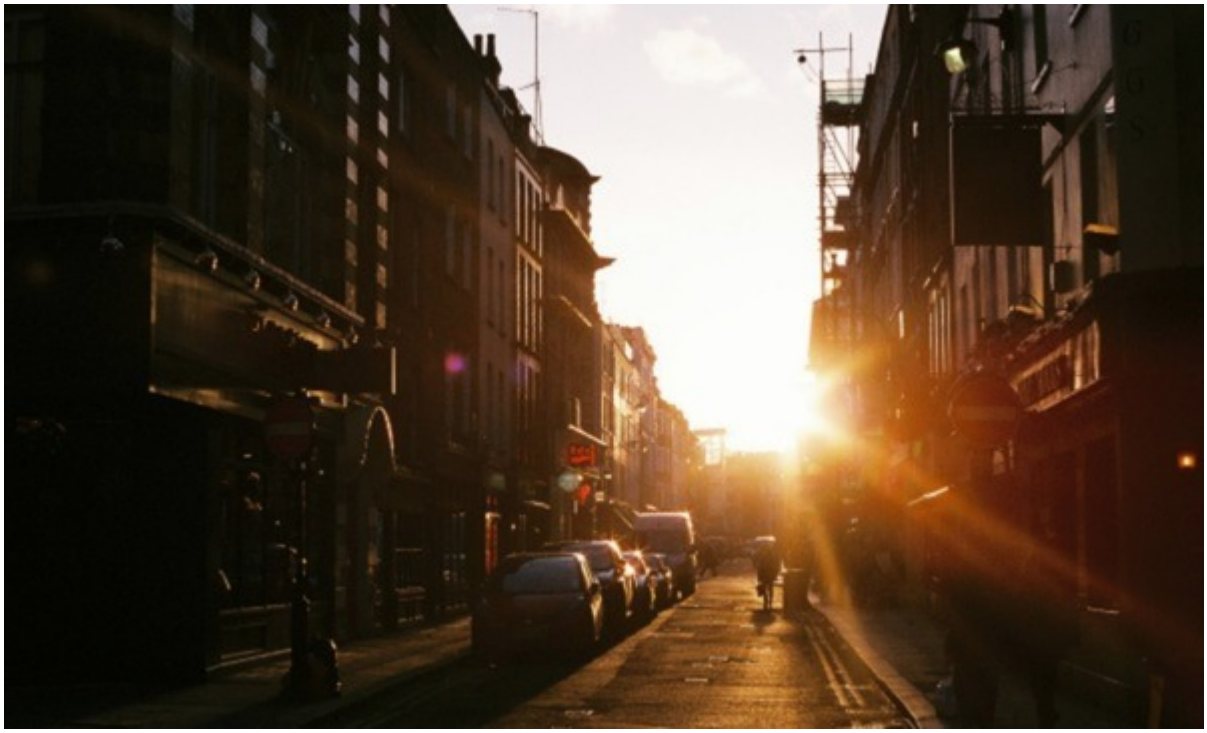
Why Homosexuality Is Not Like Other Sins

April 21, 2014 by Jonathan Parnell | Topics: Homosexuality



Homosexuality is not the only sin mentioned in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10.

> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

It's not the only sin mentioned, but it is different from all the rest, at least right now. At this moment in history, contrary to the other sins listed here, homosexuality is celebrated by our larger society with pioneering excitement. It's seen as a good thing, as the new hallmark of progress.

To be sure, the masses increasingly make no bones about sin in general. Innumerable people are idolaters, not to mention those who are sexually immoral, or who commit adultery, or who steal and are greedy and get wasted and revile neighbors and swindle others. It happens all the time. And *each* of these unrepentant sins are the *same* in the sense of God's judgment. They all deserve his wrath. And we're constantly reminded that "such were some of you" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Concerning Popular Opinion

But as far as I know, none of those sins are applauded so aggressively by whole groups of people who advocate for their normalcy. Sexual immorality is no longer the tip of the spear for the progressive push. Adultery is still frowned upon by many. Accusations of greed will still smear a candidate's political campaign. Thievery is still not openly embraced, and there are no official initiatives saying it's okay to go steal things that don't belong to you. There's no such thing as a drunk agenda yet. Most aren't proud to choose a beverage over stability, and there aren't any petitions that the government should abolish the driving restrictions of inebriated individuals. Reviling others still isn't seen as the best way to win friends and influence people. Swindling, especially on a corporate level, usually gets someone thrown into jail. In fact, the infrastructure of the American economy depends upon, in some measure, our shared disdain for conniving scammers.

Perhaps excepting fornication, these sins are still seen in a pretty negative light. But not homosexual practice, not by those who are now speaking loudest and holding positions of prominence. According to the emerging consensus, homosexuality is different.

What to Be Against

As Christians, we believe with deepest sincerity that the embrace of homosexual practice, along with other sins, keeps people out of the kingdom of God. And if our society celebrates it, we can't both be caring and not say anything. Too much is at stake. This means it is an oversimplification to say that Christians — or conservative evangelicals — are simply *against homosexuality*. We are against any sin that restrains people from everlasting joy in God, and homosexual practice just gets all the press because, at this cultural moment, it's the main sin that is so freshly endorsed in our context by the powers that be. Let's hope that if there's some new cultural agenda promoting thievery — one that says it's now our right to take whatever we want from others by whatever means — that Christians will speak out against it. The issue is sin. *That's* what we're against. And that's what should make our voice so unique when we speak into this debate.

Some would like to see this whole issue of homosexuality divided into two camps: those who celebrate it and those who hate it. Both of these groups exist in our society. There are the growing numbers, under great societal pressure, who praise homosexuality. We might call them the left. And there are people who hate homosexuality, with the most bigoted rationale and apart from any Christian concern. We might call them the right.

Those Glorious Words

The current debate is plagued by this binary lens. Those on the left try to lump everyone who disagrees with them into that right side. *If you don't support, you hate*. Meanwhile, those on the right see compromise and spinelessness in anyone who doesn't get red-faced and militant. *If you don't hate, you support*.

But true followers of Christ will walk neither path. We have something to say that no one else is saying, or can say.

Distancing ourselves from both the left and the right, we don't celebrate homosexual practice, *we acknowledge God's clear revealed word that it is sin*; and we don't hate those who embrace homosexuality, *we love them enough to not just collapse under the societal pressure*. We speak the truth in love into this confusion, saying, simultaneously, "That's wrong" and "I love you." We're not the left; we say, *this is wrong*. And we're not the right; we say, *you're loved*. We speak good news, with those sweetest, deepest, most glorious words of the cross — the same words that God spoke us — "You're wrong, and you're loved."

God tells us we're wrong, that the wages of sin is death, that unrepentant rebellion means judgment, that our

rescue required the cursed death of his Son (Romans 3:23; John 3:36; Galatians 3:13). And God tells us we're loved, that even while we were sinners, Jesus died for us, that while we were unrighteous, Jesus suffered in our place, that though we were destined for wrath, Jesus welcomes us into glory (Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 3:18; Ephesians 2:1–7).

Where the Gospel Shines

You're wrong and you're loved — that's the unique voice of the Christian. That's what we say, speaking from our own experience, as Tim Keller so well puts it, "we're far worse than we ever imagined, and far more loved than we could ever dream."

That's our message in this debate, when society's elites despise us, when pop songs vilify us, when no one else has the resources to say anything outside of two extremes, we have this incomparable opportunity to let the gospel shine, to reach out in grace: *you're wrong and you're loved*. We get to say *this*.

That's why homosexuality is not like other sins.

Related resources from Desiring God:

- "There Is No Demilitarized Zone in the Issue of Homosexuality" (John Piper)
- Is It Sin to Experience Same-Sex Attraction? (Nick Roen)
- Love Letter to a Lesbian (Jackie Hill)

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PART 1

JEHOVAH OR JEZEBEL?

Three Questions about Social Justice and Worship

You shall have no other gods before me.
–Exodus 20:3

Today almost everything is considered a matter of injustice, everything, of course, except the *main* thing. There is talk of economic injustice, reproductive injustice, racial injustice, and even, according to yesterday's headlines, facial injustice (based on a recent university policy that threatens expulsion for "mean" facial expressions).[1] What no one seems to be talking about—though it is at the bedrock of all other injustice—is *worship*. Theistic justice—bowing down to something that is worth bowing down to—is not *a* justice issue; it is *the* justice issue from which all other justice blooms.

Justice has been defined for millennia as giving others what is due them. Let's test that definition with a little exercise that will help us fine-tune our injustice detecting skills. In the following snapshots from Latin American history, see whether you can name, as precisely as possible, the injustices that occurred. In what ways were others not given what was due them? Fair warning: injustice is not pretty.

The year was 1519. While Martin Luther was busy launching the Protestant Reformation in Europe, a Spanish conquistador named Hernán Cortés landed in what is now Mexico City. Back then it was called Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec Empire, one of the five most populous cities on the planet. Towering over the city skyline stood Templo Mayor, a pyramid base with two peaks—a

red shrine for the sun god, Huitzilopochtli, and a blue shrine for the water god, Tlaloc.

At the sun god shrine, which today has a scaled-down model in Disney World's Epcot, tens of thousands had their hearts cut from their chests with flint knives. Hearts were set on fire and held up to the sky as an offering to Huitzilopochtli. Heads were removed for public display on a massive skull rack called the Huey Tzompantli, showcasing the skulls of as many as sixty thousand victims. Bodies were kicked down the 180-foot pyramid staircase to cannibals waiting below.

On the water god shrine of Templo Mayor, archeologists have found children's remains and evidence that the young Aztecs were brutalized before their ritualistic murders. Why? Because children's tears were believed to have sacred powers to please Tlaloc. I warned you that injustice is not pretty.

When Cortés and his conquistadors entered the city in November 1519, they brought with them new injustices. A Franciscan priest narrates: "Fear prevailed. . . . There was terror. . . . And the Spanish walked everywhere. . . . They took all, all that they saw which they saw to be good. . . . They took it all."[2] Within two bloody years Cortés and his troops had seized full control of the Aztec capital. The conquistadors quickly implemented a system called *encomienda*. *Encomienda* meant Spanish rulers had not just land but also, more importantly, the *people* on the land granted (or "encommended") to them as property over which they claimed total sovereignty.[3]

What happened next was exactly what tends to happen when fallen humans play God and pretend to be sovereign lords over one another: theft, oppression, rape, exploitation, fraud, murder. In short, social injustice is first and foremost a matter of misplaced worship.

These grim snapshots raise three questions about social justice and worship:

Does our vision of social justice take the godhood of God seriously?
Does it acknowledge the image of God in everyone, regardless of size, shade, sex, or status?
Does it make a false god out of the self, the state, or social acceptance?

3. "So you're saying, like those white Christians who opposed Martin Luther King Jr., that we should just preach the gospel and try to get people to heaven and not waste our time confronting oppression and social injustice here on earth."
4. "So you're saying that 'whiteness' has not been used as a justification, even by so-called Christians, to unleash unspeakable violence, dehumanization, and terror against people of color."
5. "So you're saying that the nice things white people have done throughout history and the mean things nonwhite people have done throughout history somehow excuse the vile evils done in the name of white supremacy throughout history."

No. I am not saying any of that. I don't believe any of that. If you are hearing any of that, then either the Newman effect is at work or I have simply done a poor job communicating, for which I pray you forgive me.

A Prayer to Redeem Sinners and Systems

God,

You are so holy and so committed to redemption that you oppose all sin—our individual sins as well as those we embed in systems whenever we "frame injustice by statute." Mark our hearts with that same commitment. As we seek to bring redemption to fallen systems, may we not fall into the traps of automatically assuming the most damning explanations for inequalities, ignoring evidence that may not support our ideologies, or telling self-serving narratives that pin all oppression on this or that people group. And most of all, make your first thing our first thing. The good news of Jesus's death and resurrection is "of first importance" according to your Word. Help us contend earnestly for the gospel and not try to add anything to the complete and sufficient saving work of Jesus. It would be easy to say we believe that gospel and then sit on our thumbs while people suffer. So please push us to do the kind of justice you command, the justice that is not the gospel itself but flows beautifully from that gospel. Amen.

PART 4

TRUTH OR TRIBES THINKING?

Three Questions about Social Justice and Knowledge

Love the Lord your God . . . with all your mind.
–Matthew 22:37

Every mind has what philosophers would call an "epistemology," what programmers might call an "operating system." How should we best decipher between a justified true belief and a falsehood? How should we best process and store the input and data of life? Should we feel, reason, experiment, trust, revolt, or Google our way to truth?

These aren't questions for pipe-puffing philosophers in rich mahogany offices with many leather-bound books. Everyone has an epistemology, and, as with computer operating systems, some are better than others. Some mental operating systems open our minds to new truths, while others are so riddled with bugs and viruses that they generate jumbled beliefs and crash cognitive systems.

If our mental operating systems are buggy, loving God and loving our neighbors will be difficult. If, for example, I seek truth at the psychic's shop—if palm readings, tarot cards, and Ouija boards are where I stake my trust—then my mind will not blossom into all that God designed it to be. My God-given capacities to know him deeply, reason well, weigh evidence, trust what is trustworthy, and see through propaganda—all of that God-given, intellectual potential will be squandered.

Again, the Bible does not merely say "do justice" but to "truly execute justice." Corrupted mental operating systems generate false beliefs that can easily dupe us into thinking we are doing great work for others, when in reality we are doing them damage. If we care about justice—giving both God and others what is due them—then we should care about epistemology.

Tribes Thinking

We must see Social Justice B for what it is. It is an epistemology, a mental operating system with a unique way of processing the world around us. Operating systems have names. A Mac might run on Mountain Lion, High Sierra, or Mojave. Epistemologies have names too. Some minds run on empiricism, others on rationalism, others on subjectivism. If there were a name for the mental OS of Social Justice B, it would be called "Tribes." According to Tribes thinking, reality is best interpreted as a story of oppressor groups versus oppressed groups. If you fail to see the oppression all around you, then you are sleepwalking through life. You are not "woke." You are unwittingly on the wrong side of history, the oppressors' side of history.

Why call it "Tribes thinking"? Because within the social justice epistemology, the story of oppression is typically told in one of six ways:

T, beware the **T**heocrats!
The oppressors are right-wing Christians trying to cram their outdated morality down everyone else's throats with the coercive powers of law.

R, beware the **R**acists!
The oppressors are those who marginalize and dehumanize people who do not share their skin tone or ethnic identity.

I, beware the **I**slamophobes!
The oppressors are those who fear that most if not all Muslims are hate-mongering terrorists rather than peace-loving neighbors.

B, beware the **B**igots!
The oppressors are those who use their heteronormative power to deny the rights and humanity of the LGBTQ community.

E, beware the **E**xploiters!
The oppressors are those whose capitalist greed leads them to use and abuse the poor for their own selfish, materialistic gain.

S, beware the **S**exists!
The oppressors are men who deny equal rights, equal access to power, and equal pay to maintain a patriarchal tyranny over half our species.

To a mind under this operating system, these six oppressor categories—theocrats, racists, Islamophobes, bigots, elitists, and sexists—combine to best explain the world around us.

What Tribes Thinking Gets Right

Can we say anything positive about Tribes thinking? Sure. Most epistemologies start with real insight before they go too far. The empiricists were right that our five senses can help us get at reality, just as the rationalists were right that logic and mathematics can help us get at reality. They went wrong when they ditched the countless truths that can't be tested in a lab or proved by an equation.

So the first thing to note about Tribes thinking is that there is a gut-wrenching measure of truth to it. There is no shortage of real-world examples of Christians taking political power to dangerous extremes, people being dehumanized for their skin color, moderate Muslims being treated like bloodthirsty jihadists, gays and lesbians being ousted from their homes and treated like subhumans, capitalists who have valued profits over people, and men who have trampled women. We must say, with tears, all of this is true. If we take the Bible seriously, we must strive to make all of this untrue. We must work toward a world in which the full humanity of everyone is respected and cherished, not only in theory but also in action.

This is what Tribes thinking gets right. Sure, not everything called "injustice" against such groups is automatically injustice simply because an anonymous mob says so in a collective Twitter rage. But that does not void the fact that there are real people bloodied and bruised from real injustice.

To ignore that fact is to become the priest and the Levite from the parable of the good Samaritan. We nonchalantly change lanes to pass the battered and abused who are curled up and moaning on the roadside. Ignoring the moans violates Jesus's second greatest commandment—to love our neighbors. If our mental operating systems function in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, then we should journey through our daily lives scanning the roadsides for anyone mangled by bandits. But if our epistemology keeps our eyes always fixed on the horizon—by focusing *only* on getting all our doctrinal i's dotted and t's crossed, or *only* on getting to heaven, or *only* on the triumph of our political party until the grimacing faces on the roadside become blurred—then *we* are the religious villains of Jesus's story. Of course, good doctrine matters immensely. Eternal destinies matter, well, eternally. Politics matter intensely (though not as much as the first two). We ignore them at our peril. But when

our theology or politics give us a tunnel vision that bypasses those ravaged by real injustice, it's time to repent.

Tribes thinking can be helpful whenever it encourages those on fast-paced religious journeys to pull back the reigns and look, really *look*, to see broken people on the roadside as more than blurs. But if we are to *truly* execute justice for the battered, we must ask, "Can Tribes thinking go wrong? Is it possible that an epistemology designed to open our eyes to injustice might blind us to ways in which we unwittingly add to the net injustice in the universe? Is it possible to think we are the Good Samaritans of Jesus's story when, in fact, we have become the bandits?" Here are three questions we should ask if we don't want Tribes thinking to make bandits of us all:

Does our vision of social justice make one way of seeing some things the only way of seeing everything?
Does it turn the "lived experience" of hurting people into more pain?
Does it turn the quest for truth into an identity game?

Chapter 10

The Tunnel Vision Question

Does our vision of social justice make one way of seeing something the only way of seeing everything?

One of the most common ways mental operating systems crash is when they process the world in only one way. An entrepreneur believes it is good to make money. In its proper place, this belief yields more hard work than hedonism, more generosity than greed, and more industriousness than impulsivity. At its best, the belief that making money is good would not crowd out God, family, friendship, honesty, rest, caring for the poor, and the other good things in life.

Before long, our entrepreneur's belief becomes an idol that warps his mind. His mental space is overrun with thinking about how to build himself a Walter White bed of cash. He approaches others not as people but as suckers to take by the ankles and shake until everything he wants from the relationship falls out of their pockets. On account of his epistemological tunnel vision, he can no longer truly see a breathtaking stretch of beach. It hits his retinas. But he can't really *see* it. He can't see the lightshow produced by sunrays on the ocean ripples, which looks like ten million tiny cameras flashing. He can't see glassy sheets of water gliding up and sizzling down the sand. He can't see seagulls surfing the wind currents. All he sees is untapped beachfront property that could, with some investment savvy, go for billions. Given his epistemology, he can see the world in only one color—green.

To the old colonizers, the whole world became plunder. To the postmodernists, the whole world became a power play. The human mind has an uncanny way of finding a bit of knowledge, then turning it into a totalizing way of

knowing everything. We need what Abraham Kuyper called a "unity of view," since "the question about the origin, interconnection and destiny of everything that exists cannot be suppressed."[1] We need grand, unifying stories. We need cosmic dramas with heroes and villains to make sense of life's head-spinning perplexities.

There is nothing wrong with our insuppressible need for grand stories. We are designed to live in big meaningful narratives. The problem occurs when our grand stories aren't as grand as they seem. Instead of prying the world open to us, they cram it into a tiny box and lock us inside. They make God's Technicolor world appear to us in monochrome.

Seeing What Is *Not* There

The Bible is clear. There is real oppression in the world. There is a big difference between believing this truth and downloading Tribes thinking as our mental OS. One helpful way to tell the difference is to honestly ask ourselves, "How do we process evidence that oppression may *not* be the best explanation in this or that case?"

When oppression—a true insight into *some things*—becomes the way of seeing *most things* or *all things*, then our story of the world ceases to be a grand story. Just as our tycoon couldn't really *see* a beach, he could see only dollars and cents, so we likewise lose our ability to see the world when we can see only oppression.

Take the hot-button issue of the gender pay gap. If I process the world through Tribes thinking, then I am left with one and only one interpretation—sexism. That totalizing answer forbids all kinds of important questions. Does the gender pay gap have anything to do with women voluntarily leaving the workforce or going part-time for a season because many find the prospect of raising babies to be more worthwhile than decades of overtime office drudgery? Could a gap exist because men, on average, are more disagreeable than women, and disagreeableness is a documented marker of negotiating bigger paychecks? Is it relevant that, in many fields, women make more than men when numbers are adjusted to account for overtime hours? Could the gap have ten or twenty or a hundred other contributing factors? Are we allowed to seriously ponder research into these factors, or should we simply write off the researchers as privileged members of the he-man woman-hater's club?

My point is *not* that factors other than sexism explain the gender pay gap. My point is that if our minds are programmed by Tribes thinking, then the question itself—"Do factors other than sexism help explain the gender pay gap?"—will likely never cross our minds. If the question does arise, then our mental OS will kick in and quickly suppress it. Why? Because, by the logic of Tribes thinking, the very act of questioning the sexist story of the pay gap is to commit the unpardonable sin of siding with the oppressor groups over the oppressed. If someone else poses the question to us, then our mental OS stores them away in our mental files under *S* for sexist, *M* for misogynist, or *P* for patriarchal oppressor. Those who do not accept Tribes thinking can be dragged into the trash bin for permanent deletion. The Tribes mindset trashes not only any meaningful relationship with that person but also any hope of meaningfully thinking about that person's perspective. In short, it makes us both closed-hearted and closed-minded.

Before long, we can barely scroll through our Netflix suggestions without righteous indignation kicking in. *Braveheart*—a three-hour celebration of toxic masculinity. *The Patriot*—shameless American exceptionalism. *Sleepless in Seattle*—heteronormative propaganda. *Lord of the Rings*—Eurocentric racism. *Argo, Zero Dark Thirty, American Sniper*—big budget Islamophobia. *Aladdin, Mulan, Princess and the Frog*—racial stereotyping. *Captain America*—more like Captain White Privilege.

I am hyperbolizing, but only slightly. In just the last week, the children's show *VeggieTales* has been criticized as racist for having colored vegetables with different accents play villains. The playground game of dodgeball has since been denounced at the annual Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences as "miseducative" and a tool of "oppression" because it "reinforces the five faces of oppression."[2] Behind such headlines, though laughable to some, there is serious insight into how our psyches work.

We are talking about a well-documented phenomenon that psychologists call "concept creep."[3] Like spilling ink into a tub of water, a concept expands outward in all directions until the entire tub is clouded. One valid way of seeing something spreads into the only way of seeing everything. Concept creep is how someone can become so cloudy headed that they deconstruct *VeggieTales* as racist propaganda. Concept creep is how J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* can be read as racist Eurocentrism, despite the author's vocal antiracism.[4] Sociologist Melanie Dupuis in her book *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* argues that "by declaring milk perfect, white northern Europeans announced their own perfection."[5] When a totalizing view of the world grips our minds, we experience things that are often not there. We start seeing racism in vegetable cartoons, tasting white supremacy in a glass of milk, hearing sexism in a holiday jingle, feeling oppression in the impact of a dodgeball, and smelling homophobia as it wafts from our chicken sandwiches.

Concept creep is particularly common in Social Justice B. It assumes that questioning sexism, racism, or any other evil ism as the best explanation is to side with the oppressors against the oppressed. This is exactly backward. If we care about ending actual sexism, then we should welcome the question of how much of the gender pay gap can be laid at the feet of actual sexism. Otherwise, we aren't fighting the real problem, but shadowboxing our own ideological projections. The extent to which we shadowbox our ideological projections of the problem is the extent to which we trivialize the victims of real sexism and racism. By diverting our finite injustice-fighting energies in every direction all at once, Tribes thinking unintentionally marginalizes the already marginalized. Calling most everything racism hurts the victims of actual racism. Calling most everything sexism hurts the victims of actual sexism, and so on.

Mechanics who care about cars and their owners, not merely trying to fleece their customers, will do everything in their power to ask questions, run diagnostics, and get down to the real problems. Mechanics who simply dump oil into every car without taking a serious look under the hood will create more broken-down cars and stranded drivers on the roadside. Maybe the problem is a worn timing belt, a busted transmission, or a dead alternator. Actually fixing problems requires more than one-dimensional diagnoses. Asking unpopular questions and openly gathering and assessing the facts is one of the most loving things we can do for our oppressed brothers and sisters. Contrary to popular opinion, questioning whether and to what extent sexism, racism, or any other antibiblical ism is the real problem is siding *with* the oppressed.

Yes, doing so is risky. You will not win any virtue awards or popularity contests. Online mobs are ever poised to pounce. They may call you names. They may flag you for hate speech and get your social media accounts deactivated. The question is, do we take the Bible's commands to truly execute justice seriously enough to endure the online mobs?

My point is not to deny the reality of racism, sexism, or economic exploitation. It is simply that caring about justice requires a commitment to truth. We can no more separate truth from justice than we can subtract one side from a triangle and still consider it a triangle. The extent to which Tribes thinking predetermines answers to hard questions is the extent to which it obscures truth and unintentionally leaves more people broken. If we are afraid to ask tough questions with open minds, if we equate asking hard questions with racism, bigotry, and sexism, if we aren't willing to follow the evidence wherever it leads, then we should ask ourselves, "What do we care about more, loving the oppressed in truth or marching to an ideological beat and saluting the onlooking culture so it does not brand us with a scarlet T, R, I, B, E, or S?"

Missing What *Is* There

Tribes thinking may not only cause us to see what is *not* there; it may also cause us to miss much of what *is* there. If we look at history and see no nuance or beauty, nothing to preserve or treasure, only a long brutal tale of oppressors exploiting and pillaging minority groups, then something has gone terribly wrong with our mental operating systems. We miss so much history. If we read great literature and see only dead white guys writing stories to push patriarchal oppression, then something has gone terribly wrong. We miss out on so much literary truth and beauty. When we pass someone on the street and don't see a unique person but an exemplar of an identity group, when we project all the historical transgressions of that group onto the flesh-and-blood person before us, we miss so much of who that person actually is.

Tribes thinking not only blinds us to a lot of truth, goodness, and beauty in the world; it also keeps us from seeing a lot of deception, injustice, and ugliness. It dupes us into seeing oppression where it isn't and keeps us from seeing oppression where it is.

In late 2015, I received my first branding with a scarlet *O*, for oppressor. Undercover videos had been released exposing Planned Parenthood leaders bargaining the body parts of aborted fetuses. Scrolling through my Facebook feed, I came across a student's post hailing the virtues of Planned Parenthood. The student had done a superb job of parroting Planned Parenthood's talking points. They are an "essential," "mammogram-providing" "advocate for women's health," with abortion as "only 3 percent" of its services, which have been unjustly "discredited" by "heavily edited" "fraud videos." I responded by fact-checking her points and exposing the $1.8 billion operation's long history of exploiting women, minorities, and their unborn children.[6] The student and I had a lively but charitable back-and-forth.

Then came a private message from another student. He was outraged that I would exploit the "power differential" between a professor and student by challenging a student's pro-choice arguments in a public forum. He expressed his disgust at my calloused act of online oppression. He took to social media to declare his "solidarity" with the student, whom I had apparently victimized, and his opposition to me and the historic patriarchal power I represented.

The outraged student expressed a grand total of zero outrage for the facts that surfaced in the public exchange—that Planned Parenthood aborts over 300,000 divine image-bearers a year, their historic targeting of minorities, their complicity in the sexual exploitation of minors, and their profiteering off people's bodies. There was no outrage for those victims. Who was all that outrage expressed for?

A university student with breath in her lungs and a brain that, instead of being sold to a bio research firm, had been challenged by a professor on social media.

Tribes thinking is neither as inclusive nor as concerned for the oppressed as its proponents claim. Its solidarity circle includes non-Christians, people of color, Muslims, people of the LGBTQ community, the economically poor, and certain people with two X chromosomes—that is, those who fall within the TRIBES acrostic. And, of course, we should care about all those people as divine image-bearers. However, if we care about the oppressed even more than we care about a particular political ideology, then . . .

Should we care about women exploited by the abortion industry? In 1973 seven powerful men rendered the *Roe v. Wade* decision, impacting millions. While hailed as a landmark decision for the liberation of women, 64 percent of women who seek abortions said they felt pressured by others to have abortions. Over half thought abortion was "morally wrong." Less than 1 percent said they felt better about themselves, 77.9 percent felt guilt, and 59.5 percent felt that "part of me died."[7] A massive fourteen-year study found that 81 percent of women who had an abortion were more likely to experience mental health problems.[8] That is not to speak of the physical toll that has been inflicted on them. Does our vision of social justice include these women or take their harrowing stories seriously? [9]

Should we care about the voiceless babies terminated by the abortion industry? According to the World Health Organization, abortion was the leading cause of death worldwide in 2018, tallying 42 million victims.[10] That is 42 million human beings who fell victim to the suction tubes, curette blades, and Mayo scissors of the abortion industry.[11] That is eighty image-bearers terminated in the last minute you have been reading, more than one per second. In places such as Iceland "the abortion rate for children diagnosed with Down syndrome approaches 100 percent."[12] In the United States, 90 percent of preborn humans diagnosed with Downs are terminated.[13] "In Asia, widespread sex-selective abortions have led to as many as 160 million "missing" women—more than the entire female population of the United States. Recent evidence suggests that sex-selective abortions of girls are common among certain populations in the United States as well.[14] In cities such as New York, more black babies are aborted than are born.[15] Human beings in utero literally cannot voice their oppression. How many Social Justice B advocates are willing to be the voice for those millions of divine image-bearers who do not enjoy the same size, developmental, locational, or breathing privileges they do?

Should we care about children who have endured split homes? There are mountains of research documenting the advantages of being raised by two

parents. Mom and Dad sticking together, for all their imperfections, corresponds with higher levels of academic and career success for their children, along with lower rates of criminality and mental disorder. To achieve equality, should diversity committees work to dismantle two-parent privilege and ensure that candidates from broken homes are given more seats at the table? How often does what now brands itself "social justice" champion the cause of strong intact families as a justice issue? (Instead, one of the world's most popular Social Justice B organizations declares its "guiding principle" to "disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family" in its mission statement.[16]) If we care about justice, shouldn't we be deeply disturbed that the rate of black children born to unmarried mothers climbed from 25 to a heartbreaking 70 percent from 1965 to 2017, or the fact that white children born out of wedlock skyrocketed from 4 to over 28 percent over the same period?[17]

Should we care about the victims of the exploitative pornography industry? Pornography is a $97 billion industry.[18] In 2018 more than 5.5 billion hours of pornography were consumed on a single porn site, with 33.5 billion visits. According to the Internet Watch Foundation, recorded child sexual exploitation (otherwise known as "child porn") is one of the fastest-growing online businesses, with over 624,000 child porn traders discovered in the US.[19] Analysis of the fifty most popular pornographic videos found that 88 percent of scenes contained physical violence. Then there are the established links between pornography and human trafficking, rape, domestic violence, impaired brain function, broken relationships, and depression.[20] Why are repenting of pornography addiction and fighting to bring down the dehumanizing pornography industry so rarely mentioned in the same breath as "social justice"?

Should we care about the millions of Christians imprisoned or executed around the globe? The Social Justice B narrative often uses a broad brush to paint Christians as the oppressors, the driving force behind the theocracy, racism, Islamophobia, bigotry, exploitation, and sexism in the world. To many with the Tribes mindset, it is obvious which side of the oppressor-oppressed equation Christians fall on. Yet according to *Newsweek* in 2018, "Christian persecution and genocide is worse now than 'any time in history.'"[21] This includes being targeted, imprisoned, beaten, raped, hung, crucified, and bombed for claiming Jesus as Lord. Every month an average of 345 Christians are killed for faith-related reasons, 105 churches or Christian buildings are burned or attacked, and 219 Christians are detained without trial.[22]

Should we care about the desperately oppressed victims of far-left systems like communism and socialism? According to the international bestseller *The Black Book of Communism*, the quest to achieve economic equality between the

rich and poor through communist and socialist policies has resulted in over 100 million casualties in the twentieth century alone.[23] Nevertheless, several studies show that support for socialism is trending high in the United States, particularly among younger generations. These are the same generations in which one-third believe that more people perished under George W. Bush than Joseph Stalin, almost half are "unfamiliar" with Mao Zedong and the 50 million victims of his plan for economic equality.[24] If social justice is truly about ending oppression, why are so many Social Justice B advocates quick to fall for the lofty rhetoric of "compassionate" political visions that led to the oppression and termination of more people in the last century than any other system? Can they state with clarity why their version of socialism would not yield similar catastrophic results as the socialist regimes, past and present?

The distinguishing mark of the political left, one that is particularly attractive for young generations, is its care and compassion for the "others." Frankly, I don't buy it. Do "others" include oppressed women, terminated babies, homesplit children, those exploited by the pornography industry, the religiously persecuted, or socialism's victims? The tunnel vision of Social Justice B tends to leave these millions of oppressed people in the dark.

Of course, we must not commit the same error in the opposite direction. This is where Tribes thinking serves as a helpful reminder. Scripture does command us to love our neighbors. That certainly includes our non-Christian, ethnic minority, Muslim, poor, and female neighbors. Given the political polarization of our day, seeing our side as caring about others and the other side as cruel is easy and self-serving. But it is not so black-and-white. Often the left and right simply have different "others." If we are shaped by Scripture instead of the culture wars, then we will not become the priests and Levites galloping past bodies on the side of the road. Christians should be known less as culture warriors and more as Good Samaritans who stop for battered neighbors, whether they are black, white, brown, male, female, gay, straight, rich, poor, old, young, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, atheist, capitalist, socialist, Republican, Democrat, near, far, tall, short, or smaller than a peanut.

Christians should be known less as culture warriors and more as good Samaritans who stop for battered image-bearers.

Tribes thinking, for all its claims of inclusivity, is clear about who is *not* worth stopping for. While it may help us see hurting people we may have otherwise missed, it also redefines "oppression" in a way that leaves far too many people bleeding out on the roadside.[25] The church must show the world a better way.

Missing the Main Thing

There is one final thing that Tribes thinking leaves outside its field of vision. It is the main thing—the gospel. Sadly, every one of my friends, colleagues, and students who has continued down the road of Social Justice B has ended up in the same place, a place where they no longer evangelize. They no longer tell people the truth about how supremely holy and satisfying God is. There is no talk of the scandalous reality of sin in every human heart or the sweet redemption that comes only through crucifixion and empty tomb of Jesus. They offer no loving calls to repent of sin and self-righteousness to trust completely in the righteousness of Christ. It's sad to watch the best news in the universe fade from view in a fog of rhetoric about pay gaps, cisheteropatriarchal privilege, and the evils of capitalism. It's sad to watch the cultural revolution eclipse the Great Commission. It's sad to watch political "wokeness" become their message and mission with less and less concern for seeing the spiritually dead reborn by the Holy Spirit, redeemed by the Son, and declared righteous by the Father.

If you find yourself moving toward Social Justice B, ask yourself honestly, "When was the last time I shared the good news of God's saving grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus with anyone?" "Do the justice causes I care about throw gasoline or water on my desire to proclaim Christ crucified?" Of course, working against racism, misogyny, and other sinful forms of oppression is important to the Christian life. Christianity should never be reduced to fire insurance or floating off to the clouds after we die. But if we no longer share the gospel, then there is a problem.

Let's face it. Evangelizing is risky (though far less risky than *not* evangelizing). Telling the truth about the godhood of God makes you a heretic in the eyes of those who are their own moral authorities. Straight talk about the sinfulness of sin is offensive to those convinced that their own hearts are unfallen and worth following. Proclaiming Jesus as our only hope for salvation will step on toes. So we take the safe road. A recent study revealed that nearly half of "practicing Christian millennials" believe "it is wrong to share one's personal beliefs with someone of a different faith in hopes that they will one day share the same faith."[26] (It is good for the eternities of millions that the apostles, the Jim and Elizabeth Elliots, the Lottie Moons, the Amy Carmichaels, the Hudson Taylors, the David Brainerds, and the William Careys of history did not share this opinion.) The same study found that 40 percent of millennials believe "if someone says they disagree with you, it means that they're judging you." Given this cultural climate, it is far less risky to baptize trending visions of social justice in Christian terminology than to share the gospel that Jesus and the apostles proclaimed. And let us not forget, they were beaten and executed for it.

The problem is that this shift, no matter its payoff for our public image, leaves people in profound oppression. When we don't share the gospel, we leave people shackled to soul-crushing ideologies, enslaved to sin, and captive to forces of darkness. The oppression unleashed by the world, the flesh, and the devil is real. The tunnel vision of Tribes thinking blinds us to such oppression. It shouldn't surprise us, then, that Christians who adopt this mindset eventually stop sharing the gospel, and in many cases end up rejecting the gospel altogether. If our vision of social justice reduces evangelism to an offense or an afterthought, then we don't care about the oppressed the way Scripture calls us to care for them.

NEIL'S STORY

I became a Christian in graduate school at UC Berkeley while obtaining a PhD in theoretical chemistry. Because I wanted to reach my fellow academics with the gospel, I plunged headlong into the world of apologetics, learning how to address topics like the relationship between science and Christianity, the reliability of the Bible, and the evidence for Jesus's resurrection. I tried to avoid "political issues," believing that Christians should center their faith on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the authority of Scripture.

But a few years ago, I noticed a theological drift in certain Christians, both public figures and people I knew personally. This drift began with an interest in "social justice," which I wrongly assumed meant the application of biblical principles to our laws and institutions. But these same Christians then began to express other views that were harder and harder to reconcile with orthodoxy. They moved from conservative denominations to progressive ones and sometimes left the Christian faith altogether. Why?

Not until I read Anderson and Collins's *Race, Class, and Gender* did I understand what was happening. People were not merely adopting a few new beliefs about politics; they were adopting a new worldview that was gradually displacing their Christian worldview. I began reading voraciously and discovered that contemporary "Social Justice B" is rooted in a comprehensive ideology that emerged from a discipline known as "critical theory." Social justice scholars see reality as divided between oppressed groups and oppressor groups along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, physical ability,

and age. Oppression has been redefined to refer not merely to overt acts of cruelty and coercion but also the ways in which dominant groups impose their ideologies ("patriarchy," "heteronormativity," etc.) on everyone else. Because of their "social location," oppressors are blinded by their privilege, while oppressed people have special insight into social reality.

This framework has devastating effects on our theology. First, a Christian's primary identity is not in their race, class, or gender. It is in their union with Christ. To see our brothers and sisters as "oppressors" solely because of their demographic group is to re-erect the dividing wall of hostility that Christ tore down (Eph. 2:14). Second, while unbiblical values oppress, God's values are ultimately liberating. God is our Creator, and his design for us frees us. We dare not haphazardly dismantle all society's dominant values. Instead, we must ask which values are consistent with Scripture and which are not. Third, while Christians should be concerned with giving a voice to the voiceless, our ultimate authority must always be God's voice in Scripture. Someone's membership of a marginalized group does not make them an infallible interpreter of reality. Finally, our primary problem is sin, and the solution is redemption, God reaching into history through the work of Jesus to rescue us from our rebellion and restore us to himself. Yes, Christians should be concerned with biblical justice. But that concern flows out of a heart that has been individually transformed by the work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Many Christians are unconsciously adopting a comprehensive framework that inevitably unravels basic Christian doctrines. How can you be committed to a biblical view of gender or sexuality if you view gender and heteronormativity as oppressive social constructs? How can you be committed to the authority of the Bible when it claims that Christianity is true and that other religions are false? How can you celebrate the deep truths in confessions of the Reformation if they are hopelessly "Eurocentric"? How can you be committed to centering "voices of color" while rejecting liberation theology? These are serious issues. Don't just coast along with the cultural zeitgeist. Test all things. Think critically and think biblically.

–Neil Shenvi

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Questions for Personal or Small Group Study

1. What is the kernel of truth in Tribes thinking, an insight Christians should take seriously?
2. State three ways Tribes thinking distorts our vision of justice.
3. What are three ways Tribes thinking conflicts with a biblical worldview? How might you winsomely explain those conflicts to a brother or sister in Christ who may have embraced Social Justice B?

Chapter 11

The Suffering Question

Does our vision of social justice turn the "lived experience" of hurting people into more pain?

Since I'm a speck on a blue dot in a gigantic universe, my perspective is often *way* off. I leap to wrong conclusions. I make snap judgments about other people and their motives. I can take my own experiences and my own interpretation of those experiences as far more authoritative than they actually are.

That is one reason the Bible is so important to me. It keeps me from taking my own conclusions and feelings too seriously. It is a two-thousand-page reminder that I am not the final word on reality. I am, indeed, a speck on a blue dot. That's why I try to take the words of the One who made this speck and this blue dot more seriously than I take myself.

This realization brings us to a second aspect of Tribes thinking. It encourages us to make our own "lived experiences" authoritative, a view known as "standpoint epistemology." When applied to questions of justice, this means that anyone who claims that theocrats, racists, Islamophobes, bigots, exploiters, or sexists have hurt them must not be merely heard, but taken authoritatively. Lived experiences must, in turn, become the foundations on which we rebuild everything from public policy and school curriculum to theological systems and church ministry. Questioning the narratives of the oppressed and the policies or theologies derived from them makes *you* the oppressor.

Listening

Lived experiences do matter. The Bible commands us to "be quick to hear,"[1] "bear one another's burdens,"[2] and "weep with those who weep."[3] These

commands fit together. It is impossible to bear someone else's burdens without really, truly listening to them as they bravely unbandage their wounds for us to see. In our post-Genesis 3 world with billions of firsthand experiences with evil, listening with open ears and hearts is our Christian duty. Any "Christianity" that plugs its ears is not worthy of the name.

The easy response is to roll our eyes and chalk others' experiences up to snowflakery or a Marxist conspiracy. Eye-rolling comes particularly easy to us if we have no personal experience of being mistreated because of our skin, sex, or status. We must fight the temptation to take that easy road. There really is something to the firsthand way in which truly oppressed people understand oppression that must never be sloughed off if we care about justice. Would we understand the true horrors of communism without Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, of Nazism without Anne Frank's *Diary*, of American racism without Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave*?

Consider the story of hip-hop artist Shai Linne:

> This is about how being a black man in America has shaped both the way I see myself and the way others have seen me my whole life. . . . It's about being handcuffed and thrown into the back of a police car while walking down the street during college, and then waiting for a white couple to come identify whether or not I was the one who'd committed a crime against them, knowing that if they said I was the one, I would be immediately taken to jail, no questions asked. . . . It's about the exhaustion of constantly feeling I have to assert my humanity in front of some white people I'm meeting for the first time, to let them know, "Hey! I'm not a threat! You don't need to be afraid. If you got to know me, I'm sure we have things in common!" . . . It's about having to explain to my 4-year-old son at his mostly white Christian school that the kids who laughed at him for having brown skin were wrong, that God made him in his image, and that his skin is beautiful—after he told me, "Daddy, I don't want brown skin. I want white skin."[4]

Why should we listen to such heartbreaking lived experiences? Why take them seriously? Because we are Christians. Because we worship the God who told Moses at the burning bush, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry."[5] This is the same God who says of the oppressed, "I will surely hear their cry" and "If he cries to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."[6] God listens, and so should we. This is where Tribes thinking becomes attractive to many Christians today. It markets itself

as stepping into the painful lived experiences of the oppressed. But genuine Christian listening is not the same as hearing "lived experiences" in a Social Justice B kind of way. There are important differences. Here are two.

Rewiring Brains for Breakdown

Ponder how phobias work. A trio of brain regions—our amygdalae insulae, and anterior cingulate cortexes—function together as what doctors have called "the uh-oh center" or "the fear reflex" (one famous brain researcher calls it the "Oh s***!" area of the brain). At the genesis of many phobias we find lived experiences that light up the brain's uh-oh center like a Christmas tree. A scary childhood sickness, a panic attack in a tight space, or a humiliating social moment can rewire a brain for germaphobia, claustrophobia, or social phobia.

The psychological literature is clear that exposure therapy has tremendous healing effects for phobics. Why? Because the arachnophobe who dares to pet a tarantula may learn that not all spiders are out to kill him. The germaphobe eating chips from the communal party bowl learns that she won't drop dead from Ebola. The claustrophobe in a closet comes to realize that his heart won't explode in closed quarters.

As with exposure therapy, rational cognitive therapy also has a solid clinical track record of helping people heal. When our brain's uh-oh center ignites and freaks us out, our brain's assessment center goes dark. Assessment centers are found in the lateral prefrontal cortex, "which is involved in voluntarily modulating the responses from your Uh-Oh Center."[7] Cognitive therapists help people spark their assessment centers so we can challenge the catastrophic signals of our uh-oh centers.

Good psychologists help phobics *ungeneralize*. Whether through exposure or cognitive therapy, good psychologists help people internalize that specific trauma should not be generalized in a way that the whole world begins to feel more traumatic than it already is. Trauma from *this* spider does not mean *all* spiders are out to kill you; trauma from *this* sickness does not mean the whole microscopic world is plotting your death from every doorknob. Good psychologists help rewire phobic brains to realize the world is not, in fact, as terrifying as their brain's uh-oh center would have them believe.

Tribes thinking does the exact opposite of what good psychologists do. It *generalizes*. That spider bit you. Listen to all these other stories of lethal spider bites. Here are some Facebook groups, podcasts, public protests, and college courses to remind you daily that the spiders—*or rather the theocrats, racists, Islamophobes, bigots, exploiters, and sexists*—are out to get you! The brain's

assessment center is bypassed. *People questioning whether the spiders are out to get you are probably spiders themselves!* The uh-oh center is ignited, and Tribes thinking allows for nothing that might stop the flames from spreading until the whole brain turns to ash.

This is where "lived experience" comes in. If a little boy, call him Johnny, has been convinced that most if not all spiders are out to get him, then imagine what Johnny will experience the next time he spots a daddy longlegs under his bed. He will experience fear from an arachnid that is clearly an existential threat. He really, truly feels it is out to get him. Johnny's lived experience is *his* reality. The only problem is that Johnny's reality is not reality. Daddy longlegs spiders are harmless to humans.

Next comes the confirmation bias. Imagine I tell my son, "Women in this world will hate you because you're a boy. Beware the vicious feminists!" What will happen when he hears what virtually every little kid hears from some other kid at some point: "I hate you" or "You're dumb"? These words sting for any kid. But my son will not hear just that he is hated or dumb. He will hear "You're hated or dumb *because you're a boy.*" That will be his lived experience, even if he is the victim of standard childish jabs and not *gender-motivated* childish jabs. How can he tell the difference? If he is sufficiently indoctrinated, he can't. He will deeply feel more boy-hatred in the world than actually exists.

Little Suzy, who has been indoctrinated to believe that an evil patriarchy is out to crush her feminine spirit, is taunted by Billy on the playground. Granted, little Billy is a walking, mudslinging case for original sin. But Suzy will experience his verbal assaults not as a fallen boy doing what fallen boys do, and what fallen boys do to other boys no less. She will experience it as confirmation of her mother's propaganda to beware the all-pervasive patriarchy. To the extent that ideology takes root in her soul, she will *experience* Billy as the incarnation of patriarchal oppression, the living, mouth-breathing, snot-nosed, insult-hurling proof that Western culture is indeed a grand conspiracy against her and her XX chromosomes. How can Suzy tell whether she is a victim of sexism—gender-motivated meanness—or run-of-the-mill meanness? Again, if she is sufficiently indoctrinated, she can't tell the difference. She ends up deeply feeling far more girl-hatred in the world than actually exists. The indoctrination of little Suzys around the world ends up having an ironic effect. More girls than boys will end up bearing the weight of perceived hatred under this ideology, which is a form of male-privilege that *the ideology itself* brings into reality.

Some will read me as saying there's no such thing as gender discrimination or racism; they're a grand illusion, a conspiracy fobbed on us by leftwing media or the Marxist infiltrators. That is *not* what I'm saying. There are real creepy

spiders with venomous bites in the world. There are real misogynists and real racists. When they strike, it is the Christian mandate to listen and love the struck. My point is that to love people well—especially people who bear the wounds of racism, sexism, or any other sinful ism—we must be careful not to inadvertently pour salt in their wounds with an ideology that generalizes their trauma. If we care about people, we shouldn't turn them into festering balls of suspicion and anxiety.

I have seen it happen and it's heartbreaking. A twenty-one-year-old is reasonably happy, socially connected, creative, curious, and kind. Her professors fill her head with Tribes thinking, deconstructing Shakespeare as patriarchal propaganda. Before long, every male in her life becomes a conniving power-hungry Iago plotting her demise. Her indoctrinators perhaps believed they were turning a soft "yes-girl" into a fearless warrior woman to join their just cause. I do not see a fearless warrior woman. I see a fear-racked, perpetually triggered, cynical, seething, paranoid, isolated person with the light snuffed out of her beautiful eyes. I've seen it happen more times and to more precious souls than I care to recount. As one former Tribes thinker describes his experience, "We . . . saw insidious oppression and exploitation in all social relationships, stifling our ability to relate to others or ourselves without cynicism. Activists anxiously pore over interactions, looking for ways in which the mundane conceals domination. To see every interaction as containing hidden violence is to become a permanent victim, because if all you are is a nail, everything looks like a hammer."[8]

If Tribes thinking has us seeing ourselves primarily as oppressed, then most everything around us will look like oppression. What effect did such nail-and-hammer thinking have on this young radical's soul? It left him "exhausted and misanthropic, because any action or statement can be shown with sufficient effort to hide privilege, a microaggression, or unconscious bias."[9]

Note his words: "a permanent victim," "exhausted and misanthropic." In short, Tribes thinking is mean. It adds psychological oppression to those already suffering. The more we come to think that reality is best understood as the oppression of theocrats, racists, Islamophobes, bigots, exploiters, and sexists, the more our brains are rewired for a chronic state of fear[10]—a kind of "oppressi-phobia." The oppressi-phobic's brain can't stop seeing "every interaction as containing hidden violence."

They will believe they have been retraumatized by the person who made a thoughtless comment. They will see that person as the embodiment of all the evils of the West. But the true culprits of their daily retraumatization are those who indoctrinated him with Tribes thinking in the first place—professors,

journalists, and entertainers who fancy themselves liberators. Rarely do such influencers stop to look behind the bars they have built in young brains to behold their disciples wallowing in self-pity and fear instead of enjoying the world God made. There is such a thing as *psychological* oppression. If we train brains to see oppression everywhere and never question "lived experience" then we, the self-appointed liberators, have become the oppressors. Consider the insights of sociologist Musa al-Gharbi:

> There is *abundant* research demonstrating harm caused by heightened *perceptions* of racism, discrimination, racialized violence, and racial inequality. There are very well-established and highly-adverse impacts of the psychological (and even physical) well-being of people of color when they perceive more racism, racial inequality, and discrimination. . . . We have ample reason to believe that sensitizing people to better perceive and take greater offense at these "slights" actually *would* cause harm.[11]

Do you see al-Gharbi's point? If we teach along with Robin DiAngelo that "the societal default is oppression; there are no spaces free from it," that the question should be "'*How* is it manifesting here?' rather than '*Is* it manifesting here?'"[12] then we aren't defending the oppressed; we are adding to their number. We are inadvertently adding to the net anxiety, depression, anger, and fear in the universe.

Psychological oppression is not just a risk for those on the left. For Christians on the right, be careful not to play the same cruel game in reverse, raising generations to live in chronic fear of those evil "secularists," "liberals," "Marxists," "evolutionists," "immigrants," "homosexuals," or whatever. As Christians, we must do better. Fear must never be a prime motivator in any thoroughly Christian justice. We must not teach any ideology—left or right—that pumps enough wattage into people's uh-oh Centers to light up Times Square. That would be mean. That would not be loving our neighbors. That would be oppressive. Especially in an age of social media, which capitalizes on fear in both directions, Christians must be radically countercultural.

The Bible is as anti-fear as it is anti-oppression.

Think of such fear biblically. The Bible is as anti-fear as it is anti-oppression. God commands us to "fear not" over a hundred times. God is not only pro-justice; he is also pro-fearlessness, and we should be too. It is not enough to merely be on the side of the oppressed. If we aren't *for* the oppressed without also being antifear—if we advance ideologies that generalize people's painful experiences, leave them chronically triggered, and set their uh-oh centers ablaze—then we should not pretend that we are doing the kind of justice Scripture commands.

Hurtful Experience and Helpful Evidence

This leads to a second way in which elevating lived experience can end up inadvertently hurting people we care about. As I pointed out at the beginning of the book, no one is pro-injustice. No one waves "Boo Justice!" or "Hooray Oppression!" signs. We all like to believe we're on the "right side of history." We can't all be right. The difference between those who *do* justice and those who merely *think* they do comes down to the question of truth.

Imagine a scenario in which the president can give the thumbs up to drop bombs on a compound that may be a terrorist headquarters. Half the White House situation room is convinced there are only terrorists inside. The other half believes it is a school packed with innocent children. One half says, "Fire away!" The other half passionately objects. Which half believes they are doing justice? *Both.* Which half, if they had their way, would *actually* be doing justice? It all comes down to the facts, the evidence, and the reality of the situation on the ground. If it is, in fact, a school, then the pro-bomb crowd would be committing a terrible injustice no matter how just they believed their actions to be. If it is, in fact, a terrorist headquarters, then the anti-bomb crowd would be accomplishing nowhere near the amount of justice they believe they are. It's the *facts* that matter.

Perhaps we should be less concerned about being on the so-called right side of history—a phrase so easily deployed to feel good about ourselves and demonize our opponents—and more concerned with being on the right side of *truth*. If we're on the wrong side of truth, then no matter how virtuous we believe ourselves to be, we are adding to the net injustice in the world.

Herein lies the problem with Tribes thinking. Our lived experiences can be wrong. Mine often are. Just this morning I had a lived experience of my wife being annoyed at me. My sense of injustice kicked in. It turned out to have nothing whatsoever to do with me. I figured it out eventually, but only by questioning my own feelings long enough to take the facts seriously (facts like our three-year-old biting our five-year-old's finger and our eight-year-old ignoring several requests to practice basic hygiene).

There is often a big difference between feelings and facts, between lived experience and objective reality. That difference matters, and we should take both seriously if we want our quest for justice to lead to real justice.

Yet we hear something very different from many Social Justice B scholars.

We hear that the lived experiences of the oppressed should be paramount over and against oppressive notions like objective truth, facts, research, and evidence. According to Shay-Akil McLean, "The idea of objectivity in western intellectual traditions is problematic for many reasons. . . . And to think there are universal truths perpetuates a particular kind of able-bodied white cisgender male logic."[13] In her diversity curriculum used by some of the biggest companies in the world, one of the seminal works of "anti-racism," Judith Katz argues that "objective, rational, linear thinking," "controlled emotions," "the scientific method," and "quantitative research" are all defining marks of racist "white culture" (Katz includes such values as "Individual has primary responsibility," "Working hard brings success," "Plan for future," "Delayed gratification," "Value continual improvement and progress," "Written tradition," "Owning goods, space, property," "Nuclear family is the ideal social unit," and "Belief in Christianity" as "Components of White Culture"). [14] Another professor argues that requests for evidence of oppression is itself a form of "epistemic exploitation," "epistemic injustice," and "epistemic oppression."[15] Still another adds that to free ourselves from oppressive ideologies, "we must learn to trust our own senses, feelings, and experiences, and to give them authority."[16]

This kind of thinking has swept through universities around the West. We have generations raised on a steady soundtrack of "always believe in yourself" and "follow your heart" anthems sung by cartoon characters and pop stars. Many then go off to college, already well primed to accept their professors' encouragement to treat their own feelings and experiences authoritatively, while questioning facts, evidence, and the search for objective truth as the tools of white cisgender racist male oppression.

As Jonathan Haidt has noted, this leads to a shift in higher education from "Truth University" to "Social Justice University." Truth U exists for the open-minded pursuit of knowledge. It is a place where "all become smarter" through "a process in which flawed individuals challenge each other's biased and incomplete reasoning" with a shared goal in mind—truth. The ultimate reason Social Justice U exists is "changing the world in part by overthrowing power structures and privilege."[17] One university encourages students to question their lived experiences and actively seek out contrary evidence. It welcomes diverse viewpoints. Why? Because its commitment to truth recognizes how biased, incomplete, and off base our understandings and experiences often are. It recognizes our shared need for a standard of reality higher than our fallible selves.

There are important questions we might ask, like: On which campus—Truth U or Social Justice U—are we more likely to find students caught in downward spirals of fear, suspicion, and resentment? On which campus are

we more likely to find students inspired by the literary beauty of Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky's probing insights of human nature, or the Western world's hard-won triumphs over global slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? On which campus are we more likely to find open-mindedness or humility among the student body?

For the purposes of this chapter, there is a still deeper question. *Which campus is more likely to produce the kind of students who will go out into the world and help make it a more just place?* Since truth is the decisive factor between *doing* justice and merely *thinking* we are, it is no mystery which university's students would bring more justice to the world.

Making the lived experience of the oppressed authoritative and writing off counterevidence as oppressive adds oppression to the world. Counterevidence may be the very thing that helps most. I offer one example.

Pretend you are in Chile in 1970. Outspoken socialist Salvador Allende is running for president. Socially concerned church leaders weigh in. Priests rooting for Allende from the parish in Santiago declare, "Socialism . . . offers a possibility for the development of the country for the benefit of all, especially the most neglected."[18] Leaders from the Workers' Catholic Action Movement supported Allende because his "Socialism generate[s] new values which make possible the emergence of a society of greater solidarity and brotherhood."[19] Why were they so committed to Allende's socialism? "The profound reason for this commitment is our faith in Jesus Christ."[20]

You raise questions but are told you are cancelling the lived experiences of the poor, siding with the Western capitalist oppressors. This is where things get problematic. Allende wins. He begins implementing socialist policies, collectivizing land and agriculture to reduce the unjust disparities between rich and poor. Inflation skyrockets 600 percent, and poverty rates spike 50 percent. What occurred wasn't "the development of the country for the benefit of all, especially the most neglected" but the further destitution, scarcity, and even more people forced into the sad ranks of the neglected. There wasn't "greater solidarity and brotherhood;" there was more protesting and strife.[21]

It is common to use people's tragic lived experiences to push a political vision, advertise that vision with winsome words such as *solidarity*, compassion for "the neglected," and even "faith in Jesus Christ," then assume anyone who doesn't accept our political vision is anti-solidarity, anti-"the neglected," and anti-"faith in Jesus." Here's the problem. A mother endures the lived experience of seeing her family torn apart by immigration enforcement agents. That happens and it's horrible. Another mother has the lived experience of seeing her family torn apart by a homicide committed by an illegal immigrant. That also

happens and it's horrible. I am not taking sides on the immigration debate here. I am simply pointing out that both of these women's lived experiences can be used to advance opposite political visions. Both visions can use noble language to market themselves. Both can charge anyone who questions these visions with failing to show "solidarity" with these "neglected" mothers and failing to represent their "faith in Jesus." But which mother's lived experience should be made more authoritative than the other's if we want to use their experiences to promote this or that public policy? It's not so easy to highlight one without erasing the other in such a way that one mob or the other won't come after you for your utter lack of compassion.

To end where we began, everyone thinks they are on the right side of history. The difference between those actually making the world better and those who only *think* they are has everything to do with the facts. Lived experiences matter. They matter in working for important social changes, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Anne Frank, Solomon Northup, and many others have proved. We should never write off people's pain but should instead listen with open ears and "weep with those who weep."[22] But using the lived experiences of the oppressed to push noble sounding visions of social justice and insulate those visions from factual criticisms is not compassionate. It is cruel to the oppressed. It exploits their pain. It adds to their number. Again, as Christians commanded to *truly* execute justice, we have to do better.

BELLA'S STORY

Raised in a Christian home, I knew the gospel years before I wanted it. I wanted life on my own terms; I wanted love I could deserve. By the time I started college, I had all but "deleted" God from my life. I chased the mirage of love through fraternity houses, down bottles of liquor, and into the beds of strangers. Soon I was empty, afraid, and aching. I made new friends who had a "solution" to my pain: fighting injustice with anger. I learned that all men are predators, that religion is oppressive, and that "truth" and "morality" are only constructs. If I just converted fear into anger and rejected all these institutions, I would be free.

What I didn't know is that when you choose an anger-fueled life, you choose a fear-controlled life. I feared men and anticipated abuse constantly. I saw social injustice everywhere, and it appeared to be winning.

And scariest of all, I didn't know where to find my self-worth. If morality didn't exist, how could I ever hope to be "good"? After two years of living this way, I was a mess. I desperately needed to recalibrate and decided to take a year off from school.

I took an internship with an anti-sex-trafficking organization in Germany. I tolerated that it was a Christian organization. I wanted to be enough to save these women but was no match for this evil—women sold for consumption, men addicted to dehumanizing abuse, and pimps using sex as a weapon. Absolute evil really did exist, and I was looking at it. How were my Christian coworkers not drowning in this darkness as I was? In that stillness, I heard a whisper. It said this darkness wasn't the end of the story, that without a good God, this would be all there was, but God cannot be deleted. I remembered Jesus and how his promises to heal this world finally made sense. And so, on a cold spring morning, I walked outside and cried out to him. The heart transformation was immediate; God released me from anger and fear. Years of shame slid off me and I was clean. While I was still a sinner, Christ died to purchase my heart, and I was made whole.

I transferred to Biola University to pursue God. I had no idea of the pain that awaited me in California. A week after moving, I ventured off campus to go dancing in LA with my new roommates. A group of young men drugged me and gang-raped me until five in the morning. When I woke up, there was no denying the black bruises covering my body or the flashbacks of cruel violence. I told my roommate, who sobbed with me and went with me to the police station.

As we drove to the station, I expected to feel hopeless, dirtied, and lost. Instead, I felt perfect peace. My Father was holding me in his arms, and I could feel it. I played "In Christ Alone," singing and worshiping God with deep joy. I can't put into words how deeply I understood his love that day. Though I could never earn his love, he pours it into my heart. I am his precious, beloved daughter; no evil could ever change that. Even through horrible flashbacks and anxiety attacks, I stand firm in this confidence. The final chapter of my story is already written and waits for me; it ends with me running into the Father's open arms. No power of hell or scheme of man could ever pluck me from his hand.

I have a new heart, one that sees every human as a precious creation of God's love. I do not hate anyone, not even my rapists. I know those men are responsible for their wrongs, but I also know God longs for their hearts

as recklessly as he longed for mine. Jesus paid my full debt on the cross, and anyone who turns to Jesus has theirs paid too. I still care deeply about justice for victims of sexual violence, now more than ever. However, I no longer use hatred and fear as fuel for revenge. Instead, I draw on God's perfect love for restoration. Fear can't drive out fear, nor hate drive out hate, only love can do that. And God's love can and will heal the pains of this world a thousand times over, just as it healed mine.

–Bella Danusiar

Bella is a student at Biola University and is currently training for lifelong gospel ministry and justice work.

Questions for Personal or Small Group Study

1. Lived experiences matter. It would be easy to write off people's stories if we immediately associate them with political ideologies we disagree with. How can we resist this urge and be more present with people in their pain? How can we bring the gospel to bear on their pain?
2. God commands us to be fearless. In what ways can we end up inadvertently making people more fearful and easily triggered in the name of "social justice"?
3. Why is the pursuit of truth so essential to the biblical pursuit of justice, and how does Tribes thinking derail us in that pursuit? How can serious thinking and research, even if our conclusions go against the political orthodoxies of our day, make us more effective in loving the oppressed?

Chapter 12

The Standpoint Question

Does our vision of social justice turn the quest for truth into an identity game?

Tribes thinking can make us see things that aren't there and miss things that are. It can elevate lived experience in ways that make oppression worse. It can also make its own conclusions unfalsifiable by turning the quest for truth into an identity game.

We must first understand what philosophers mean by the clumsy term *unfalsifiabile*. If no amount of logic, evidence, experience, or Scripture could possibly change our outlook, then our beliefs are unfalsifiable.

A man sitting next to you on a train clutches your arm and whispers, "The KGB is after me." You politely explain that the security arm of the Soviet Union has been disbanded since 1991. "That's exactly what a clandestine organization would *want* you to think," he replies. "The devil's greatest trick was convincing the world he doesn't exist. Trust me, red devils are everywhere!" He motions with his eyes to a man reading a newspaper across the aisle. "That's one there," he whispers.

"Looks like a businessman in a suit to me," you reply.

"That's how disguises work, dummy! You think he'd wear one of those furry ear hats while reading the Communist Manifesto and humming *Slav'sya, Otechestvo nashe svobodnoye*?"

Just then the stranger across the aisle interrupts, "Excuse me. Which way to the dining car? Caffeine time, if you know what I mean."

You point him the right direction. "Not much of a Russian accent," you remark.

"Of course! Foreign agents are trained to master every voice inflection of

desiringGod



Interview with John Piper
Founder & Teacher, desiringGod.org

Audio Transcript

Two weeks back, two Mondays ago, we looked at how to glorify God in our business successes. That was APJ 1915. Now two weeks later, we are talking about business again more broadly. It's a question from a listener named Travis. "Pastor John, hello to you. Can you tell me whether our work today is a blessing or a curse? Much of our work seems to be cursed, based on Genesis 3. But a lot of our work also seems to be a God-given blessing, according to Ecclesiastes. According to the Bible, is my nine-to-five job a blessing, or is it a curse?"

Let's start with the first work mentioned in the Bible — namely, God's work. Genesis 2:2–3:

> On the seventh day God finished his *work* that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his *work* that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his *work* that he had done in creation.

You can't miss the point. God worked, God worked, God worked. Now, work was not a curse for God. God is not cursed; he's not burdened; he's not frustrated; he's not coerced to do what he does not wish to do. He worked in creation because it was a sign of his greatness and his fullness that he should overflow in creating a world that declares his glory and a human image of himself that can enjoy and worship that glory. That's no sign of weakness or burdensomeness or frustration; that's glory. Work was glory for God.

Satisfying Work

From the beginning, work was not a curse. It was a God-like gift, a blessing. The essence of work, as God designed it before the fall into sin, was creativity: creative, productive doing, arranging, making. When God did his primal work, he created the world. Now, that's the essence of work. Then he created us in his image to put us in a world that he had made, and he said,

> Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. . . . [Let them] fill the earth and subdue it. (Genesis 1:26, 28)

Then in Genesis 2:15, it says, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." Literally, the word is *serve*. "Serve it," almost like a serving in the work of the Lord — to serve it, to work it and keep it.

Now, I presume this working and keeping of the garden before the fall was a partial fulfillment of having dominion

over the earth and subduing it. Now, what does that imply then? It does not mean that the garden was imperfect as God made it. It wasn't imperfect. It didn't need correction, as if God had made a mistake. "Oops! I didn't fix the garden right; it needs help." It means God made the garden for man, and part of its perfection was in providing for the man the raw material for being creative like God. Man would flourish in working the garden; the garden would flourish in being worked. It would be beautifully satisfying — not frustrating, not burdensome, not futile. That's work before the fall: thrilling, satisfying, creative.

Cursed Work?

Now, what the fall did, what sin did when it came into the world (Genesis 3), was to make this glorious reality of satisfying work become futile, burdensome, frustrating. Genesis 3:17–19:

> In pain [Adam] you shall eat of [the earth] all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you. . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground.

It's not accurate to say that work is a curse. What's accurate is to say that the futility and frustration and burdensomeness and painfulness of work is a curse. Paul said in Romans 8:20–21, "The creation was subjected to futility." When sin came into the world, God subjected creation to futility, "not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself would be set free from its bondage to [futility]." The futility and burdensomeness of work, therefore, is part of the curse of creation, and it won't always be this way. He said, "There's a hope coming," and God put the world under this curse temporarily to show the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

God's Workmanship

But Christ has come to redeem the world from the curse, and that happens in stages, not all at once. This is true for work as well. It is really significant, when you think about it, that the gospel — the good news of Jesus's salvation — does not stipulate that work is how you earn it. You can't earn it; it's free. Work is not assigned that impossible, hopeless, burdensome role in salvation. This is really good news.

Listen to the three things said about work in our salvation, according to Ephesians 2:8–10:

> By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [1] not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his [2] workmanship, created in Christ Jesus [3] for
>
> good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

This is glorious. First, work does not bear the weight of having to save us. Christ saves us; he does it by faith. Second, God steps in and does the work. He makes us new, and he does everything required to make us new creatures in Christ. We are his workmanship. Third, now that we are loved and forgiven and accepted and adopted, we are created for good works. We were created the first time — that is, brought into being as human people — for good work, way back in the beginning. That was our original intent as human beings, and we are recreated in Christ for good work.

Light Yokes for God's Glory

This work in Christ is not burdensome. If we find it burdensome, if you find obedience to Jesus and work for Christ to be burdensome, then you're not thinking clearly, or you're not trusting Christ the way you should. Listen to Matthew 11:28–30. This is the paradox of the work that Christ calls us to do. On the one hand, we are like hardworking, yoked oxen — and on the other hand, our work is lighter than a feather. Here's what he says: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke" — oh, wait a minute, you just said *rest*. What's with the yoke? A yoke is what you put on oxen to pull a plow, and it's hard. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Yes, there is meaningful work to do as we follow Christ. That's the meaning of *yoke*. We have a yoke to wear. We're not thrown out to be doers of nothing. How boring would that be? But in that work, that yoke, there is a restfulness of spirit that is free from the curse. The key in all our work that turns it from curse to blessing, and the key that glorifies Christ in it, is described in 1 Peter 4:11: "[Let the one who] serves" — just say, "Let the one who *works*" — "[work] by the strength that God supplies — in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." The one who gives the strength gets the glory. We get the help, he gets the glory, and work is delivered from its burdensome cursedness.

Or here it is again in 1 Corinthians 15:10: "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them" — any of the other apostles — "though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." That's the glory of hard work in the Christian life, just like it was before the fall. I don't doubt that Adam gloried in a long day's work in the garden, making it perfectly suitable to his needs, flourishing in all his efforts. "Not I, but the grace of God with me" — that takes away the misery of burdensomeness and futility.

Whatever You Do

When Paul calls us to do lots of work as Christians, he's not calling us to a burdened, frustrated, cursed life. He's

calling us to our glory and our joy. First Corinthians 15:58: "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord" — I think that means doing lots of it — "knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." It's not futile. I think that applies to any work done in the name of Jesus, for the glory of Jesus, in reliance upon the power of Jesus — not just church work, *all* work.

In fact, Paul says in Colossians 3:23–24, "Whatever [that's an important word] you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." So that elevates all of our work — not just church work, but all of our work — to the level of worship. If we do it in the name of the Lord, in reliance on the Lord, for the glory of the Lord, it's not mere human work; it's divine work. It honors Christ.

I'll say it again. From the beginning, we were made for work — shaping, creating, subduing the world according to the wisdom and goodness and beauty of God. This was not — it *is* not — a curse; it is a blessing. And I think it will last happily forever.

desiringGod

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The Sacred Call to Normal Work
How the Reformation Renewed Vocation





Article by Brian Hanson
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The Protestant Reformation in sixteenth-century England transformed the theological landscape of Christianity in the commonwealth, but it was not solely a reform of theology and doctrine. The English Reformation permeated every facet of society, including the theology of work and one's vocation. The English evangelical clergy reiterated two primary arguments regarding work and vocation, arguments that were transferred to the Puritan work ethic in

the seventeenth century, both in England and in its American colonies: (1) all space is sacred space, and (2) diligence is an essential Christian virtue.

All Space Is Sacred Space

The Reformation principle that all space is sacred space was one application of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, a doctrine that affirmed that every Christian is accountable to God and has equal access to him and to the Scriptures. The doctrine stressed that all Christians have equal value and dignity in the sight of God. As a result, evangelical clergy during the Protestant Reformation consistently preached that all geographical and material spaces, all vocations, all roles, and all spheres in which believers operated were sacred and mattered to God.

Ultimately, no work or vocation for believers was mundane or insignificant. Even the most seemingly menial task could be holy to God and was to be performed with a holy attitude. All vocations, insofar that they were tethered to biblical principles and had moral value, had equal dignity and value in the sight of God.

This teaching was a seismic shift away from late medieval Roman Catholic teaching that stressed the disparity of the clergy and the laity. From the Protestant perspective, work as a cobbler could be just as godly as a preacher's vocation. Serving one's children as a mother could be just as noble as prosecuting criminals as a lawyer. The evangelical clergy taught their respective congregations that the barrier between the "sacred" and the "secular," which the medieval church had erected, was nonexistent.

No Vocation Too Humble

The evangelicals submitted and taught two practical applications from the principle of the sacredness of all work and vocations. First, all Christians were to "walk in" or "answer to their vocation."[1] "Walking in" one's vocation encompassed faithfulness to one's employer and attendant duties in the place of employment. Faithful labor was to be done for the Lord's sake primarily, but the evangelical ministers also reiterated the principle of working for the love of one's neighbor. They contended that one's vocation, whatever it was, served and benefitted the commonwealth both socially and economically.[2] Additionally, ministers reminded congregants to be content with their vocation and the work that God provided them.[3]

The evangelicals made another application of the principle "all space is sacred space" in regards to one's labor and vocation. They argued that since God was deeply concerned about all vocations, and since all work and vocations were sacred, prayer should be made for all people in their respective vocations. Many Reformation prayer books, like Thomas Becon's *A flour of godly praiers* (1550), contained prayers for magistrates, soldiers, mariners, travelers by land, lawyers, merchants, landlords, and mothers.

Within his prayer book, Becon offers a general prayer for all Christians to pray, that they all would "walke

accordinge to [their] vocacion in thy feare."[4] In these prayer books, the evangelicals gave special attention to mothers. Mothers were encouraged both through sermons and implicitly through the wording of the prayers that their domestic work was "godly." These evangelical prayer books implicitly taught English society that all spheres were sacred and were worthy of prayer to God. No vocation was too humble to petition his blessing for the work.

Call to 'Earnest Diligence'

The English evangelicals reasoned that since all vocations and activities were holy in God's sight, it was incumbent on believers to pursue their vocation with diligence. Industriousness, with it is corresponding virtues — self-discipline, self-governance, and perseverance — constituted an indispensable Christian virtue in the English Reformation ethos. There was no space for idleness in the Christian ethic.

In fact, the sin of idleness was perpetually condemned in evangelical printed sermons and tracts. It was considered a "fleshly and perverse" sin.[5] It was the "wel[l] spring and ro[o]te of al[l] vice."[6] For those enslaved to idleness, their sin was tantamount to "offer[ing] themselves a sacrifice, not to God but to the devill."[7] A pattern of idleness in a professing Christian's life brought into serious doubt his conversion. Laziness was incompatible with biblical Christianity. It was consistently included with lists of other sins that incurred the wrath and judgment of God — murder, adultery, theft, treason, witchcraft, blasphemy.[8]

One reason why diligence and idleness were addressed so frequently and zealously in evangelical catechisms and sermons was the context of increasing poverty in urban areas in England, particularly in London. The evangelicals observed that much of that poverty was due to idleness among men.

Diligence stood as a prominent theme in English evangelical print, and it was stressed to all audiences, regardless of age or status. Children were taught the value and benefits of diligence from their parents at a young age through catechesis in the household. The earliest evangelical catechisms and manuals of virtue emphatically encouraged youth to pursue diligence, "takynge payne with all thyne industry," while also fleeing "slouthe and over much sle[e]pe."[9] In his catechism, William Perkins exhorted children and adults alike to "labour and toyle," but also reminded Christians that diligence was "nothing and availes not, unlesse God still give his blessing."[10]

Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, in his definition of true preaching, explained that the evangelical preacher's aim was in part to teach his parishioners "to honor and worshippe almighty God, and diligently to serve hym, every one accordynge to their degre[e], state, and vocacion."[11] English ministers regularly made biblical applications in their sermons to those of specific vocations. "Earnest diligence" about one's "business" was the call and mindset for all genuine Christians.[12]

Early American Work Ethic

How did the Reformation view of vocation influence future generations of Protestants? The seventeenth-century English Puritans were the inheritors of the Reformation and imbibed the intellectual and practical theology of their Reformation forbears. The Puritans and Pilgrims who crossed the Atlantic to the New World transported with them the Reformation view of work as a sacred trust and holy privilege. Cotton Mather (1663–1728), for example, articulated the Puritan ethic of responsibility and self-governance, that all men should "love" and "like" their vocation, because it is "a blessing to have a calling [vocation]."[13]

John Cotton (1585–1652) elevated all vocations as equally glorifying to God, encouraging his fellow colonists in Boston to "embrace" and perform even what might be considered the most mundane or menial of tasks.[14] True faith, he contended, was not ashamed of accomplishing such work, because that work was sanctioned and given by God. Cotton posited the biblical model of Jesus's washing of his disciples' feet.

The early American colonists applied these biblical principles to their respective jobs, establishing what would be known for generations as a sturdy work ethic and a high level of individual responsibility. This, in part, contributed to the flourishing of American colonial society, particularly in its economy and education.

Establish the Work of Our Hands

The English Reformation view of work and vocation can serve as a healthy model for us today. Persistent, disciplined, excellent work for the glory of God is noble and virtuous. There is dignity in any vocation and in performing one's task, no matter how seemingly mundane or menial, while depending upon God to bless the outcome. God calls us to do all things, including our work, with excellence and joy for his glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). Idleness, laziness, and lack of responsibility are sins to be confessed and repented of.

Moses petitioned God on behalf of the congregation of Israel in Psalm 90:17 to "establish the work of our hands." This statement humbly acknowledges utter dependence on God for any success in work. Unless he blesses and uses our skills, time management, education, and job opportunities, we will not prosper in them (Psalm 127:1). All is futile without God and his blessing. But when God blesses our labor and vocation, it will not be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:58). In fact, the work we do for God's sake will have spiritual and eternal value (Matthew 25:14–30).

As with the evangelicals in Reformation England, we too can cultivate a disposition of doing all things heartily for our Lord (Colossians 3:23), asking him to "make us diligent & happy in the workes of our vocation."[15]

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1. Thomas Becon, *A flour of godly praiers* (London: John Day, 1550) STC 1719.5, sig. J4r; Robert Crowley, *The voyce of the laste trumpet* (London: Richard Grafton, 1549) STC 6094, sigs. B4v, B7v, D3v, D6r. ↩

2. Brian L. Hanson, *Reformation of the Commonwealth: Thomas Becon and the Politics of Evangelical Change in Tudor England* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 41, 128. ↩
3. Thomas Lever, *A fruitfull sermon made in Poules churche at London* (London: John Day, 1550) STC 15543, sig. G5v; William Turner, *A new booke of spirituall physik* (Emden: Egidius van der Erve, 1555) STC 24361, sig. B7r. ↩
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6. Thomas Becon, *The governance of vertue* (London: John Day, 1566) STC 1727, sig. L6r. ↩
7. William Perkins, *An exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles* (Cambridge: John Legatt, 1595) STC 19703, sig. I2r. ↩
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9. Anonymous, *The schoole of vertue and booke of good nourture for chyldren* (London: William Seres, 1557), STC 22135, sigs. A6r, A3r. ↩
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12. Becon, *Governaunce*, sig. B3r. ↩
13. Cotton Mather, *Winter meditations: directions how to employ the leisure of the winter for the glory of God* (Boston: Benjamin Harris, 1693), sig. I3v. ↩
14. John Cotton, *The way of life* (London: M.F., 1641), sig. Ee7v. ↩
15. John Bradford, *A godlye medytacyon* (London: William Copland, 1559) STC 3483, sig. A7v. ↩

MAY 24, 2006

Worldview and Culture \ Worldview \ Ethics

The Sanctity of Labor

Ephesians 6:5–9

EPHESIANS 6:5–9

"Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ... rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man" (Eph. 6:5–7).

It is impossible to drive an automobile for too long in the United States without seeing a bumper sticker on a car in front of you. Whether it advertises a person's politics, sense of humor, or religious affiliation, it seems just about everyone has one of these stickers on the fender of his car. One of the more common of these reads something like "a bad day fishing is better than a good day working."

Whether or not we happen to be fishing aficionados, everyone can identify with this sentiment, at least on occasion. The daily pressures of getting up and serving an employer can be tremendously demanding. Most jobs can become monotonous, and countless laborers hate what they do for a living. Moreover, some people at times try to get the most they can from the least amount of effort.

This view of employment is far different from the one taught in Scripture. As we saw a few months ago, labor is a gift from God, given to man before the fall (Gen. 2:15). Sin brought a curse to our labor, and so we occasionally find it dreary. However, work itself is not the punishment for sin. It is a source of blessed purpose in our lives.

Our conversation implicitly reveals this. Labor is so vital to our identity that we usually ask new acquaintances what they do for a living within the first conversation. Yes, work can become an idol, but even this distortion of our vocation shows how labor defines our sense of worth. Servitude as practiced in the ancient world is the closest parallel we can find to employment in modern society, and thus today's passage bears upon our work ethic. Paul tells us to serve our supervisors industriously, as if we are serving the Lord (Eph. 6:5–8). But managers should note that they are not to take advantage of their employees; instead they must treat them with respect (v. 9).

All of us are to seek to fulfill our callings for God's kingdom. We serve our Lord by working hard to feed our families, support His church, and transform the world. From the president of a multi-million dollar corporation to the janitor of the same, all of us must honor our Creator and be as productive as we can (Matt. 24:45–51).

Coram Deo

How do you feel about your line of work? Are you counting the days till retirement? Do you hate getting up every morning and doing the same task you did the day before? Do you look forward to serving your boss and accomplishing your work quickly and efficiently? If you do not enjoy your job, consider whether you have found your life's calling. But whether or not you enjoy your work, strive to be as industrious as possible for God's glory.

For Further Study

GENESIS 39:1–6 | PROVERBS 10:4–5 | 2 THESSALONIANS 3:... | 1 TIMOTHY 5:8

desiringGod

AUGUST 10, 2018

The Greatest Thing You Can Do with Your Life





Article by Jon Bloom
Staff writer, desiringGod.org

One of the most wonderful and hopeful things you can know about yourself and your life is captured in a rather unassuming, simple sentence:

> Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. (1 Corinthians 7:17)

The verse might hit us as a bit constrictive, perhaps even oppressive, especially if our circumstances are difficult or painful. But that would miss the heart of God's intention for us.

Your life is a *gift* and an *assignment* from God. This should infuse our life — its good and evil, its sweet and bitter, its

health and affliction, its prosperity and poverty, its comfort and suffering — with an unfathomable dignity, purpose, and glory. You are not an accident. Neither are you a ruined potential, run off the rails because you were dealt a poor genetic hand of cards, suffered others' abuse, or made foolish and sinful choices, putting you beyond the hope of a useful calling in Jesus's kingdom.

No, you exist because God wanted you to exist. And you are *who* you are, *what* you are, *how* you are, *where* you are, and *when* you are because God made you (John 1:3), wove you in your mother's womb (Psalm 139:13), called you to be his own (John 10:27; Romans 8:30), and assigned you a place to live (Acts 17:26).

The greatest thing you can do with your life is to live to the hilt the adventurous assignment God has given you.

God Has Called You

Think about this for a moment: "Let each person lead the life . . . to which God has called him." God has made your entire life your calling!

We tend to think of our *callings* as our vocations, some significant job God gives us to do with an identifiable and preferably esteemed title. Perhaps it's a career vocation or perhaps it's a noncareer vocation in a church or ministry. But that's too narrow. Of course, vocations should be vehicles for our calling — ways we fulfill our assignment from the Lord. But our calling encompasses more than our vocations.

Our primary core calling is to love God with all we are and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27). And this calling incorporates everyone we interact with, or perhaps comes to mind, in everything we do from morning till night. Which is why John Calvin said, "God commands each one of us to consider his calling in every act of life" (*Institutes*, 821).

This means that our calling isn't behind that door we're waiting for God to open someday (though that may be part of tomorrow's calling). Our calling is to love God today, to love the neighbors God places in our "road" today, and to do well what God gives our hands to do today.

That's one reason Jesus tells us, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34). Being overly preoccupied with tomorrow's calling, as tempting as that can be, is often a way we are deceived into being disengaged from today's calling. Jesus doesn't want us to spend the priceless gift of life he's given us today absorbed in the unreality of an imagined tomorrow.

Now, it is true that our callings change over time. We move through different phases of life, we might be deployed to different places at different times, and we experience various circumstantial and health changes. All these alter our calling. And as the Spirit gives us light, we should seek to anticipate and plan for changes as befit good stewards.

But God wants us focused primarily on the life he's called us to, which is the life we have today.

Be Faithful to Your Assignment

The Spirit tells us through Paul, "Let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him."

Perhaps you're thinking, *You don't know my circumstances.* Without wanting to be insensitive, it doesn't matter what your circumstances are.

The circumstances of the Corinthian Christians to whom Paul was writing were all over the board: married, betrothed, and single, widows and bondservants, circumcised and uncircumcised. That's just a sampling.

Think of the bondservants. They were the physical property of a human master. And yet Paul says to them in 1 Corinthians 7:21, "Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)" What Paul meant was circumstances, even very difficult ones, don't disqualify anyone from God's assignment. If we can extricate ourselves honorably from such circumstances, we ought to do it. But if not, let us consider it God's assignment, at least for today, and be faithful,

> not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. (Ephesians 6:6–8)

Assigned to Affliction

Think of Paul's own various circumstances: imprisoned, violently persecuted, ill, exposed to the cold, hungry, shipwrecked, betrayed, homeless, poorly dressed, mocked, maligned, distrusted, spiritually opposed, afflicted, sometimes despairing of life, and finally killed (2 Corinthians 11:23–28). And it was glorious! All of it! Because Paul's life was hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3) and since *the Life* (John 14:6) had given him eternal life, death could only gain him a whole new level of life (Philippians 1:21).

As John Calvin said, "we should all regard our particular situation as a post assigned to us by God, lest in the course of our lives we flit to and fro and drift aimlessly about" (*Institutes*, 821). See your life today as an assignment from God. And stay faithful at your post until the Lord moves you.

Your Greatest Adventure

Here's the bedrock truth beneath 1 Corinthians 7:17: God — the Creator and sustainer of all that exists — is the one who has chosen us and bestowed on us the exceedingly rare honor to live here and now. He has assigned us a life to lead. And there is no more wonderful, exciting, hopeful, fulfilling, joy-producing sense of life purpose than to realize that we are *who* we are, *what* we are, *how* we are, *where* we are, and *when* we are by the assignment of the Lord.

You have been given the unfathomable gift of life. You have been given the infinitely more valuable gift of eternal life. And you have been given the astounding and extremely rare privilege of receiving an assignment from God. There is no higher calling than to lead the life that the Lord has assigned to you. Embrace your assignment, this great adventure chosen for you, and press it to the limit.

AUG 11, 2018

Christian Living \ Life Issues

Where Do You Find Your Identity?



Steffen Mueller • Luke 16:19–31

In Luke 16, Jesus talks about a rich man and a man named Lazarus. It is interesting that Jesus gives us the name of one man—Lazarus—but he does not give us the name of the other man. He simply calls the other man "a rich man." We don't know exactly why Jesus did this, but I think that Jesus wanted to express that the financial wealth that the rich man possessed was the main thing that could be said about him.

Jesus tells us in verses 22–23 that when Lazarus died, he "was carried by the angels to Abraham's side," whereas the rich man ended up in Hades. This is not to say that all wealthy people will end up in Hades. For even though Jesus says in Luke 18:25 that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God," Jesus says right after that in verse 27 that "what is impossible with man is possible with God."

The Emptiness of Wealth

By God's grace, I have had the privilege of planting a church in South Munich, Germany, in a suburb called Gruenwald, which is financially the wealthiest place in all of Germany. Sadly, there are people in Gruenwald who find their identity

only in their financial wealth. If they are successful financially, they feel like they are doing great and they feel important and special. However, when things go sour financially and they lose their financial wealth, there is not much left in terms of identity.

I believe that this dynamic is why Jesus in Luke 16 just calls the man "a rich man" and does not even mention his name, for apart from his financial wealth there is utter emptiness in the man's life.

Our True Identity

Where do you find your identity? Where do you find your strength and your hope? If you find your identity in anyone or anything other than Jesus Christ, then you will be in the end utterly forsaken. It is only in Jesus Christ and through a personal relationship with Jesus that you find true and lasting identity and value. All those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior are already perfectly loved and accepted and valued on the basis of the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ. Trusting in an idol eventually leaves you with emptiness and eternal despair, whereas trusting in Jesus provides an eternal and secure identity full of hope, faith, and love.

It is important to remember in daily life that as believers, all that we have and all that we are is by God's grace, and that as children of God, we are already perfectly loved by the One whose judgment truly matters: the Lord and King Jesus Christ.

Having that firm foundation and identity in Christ liberates us to live our lives to the glory of God, no matter the ups and downs we face. *Soli Deo gloria*!

For Further Study

LUKE 18:25 LUKE 18:27

surface and should likewise create media that penetrates beneath the surface of sensory perception. As writing does this naturally and inherently with speech, Christians should likewise do this intentionally and carefully with visual media of analogical symbols: we should create visual media that we can hear the effect of internally.

If the Old Testament insisted that we not make any visual images of God, then today we live in a technological society where visual media imagery has become a competing god for our time and attention and money. Perhaps we can strengthen our witness by guiding our visual-audio culture toward an audio-visual understanding. This should include an implicit understanding of all media forms as pointing to something beyond or beneath themselves, and to an explicit standard of media participation and production that creates from the knowledge that "all things would be absurd, if their meaning were exhausted in their function and their place in the phenomenal world, if by their essence they did not reach into a world beyond this."[41]

We must avoid this absurdity lest the world find us more absurd, and our message less relevant, than we already are and they already do. In reclaiming the lost understanding of the historic church regarding the perception of ear and eye, perhaps conscientious Christians can once again speak meaningfully to those who have ears to hear, and perhaps we can begin to bring some unity to the fragmentation of our "multiple Christianities" and the gazillion-channel universe that perceives them as but frequencies along the entertainment spectrum.

[41] Johan Huizinga, quoted in Eco, *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, 52.

✚ 4

YOU ARE BEING LIED TO. WHAT IS THE NATURE OF THE LIE?

The key things to remember in all media study is that all media exist within the context of global capitalism, they manifest themselves as corporations, and all of these corporations operate with the identical, ultimate goal of producing an economic return-on-investment for their owners and shareholders. Thus, no matter what point of view, ideology, or philosophy you think you are getting, buying, renting, or subscribing to, the ultimate philosophy of most media is that of profit. In a sense, this is no bigger news than Scripture announcing to you (as it has for millennia) that you cannot serve both God and mammon (cf. Matt. 6:24 KJV; Luke 16:13). In God's economy of nature, based on surplus, there is enough to go around for everyone. (See the book of Acts for how this happened in early Christian communities.) In man's economy of culture, based on scarcity (or the manufactured perception thereof), a person must fight for the "limited resources" that exist in all sectors in order to survive.

Here's a strange, invisible fact of modern life: the automobile kills more people each year (1,240,000 globally) than war and terrorism combined (440,000 globally). So just as it is wise to recognize that getting into your car is the most dangerous thing you do each day, so too is it helpful to remember that when you open a screen, turn on a TV, click a link, or pick up a magazine, whatever else someone is trying to inform, persuade, or entertain you with,

they are trying to relieve you of the money in your pocket. So there is always an "agenda" with modern media, and this is first and foremost an economic agenda that has nothing to do with political or religious or philosophical beliefs.

Then too, the agenda has been concentrated, whereas it was once distributed. As the late Turkish-American media critic Ben Bagdikian noted in his 1983 book *The Media Monopoly*, there was an ever-growing concentration of mergers and acquisitions whereby the vast majority of your news, information, and opinions were coming from just fifty sources in the mid-twentieth century. Bagdikian's alarm in 1983 was that what used to produce the "public's right to know" was a vast and broadly based collection of papers and magazines, large and small, all competing for your readership and attention. Now, under television conditions, all that was shrinking. What ultimately horrified Bagdikian in his updated 2000 edition, was the discovery that these fifty media corporations had now merged themselves down to just five! These are the five media corporations that produce your entertainment, your news, your opinions, your culture, your level of public discourse; "they manufacture a social and political world":

Time Warner
Walt Disney (ABC News)
News Corporation (Rupert Murdoch)
Viacom (formerly CBS)
Bertelsmann (Germany)

In close sixth place behind these five is NBC, which is owned by American multinational conglomerate corporation giant General Electric. Five out of the six are American multinational conglomerates, and it is their media product that not only Americans, but also now the whole world, primarily consumes. This is to say nothing of the big digital five (Amazon, Google, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft), which are soon going to eat the five media corporations

for lunch the way Amazon just swallowed Whole Foods. In Europe, for example, the US market share of cinema audiences ranges from 54 to 86 percent.[1] A Parisian in France has a 65 percent chance of watching an American film when going out to the movies and less than a 35 percent of watching a French film (because other countries' films are also playing). No wonder the French describe their free time with the phrase "*le weekend*" instead of the French term "*fin de semaine*."

Now it is still an open question that historians of the future will likely determine, whether an American agenda for global politics, culture, education, and society will produce a new Golden Age or another fall of Rome. But this is the direction that the technology has taken us, and it is to this that we should be paying attention. It just happens to have happened to America, by virtue of our technology. Any country that developed military and civilian technologies (flip sides of the same coin) as rapidly would also find itself in the same position. The historical syllogism is very simple:

History is written by winners.
Winners are the winners of wars.
Winning wars requires superior technological capabilities.
Thus, Team America.

The Internet, like the highway system, is but another military technology leased to citizens in times of peace. The average consumer does not perceive this, but the history of the Internet, from Darpanet down to the NSA, reveals a consistent pattern of control of information on the presupposition that knowledge is power. And by "times of peace" I mean, of course, times of war. Since 1945, the United States has been in a continuous militarized state of war, with the latest being the GWOT, the Global War on Terror.

[1] Robert J. Lieber, *The American Era: Power and Strategy for the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 103–4.

So even though Americans may perceive it as "times of peace," it is anything but.

In World War II, there were roughly 72 countries at war. In 2016, there were 151 countries at war.[2] As Marshall McLuhan put it, "War is never anything less than accelerated technological change."[3] And if technology can determine geopolitics, then it can also play a determining role in psychology, religion, and spirituality itself.

TECHNOLOGY IS THEOLOGY: THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSIAH

Technology is epistemology. That is the theory. Everything else is commentary. The shorthand way to understand this is simply to follow the syllogism down to its roots:

> Everything you are conscious of is predicated on what you are not conscious of.
> Everything you are conscious of comes to you through your perceptions.
> Every perception you have is a function of your five senses.
> Every new technology alters the balance, or "ratio," of your senses.

To regain your senses, you have to go back to the beginning and ask two different but identical questions:

1. Who was I before all this technology took over my life?
2. Who was man before the fall?

A Christian theory of media posits that God made man, his highest organism, and placed him into the perfect environment wherein man could thrive, prosper, and be happy. There was no technology in this environment because, in a perfect world, you

[2] For a more nuanced view of this data, see http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/GPI-2016-Report_2.pdf.
[3] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 102.

cannot improve it by inventing any form of labor-saving or time-saving devices. The improvement upon perfection that Adam and Eve sought did not exist, was based on a lie told by the accuser, and only served to imbalance the sense ratios of the original humans. In the garden, the hierarchy of the senses went like this, from most important to least:

> hearing
> seeing
> smelling
> touching
> tasting

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was made appealing by Satan's appeal to the primacy of the eye over the ear. Prior to this, Adam and Eve walked in the garden and were continuously in the acoustic, but not visual, presence of the Lord. They could hear him. And he could hear them—his curiosity about their ingenuity, in fact, lay only in the very linguistic ability he had given them (and which separated them from the rest of the animals: he wanted to know what Adam would name them).

Satan's promise to Eve offers three parts (Gen. 3:5):

1. Your eyes will be open.
2. You will know good and evil.
3. You will be like God.

And like all great liars, two out of three of these promises did come true: Their eyes were opened. They did know good and evil. But instead of being "like God," they suddenly found themselves naked and ashamed. Whereas before, they were naked and unashamed.

After the fall, the hierarchy of the senses shifted to this:

> seeing
> hearing

smelling
touching
tasting

You can perceive this by watching little children at the beach. The toddler is naked and unashamed to not be wearing a diaper. Anyone over three years old is ridiculously self-conscious about being naked.

Students without their iPhones? "I feel naked without it." This is a theological statement: the Hebrew word for *atonement* is the same as the word for *covering*.

Digital media technology is simply the fourth and latest stage of technological development (after writing, printing, and electricity), and it too promises a similar threefold Godlikeness:

1. You will be omniscient.
2. You will be omnipresent.
3. You will be omnipotent.

Thanks to the smartphone and a reliable Wi-Fi signal, now almost all of us carry in our very pockets the tools of portable omniscience and omnipresence. But two out of these three have not yet added up to omnipotence, and the evidence suggests that it is not only not granting us the power of a god, but it seems to be robbing us of our very finite but very real human dignity, identity, history, and purpose.

Ever after Adam and Eve traded an ear for an eye, they and their descendants were reminded that "faith comes from hearing" (Rom. 10:17) and that "faith is . . . the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1 KJV).

When Abraham left home and went west to the land of Canaan, he perceived for the first time that a change in faith would necessarily be accompanied by a change in media forms of worship: he traded the gods of stone and wood for the invisible God of gods.

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, he led them through forty years in the wilderness, with a significant stop at Mount Sinai. Here he received the Ten Commandments, which some scholars suggest was also the birth of the Hebrew alphabet—an exchange of the Egyptian pictographic writing system for an abstract, phoneme-based writing system. The squiggles evolved to no longer "look like" the things they represented; now they represented abstract noises that the human mouth could make, and it took another layer of completion before you could make certain sounds arrive at certain meanings. The second commandment God gave to ensure this new identity was a law that connected communication style with moral outcome: henceforth, thou shalt not use any pictographic symbol systems; it will bias you toward idolatry.

This means that *God cares about the forms of the media technologies we use as much or more than the content*. For New Testament examples, consider that even Paul pointed out that speech was life-giving while writing tended to produce a hardening of the perceptual categories: ". . . for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). Our Lord Jesus Christ made this principle profoundly vivid when he liberated the woman who was caught red-handed in adultery. He used the power of the living word—speech—to create a mistrial and thereby free a woman who was already dead in the eyes of her judges, jury, and executioners.

So if you accept that God cares about the form as much as the substance, about the medium as much as the message, about the context as much as the content, then Christians should care what unintended messages they might be sending by simply adopting the newest, the latest, the fastest, and the most efficient technologies in the name of Christ. Digital media technologies already possess, in and of themselves, their own presuppositions, their own effectiveness, and their own epistemology, and cannot be put in the service

of Jesus Christ without a certain amount of fear and trembling about their unintended consequences.[4]

Jesus Christ, who is our Mediator, our Medium, and our Messiah, is also the basis of our community, our communication, and our communion. He is the center, source, focus, and purpose of all that we should do. If you have a media or technology-related question, he is the one to ask. In Greek, Jesus was not a carpenter, he was a *tekton*, a master builder (in wood or stone), which is also related to the root word of *architect*. This comes from *tekne*—art or craft—and is the root of the word *technology*. Thus, the second Person of the Trinity is the Master Builder, Architect, and ultimate Maker of the cosmos and all that is in it. He should know a thing or two about how things are made, how they work, and what the design was. Science is just now beginning to catch up to how nature is actually an incredibly sophisticated ecological design system in which the parts all contribute to a whole that is greater than themselves.

Now is the time for Christians to take up a conscious awareness of the unconscious effects of media and communication technologies. Now is the time for the sleepers to awake.

[4] Material in this paragraph was largely drawn from my article "The Future of the Church Is Analog, Not Digital," *Christianity Today*, September 23, 2016, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/october/future-of-church-is-analog-not-digital.html.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

I hope thus far that I have been descriptive and not prescriptive. I hope to impart to you the ways in which a Christian ecology of media is, like media ecology in general, very much more interested in questions than in answers. That is how Jacques Ellul understood the Bible itself—not as a series of answers to life's questions, but as a series of questions that asks each of us, in our particular historical circumstance, to answer for our lives to God himself. And so I would like to end this book with a lengthy series of questions written by myself and by others who have come before me. I encourage you to revisit this section and ask yourself at least one of these questions each time you engage in media, journalism, or communication technologies during your life.

1. How much media do you consume? What is your media diet? Keep a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly journal and log every minute spent with media. You may be surprised by your findings.

2. What do you want to do with your life? How many hours would it take to achieve that level of expertise or excellence in your chosen field? Where can you find those hours? In this exercise, take the number of hours discovered in Question 1 and divide them by the number of hours needed in Question 2. Which number is bigger? Does a selective sacrifice of media intake allow you to achieve your dreams?

3. What media can you fast from? What can you live without?

4. What media are you using? What media are you intentional, rational, and purposeful about? What media forms are disembodied means to embodied ends? What media are you using to actually further the kingdom of God? What media are you passively being used by? What media, if you're honest with yourself, are you lying to yourself about?

2

WHY SHOULD WE ENJOY ART AND MUSIC?

Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 reads like a dismissal of culture and, in particular, of leisure:

> I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?" I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Laughter, wine, houses, horticulture, animal husbandry, wealth, and music all proved useless to the Preacher. They were for him a kind of madness: "a striving after wind." But how can this be, given what the Scriptures say elsewhere about these things?

- In Luke 6:21 Jesus uses laughter to describe those who enjoy the favor of God. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh."
- John 2 describes how Jesus "manifested his glory" by miraculously providing good wine at a wedding celebration.
- In Jeremiah 29:5 God tells the exiles in Babylon to "build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce."
- Elsewhere God promises flourishing herds and flocks to the remnant of his people who repent and dwell in Zion. For example, in Isaiah 30:23 he says, "In that day your livestock will graze in large pastures."
- Silver and gold, too, can be a blessing. In Genesis 24:35 Abraham's servant says, "The LORD has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys."
- As for singing, well, all God's people are singers by definition. About a hundred times in Scripture, we are urged to make music. For example, back in Isaiah 30 the remnant is told, "You shall have a song as in the night when a holy feast is kept" (v. 29).

Interpreting Scripture with Scripture, we see that the most straightforward reading of Ecclesiastes 2 cannot be the correct one. The kinds of culture and leisure in question are not necessarily vain but can be a major component of the abundant life Christ intends for us to have. The passage from Ecclesiastes 2 does give us a clue to its proper interpretation even without the help of the other Scriptures, but we must look closely at what is actually being said there.

Verse 1, taken with verse 11, tells us that to "enjoy yourself" is vanity. What the ESV translates as "enjoy yourself," the King James Version translates as "enjoy pleasure." So which is it? As it turns out, both are right. The two Hebrew words, *ra'ah towb*, literally mean "to see or consider a good or pleasant thing," but in

the context of the Preacher's discourse, the translators of the ESV and KJV rightly notice that something more than that is being said. The two translations (which date from 2001 and 1611) describe, respectively, the postmodern and classical errors about beauty, both of which are then condemned as vanity.

Taking the ESV's translation, we know that "enjoy yourself" is exactly what the postmodern aims at. He does not enjoy laughter, wine, or houses. He enjoys himself. If beauty is subjective, then only the subject is left as an object of enjoyment. And of course this is vanity. Taking the KJV's translation, we describe exactly what the ancient Greeks did. They "enjoy[ed] pleasure." Seeing beauty as something in the object itself, and setting their eyes on it alone, they "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things" (Rom. 1:23). Pleasure is merely a by-product of our enjoyment of God. To pursue it, rather than God, is, as Lewis put it, to have our hearts broken. The Christian doctrine of leisure avoids both of the pitfalls expressed alternatively in these translations. It teaches us that all things were made for God's glory, and we find joy in them only insofar as we enjoy God through them. Hence the Preacher concludes in verses 24–25: "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?"

Elsewhere the Bible gives us models of such godly leisure. Adam was put in a garden, which implies both work and contemplative leisure. David, the man after God's heart, played the lyre "day by day" (1 Sam. 18:10). Jesus celebrated weddings. He "came eating and drinking" (Matt. 11:19). Paul, in an aside, affirms that wealthy Christians may enjoy God's material gifts: "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17; see also 4:3–4). What

1 Timothy 6 teaches us is that pleasure in its proper place is a good thing. More importantly, it teaches wherein pleasure is found: neither in ourselves nor, ultimately, in the thing that mediates pleasure, but in the Lord. Perhaps here is the basis for distinguishing between idleness (Prov. 31:27; 2 Thess. 3:6–7) and what we might call "recreation" (Gen. 24:63; Ps. 8:3). Idleness is enjoying oneself or the pleasures themselves. Recreation is enjoyment of God, which is part of our chief end.

We enjoy God by pondering his ways (Ps. 77:12). We study his Word, which theologians call "special revelation," and we study his works of creation and providence, which theologians call "general revelation." God intends the two kinds of revelation to go together, and each is incomplete without the other. Without the good news of the gospel found in the Bible, the wonders of nature and culture only serve to intensify our alienation from God; we cannot bear such clear examples of the goodness, wisdom, and power of the one we hate. To quote Calvin, "People, immersed in their own errors, are struck blind in such a dazzling theater."[1] But when the Lord makes known his salvation, all the earth makes a joyful noise as in Psalm 98 (on which Isaac Watts's hymn "Joy to the World" is based). "Let the sea roar, and all that fills it. . . . Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth."

Conversely, without the wonders of nature and culture, the Bible is unintelligible. What urgency would the gospel have if we had no existential knowledge of God or any idea of our filth and alienation from him? Why would we care about God's redemptive purposes? Indeed, sensitivity to general revelation is necessary to appreciate any page of Scripture. Psalm 1 says that the blessed man is like a tree. But what could that possibly mean to someone who is ignorant of, or indifferent to, trees? It seems likely that when God

[1] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.5.8.

made trees on the third day of creation, part of his purpose was to design a picture of what the blessed man is like. In the book of Job, the Lord answers his great questions—our questions—with an appeal to general revelation (Job 38–41). Jesus teaches us about anxiety by telling us to "consider the lilies" (Matt. 6:28).

There can be little doubt that *the leisurely contemplation of general revelation is an essential part of the Christian life* and that our capacity for joy depends, in part, on our being good stewards of leisure. A happy person's leisure will include the direct study of creation (in woodland walks, for example, or in a butterfly collection or in a fun math problem) and of providence (in history), but such a happy person will also learn from other people how to appreciate revelation. The literary and scientific achievements of human culture can, despite their fallibility, aid us in contemplating the glory of God. So, too, can the arts. What follows, then, are four reasons, based on the Christian doctrine of general revelation, why we should enjoy art and music.

REASON 1: ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS EXPOUND GENERAL REVELATION IN MUCH THE SAME WAY THAT PREACHERS EXPOUND SPECIAL REVELATION

A comparison to the preaching of God's Word works very well. Though God's Word is open to all believers, not every believer is equally gifted in or trained especially for the reading and understanding of it. Likewise, though the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen in the things that are made (Rom. 1:20)—even by nonbelievers, let alone believers—some people are especially gifted at observing particular things about general revelation. When the things they observe are mathematical, we call those people "mathematicians." When the things are marine, we call those people "mariners." But when those things relate to patterns of sound, we call those people "musicians." A composer takes pitches and rhythms and organizes them according to principles of design apparent in

nature. Trunk is to twig as symphony is to melody. A great piece of music, through its interrelationship of parts, is a little world of its own, echoing imperfectly the world after which it was patterned—which world echoes the Creator. How music does this is the work of chapter 5 of this book. Likewise, the visual artist, whose work is described in chapter 4, has peculiar gifts that make him able to see better than we. He is also able, through the disciplines of his art, to report back to us what he sees in a way that will make our seeing more clear. He draws our attention to significant features of things, sometimes by means of exaggeration or even abstraction, to show us the nature of those things. He uses shapes and colors, not words, to do this. Just as preachers use words to talk about God's Word, so artists and composers make "works" to talk about God's works.

Now, we should come clean at the outset and say that just as third-born sons of the nineteenth-century English gentry were able to make a living as preachers, and the farmers and fishermen they preached to were willing to put up with their inanity, so too the charlatan artist of twenty-first-century London will be able to make a living at his "craft," thanks to the fashionable rich who thoughtlessly praise his work. Nor do we pretend that even competent and expressive nonbelieving artists are able to admit that it is God's glory about which they report in their art; they suppress this knowledge (Rom. 1:21). Yet just because something can be done badly or from the wrong motivation does not mean that it is always done badly or that bad motivation necessarily mars the outcome. The Roman emperor may hand out bread from a fear of uprising or from a love for the people; the bread will taste the same either way.

Many are concerned that in the face of possible charlatanry in art and music, they might not be competent to tell the difference between a work of art that reports a great deal about the basic designs of nature and a work that reports almost nothing. Scripture comes to our aid in this and all epistemological crises. Psalm 19, for instance, tells us that the heavens *declare* the glory of the Lord.

They don't merely hint at it, leaving us without model for good art and music. In his exhortation to the Philippians, Paul tells them to think on whatever things are lovely (4:8). This assumes that they have some idea of what is lovely and what is not. The problem is not that we cannot tell the difference between the sham art and the real, but that, having distinguished the two, we nevertheless choose the sham art. Most people have the ability to know the difference between a good sermon and a bad one, but someone who sits under bad sermons long enough will lose that ability.

It is easy to see how artists and composers are the preachers of general revelation if we think about how artists and composers work and then compare their work to sermon preparation. A composer comes up with a small melodic snippet that catches his imagination. He hears in those few notes the potential for development, involving perhaps conflict and resolution. He builds a framework lasting many minutes, during which that snippet can relate to itself and perhaps to other antagonistic snippets to create a musical narrative. The painter, likewise, passes by a fruit bowl lit by the morning sun as it sends a narrow beam through the kitchen window. He stops in front of it because, in that fruit bowl, a host of interrelated shapes and colors play with one another, coming to life in the limited light that exposes them. He decides on a particular vantage point because he wants to capture just those relationships apparent there. He exaggerates some details and glosses over others, so that we will notice just the things he notices and be moved by just the things that move him. And what is it that moves him? The invisible attributes of God, of course, made known in the things that are made. Anyone who has prepared a sermon can see the parallels: one comes to the biblical text and examines it; one looks for connections within the ideas there, as well as for what those ideas tell us about other things in Scripture; and then one writes a sermon that focuses on those connections to help the congregation better understand them—and thereby understand God.

Incidentally, the preacher and the artist are, as much as the bowl of fruit, "things that have been made." So the preacher himself, like the pomegranate, is an example of general revelation. His very ability to tell us about God's Word tells us something about God, which brings us to the next reason for enjoying fine arts.

REASON 2: ART AND MUSIC ARE COMMUNICATION FROM OUR FELLOW MAN

To have the God of the universe speak to you is no small thing. It is only through this that we will have life and health and peace. We know that God speaks through the Bible. But that same Bible tells us that God speaks through his creation too. How is it, for instance, that the meadows and valleys of Psalm 65:13 "shout and sing together for joy" except through the way they look? Or how is it that in Psalm 148 the sea creatures and deeps and fire and hail and snow and mist and all the other things there listed are to praise the Lord? They can only do so by their forms, since they have no other language. We know that God speaks through design as well as through words. So do artists and composers.

One of the pleasures of looking at a painting is that of receiving communication from another human—one who articulates the relationships between visual objects that we've never thought of and articulates them more clearly than we could. Through the artist's design, we learn about the nature of design itself, but, almost as interesting, we learn *from* someone else. The postmodern rightly questions this possibility. He wonders how it is we can be so confident that we understand what the artist or composer is getting at. "How do I know that I understand what my neighbor has said to me?" The Christian faith answers, "Because God's glory is made known *through* the very process of communication (Gen. 2:19; Acts 2:3). Since God is zealous for his glory (John 16:14), we know that he will uphold communication inasmuch as it gives him glory (though, see Genesis 11)." So while we *can* misunderstand

one another as easily in art and music as we can in conversation and gesture, this potential for misunderstanding is routinely overcome, in a conversation as in a concerto, by the intervening work of God's common grace. Consequently, when we look at a Constable landscape, we learn about the design of landscape from someone better at observing that design than we and in the process have a conversation that reaches across history.

This brings with it an improved historical imagination for the viewer. Painting can help us to understand God through his providence in history. Some people treat art as if this were its main purpose, so that, one must suppose, the great painters took up their work like the soccer mom with her video recorder—because a record of the event *must* be made for posterity. But this is not principally why painters paint, so it is not principally on this ground that we should engage the message of their painting. Painters paint because they have something to say through design. Because God upholds human conversation, we can listen. And we enjoy learning what the world can look like through the eyes of another.[2]

REASON 3: ART AND MUSIC HELP US AVOID BEING DESENSITIZED

A student, during a class discussion about a still-life painting, remarks that "the artist has randomly arranged an equally random selection of fruits and vegetables." In a discussion about a fiery piano etude, an otherwise bright student exclaims that "the piece is just random chords banged out as loudly as possible." The students can use the word *random* because of the intuitive but false assumption that the making of art and music is an impulsive act—that the things to be found there might appear without any more effort from the artist than the effort he might exert to bring up a freckle on his own cheek. And, to be fair to the students, the

[2] C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1961), epilogue.

word *random* could be applied correctly to art or music were they dreadfully bad. A careless artist might make a slip with his brush and give us designs resulting from biomechanics rather than from human reason. Although there was no such "slip of the brush" in the incidents described above, one can appreciate why the students suspected randomness in forms they did not understand. But what if the artist were inerrant?

Consider the observer of an oak tree who notes that "its branches jut out all at random." Or consider the fisherman who says he enjoys the view of his pond because of "its random clusters of lily pads." As soon as one believes in the God of the Bible, who gave to the wind its weight, to the waters their measure, to the lightning its way (Job 28:24–27), and to the sparrow the time of its demise (Matt. 10:29), one must believe that the growth patterns of an oak tree or the drift of lily pads must be the result of his will, too. This means that the look of the natural world (to say nothing of its fitness or function) is no more random than the letters inside the copy of Scripture at your bedside. Both are messages to us, and we do well to learn their languages.

But our culture is not very sensitive to the language of the natural world. Offer a room full of average, TV-watching, iPod-listening, text-messaging people a box of crayons and ask them to select a color for the trunk of an oak tree. Most of them will select the brown crayon, though the trunk is gray. Hum a tune to them in major mode (the musical mode of "Happy Birthday to You" and "Jesus Loves the Little Children") and then hum the same tune turned to minor mode (the musical mode of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again" and "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen"). Then quiz them for ten minutes, moving back and forth from one version of the tune to another and asking which is major and which is minor. More will get the answers wrong than will get them right. Yet, the difference between gray and brown and between major and minor mode are not subtle ones. For a culinary example, consider

the offerings of candy in the chrome-and-glass vending machines at the exits of your average big-box store. Many are marked with words that sound like threats: "atomic warhead," "tear-jerker" or "super sour." (Can any reader remember the day when the word "sour" was applied to foods that had gone bad?) Go to the toiletries section and, where years ago delicate scents like lavender and bluebells once sat, you'll find overwhelmingly acrid ones instead, often named after implements of physical trauma.

It seems that our culture sees the world only in the colors of plastic toys, hears from it only low thuds (consider the recent rise in sales of sub-woofers for home theaters), tastes only when the tongue is etched by acid, and smells only acrid chemicals. But if God is revealing himself to us in the things he has made, and if we as a culture are becoming less and less sensitive, then we will less and less understand God as he is revealed generally. Hundreds of years ago, the church began a campaign to make the world literate so that it could read God's Word. Perhaps we need another campaign to make the world sensitive so that it can "read" God's works. It is almost as if the Devil, having tried to deceive us of the truth of God's glory for millennia, has now changed his tactics and tries to get us to gouge out our own eyes and stop up our ears—or rather, to benumb our own intellects to the point that neither eyes nor ears will do us any good. Art and music can offer us a recovery from this illness because artists and musicians, gifted as they are in attending to the beauty of creation, help us through their own designs to attend to that beauty as well. Their expressions, far from random, help us understand the subtleties in the designs of nature that our blindness overlooked as randomness.

REASON 4: FAILURE TO ENJOY ART AND MUSIC INVITES FOLLY

In an essay about having "eyes to see," C. S. Lewis describes the process of avoiding God thus:

> The avoiding, in many times and places, has proved so difficult that a very large part of the human race failed to achieve it. But in our own time and place it is extremely easy. Avoid silence, avoid solitude, avoid any train of thought that leads off the beaten track. Concentrate on money, sex, status, health and (above all) on your own grievances. Keep the radio on. Live in a crowd. Use plenty of sedation. If you must read books, select them very carefully. But you'd be safer to stick to the papers. You'll find the advertisements helpful; especially those with a sexy or snobbish appeal.[3]

The commonality in all the items on Lewis's list is not that they are all things that lie, but that they are all things that prohibit both truth and lies from being contemplated. The reason why the radio (in Lewis's day much less noxious than our own) can keep a man from God is not that he will likely hear pornographic songs there (though he will) but that those pornographic songs don't even invite enough intellectual clarity from the listener to allow him to idolize sexuality well. Were they to do even this much, he might awaken to a hope for something better. As discussed in chapter 1, beauty is the medium for truth. If a work of art is beautiful, it will allow truths to be communicated with clarity. If we avoid the things that speak most clearly—like great art and music—we avoid the opportunity to contemplate the truth. "The wise lay up knowledge," says Solomon (Prov. 10:14).

By "truth" we do not mean only the subject matter of a narrative painting or the text of a song. Of course, truth may be found there. But the peculiar success of art and music is that it brings to us a special species of truth that can be articulated only through visual or musical design. Indeed, there are works of art, like the pagan statuary of Greece, for which the subject matter is false but for which the design—that is, the message spoken by the form—is very true.

[3] "The Seeing Eye," first published in *Show* 3 (February 1963) under a title, "Onward, Christian Spacemen," that was odious to the author. Here cited from *C. S. Lewis: Essay Collection and Other Short Pieces*, ed. Lesley Walmsley (London: HarperCollins, 2000), 59.

What does it look like, then, to cut oneself off from these truths? We may see something of it in the life of Charles Darwin, who had the candor (or folly?) to report his own degeneration thus:

> Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds, such as the works of Milton, Gray, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, gave me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in Shakespeare, especially in the historical plays. I have also said that formerly pictures gave me considerable, and music very great delight. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of poetry; I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intolerably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost my taste for pictures or music. . . . I retain some taste for fine scenery, but it does not cause me the exquisite delight which it formerly did.[4]

Note that it is not merely the content of the poems, many of which had spiritual implications distasteful to Darwin, that bothered him. He could not endure even a "line" of poetry. Even "pictures" and "fine scenery" (that is, art and walks in nature) did little for the aged atheist. Romans 1:18–32 describes not a single instance or state of being, but a process. Notice that in verse 21 men "knew God," but then their thinking "became futile" and their hearts "were darkened." In verse 22, they "*became* fools." What were they before they became fools? Presumably, they were what Darwin was before he stopped liking Milton.

CONCLUSION

Ask a dozen Christians to fill in the blank from Genesis 1:10:

> God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God _____ that it was good.

[4] Francis Darwin, ed., *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1887), 100–101.

The chances are very great that a full half of the Christians you ask will fill in the blank with the word "said." We hear it thus misquoted even from the pulpit. No doubt, when a great artist steps back from a great work of art, he may in a moment of self-congratulation say, "Ah, a good one." But it is not his declaration that makes it so. Neither was it God's. The missing word is not "said" but "saw." God could not, without violating his own character, merely declare any old creation "good" by order of his word. He *saw* that it was already good; he needn't *say* anything to make it so. We are not told of a God who self-awards but of a God who contemplates. If God enjoys a bit of art appreciation at the end of a week of work, why should we deny ourselves the same pleasure?

Notice that God does not look back with fond memory on the formlessness that has now been displaced. He shows no regret for the lost deep over which he once brooded. Instead, he pauses to enjoy the most beautiful physical objects around. We follow his example when we elect to fill our leisure hours with the very best things we can—among which are the best works of art and music. Lamentably, many Christians justify their fondness for things nearly "without form and void" by trying to point out one or two good things in those leisure activities. "Sure, the pop song I like isn't as good as Beethoven, but there's more in it than you think." Yes, and there may have been something poignant about the earth without form and void, so pregnant with potential as it was. But this will be true of all created things, even the ones that humanity has, as far as possible, muted. We are to pursue the *best* things.

3

HOW DO WE JUDGE ART AND MUSIC?

Having ended the previous chapter with a call to pursue the best things, it's only fair that we discuss at this point how one identifies the best things so as to pursue them. One encounters a bewildering array of recommendations. Charlie Brown's friend Schroeder likes Beethoven. Bill Clinton likes Fleetwood Mac. One's roommate swears by a band called Panic! at the Disco. Most bewildering of all is the consistent dichotomy between what is highly regarded by experts and what is actually popular. According to *Billboard*, the American rapper Eminem was the most successful musician of the last decade, but his work rarely appears in the curricula of university music departments. Something like one in twenty American homes contains a Thomas Kinkade painting. Why, then, does not a single major museum? Musicologist Joseph Kerman compares listening to Beethoven's String Quartet in F Major, Op. 59, No. 1, to a trip to Athens or a first kiss. You would think many would be drawn to such pleasure. And, yet, do you personally know anyone who is? Anyone who listens to this quartet for pleasure? The dichotomy is so striking that we naturally want to understand it better.

Adherents to the classical view of beauty have an explanation: the masses are too stupid to recognize how to get what they want. The classicist thinks he knows why ordinary people include art and music in their lives, and he has developed all sorts of rules

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Science proves kids are bad for Earth. Morality suggests we stop having them.

We need to stop pretending kids don't have environmental and ethical consequences.



Double trouble. Matt Nighswander / NBC News

Nov. 15, 2017, 4:17 AM EST / Updated Nov. 15, 2017, 4:17 AM EST

By Travis Rieder

A startling and honestly distressing view is beginning to receive serious consideration in both academic and popular discussions of climate change ethics. According to this view, having a child is a major contributor to climate change. The logical takeaway here is that everyone on Earth ought to consider having fewer children.

Although culturally controversial, the scientific half of this position is fairly well-established. Several years ago, scientists showed that having a child, especially for the world's wealthy, is one of the worst things you can do for the environment. That data was recycled this past summer in a paper showing that none of the activities most likely to reduce individuals' carbon footprints are widely discussed.

The second, moral aspect of the view – that perhaps we ought to have fewer children – is also being taken seriously in many circles. Indeed, I have written widely on the topic myself.

But scientific evidence and moral theorizing aside, this is a complicated question with plenty of opponents. In what follows, I will address some of the challenges to this idea. Because while I recognize

that this is an uncomfortable discussion, I believe that the seriousness of climate change justifies uncomfortable conversations. In this case, that means that we need to stop pretending the decision to have children doesn't have environmental and ethical consequences.

The argument that having a child adds to one's carbon footprint depends on the view that each of us has a personal carbon ledger for which we are responsible. Furthermore, some amount of an offspring's emissions count towards the parents' ledger.



The seriousness of climate change justifies uncomfortable conversations. Matt Nighswander / NBC News

Most environmentalists accept this sort of ledger view when it comes to recycling, driving, and flying, but support begins to decrease when applied to family planning. The opposition is typified by Vox writer David Roberts, who argues that "such an accounting scheme is utterly impractical" because it seems to entail that one is never responsible for one's own emissions. Because "we don't want to double-count," as Roberts says, this means parents are really only responsible for their kids' emissions.

The flaw in this objection is the plausible-sounding caveat: "we don't want to double-count." Because why wouldn't we want to double-count? If moral responsibility added up mathematically, then double-counting would be a serious problem. But I think it's clear that we should not accept a mathematical model of responsibility.

Consider a different case: If I release a murderer from prison, knowing full well that he intends to kill innocent people, then I bear some responsibility for those deaths – even though the killer is also fully responsible. My having released him doesn't make him less responsible (he did it!). But his doing it doesn't eliminate my responsibility either.

Something similar is true, I think, when it comes to having children: Once my daughter is an autonomous agent, she will be responsible for her emissions. But that doesn't negate my responsibility. Moral responsibility simply isn't mathematical.

If you buy this view of responsibility, you might eventually admit that having many children is wrong, or at least morally suspect, for standard environmental reasons: Having a child imposes high emissions on the world, while the parents get the benefit. So like with any high-cost luxury, we should limit our indulgence.

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The rebuttal to this argument is that individual actions simply don't make a significant difference, and that institutional action is how you actually have an impact. Do everything you can to minimize your emissions, and the "earth won't give a damn."

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All of these claims are true. Most individual actions won't matter in the context of a trillion ton, all-time anthropogenic carbon budget. And indeed, policy and collective action are important for seriously mitigating the harms of climate change.

But does this mean my individual actions are morally permissible? I think the answer is clearly no.

If morality only applied to meaningful change, then morality would rarely recommend actions of symbolic integrity or defiance. We would not, for example, praise the activist who stands up for what she believes in until there was evidence that her tactics work. And those who sacrifice their own interests in order to contribute minuscule amounts of time, money, or labor to alleviating global hunger or poverty would look like suckers rather than saints.

I don't think these judgments sit well with our moral sensibilities. On reflection, many of us believe that it is wrong to contribute to massive, systematic harms, even if each individual contribution isn't causally significant. This explains why many of us think you are obligated to do things like recycle, especially when it's easy. Your recycling doesn't matter much to the environment – the earth doesn't give a damn – but you should do it anyway.

The confusion around this sort of moral claim is understandable. Our moral psychology has not yet evolved to solve the problems of today. Humanity grew up in relatively small groups; Rules like “don’t harm others,” or “don’t steal and cheat” are easy to make sense of in a world of largely individual interactions.

That is not our world any longer, though, and our moral sense is evolving to reflect that difference. Moral decisions are no longer about math; Being a part of the solution matters.

The importance of this argument for family size is obvious. If having one fewer child reduces one’s contribution to the harms of climate change, the choice of family size becomes a morally relevant one.

I am certainly not arguing that we should shame parents, or even that we’re obligated to have a certain number of children. As I’ve said elsewhere, I don’t think there is a tidy answer to the challenging questions of procreative ethics. But that does not mean we’re off the moral hook. As we face the very real prospect of catastrophic climate change, difficult – even uncomfortable – conversations are important. Yes, we should discuss the ethics of making babies with care and respect; but we should discuss it.

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FAMILY & SOCIETY

by Carl R. Trueman

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Are evangelical leaders as courageous as J.K. Rowling?

Now is the time for prominent leaders and institutions to push back against the gender revolution



J. K. Rowling arrives at the world premiere of *Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore* in London on March 29, 2022.

Associated Press/Photo by Scott Garfitt

It is a well-established trope today that evangelical Christians were on the wrong side of cultural debates in the past and that present generations must therefore do public penance, whether the issue is racism or sexism or whatever. That raises the question of what issues the evangelical establishment might be misjudging today that will lead to future disdain towards this generation of evangelical leadership. Here is my suggestion: the issue of transgender ideology.

Why do I say this? Two reasons: first, transgender ideology is leading to the promotion of medical practices that mutilate the bodies and permanently ruin the lives of children too young to elect to have a tattoo. Second, it is destroying women's rights through its impact on private spaces, safety, and (trivial but true) sports. Given that both the political and the medical establishment are fully on board with this madness, we might say that we are living at a moment when the institutionalized abuse of women and children is not just grotesque. It is also catastrophic.

And if anyone thinks that the politicians pushing this vicious garbage are operating from a position of knowledge and informed nuance, they should read the recent transcript of former Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon explaining why trans women are real women unless they happen to be vicious male rapists. In short, trans women are women unless that identification might prove to be a

liability at the ballot box. Sturgeon, like most pro-trans politicos, has merely been reciting a liturgy that plays well to a certain lobby group—a liturgy, however, that has harmful real-life consequences for real women.

Yet, for all of the evil that is being done to confused children and vulnerable women, it is some feminists who are speaking out on this. Kathleen Stock, the feminist philosopher, remains one of the most consistent and vocal opponents of the trans madness, even at the cost of her academic job. Abigail Shrier is another. And most famously author J. K. Rowling continues to speak courageously on the matter, though woe betide any who defend her, as Pamela Paul can now testify. It is right and proper that Christians give thanks for these voices.



Silence in the face of this evil is culpable and, make no mistake, will be noted by future generations.

This is why it is surely now time that the flagship evangelical organizations speak out too, using their broad appeal and status to have a real impact on the debate. It would be wonderful if *Christianity Today* were to run a series of detransition narratives, or Wheaton College host a conference on the damage that trans ideology is doing to children and to families. Such things would help confused parents and pastors. Then there are evangelicals with easy access to the pages of *The Atlantic*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. If they were to use their platforms to speak out about this institutionalization of child abuse and misogyny, it might—no, it would—make a huge difference.

The trans issue might well collapse in the coming decades. Indeed, I am actually very hopeful that it will. But sadly, if it does so, it will only be after the pile of mutilated children's bodies, ruined families, and shattered lives has reached a critical mass. That is why it is imperative to speak and act now, to make such damage as minimal as possible. The stakes are very, very high, and, as the case of Nicola Sturgeon demonstrates, the political leadership class is wickedly committed to the most incoherent and evil of policy paths. These people do not really care about helping trans kids or women. They care only about using the trans issue to drive their own careers by imposing their own irrationalism on the rest of us, whatever the cost in innocent lives.

The time for evangelical leaders and institutions to speak is now. The moment to use the platforms we have to protect women and children has come. If J.K. Rowling has the courage to stand for the truth and to call for the protection of children and women, then so should we. Silence in the face of this evil is culpable and, make no mistake, will be noted by future generations.

Yes, it is always easier to apologize for the past than do the right, and costly, thing in the present. But perhaps this time we might pre-empt the need for any future evangelical apologies by doing the right thing at the right time, though it cost us in the short term a light, momentary affliction.

Carl R. Trueman

Carl R. Trueman taught on the faculties of the Universities of Nottingham and Aberdeen before moving to the United States in 2001 to teach at Westminster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. In 2017-18 he was the William E. Simon Visiting Fellow in Religion and Public Life in the James Madison Program at Princeton University. Since 2018, he has served as a professor at Grove City College. He is also a fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and a contributing editor at *First Things*. Trueman's latest book is the bestselling *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*. He is married with two adult children and is ordained in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.



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