

# The True State of American Evangelicals

*Steve Cable analyzed the data concerning 18- to 40-year-old born-agains and presents a concise summary of the results.*

## Good News for Evangelicals?

How is the evangelical church doing in America as we begin to make our way through the second decade of this century? Are we growing in numbers and in the clarity of our message, or are we holding our own against a tide of secularism, or are we on the verge of a major collapse partially obscured by continuing attendance? The people who should have the best handle on this question are the sociologists and pollsters who map and track many different aspects of our society. What are they saying about the evangelical church?

First, consider Bradley Wright, professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut. In his 2010 book, *Christians Are Hate-filled Hypocrites . . . and Other Lies You've Been Told*, he finds "there seems to be no compelling evidence-based on the data we have about our young people—that the church in America is on the verge of collapse."[{1}](#)



Looking at the data from the Pew U. S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008, and the General Social Survey, he concludes, "On the negative side, the number of young people who do not affiliate with any religion has increased in recent decades just as it has for the whole population. . . . On the positive side, the percentage of young people who attend church or who think that religion is important has remained mostly stable. . . . What I don't see in the data are evidence of a cataclysmic loss of young people."[{2}](#)

Wright notes that the percentage of Evangelicals has remained fairly constant in recent years, while mainline Protestantism has declined. He suggests that one reason mainline Protestantism has decreased as a percentage of the population is that most mainline churches have not emphasized church planting. Therefore, “the number of Americans has grown every year but the number of seats in mainline churches has not.”<sup>{3}</sup>

Another sociologist looking at this question is Byron Johnson, professor of Social Sciences at Baylor University. Considering data from a survey commissioned by Baylor in 2005,<sup>{4}</sup> he concludes, “Leading religious observers claim that evangelicalism is shrinking and the next generation of evangelicals is becoming less religious and more secular, but these are empirical questions, and the evidence shows that neither of these claims is true. . . . Those who argue that a new American landscape is emerging—one in which the conservative evangelicalism of the past few decades is losing numbers and influence—are simply ignoring the data.”<sup>{5}</sup>

As Johnson points out, “For starters, evangelicals have not lost members . . . Fully one-third of Americans (approximately 100 million) affiliate with an evangelical Protestant congregation.”<sup>{6}</sup>

Another eminent sociologist, Christian Smith of the University of Notre Dame, has done an extensive study of young Americans over the five years from 2003 to 2008, which he summarizes in his book *Souls in Transition, The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*.<sup>{7}</sup> He begins by identifying the distinctly different culture of today’s twenty-somethings in contrast with those of prior generations. The major source of distinction is the view that they don’t really need to start living as married adults until they reach their thirties. The twenties are for exploring different jobs, lifestyles, and relationships before getting married and settling down. But when it comes to religion, he states, “The preponderance of evidence here shows emerging adults ages 18 to 25 actually

remaining the same or growing more religious between 1972 and 2006—with the notable exceptions of significantly declining regular church attendance among Catholics and mainline Protestants, a near doubling in the percent of nonreligious emerging adults, and significant growth in the percent of emerging adults identifying as religiously liberal.”<sup>{8}</sup>

However, looking at the more detailed data from his surveys, he concludes, “Most emerging adults are okay with talking about religion as a topic, although they are largely indifferent to it—religion is just not that important to most of them. . . . Most of them think that most religions share the same core principles, which they generally believe are good.”<sup>{9}</sup> He goes on to say, “Furthermore, among emerging adults, religious beliefs do not seem to be important, action-driving commitments, but rather mental assents to ideas that have few obvious consequences.”<sup>{10}</sup> He also concludes that among these young adults the tenets of liberal Protestantism have won the day, influencing many evangelicals, Catholics and Jews as well as mainline Protestants. One surprising outcome of this trend is the demise of mainline Protestant churches since their teaching is “redundant to the taken-for-granted mainstream” that they helped create.<sup>{11}</sup>

Standing in contrast to these eminent sociologists are the findings of George Barna and the Barna Group. Their surveys between 1995 and 2009<sup>{12}</sup> indicate that among all Americans who self-identify as being born again, less than 20% of them agree with six basic historic Christian beliefs<sup>{13}</sup> which Barna associates with a biblical worldview. Among those between 18 and 25, this number drops even further. Young people may be affiliating with evangelical churches at similar rates over the last fifty years, but that affiliation does not mean that they have beliefs similar to prior generations.

So what is right? Is it true that there is no compelling evidence that the church in America is on the verge of

collapse? Or, do we have more religious young people who are heavily influenced by the beliefs of mainline Protestantism? Or, is the dearth of a biblical worldview an early warning sign of a significant collapse? As you can imagine, this is a question that we at Probe just had to get to the bottom of. So, we dove in to analyze the data behind the statements above, using their own data to validate or question their conclusions. We also commissioned our own survey of 18- to 40-year-old, born-again Americans to probe deeper into this question. Unfortunately, what we found convinced us that things are not only worse than what Wright, Johnson, and Smith concluded, but they appear to be worse in some ways than our prior assumptions from the existing Barna surveys.

## Where Do We Really Stand?

When we look at the underlying survey data used by Wright, Johnson, Smith, and Barna, we discover an unsurprising result: on similar questions they get similar results. For example, consider the question “Do you believe God is all powerful and involved in the world today?” This question is asked in one form or another by all four surveys used by the authors above.[{14}](#) Looking at twenty-somethings, we find the following affirmative responses:

Question	Author	Source Survey	Result
All powerful God involved in the world today	Wright	GSS	79%
	Johnson	Baylor 2005	83%
	Smith	NSYR 2008 <a href="#">{15}</a>	83%
	Barna	Barna 2009	83%

As you can see, all sources have essentially the same results (which is nice since it tends to corroborate their polling techniques). So, how did they come to such different conclusions about the meaning of similar sets of data? Looking

at these high percentages, how could Smith say there is something different about this emerging generation, or how could Barna say that “Jesus would be disappointed by the answers He received from today’s Americans?”

The answer comes from two sources. First, you need to ask more questions about their beliefs and practices than just “Do you believe in a God and in Jesus as His Son?” A person can mean a lot of different things when answering yes to those questions. Second (and it turns out to be extremely important), you must look at the combined answers to a set of related questions. In his book, Smith took the first step of asking a lot of probing questions, both in the survey and in face-to-face interviews. By doing this, it became clear that their answers to a few questions about God and Jesus did not mean that they were biblically literate Christians. Barna took the second step of looking at the answers to a combined set of questions and discovered that the beliefs of Americans were disjointed and inconsistent, particularly among the younger generations. So, even though 83% of 18- to 26-year-olds who professed to be born-again believed that God is all powerful and involved in the world today, only a small subset of them believed all six biblical worldview questions.[{16}](#)

What happens if we look at the results of the surveys used by Wright, Johnson, and Smith? Fortunately, we were able to access the raw questionnaire results using the Association of Religious Data Archives online database. Of course, these surveys did not ask exactly the same questions, but we were able to find a set of roughly equivalent questions within each survey. And this is what we found about those with a biblical worldview, compared to those who actually apply their biblical worldview to the way they live:

Belief	Baylor	NSYR	Barna	Probe
				<a href="#">{17}</a>

Biblical Worldview	27%	22%	19%	37%
Biblical Worldview plus Cultural Application	8%	3%	NA	10%

So each of the surveys used by the four different sociologists basically showed the same result: less than one third of born-agains (or evangelicals) had a set of beliefs consistent with the biblical worldview taught by Jesus, and less than 10% had a biblical worldview *and* a set of cultural beliefs (e.g. beliefs about sex outside of marriage, abortion, materialism, caring for the poor, etc.) taught by Jesus in the New Testament. So, it appears that if they had done more in-depth analysis of their own data, Wright, Johnson and Smith should have been espousing the same message as the Barna survey.

This surprising result (at least to Wright and Johnson) that their data actually is consistent with Barna's data allows us to quit worrying about the differences and concentrate on the common message of these surveys. Among several, I think that three major messages from the survey results are important for us to consider here.

1. First, as the culture has adopted more unbiblical views regarding pluralism, sexuality, honesty, etc., the majority of evangelical church members have adapted to accept the new cultural positions rather than stand firm in the truth taught by Christ and his apostles. In other words, they have been taken "captive by the empty deception and philosophy according to the traditions of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Col. 2:8).

2. Second, our 18- to 29-year-olds are leaving a classical evangelical faith in large numbers. A third of them directly leave any involvement with evangelical church, with half of that number going into liberal mainline denominations and the other half leaving behind all church affiliation. Of those who remain associated with an evangelical church, one third of

them attend church but do not hold to a biblical worldview and another third do not go to church or hold to a biblical worldview. So, just less than 8% of American teenagers move into emerging adulthood with a strong, evangelical worldview.

3. The percentage of Americans belonging to evangelical churches has remained fairly consistent, but that does not mean that the beliefs of the members have remained constant. The sacred / secular split, described by Nancy Pearcey in her book *Total Truth*, [{18}](#) allows them to ascribe to at least a limited set of evangelical beliefs in their sacred side while keeping the “real truths” of the secular side isolated and unaffected by any evangelical beliefs.

## How Did We Get to This State?

If you find your child trapped inside the dryer at home, you not only want to get them freed from captivity, you also want to understand how they got into that mess so you can prevent it in the future. In the same way, Probe has undertaken an in-depth survey to help us understand how seemingly born-again believers in Christ are so often taken captive by the thoughts of men rather than Christ. Our survey found they fall into three equally sized categories:

- Those *with* a biblical worldview who *attend* church regularly (Free Ones)
- Those *without* a biblical worldview who *attend* church regularly (Partial Captives)
- Those *without* a biblical worldview who *do not attend* church regularly (Full Captives)

The first take-away from this study is disturbing but not very surprising. Most American born-agains between the ages of 18 and 40 received their spiritual beliefs (and most of their other beliefs) from their parents or grandparents. In other

words, their hodgepodge of inconsistent beliefs covering everything from God to gossip, they essentially obtained from the previous generation. What the other surveys show is that people in their 40s and 50s have viewpoints that are more conformed to the culture than to Christ just as their children do. It is not quite as dramatic but it is very pronounced. If we parents are holding beliefs that are captive to the traditions of men and the elementary principles of this world, then it is not surprising to see that thinking expanded in our children.

It is very interesting to note that 42% of church-going young adults with a biblical worldview (called the Free Ones hereafter) stated that their spiritual beliefs were driven by sources other than immediate family members, versus only 30% for other born-agains (an increase of 40%). Interestingly, this difference also coincides with the higher percentage of college graduates among the Free Ones relative to other young born-agains. In fact, college graduates influenced by sources outside their family are more than twice as likely to be church attendees with a biblical worldview than are those who did not graduate from college. So, it appears that this committed group of church-going young adults with a biblical worldview had to deal with challenges to their faith in college which led them to delve into the questions and develop a solid biblical worldview, drawing from sources outside their families.

However, it is worthwhile to note that when asked an additional six worldview questions only half of the Free Ones expressed a biblical point of view on those questions.

The second take away is in the different ways of viewing non-biblical thinking among young adults. We surveyed their attitudes and actions on a number of unbiblical areas of behavior including sexual activity, negative feelings such as anger and unforgiveness, use of the tongue, self-focus and greed, negative attitudes and sinful actions. For these

unbiblical behaviors, if they engaged in that behavior we asked them what they thought about it. They could select from “I do not believe it is wrong,” “Believe it is wrong, do it anyway and feel guilty or embarrassed,” or “Believe it is wrong, do it anyway, without feeling guilty or embarrassed.” Not surprisingly, the Free Ones tended to have the same level of participation in each area as other born-agains, but a significantly lower percentage of those said the behavior wasn’t wrong or did it without feeling guilty or embarrassed. On the other hand, among the one-third with irregular church attendance and no biblical worldview (the Fully Captive), about one-third had no guilt with their sexual indiscretions and over one-half had no guilt associated with issues of internal attitudes, sins of the tongue, and other negative actions.

A third take-away from our survey was a difference in attitude as a function of age. Those between 30 and 40 were almost 30% more likely to subscribe to a biblical worldview than those between 18 and 24. Similarly, Christian Smith’s data shows that over one-third of all 18- to 24-year-olds are no longer affiliated with any Christian religion today as compared to about one in five thirty-somethings.[{19}](#) If this is a precursor to permanent erosion in the number of people with a biblical worldview, we need to address it now.

In summary, the majority of young born-agains

1. Caught their unbiblical beliefs from their parents
2. Make important decisions without considering biblical truth
3. Don’t consider sinful behavior much of a problem

It should be noted that not all of the 817 born-agains questioned in our survey are affiliated with evangelical churches. From the Baylor survey, we find that in the general population from age 18 to 44, 35% are evangelical or

Pentecostal, 20% are mainline Protestants, 20% are Catholic, and the remaining 25% are not Christians. Among those who self-identified as born-again, 57% are evangelical or Pentecostal, 30% are affiliated with mainline Protestant denominations, and only 5% are Catholics. However, when we look at those born-agains with a biblical worldview, we find almost 71% are evangelicals and Pentecostals, about 27% are mainline Protestants and only 1% are Catholics. This result shows the wide disparity of beliefs across denominations even among those who meet the criteria of being born-again.

We asked these born-agains in making decisions associated with family, business, and religious matters, "What is the primary basis or source of those principles and standards that you take into consideration?" We found there was a huge difference between Free Ones and the remainder. In fact, 75% of the Free Ones looked to a biblical source in making those decisions while only 33% of the Partially Captive and 10% of the Fully Captives considered a biblical source.

## **From Captives to Conquerors**

As we dove into the data on how the American church is faring today, we started with something that first looked like a pure, white sand Caribbean beach but turned out upon further evaluation to be a trash-filled swamp of putrid, stale water. And, we have to ask the question, Can the church continue on this trajectory of scattered beliefs and split personalities for long? I think the answer has to be no. Either the evangelical church will follow the path of other Protestant denominations into shrinking, irrelevant entities, or something will bring it back to the truth found in Christ Jesus.

An encouraging note in this discouraging journey of discovery is that our status is not new. The apostle Paul expressed concern about a similar loss of the truth impacting the

genuine believers of Colossae. He warned them, “I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument” (Col 2:4) with the intent of taking them captive “through philosophy and empty deception . . . rather than according to Christ” (Col 2:8).

We find in the New Testament that it is clearly a strategy of Satan to offer watered-down and distorted views of what it means to live in Christ as a way to prevent Christians from bringing more people into eternal life through faith in Jesus. Clearly, from the data we have looked at for American evangelicals, this strategy is having a powerful effect in America today.

In this second chapter of Colossians, Paul goes on to highlight four different types of arguments that could lead us astray: Naturalism, Legalism, Mysticism and Asceticism. All four of these false views are alive and well in our world today. Naturalism (e.g. neo-Darwinism) and Mysticism (e.g. the forms presented by Eckhart Tolle and Oprah Winfrey [{20}](#)) are the most prevalent in our society, but Legalism (i.e. religious rituals and performance over grace) still has a strong influence, and Asceticism (i.e. denying the body through severe treatment) is very strong in other parts of the world.

But, just as it was true for the Colossians, it is true for us: we don't have to fall for these traps that are out to delude our minds. Christ gives us the freedom and Paul gives us clear directions on how to escape from delusional thinking. Paul's advice can be summarized in five key areas:

- Ask God to fill us with the knowledge of His will (of the truth) with all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col. 1:9-10; 2:2-3).
- Recognize that Christ is the maker and the sustainer of all, and therefore every truth in this world is Christ's

truth (Col. 1:15-20).

- Accept that in Christ I have been made complete, and the acceptance of men and accolades of this world cannot add to that completeness (Col. 2:9-10).
- In the same way I received Christ Jesus for eternal life, I am to walk in His truth in this life. Jesus is not just my insurance for when I die; He is my life and I need to be “firmly rooted and grounded in Him” (Col. 2:6-7).
- Realize that I am now living in eternity with Christ and am assigned for a brief time to this temporal world (Col. 3:1-3).

Don't fall for Satan's trap that some man-made concept has a better grip on truth than Jesus our creator and sustainer. We have seen that coming generations are looking to you to define their beliefs. Are you going to show them an active belief in Christ as your Truth? If you do, it can make a difference!

## Notes

1. Bradley Wright, Ph.D., *Christians Are Hate Filled Hypocrites . . . and Other Lies You've Been Told* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Bethany House, 2010), 75.
2. Ibid., 66.
3. Ibid., 41.
4. Baylor University. 2005. The Baylor Religion Survey. Waco, TX: Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion.
5. Byron Johnson, Ph.D., “The Good News About Evangelicalism,” *First Things* online edition, February 2011, [www.firstthings.com/article/2011/01/the-good-news-about-evangelicalism](http://www.firstthings.com/article/2011/01/the-good-news-about-evangelicalism).
6. Ibid.

7. Christian Smith with Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition, The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). You can find two extensive articles on the Christian Smith book and data by Steve Cable at the Probe web site: "Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America," [bit.ly/g5VH4h](http://bit.ly/g5VH4h) and "Emerging Adults Part 2: Distinctly Different Faiths," [bit.ly/m0Yubb](http://bit.ly/m0Yubb).

8. Ibid., 101.

9. Ibid., 286.

10. Ibid., 286.

11. Ibid., 288.

12. Barna Group, Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years, 2009. [bit.ly/akBPci](http://bit.ly/akBPci)

13. For the purposes of the survey, a "biblical worldview" was defined as believing that absolute moral truth exists; the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches; Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic; a person cannot earn their way into Heaven by trying to be good or do good works; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today. In the research, anyone who held all of those beliefs was said to have a biblical worldview.

14. GSS (Bradley Wright): Believe in God

Christian Smith: God is a personal being involved in the lives of people today

Baylor study: I have no doubt that God exists and He is concerned with the well being of the world

Barna Group: God is the all-knowing, all-powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today

15. [www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/NSYRW3.asp](http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/NSYRW3.asp).

"The National Study of Youth and Religion," [www.youthandreligion.org](http://www.youthandreligion.org), whose data were used by permission here, was generously funded by Lilly Endowment Inc., under the direction of Christian Smith of the Department of Sociology at the University of Notre Dame.

16. A "biblical worldview" was defined as believing that absolute moral truth exists; the Bible is totally accurate in all of the principles it teaches; Satan is considered to be a real being or force, not merely symbolic; a person cannot earn their way into Heaven by trying to be good or do good works; Jesus Christ lived a sinless life on earth; and God is the all-knowing, all powerful creator of the world who still rules the universe today. In the research, anyone who held all of those beliefs was said to have a biblical worldview.

17. We included the results from the Probe study done for us by the Barna Group and discussed later in this report for comparison purposes.

18. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004).

19. From GSS survey data.

20. Steve Cable, "Oprah's Spirituality: Exploring A New Earth," [probe.org/oprahs-spirituality](http://probe.org/oprahs-spirituality)

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## Honey I'm Tempted: A Review

# of Andy Grammer's "Honey, I'm Good."

You might have heard rising musical artist Andy Grammer's new song called ["Honey, I'm Good."](#)<sup>{1}</sup> The song's catchy and upbeat music and positive message might have caused you to dance a little in the car. Among many popular songs today, I think Christians do have a reason to be encouraged about this song and its message. Grammer explicitly portrays the theme of faithfulness in relationship through the closing line, "I will stay true." This song does offer hope of self-control and faithfulness in a culture that seems to value those virtues less and less. However, the Scripture offers much more insight about faithfulness and fleeing temptation.

## **Fidelity and Self-Control**

The lyrics reflect the truth that God meant romantic relationships to be exclusive. The song's writer, Nolan Sipe, captures the parameters of love: "My baby's already got all of my love." Although the woman may not be his wife, the connection seems natural to God's mandate for marriage as exclusively between one husband and one wife. In that way He made it beautiful and pure.

Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and even John in Revelation all invoke marriage as a picture of Christ as the husband and the Church as His bride. So the special love and acts accompanying marriage should not be shared outside the relationship, just as our love and worship of Christ should not be offered to any idols. Sexual immorality and affairs are so offensive because they rob the spouse of love saved for them alone, thus destroying what God intended for marriage and victimizing the spouse. So when a song calls for fidelity in romantic relationships, that is something Christ-followers can get behind.

“Honey, I’m Good.” engages with idea of temptation by describing a situation in which a man is fleeing the very real and near pull to be unfaithful. Without much detail, the song narrates the fight to turn down the apparent advances of a physically attractive woman. Sipe accurately conveys the tragedy of falling into lustful temptation by writing the lyrics, “Now better men than me have failed, drinking from that unholy grail.”

Although the song does demonstrate the power and danger of sexual lust, the Bible offers more wisdom on just how dangerous lust really is to faithfulness. As Christians we should continually look to Scripture for further insight and grounding because, although the writer gets it right, there’s no basis for this ethic other than loyalty felt in the moment—something that could quickly and easily change. God understands our temptation and warns against entertaining lustful desires in Matthew 5:28 by equating such fixation on forbidden fulfillment with the act of adultery.

Lust is not only dangerous because it is so offensive to God but also because it is powerful. Peter claims that lust wages war against our souls in 1 Peter 2. Additionally, lustful desires can and often are accompanied by lies that tell us our sexual immorality will make our lives better and will be consequence-free. Through prayer and meditation in Scripture we are equipped to fight lustful desires and lies. By the power of God’s Spirit within us, we can win over what the Bible refers to as our flesh. Before Paul calls the Colossians to “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality...,” he entreats the believers he cares so deeply about to “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth” because “you have been raised with Christ.”[{2}](#)

### **The Lie of Temptation**

Andy Grammer sings in the chorus “I’m good, I could have

another but I probably should not. I got somebody at home, and if I stay I might not leave alone.” Recognizing the temptation is laudable, but there is danger in thinking along the lines of “I could probably have another.” As Christ-followers, I think we often put too much faith in our ability to resist temptation and are not wise about actively fleeing temptation like God repeatedly calls us to do in Scripture. It may be true that we “could probably have another” whatever or whoever “another” may be, but we ought to default to fleeing.

Furthermore, we often tell ourselves when we are struggling with a sin or temptation that we can conquer this sin or flee this temptation alone. But sometimes it is not as easy as refusing another drink at the bar. Often temptation sneaks up on us when our guard is down. This is why God gave us our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We need the accountability of God’s Word and our Christian community—because most of the time we cannot fight the battle alone, something the song does not touch on.

### **Don’t Just Reject, Abstain!**

Despite Sipe’s lyrics at the beginning of the chorus, the end of the chorus concludes with fleeing temptation when he writes, “No, honey, I’m good, I could have another but I probably should not, I gotta bid you adieu.” As a Christian, I am glad to see this insight reflecting the Bible’s command.

However, as we think about this song as Christians we should hold ourselves to the higher standard Christ has given us. We should not only flee temptation like the song suggests, but we should actively avoid situations where temptations arise. When I first heard this song on the radio I was surprised at the message but I could not help but wonder why that man was in this position to begin with. My first thought was, “Don’t go to the bar or club if there are women there who want to seduce you!”

Whenever it is possible to avoid temptation, we are required to do so. Matthew beautifully encourages us how to deal with temptation when he quotes Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."<sup>{3}</sup> With that being said, sometimes it is not possible to avoid situations where compromise could arise. For example, if you are a man it may not be practical or even loving to avoid all women all the time as a measure against adultery. However, you should equip yourself mentally and spiritually and have backup from a fellow believer (a "spiritual wingman") for unavoidable tempting environments.

Overall, I think we can dance and be thankful for the Christian morals that can be gleaned from Andy Grammer's song "Honey, I'm Good." I also hope that if we hear that song on the radio we will be reminded of the insight and commands that God gives us to flee temptation.

Mostly importantly, we need to remember that when it comes to temptation, we ultimately have the strength to fight it by the power of the Holy Spirit working through us and through Christian encouragement and accountability. And if we fall into temptation we also need to meditate on the promises of the gospel. Through Christ's death and resurrection, God gives us full forgiveness even though consequences may still remain.

## Notes

1. Warning: The music video shows homosexual couples and has mild language. I do not address either in this article but am instead focusing on the overall message of the song.
2. Colossians 3:1-5, All Bible Verses are in the English Standard Version
3. Matthew 26:41

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# Don't Take Me to Church Without the Gospel: A Review of Hozier's "Take Me to Church"

What started as a music [video](#) on YouTube as a statement against the abuse of the homosexual community peaked as the second most popular song according to Billboard Top 100 in early 2015. With its powerful music and damning words towards the Church, I was compelled to research and find the meaning and implications of Hozier's song "Take Me to Church." In the song, Hozier captures the sacrifice of religion without the truth and hope of the gospel.

The chorus, especially, paints a rather bleak picture of the seemingly pointless sacrifice of religion. In it Hozier writes,

"I'll worship like a dog at the shrine of your lies  
I'll tell you my sins and you can sharpen your knife  
Offer me that deathless death  
Good god, let me give you my life."

Through the song, Hozier rightly grasps the element of sacrifice required of faith. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include parallel passages that call Christians to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus.

## Christians' Meaningful Sacrifice

Sam Allberry, author of [Is God Anti-Gay?](#) and associate pastor at St Mary's Church in Maidenhead, UK, spoke at Covenant College recently about Christianity and homosexuality as

someone who struggles with same-sex attraction himself. He expounded upon this idea of the sacrifice of Christians when he told the story of someone with a same-sex partner who asked him, "What could possibly be worth leaving my partner for?"

This question of sacrifice is essential for everyone faced with the gospel to ask. There is a cost; you will have to deny yourself, whether it's the issue of same-sex sexual practices, alcohol abuse, pride, or even just laziness.

If the message of the Bible stopped there, we would be left with the hopeless and purposeless sacrifice that the song portrays. However, the Bible does not start or end with our sacrifice. Romans 5 points Christians to Christ's ultimate sacrifice for us by proclaiming that ". . . God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Those who trust in Christ will never have to pay the price of our own sins because Christ did it once and for all on the cross while we were still in sin. We can entrust Him with our lives because He first gave His perfect life for us. Even though we are steeped in sin as Hozier points out through the lyrics "We were sick but I love it," Christ does not leave us in our sickness. In fact, He heals us, showing us hope in something much greater than our sins.

Allberry concluded that the answer to the question presented to him had to be: the gospel—only the gospel is worth leaving everything for. The gospel is truly *the* good news for everyone, because through His sacrifice the lyric rings true, "only then I am clean."

So our sacrifice is meaningful in Christ not because our sacrificing saves us but because it is a response of the saving grace Christians have already received. Christians can give up our old way of life because Christ has given us new life. In Ephesians 4, we are called to this painful process of "putting off our old self which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be

renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

## How Should We Respond?

It is legitimate to wonder what we as Christians should do with songs and a culture that seem to attack or misrepresent the Church. I do not think we should respond to such songs by posting combative comments online or by changing the radio station every time the song plays. Rather, we should appreciate the song for its musicality and learn from its lyrics. I see two main takeaways:

First, I think we should reflect on what songs say about our culture's view of the Church and how we as the Church can respond to this marred image. In an [interview](#) by Gigwise, Hozier says that "It hasn't been a good year for the Church-it hasn't been a good hundred years for the Church." In some ways, I agree with Hozier that, especially on the topic of homosexuality, we have not loved those outside and inside the Church well. I mourn for those abused by the Church for their sexual sin as the song and music video illustrate. Sometimes the Church has fallen short of showing truth in love as commanded by Scripture. Instead the Church often fails to speak truth by accepting the sin of homosexuality or lovelessly alienating, and trying to legalistically "fix" the sin.

Second, the core of our religion as Christians must remain the gospel; without it the lyric would ring true: "Every Sunday's getting more bleak, a fresh poison each week." In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that as Christians, "We are of all people the most to be pitied" if the gospel—the message of Christ's death and resurrection that reconciles us to God—is not true. I would challenge you, as I have been challenged, to continually ask yourself, "How does the gospel apply?" Wherever the gospel is missing so is truth, hope, and joy.

While I struggle with messages of hopelessness, I marvel in the promise that the gospel is true and there is hope for us who rest in the salvation of Christ both in this life and the next. I look forward to Heaven with my Lord and Savior, and yes, it is something worth leaving everything for.

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## Can the Just Succeed?

*Can the just succeed? Can people living by Biblical principles successfully compete in a capitalist economy without compromising? Should we even try? Steve Cable provides a biblical perspective.*

### Corrupting Cultural Climate

At the turn of the twenty-first century, America was hit with a tsunami of corporate corruption. Names like Enron, Tyco and WorldComm became synonymous with greed and failed corporate leadership. Today, even after Congress and the SEC have strengthened their oversight, high profile cases, such as backdated stock options at Apple, continue to plague us. We can't even take comfort in some past golden era of corporate ethics as we look back at a history filled with robber barons, ruthless company towns, and shady land deals.

In the light of this discouraging reality, we are asking the question, Can the just succeed? Can people living by Biblical principles successfully compete in a capitalist economy without compromising? Should we even try?

Let's begin our exploration of this question by considering



the overall cultural climate surrounding our free market economic system. A number of recent studies indicate less than honest behavior, and downright dirty dealing are common throughout our culture.

Let's begin at the top. What type of standard is being set by our business leaders? One recent poll showed that less than twenty percent of Americans had confidence that CEOs would consistently make job-related decisions that were morally appropriate.<sup>{1}</sup> Is this skepticism well-founded? After all, most CEOs have worked their way to the top as a result of excellent performance in lower positions. Almost fifty percent of corporate executives in a recent Tulane University study were willing to commit fraud in role playing exercises.<sup>{2}</sup> What was particularly disturbing was that these same executives had affirmed their unwavering commitment to the highest ethical business standards.

Perhaps, we can rely on our workforce to apply their solid middle class values to curb the effects of corrupt leadership. Sadly, a recent study found that forty-eight percent of workers admitted to acting illegally or unethically in the workplace during the previous year.<sup>{3}</sup> Over thirty percent of them said that their coworkers condone questionable ethics by showing respect for those who achieve success using them.<sup>{4}</sup> In other words, cheating is not only condoned, it is respected.

We all hope that the upcoming generation will improve upon the sins of the prior generations. Are they bringing a standard of personal values that will clean up the marketplace of the future? Or, are they following in their elders' footsteps? From 1969 to 1989, the number of students who let someone copy their work rose from fifty-eight to ninety-seven percent.<sup>{5}</sup> A recent survey published in *Education Week* found that three out of four students admitted to engaging in "serious cheating" within the previous year.<sup>{6}</sup>

People emulate the behavior they believe will make them successful. Perhaps, today's Christians should join Habakkuk as he questioned God: "Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?" (Hab. 1:13)[{7}](#)

It appears that we will be dealing with a culture of dishonesty in the marketplace for the foreseeable future.

## The Slippery Slope

Surprisingly, most Americans identify themselves as trustworthy. So, why are all of these good trustworthy people demonstrating by their behavior that they are not worthy of our trust?

Well, Paul gives us a lot of insight in his first letter to Timothy when he writes, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil" (1 Tim. 6:9,10).

When we want to accumulate money for our own enjoyment beyond what we need to live, we are tempting ourselves to unethical behavior.

In his book *There is No Such Thing as Business Ethics*, John Maxwell identifies three primary reasons "good" people are led astray in business dealings.[{8}](#)

First, we do what is convenient. Many times doing the right thing is a lot more trouble than doing the convenient thing. Have you ever discovered that you were given too much change, but you didn't want to go to the trouble of returning to the store? Sometimes a convenient lie can help us avoid the consequences of a mistake.

Second, we do what we must to win. After all, everyone is

doing it. I have to compromise my standards in order to compete. During my years in a very competitive industry, one of my co-workers often stated, "If you can't lie on a proposal, when can you lie?" In other words, promise whatever you need to get the job, and try to wiggle out of it later.

Third, we rationalize our unethical choices with relativism. We tell ourselves that our ultimate intentions are good. And, besides, if it is good for me, then it must be good. It is scary to think how easy this will be in a postmodern society where all truth is relative truth.

All three of these relate to putting our success ahead of our values. John Maxwell put it well when he said, "Ethics is about how we meet the challenge of doing the right thing when that will cost more than we want to pay."[{9}](#)

I would like to add a fourth reason I call the Sudden Slippery Slope. We are taught that as long as we can justify our actions by the rule book then they are OK. In order to get ahead, we start to push the envelope of how we interpret the rules. One day we wake up to find that we have clearly gone beyond the boundary. We discover that we are on a slippery slope where the more we try to cover up or undo our actions the more we find ourselves breaking the rules. Enron is an excellent example of this effect.[{10}](#) No one at Enron started out with the objective to wipe out \$50 billion in shareholder value overnight through unethical business practices, but a culture of pushing the ethical boundaries will inevitably result in a culture of corruption. Proverbs warns us that when we get in this mode, we have a hard time telling right from wrong: "But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble" (Prov. 4:18-19).

# A Christian Perspective on Capitalism

Let's consider a biblical perspective on capitalism.

People are rarely neutral when it comes to capitalism. Some people blame capitalism for the excesses of unethical behavior described earlier in this discussion. But capitalism as the primary cause of corruption is exonerated by comparisons with many communist and socialist economic systems. Historically, these systems have raised corruption and graft to the highest levels.

On the other hand, some commentators seem to equate capitalism with Christianity, implying that one of the tenets of Christianity is a capitalistic free market system. This premise does not hold up to scrutiny either as Christianity has flourished under a variety of economic systems.

Before we go any further, a simple definition of capitalism is needed. Capitalism is an economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately or corporately owned, and development is proportionate to the accumulation and reinvestment of profits gained in a free market.[\[11\]](#) In other words, private individuals own the resources and make decisions on how to use those resources based on an expectation of return. The genius of capitalism is that individuals or corporations who can provide valuable services better or more efficiently are rewarded with more resources. So, resources tend to be allocated to those who are most capable of using them to produce desired goods and services.

However, one can approach capitalism from either a secular or a faith perspective. In secular capitalism:

- the purpose for business is to return a profit,
- the standard of conduct is the rule of law, and
- the measure of success is accumulation of wealth.

Under a Christian view of capitalism:

- the purpose for business is to honor God,
- the standard of conduct is the Golden Rule, and
- the measure of success is the ability to bless others with the resources God has entrusted to us.

A secular capitalist is accountable only to himself and his shareholders. A Christian business person is accountable to God with a responsibility to all of the stakeholders in the business, including customers and employees.

Capitalism is not essentially Christian, but, as Max Weber pointed out in his classic book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, [\[12\]](#) Christianity is good for capitalism in many ways including:

- An excellent work ethic motivated by Paul's admonition in Colossians to "work with sincerity of heart as unto the Lord." Our work results reflect on our Savior, so we are motivated to excellence.
- A willingness to put integrity above profits and to forego investing in businesses which degrade or take advantage of others. As Proverbs 28 says, "Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked though he be rich. . . . He who increases his wealth by interest and usury gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor" (vv. 6,8). Integrity reduces the "greed tax" which is all of the effort wasted on monitoring others to prevent theft.
- A long term perspective that is willing to forgo near term gratification for long term benefits such as investing in hospitals and schools.

Counter to the view of Michael Douglass' character in the movie *Wall Street*, greed is not good. Greed is not what makes capitalism successful. Trusting resources to those who are productive and want to do something of significance is the key to long term economic success!

# Called to the Marketplace

What is the role of Christians in the marketplace?

Over the centuries, Christians have had varying responses to the secular marketplace. Some, like the Amish, attempt to isolate themselves from the corrupting influence of the secular world. Others, like the Puritans, believed that excelling in the marketplace was a critical part of the Christian life as evidence of one's election. In recent years the trend has been for Christians to segregate their spiritual church life from their secular work life. This attitude allows many to believe they can conform to the compromised values of our culture without impacting the spiritual aspects of their life. However, since God's truth is the truth in all aspects of our lives, this attitude could not be truth.

What does the New Testament have to say on this subject? Out of twenty-two letters to churches, not one advised Christians to quit working in or participating in the Roman economic system. None of these letters encouraged all Christians to leave their secular vocation and immediately leave for the mission field. The overall picture is that some people are given as gifts to the church, devoting their energies to equipping the church for ministry. But the majority of us are called to be ministers in our vocation (whether that vocation is as a business leader, a laborer or a stay-at-home mother). As Christians, we are called to be a redeeming influence in the place where non-Christians can be found, the marketplace.

As we enter the business world, we should be clear as to our purpose. I don't think that it is to prove our salvation by getting the most promotions. Four clear biblical purposes for Christians in the work place are:

1. To honor Christ through my attitude, performance and integrity (Col 3:22-25). In my career, whenever I was asked to state my career objectives, I would focus on Colossians 3

for my answer. I would tell them that since I was called to "work heartily as unto the Lord" and to serve with "sincerity of heart", my career objective is to fulfill the role that creates the most value for my employer. That statement was not only true, but was also warmly received by my supervisor.

2. To share Christ in my unique mission field. We interact with more non-Christians in the business world than just about any other venue (Col. 4:5-6).
3. To provide for the physical needs of your family (1 Tim. 5:8).
4. To be able to share with others who need help (2 Cor. 8:12-14).

Jesus summed it up for us when He said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

## **Compelling Results**

Let's conclude by considering the characteristics of a just business and looking at some measures of success.

Whether for the individual or for a corporation, Christian behavior is going to be characterized by the Golden Rule taught by our Lord: "Treat others the way that you want them to treat you" (Luke 6:31). This means that we are not going to deceive, covet, or steal in our business dealings. We are going to treat others with respect and with grace. We are going to choose integrity over convenience or profit.

Since we all like to win, does the Golden Rule mean that I should always let my competitors win? Should I just turn over the market to them? I don't know about you, but I absolutely hate it when someone lets me win. Everyone loses if we allow

inferior or more costly products to claim the market because no one wants to compete with the status quo (think about the fall of the Soviet Union when you consider this topic). Competition promotes better products and greater productivity which creates more resources and opportunities even for your competitors. The problem arises not from having a competitive system, but from greed causing some to hoard wealth. So, a Christian business will compete aggressively but fairly. They will also realize not to compete by destroying the lives of employees through long hours, poor working conditions, or unfair wages.

Won't a company or individual applying these principles put themselves at a disadvantage? After all, when swimming with sharks, a guppy will always get eaten. In his book *Profit at Any Cost*, [{13}](#) Jerry Fleming analyzed the results of corporations who appeared to place a premium on a high standard of ethical behavior. He discovered that these businesses typically induce others to behave ethically toward them. There is also a strong correlation between a firm's commitment to ethics and a lower employee turnover. Typically, a lower turnover rate results in greater productivity from experienced, content employees. At the bottom line, he found a significant positive correlation between a firm's ethical behavior and its economic performance. Companies promoting unethical practices pay a price in the long run (think Enron). An investment in ethically responsible firms has resulted in a return eight times better than the return on the Dow Jones Industrial Average over a period of thirty years.

What conclusions can we draw from our study of Christian principles in the workplace? Applying Christian principles to business is not:

- a magic shield against failure, or
- a way to always avoid criticism, or
- an assurance that your product will be the best on the market.

But, it is:

- a part of our calling to follow Christ,
- the best way to conduct business, and
- a consistent companion of long term success.

No matter the financial results, we are a success when we follow Christ's example in the work place.

## Notes

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7. All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Updated Edition.
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10. For an in depth look at what happened at Enron see Kurt Eichenwald, *Conspiracy of Fools* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005).
11. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed., s.v. "capitalism."
12. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd; January 27, 1977).

13. Jerry Fleming, *Profit at Any Cost* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003).

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# “Culture in Conflict” Conference MP3s



## Conference Recordings

**Kerby Anderson:**

[Being Christian in a Post-Christian Society](#)

[Truth Decay](#)

[Basic Christian Evidences](#)

**Dr. Ray Bohlin:**

[The Privileged Planet and Intelligent Design](#)

[Evidence for the Existence of God](#)

[The Reliability of the Bible](#)

**Sue Bohlin:**

[Thinking Clearly About Sexual Confusion](#)  
[Helping Teens Understand Homosexuality](#)  
[Raising Gender-Secure Children](#)

**Ray and Sue:**

[Guys are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus](#)

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# Crimping Consciences: Texas City Railroads Pro-Gay Ordinance

*Byron Barlowe blogs about the his city's Anti-Discrimination ordinance intended to give full recognition to the LGBT community at the expense of those who disagree.*

## New Anti-Discrimination Policy Approved

According to the [Dallas Morning News Plano Blog](#), "In a split vote Monday, the Plano City Council passed the controversial Equal Rights Policy [ERP] over the objections of many residents in the standing-room-only crowd.

The amendment to the city's 1989 anti-discrimination policy extends protections from housing, employment and public accommodation discrimination to include sexual orientation, gender identity and other categories" like veterans. While no one objected to the inclusion of veterans, an overwhelming number of surprised and very lately aware (as in, the day of) citizens voiced strong opposition. These objections, while noted, seemed to make little to no difference to the city council and certainly to Mayor Harry LaRosiliere, who was so

eager to vote for the statute that he went out of order during proceedings.

As a Plano resident who publicly urged the council to vote “No” on the measure, I offer some reflections on the issue—both local and larger—from a biblically informed worldview.

## **Good Intentions: Trying to Legislate Values *Directly***

Rather than seeking to legislate merely out of a set of values—an unavoidable reality—the Plano City Council clearly tried to impose a set of values directly onto the public by adopting this more expansive anti-discrimination ordinance. Such legislative overreach has become part and parcel of an increasingly politically correct polity known as the United States of America. Plano is now more PC. While this kind of ordinance is not only inadvisable because it cannot hope to work well, it also steps beyond the scope of a proper role of government.

IT CANNOT WORK BECAUSE . . .

We often hear the phrase “You can’t legislate morality.” Well, yes and no. While the very nature of human law at its root is a delineation of and codification of right vis a vis wrong—that is, strictures or incentives administered by the state as a morally informed code of conduct—it is also true that government cannot successfully impose morality, *per se*, onto the consciences of their citizens.

Yet, that is precisely what such ordinances as Plano’s ERP seeks to do. Plano’s “out” regarding the problem of conscientious objection? City Attorney Paige Mims assures us that if anyone outside of the many exempted statuses has a moral or religious objection, they can go through a waiver process. This is, on its face, an undue imposition on businesspeople who don’t fall under exempted categories like

education, non-profit or religious. Recent legal precedent (see Hobby Lobby case) makes clear that religious businesses do not somehow lay down their rights of conscience when they go into business.

#### ROLE OF GOVERNMENT. . .

When government entities try to arbitrate motives, for example hate crimes laws that purport to regulate actions based on the attitudinal intent of the actor, it steps into a sphere where it does not, indeed it cannot, belong. In other words, it takes on a godlike sovereignty to righteously discern between this and that intention. Can't be done. Not righteously. Not fairly.

People—including city legal departments and judges—are fallible humans who lack the innate ability to administer justice based primarily or solely on someone's internal motivation. “The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out” (Proverbs 20:5). Drawing out the “purposes” of a man's or woman's heart is certainly not a governmental role. But this is what it takes to know motives, a role only God claims full access to, and a role traditionally reserved for clergy, other spiritual advisers and psychologists.

Here is a pithy bunch of [biblical worldview teaching on the role of government](#).

Biblically, the proper role of government is founded in limits primarily written in Romans 13. As I understand it, a biblical worldview on government's role is limited to: fighting wars, passing and enforcing laws concerning public human interactions and that's about it. Anything else falls under the jurisdiction of religious and social institutions. Government: stay out!

**I'm not arguing for such a state of affairs as an absolute in the real world**, but as a plumb line to measure when government

has stepped over its proper boundaries. In the case of Plano's ERP government has overstepped.

## Progressivism on Parade

The subtext of public deliberations on Plano's ERP was plainly a progressive agenda. Why else would a city seek to get "ahead of the curve" on a social issue such as gender bias or sexual identity discrimination or whatever the euphemism is today? (Refer above to the value of limited role of government, which was expressed repeatedly to the council by citizens of Plano.) The council, challenged that there are no known cases of such discrimination, seemed to shrug dismissively and invoke the need to "get ahead of" the issue.

"The issue of equality is a basic human rights issue and the choice for some to focus on a person's sexuality is conflating the issue," said the Mayor. Conflating what with what? Either the mayor misunderstands the term "conflating" (making things the same) or he's basically accusing objectors of the very thing that has been foisted upon them—namely, making one's sexual choices (not their true sexuality) the determiner of human rights. This is like watching someone start a fight over a piece of land and then accusing the one attacked of starting that same fight over that very piece of land!

Questioning the need for the statute was otherwise met with a not-so-veiled sense of accusation, an implication of inherent bias on the part of the objectors, despite an overall congenial atmosphere. So, if I question the veracity of the claim to need such a policy or ask for reasonable cause, I am automatically anti-gay? That's patently false and unfair. Yet that was the sense of things in a politically correct undercurrent that is the zeitgeist of our day.

## Worldview War

This is the serious game begun back in the 1970s by Marshall

Kirk and Hunter Madsen who spelled out the propaganda project of the gay lobby in a book titled *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear & Hatred of Gays in the 90s*. Now that their jamming (name-calling, guilt by association and other tactics) have worked so well, only an implicit inference need be made at such meetings as Monday night's. It has a chilling—no—a virtual shutdown effect.

Yet, many citizens displayed aplomb when speaking on the Constitution and related matters. Businesspeople appealed to the unfairness of having to seek redress through a voucher system. One person well said in response: “The Constitution is my waiver.” First Amendment (or any other) rights do not require special permission. It’s government’s role merely to ensure them, which Plano may think it’s doing by elevating ever more special interests to protected status. That is an upside-down approach that’s illegitimate no matter how much case law exists or how many other cities and companies enact similar policies.

## **The “We’re Just Following” Fallacy**

An admittedly very arguable point I’d like to add: Mayor LaRosiliere and City Attorney Mims claimed that other major cities in Texas have such statutes on the books. Hence we are not, as implicated, “out front” taking legal risks, but rather are following others’ lead. This seems disingenuous.

Are we “out in front” of the issue or are we, as strongly emphasized by the Mayor, simply one in a fairly long line of municipalities trying to codify fair treatment to people of all lifestyles and segments? One could make the case that Plano is in the vanguard overall but not first in implementation. However, that is unsatisfactory to many. You can’t ultimately have it both ways: either you’re progressive on social issues (which does not truly reflect Plano well) or you’re just falling in line with current legal trends.

# The “Gay Gene” at the Bottom of the Debate

One thing is sure: *increased expansion of rights and privileges to previously unaddressed parties is the trend in our culture—and lots of it has to do with sexuality in a newly politicized way.* But we thought government was supposed to get out of our bedrooms?

Any claim to that distinction has been lost with the adoption of the near-universal belief in what amounts to a “[gay gene](#)”—that a person inherently possesses a sexual identity that may indeed be homosexual or of other varieties. This, over and against a mere proclivity or attraction to the same sex, which leaves room for choice, which is an ethical issue. Remove choice regarding homosexuality, you remove any basis of objection. Remove objection, you can run roughshod over any cultural restraints on the free and damaging expression of sexuality outside the bounds of its Inventor, God. Remove those restrictions, celebrate the lifestyle, then codify and impugn those who disagree, and the After the Ball agenda is a complete success.

Monday night’s meeting was an incremental victory toward this end, whether or not players on the city council or either side of the issue realized it. Regarding objectors’ motives, it’s one thing to care for individuals whose sexual identity is in question or those who act out a gay lifestyle and it’s another kind of thing entirely to exercise one’s rights to oppose codification of these choices and lifestyles. I and many of my friends there that night were doing one while we practice the other in private situations, too.

There is no cognitive dissonance or hypocrisy here—one can do both public square advocacy of conservative values and also outreach to individuals who struggle in a certain area of sin—namely other-than-heterosexual-wed sex. True Christlike

love does not affirm that which the Bible condemns, but shows grace nonetheless.

## **There is a Precedent for Unintended Consequences and Abuse**

Plano's ERP sets up the same oppression of religious objectors that has been seen already across the U.S. with cake bakers, wedding venue owners and others who—for reasons of conscience—refuse to do business with certain parties in select situations like gays getting married. Yes, exemptions were written into Plano's ordinance, but does anyone seriously believe these will stand up under judicial scrutiny in this day and age? The erosion of rights continues—and saying so, again, is not to be confused with [intolerance](#).

This brand of identity politics is rooted in the cultural adoption of the doctrine of a gay gene ("God or nature made me this way!"), which is at a worldview level, where most objectors to the statute were coming from. We object to the underlying presupposition that homosexuality is not utterly tied up with choice, which is so fundamental to opposition to the gay rights issue. (I almost come off as a throwback rube for even bringing it up in today's enlightened culture—which furthers my point!)

## **The Condescension that Falsely Pits Feelings vs. Facts**

Monday night's proceedings—at least from the point of view of the city council—were saturated with what has been called the Sacred / Secular Split. On this view, there are basically two levels of discourse: an area of public life informed largely by science but also by enlightened social values (invariably liberal / progressive / non-traditional ones) balanced unevenly by a lesser valued, private world of emotional / psychological / religious sentiments.

The former—where real knowledge resides—should supposedly be the domain of public policy. The latter—again, a private set of often closely held feelings and values that should have no sway in the public arena yet the existence of which are somewhat guarded by government and other institutions—are to be tolerated as inevitable but will hopefully catch up with social contracts like those being forged by the gay lobby and societal institutions across the waterfront. The notion is: “You have a right to your private opinion. Just don’t bring it into the public square.”

This attitude, this taken-for-granted starting place was most evident in closing remarks made by several city council members—all of whom happened to vote for the policy. One council member waxed eloquent on his world travels, noting that the most advanced societies he’d run across made it a point never to discriminate. (I don’t know where he’s been, but perhaps his hotel’s staff might beg to differ—just guessing.)

More poignantly, he and another council member who said that her Christian faith informed her “yes” vote, was only one more who joined a chorus of comments like:

“There were lots of strong feelings on the topic of discussion tonight” and

“This is a very emotional issue for many. . . .”

The plain inference was that objections were raised out of the private, sacred area of life, laden with “emotion” and “feelings” while effective debate occurred on the level of law, fact and agreed-upon societal norms (at least the evolving kind that our “City of Excellence” wants to be known for).

Pronouncements by a clergy woman (Disciples of Christ) who serves as an officer of a Plano Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender association, the mayor and at least one more gay

advocate that the passage of the ERP was just “the right thing to do” obviously paints the vast majority of citizens as those who want to do the wrong thing. According to Mayor LaRosiliere, “Providing equal rights to everyone is the right thing to do.” Rights to what? Rights in displacement of whose rights? The task in a pluralistic society is to find that fairest middle ground—and that failed Monday night.

Apparently bigotry, at least ignorance, was the only thing standing in the way of Plano’s ERP. Thank you for the condescension. Which leads to my final point: the race card was deftly played by none other than Mayor LaRosiliere where it has no place. And the Mayor did precisely what he accused others of of doing, that is . . .

## . . . **Conflating Race & Sexual Lifestyle**

Plano’s Mayor ended deliberations (or nearly did) with [a speech](#) on the equivalency of historical human rights movements to the current push for special privileges for sexual identities and lifestyles. His well-written story arc was centered on the question, “Why are we doing this now?” In a series of juxtaposed historical references, he posed the question he deemed was being needlessly asked about Plano’s Equal Rights Protection ordinance: **Why pass this now if there is no case on record of any discrimination?** In the case of the infamous Dred-Scott Supreme Court decision that ruled blacks were 3/5 of a person one might ask, he said, “Why are we doing this now?”

“If we spoke in 1919,” LaRosiliere continued, “to allow women to vote, the question would be, ‘Why are you oppressing me and making me subject to this now.’” He went on to paint discrimination against the Irish in early 19th Century New York and segregation in the South in the 20th Century as morally equivalent instances comparable to the current situation—ostensibly oppression of gay, lesbian and transgender citizens.

Very cleverly devised rhetorical device, that. But it **presupposes a moral equivalency that a black man sitting beside me rejected outright.** This gentlemen from Nigeria was so confused by the proceedings and the Mayor's speech capping them off that he was convinced the entire issue at hand was racism! When I asked him this question, he unequivocally answered "No!": "Do you think that homosexual identity is the same kind of thing as you being black or being from Nigeria?"

"No!"

And rightly, **my new African friend—who is a Christian—was bothered by the conflation of the two and the use of such rhetoric to elevate a class of people based on their sinful behavior and identity to it as the basis to extend so-called human rights. We all have the right to fair treatment as humans made in God's image. We do not have a right to socially engineer law to force the compromise of conscience that is being carried out by Plano's new ordinance.**

As I pleaded with the council not to allow, we will surely read about this case going to court, being found unconstitutional and otherwise unlawful and costing this taxpayer and all others unnecessarily.

Ideas, worldviews, do indeed have consequences.

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## **The Euphemism of 'Death With Dignity'**

There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death. (Proverbs 14:12)



Brittany Maynard, a young woman with an incurable brain tumor, recently took her own life rather than suffer through a painful, difficult descent into natural death. She had moved from California to Oregon, which is a "right-to-die" state that allows terminally ill people to be assisted in ending their lives on their terms.

How should we think about this? It depends on your starting point.

If you leave God out of the picture, believing that man is autonomous with the right to make all our own choices independent of any outside source of moral truth, then avoiding needless pain and suffering makes sense. If you leave God out of the picture, then there is nothing particularly special about people as opposed to beloved pets, which we put down when their suffering becomes too great for us. If you leave God out of the picture, and you believe that life ends with your last breath on earth, then ending one's life is really not much different from turning off a movie before its end because you're tired and want to go to bed. If you leave God out of the picture, then it makes sense to do whatever you want.

But leaving God out of the picture doesn't make Him go away.

It just means people are in denial about His existence. About His right to determine life and death because He is the creator of life.

If your starting point is God Himself, who creates people for His pleasure and for His glory (Rev. 4:11, Eph. 1:6), then we are accountable to the Author of Life, and ending one's earthly life is not a choice we have the right to make. If your starting point is God Himself, who made us in His eternal

image to live forever, then ending one's earthly life is the doorway to the next life. Not believing in life after death doesn't make it go away. As one character says in the movie *City of Angels*, "Some things are true whether you believe in them or not."

As far as we can tell from what the media presented, Brittany Maynard left God out of the picture in deciding to end her suffering. If she died as she may have lived her life, separated from the God who is created her, then even on her worst days of tumor-induced pain on earth, that was as close to heaven as she was ever going to get. If she remained separated from God as she drank a sedative mixture that allowed her to fall asleep and then die, she made a horrible choice to enter eternity remaining separated from God forever. That means separated from all that is good, from all that is kind, from all life and light and love and joy. Because all these things are found only in God, and if we remain separated from Him, we cut ourselves off from their source. We are left with evil, cruelty, death and darkness and isolation and despair. An eternity of it. There is no dignity in this kind of unending death.

It's possible that she cast herself on God's mercy in her last minutes; I don't know what the state of her soul was as she drew her last breath. I truly hope so.

But the horrific earthly suffering she opted out of, would be nothing compared to the eternal suffering of being cut off from all that is good. I don't mean to make light of the indescribable suffering of those dying from terminal diseases. But it's essential to not leave God out of the picture, and to remember He does great things in people through suffering. Not just the one with the illness, but the family members and others around them.

Responding to this news about Ms. Maynard, one woman wrote of her husband, "a man who suffered well. It was agony... Watching

him suffer. Knowing there was nothing I could do to heal him and little I could do to lessen his suffering. All I could do was hold his hand during biopsies and chemo. During the pain and nausea. I marveled at his strength, his faith, his refusal to give up. I held his hand when the doctor told us there wasn't anything else they could do. When the morphine caused hallucinations and he forgot we were married. I held his hand and discovered that if you love someone... If you have faith, you can tap unknown reserves of strength, you can endure pain unimaginable. Neither one of us picked the other for the ability to suffer well. But because we truly loved, we were able to put the other person first. That's love. All the feel good stuff is just romance. It's nice. It feels good. But it's small comfort when illness and death come knocking on your door. *I'm so blessed for having had the opportunity to suffer alongside B\_\_\_\_\_.* He was an amazing man!"

I think that is what true "death with dignity" looks like: being faithful to the end, suffering well, trusting God when the storm rages on.

Speaking of suffering well . . .

Hero to many of us, Joni Eareckson Tada wrote an [open letter](#) to Brittany weeks before she died. Joni has lived longer, and suffered more, than the vast majority of quadriplegics. She knows something of suffering, dealing with a severe handicap plus cancer plus chronic pain. Joni's voice deserves to be heard above all others, I believe:

"If I could spend a few moments with Brittany before she swallows that prescription she has already filled, I would tell her how I have felt the love of Jesus strengthen and comfort me through my own cancer, chronic pain and quadriplegia. I would tell her that the saddest thing of all would be for her to wake up on the other side of her tombstone only to face a grim, joyless existence not only without life, but without God."

This is a deeply sobering, difficult discussion. Please don't leave God out of it.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/the\\_euphemism\\_of\\_death\\_with\\_dignity](http://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_euphemism_of_death_with_dignity) on November 4, 2014.

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## On Black Holes and Archangels

*Dr. Terlizzese too often hears from Christian leaders and laymen that film, philosophy, literature, music, mythology, etc. (arts and humanities), are polluted wells that Christians do better to avoid rather than risk contamination. Yet no such warning is ever given about science and technology, always readily accepted under the rubric of natural revelation, except for some strange birds like Jacques Ellul or Neal Postman. "On Black Holes and Archangels" attempts to bridge this hypocritical divide in knowledge through raising art to the status of science as a legitimate source of knowledge concerning God and the human condition. As professor Lewis Sperry Chafer once wrote, theology uses "any and every source."*

## Reversal of Theological Priorities

When theology students talk about general revelation they mean science. God shows himself through the natural world; the movement of the stars, the rhythms of biology, the complexity of chemical synthesis, the beauty of the Grand Canyon and the like. Invariably, they almost always neglect human



nature as a prominent theological source in acute reversal of theological priorities.

Comparatively, the bible says very little about the nature of the cosmos and the animal kingdom; instead it focuses on Adam's Race (humanity), Adam's prominence as divine vice-regent, his fall from innocence, the pain and suffering ensuing from a ruptured relationship with the Maker; the creation of the Hebrew people and the sacrificial offering of his Son (the Second Adam [Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:45]) in the plan of redemption.

The Bible is mostly about Israel's reluctance to serve God. Their obstinate disobedience, their refusal to recognize absolute righteousness of the One God, the pleading of the prophets to return to the Truth; their judgment and horrifying dissolution, but final salvation thanks only to the divine mercy of their heavenly Father, "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). Israel serves as paradigm for all people, as the new creation of humanity in the Second Adam that brings the renewal of God's creation, the natural world; "A shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse . . . the lion shall lay down with the lamb . . . they will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:1-9; 27:6).

The theological reversal of priorities places science and reason over religion and faith, which interprets human nature in light of the cosmos rather than the cosmos in light of human nature and salvific transformation; as Adam goes so goes nature; "Cursed is the ground because of you [Adam];" "the creation will be set free from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Genesis 3:17; Romans 8:19-22).

This reversal is reminiscent of C. P. Snow's critical paradigm called the *Two Cultures*.[{1}](#) Snow elucidated the theory that

modern epistemology splits between science and the humanities, or said simply, between religion and science, between subjective and objective knowledge, creating an imbalance that favors one way of knowing over the other. Any juxtaposition in knowledge will result in the denigration of religion or science that fails to recognize their inherent compatibility.

Evangelicals are quick to latch onto the split in knowledge, recognizing science's superiority as source of knowledge and engine for technological acceleration in a theological reversal of priorities that recognizes all things scientific and technological as gifts from God, even offering metaphysical justification for technological acceleration under the theological rubric of general revelation, yet disparaging the humanities as a polluted well. However, science is not general revelation, it is only the philosophical lens used to interpret it—which is not incorrect, just incomplete. A consistent application of general revelation must include the humanities as a valid source of knowledge on human nature as equal to science: philosophy, religion, literature, art, film, etc., all present a valid interpretation of human nature that serves as sources for theology. L. Sperry Chafer's argued decades ago that theology uses “any and every source.”[{2}](#)

## What is General Revelation?

Most evangelical theology divides revelation or God's self-disclosure into two categories called general revelation and special revelation, a division of knowledge going back at least to Saint Thomas Aquinas, receiving its greatest expression in the early modern period with the theory of the *Two Books* by Francis Bacon. The first book of the knowledge of God comes from the natural world, discerned and interpreted by reason, open to all—hence general knowledge; modern science and philosophy grounded in rationalism develops from this theological base. The second book of knowledge of God was

considered Holy Scripture, discerned and interpreted through faith supported by reason—hence it is not open to all, only the faithful.

General revelation refers to the knowledge of God outside of the Bible in nature, history, and personal experience; it is open to all people and anyone can understand it. Special revelation refers to the knowledge of God revealed in the Bible alone, such as the dual nature of Christ as the God/Man, the Trinity, the story of redemption and the knowledge of salvation. It is special because only those who accept the word of God by faith know these truths discerned by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2). The two forms of revelation always complement each other. However, special revelation has greater authority than general revelation as the exclusive source for knowledge of salvation. We are saved through special revelation and never through general revelation which largely teaches humanity's need for God, but offers no solution because that will only be found in special revelation.

God's presence is revealed in nature but in a very limited way. Humanity actually knows very little about God from general revelation. People talk about "the love of God" but that is not a concept drawn from the natural world. The poet Tennyson said "nature is red in tooth and claw," meaning nature is cruel and unforgiving. The reality of nature as hostile and uncaring does not reflect the character of God. We know God is love, only because the Bible, not nature, tells us He is love (John 3:16; 1 John). Seeing a grizzly bear mother eating her young on a nature documentary convinced me of the truth of Tennyson's statement.

General revelation means God reveals himself through the humanities as well as the sciences. The opening of the evangelical mind begins with a view of revelation that takes the arts and humanities as seriously as the sciences as a valid source of knowledge.

# On Black Holes and Archangels

As the astronomer sees and reflects the divine glory of the cosmos, so the philosopher, musician, novelist and film artist reflects the inner light of soul—as complicated, profound and stunning as the swirl of galaxies, as explosive as a supernova and as deep and forbidding as a black hole! Artists explore remote and inhospitable depths of inner space. They transport the human spirit to destinies Magellan, Columbus and Verrazano never dreamt of; where Voyager will never encounter, where the telescope sees blindly . . . where angels fear to tread!

Art explores inner recesses of human nature and delivers subjective knowledge on topics such as anxiety, alienation, despair, boredom, hate, faith, love, fear, courage, lust, oppression and liberation, not quantifiable or objective, but just as real and valuable to Christian theology as the scientist's observations. Theologian of Culture Paul Tillich insightfully argued that art was the spiritual barometer of culture: “Art is religion.”<sup>{3}</sup> In order to understand culture and the ultimate questions it asks in relating the Gospel message, the theologian must turn to philosophy, literature, paintings, music, etc.

Science and art are not in competition. Just as reason and faith complement each other as sources of knowledge, so subjective and objective knowledge act as two halves of the same coin—the union of the left and right sides of the brain. “Historian of Evil” Jeffrey Burton Russell writes,

*This question of how we know seems unfamiliar because we have been brought up to imagine that something is either “real” or “not real,” as if there were only one valid world view, only one way to look at things, only one approach to truth. Given the overwhelming prestige of natural science during the past century, we usually go on to assume that the only approach to truth is through natural science . . . it seems to be “common sense” . . . there are multiple truth systems, multiple*

approaches to reality. Science is one such approach. But . . . science is . . . a construct of the human mind . . . based on undemonstrable assumptions of faith. There is no scientific proof of the bases of science. [There is] no real difference between the subject and objective approach to things . . . science has its limits, and beyond those limits there are, like other galaxies, other truth systems. These other systems are not without resemblances to science, but their modes of thought are quite different: among them are history, myth, poetry, theology, art, and analytical psychology. Other truth systems have existed in the past; still more may exist in future; we can only guess what thought structures exist among other intelligent beings.[{4}](#)

Only novelists, film makers, poets and theologians can communicate the possible thought structures of angels, demons or ETI's. How does the thought process of an archangel differ from that of seraphim and cherubim? The *Star Trek* franchise may be our best introduction to alien civilizations in the absence of any hard evidence.

## ***Elysium: The Acceleration of the Status Quo into Outer Space***

The recent (2013) science fiction movie *Elysium* depicts the human condition as it has existed throughout human history and extends it to the space station Elysium. In the year 2154, the class difference between the haves and the have not's appears in bold relief. Elysium is a haven for the wealthy and technologically powerful elite who rule the sub-proletariat peoples of earth living in squalor, misery and deprivation. Los Angeles is reminiscent of the shanty towns of Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo today. The few control the many through the accumulation and withholding of wealth and technological power, especially medical machines "Med-Bays" that reverse cell damage and heals all sickness and disease, granting

virtual immortality. A self-appointed champion of the people Max Da Costa (Matt Damon) with nothing left to lose—since his exposure to a fatal radiation dose has left him with five days to live—mounts an assault on Elysium and accomplishes the impossible, a revolution that gains control of the space station's computer system and the robot guardians, turning them against the establishment and bringing relief to the people of Earth.

*Elysium* serves as a great cinematic example of liberation theology and window into the human condition that never changes despite technological acceleration that empowers the few to control the many. In any late stage of civilization, from Egypt and Rome to modernity, the same conditions prevail: the elite rule the many and technology makes no difference in alleviating social inequalities. Technological advance, as the movie portrays, only accelerates the status quo so that the struggle for freedom and equality of all people simply takes place off the earth on a space station.

The Enlightenment idea of progress envisions a global advance of humanity across all social lines. Any concentration of power and wealth in an elite group to the neglect of the rest of the planet, regardless of how technologically advanced or socially integrated, is not progress but regress. *Elysium* reflects contemporary global conditions—the status quo, the way things actually are, projecting them one generation or forty years into the future.

When technological acceleration grants the world equal social conditions, such as the elimination of poverty, hunger and disease in Africa and Latin America as in the Western world, or the ready accessibility of health care in the United States as in the Netherlands or Canada, then we do justice to the noble word “*Progress*.” In the absence of social equality, technological growth renders the same absolute social imbalances and universal disillusionment in the modern world as existed in the late Roman Empire, the concentration of

power in an elite, ruling ruthlessly over the masses without hope of change, except on a global scale that moves rapidly towards dissolution, where robot guardians replace the Praetorian Guard.[{5}](#)

## “Nein! Nein! Nein!”

There is no saving knowledge of God in history, science, economics, philosophy, math or whatever. NO! NO! NO! I am in complete agreement with Karl Barth on this point: “Nein! Nein! Nein!” No! Absolutely not! Never! The saving knowledge of Christ comes only through the word of God and centers on the work of Jesus Christ for all mankind. The knowledge of God in general revelation is not saving knowledge of the Gospel. If one could know God through the means of general revelation then it would make special revelation and the coming of Christ superfluous and useless. General revelation only condemns and functions for Gentiles like the Law of Moses for Jews (Romans 1:18-32; Galatians 3).

General revelation prepares humanity for special revelation. Knowledge of God and the human condition in general revelation creates the need for special revelation. General revelation shows humanity its sinfulness and need for a savior; “How majestic is Your name in all the earth. Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens . . . What is man that Thou art mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:1-4). Job gave the only possible answer as a finite being when reminded of wonders of God’s creation: “I know You can do all things . . . I declared that which I did not understand . . . I retract and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:1-6). “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). General revelation demonstrates God’s absence from humanity; it reveals the “UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23).

Special revelation meets that need for reconciliation with God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation cannot come from any

other avenue than special revelation, a major theological premise the great theologian Karl Barth staunchly defended. According to Barth, all revelation is special revelation and all revelation imparts the saving knowledge of Christ.

General revelation brings the knowledge of God's absence, consciousness of alienation from the divine, much as the Mosaic Law brings the awareness of sin (Romans 1-3); but only to set us up for the knowledge of the Savior that comes from hearing the gospel of Christ preached (Romans 4-10). "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). [\[6\]](#)

## Notes

1. C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1959).
2. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. One* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 5. Chafer defined systematic theology as "A science which follows a humanly devised scheme or order of doctrinal development and which purports to incorporate into its system all truth about God and His universe from any and every source."
3. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 7.
4. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press), 18, 19.
5. Carroll Quigley, *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1979); Roderick Seidenberg, *Posthistoric Man: An Inquiry* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1950); Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1987, 1949); Lawrence J. Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Eugene, OR; Cascade,

2005).

6. Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology: Comprising Nature and Grace* by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply *No!* by Dr. Karl Barth (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002, Reprint).

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## Arguments Against Abortion

*Kerby Anderson helps us understand that concerns about abortion are more than just a fundamentalist backlash. He reviews arguments from a Christian, biblical perspective and then introduces arguments from medical, legal and philosophical points of views as well. He concludes, "The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life."*

### Biblical Arguments Against Abortion

In this essay we will be discussing arguments against abortion. The first set of arguments we will consider are biblical arguments.

That being said, we must begin by acknowledging that the Bible doesn't say anything about abortion directly. Why the silence of the Bible on abortion? The answer is simple. Abortion was so unthinkable to an Israelite woman that there was no need to even mention it in the criminal code. Why was abortion an unthinkable act? First, children were viewed as a gift or heritage from the Lord. Second, the Scriptures state—and the Jews concurred—that God opens and closes the womb and is sovereign over conception. Third, childlessness was seen as a curse.

One of the key verses to understand in developing a biblical view of the sanctity of human life is Psalm 139. This psalm is the inspired record of David's praise for God's sovereignty in his life. He begins by acknowledging that God is omniscient and knows what David is doing at any given point in time. He goes on to acknowledge that God is aware of David's thoughts before he expresses them. David adds that wherever he might go, he cannot escape from God, whether he travels to heaven or ventures into Sheol. God is in the remotest part of the sea and even in the darkness. Finally David contemplates the origin of his life and confesses that God was there forming him in the womb:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (vv. 13-16).

Here David speaks of God's relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. Notice that the Bible doesn't speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. The description here is not of a piece of protoplasm that becomes David: this is David already being cared for by God while in the womb.

In verse 13, we see that God is the Master Craftsman fashioning David into a living person. In verses 14 and 15, David reflects on the fact that he is a product of God's creative work within his mother's womb, and he praises God for how wonderfully God has woven him together.

David draws a parallel between his development in the womb and Adam's creation from the earth. Using figurative language in verse 15, he refers to his life before birth when "I was made

in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth.” This poetic allusion harkens back to Genesis 2:7 which says that Adam was made from the dust of the earth.

David also notes that “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance.” This shows that God knew David even before he was known to others. The term translated *unformed substance* is a noun derivative of a verb meaning “to roll up.” When David was just forming as a fetus, God’s care and compassion already extended to him. The reference to “God’s eyes” is an Old Testament term used to connote divine oversight of God in the life of an individual or group of people.

Next, we will consider additional Old Testament passages that provide a biblical argument against abortion.

## **Additional Old Testament Arguments Against Abortion**

Now that we’ve looked at Psalm 139, the most popular argument against abortion, let’s look at two other Old Testament passages.

Another significant passage is Psalm 51. It was written by David after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and records his repentance. David confesses that his sinful act demonstrated the original sin that was within him, “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). David concludes that from his time of conception, he had a sin nature. This would imply that he carried the image of God from the moment of conception, including the marred image scarred from sin.

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6). Bearing the image of God is the essence of humanness. And though God’s image in man was marred at the Fall, it was not erased (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9). Thus, the unborn baby is made in the image of God and

therefore fully human in God's sight.

This verse also provides support for what is called the traducian view of the origin of the soul. According to this perspective, human beings were potentially in Adam (Rom. 5:12, Heb. 7:9-10) and thus participated in his original sin. The "soulish" part of humans is transferred through conception. Therefore, an unborn baby is morally accountable and thus fully human.

Another argument against abortion can be found in the Old Testament legal code, specifically Exodus 21:22-25.

If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

The verses appear to teach that if a woman gives birth prematurely, but the baby is not injured, then only a fine is appropriate. However, if the child dies then the law of retaliation (*lex talionis*) should be applied. In other words, killing an unborn baby would carry the same penalty as killing a born baby. A baby inside the womb has the same legal status as a baby outside the womb.

Some commentators have come to a different conclusion because they believe the first verses only refer to a case of accidental miscarriage. Since only a fine is levied, they argue that an unborn baby is merely potential life and does not carry the same legal status as a baby that has been born.

There are at least two problems with this interpretation. First, the normal Hebrew word for *miscarry* is not used in this passage (cf. Gen. 31:38; Exod. 23:26; Job 2:10; Hos. 9:14). Most commentators now believe that the action described in

verse 22 is a premature birth, not an accidental miscarriage. Second, even if the verses do describe a miscarriage, the passage cannot be used to justify abortion. The injury was accidental, not intentional (as abortion would be). Also, the action was a criminal offense and punishable by law.

## Medical Arguments Against Abortion

Thus far in our discussion we have looked at biblical arguments against abortion. But what if someone doesn't believe in the Bible? Are there other arguments we can use? Yes, there are: medical arguments, for example. Let's look, then, at some of the medical arguments against abortion.

The medical arguments against abortion are compelling. For example, *at conception the embryo is genetically distinct from the mother*. To say that the developing baby is no different from the mother's appendix is scientifically inaccurate. A developing embryo is genetically different from the mother. A developing embryo is also genetically different from the sperm and egg that created it. A human being has 46 chromosomes (sometimes 47 chromosomes). Sperm and egg have 23 chromosomes. A trained geneticist can distinguish between the DNA of an embryo and that of a sperm and egg. But that same geneticist could not distinguish between the DNA of a developing embryo and a full-grown human being.

Another set of medical arguments against abortion surround *the definition of life and death*. If one set of criteria have been used to define death, could they also be used to define life? Death used to be defined by the cessation of heartbeat. A stopped heart was a clear sign of death. If the cessation of heartbeat could define death, could the onset of a heartbeat define life? The heart is formed by the 18th day in the womb. If heartbeat was used to define life, then nearly all abortions would be outlawed.

Physicians now use a more rigorous criterion for death: brain

wave activity. A flat EEG (electroencephalograph) is one of the most important criteria used to determine death. If the cessation of brain wave activity can define death, could the onset of brain wave activity define life? Individual brain waves are detected in the fetus in about 40-43 days. Using brain wave activity to define life would outlaw at least a majority of abortions.

Opponents to abortion also raise the controversial issue of fetal pain. Does the fetus feel pain during abortion? The evidence seems fairly clear and consistent. Consider this statement made in a British medical journal: "Try sticking an infant with a pin and you know what happens. She opens her mouth to cry and also pulls away. Try sticking an 8-week-old human fetus in the palm of his hand. He opens his mouth and pulls his hand away. A more technical description would add that changes in heart rate and fetal movement also suggest that intrauterine manipulations are painful to the fetus."[{1}](#)

Obviously, other medical criteria could be used. For example, the developing fetus has a unique set of fingerprints as well as genetic patterns that make it unique. The development of sonography has provided us with a "window to the womb" showing us that a person is growing and developing in the mother's womb. We can discern eyes, ears, fingers, a nose, and a mouth. Our visual senses tell us this is a baby growing and maturing. This is not a piece of protoplasm; this is a baby inside the womb.

The point is simple. *Medical science leads to a pro-life perspective rather than a pro-choice perspective.* If medical science can be used at all to draw a line, the clearest line is at the moment of conception. Medical arguments provide a strong case against abortion and for life.

## Legal Arguments Against Abortion

At this point in our discussion, we need to look at legal

arguments against abortion.

The best legal argument against abortion can be seen in the case of *Roe v. Wade*. It violated standard legal reasoning. The Supreme Court decided not to decide when life begins and then turned around and overturned the laws of 50 different states.

Most of the Supreme Court's verdict rested upon two sentences. "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to an answer."

Although the sentences sounded both innocuous and unpretentious, they were neither. The Supreme Court's non-decision was not innocuous. It overturned state laws that protected the unborn and has resulted in over 30 million abortions (roughly the population of Canada) in the United States.

The decision also seems unpretentious by acknowledging that it did not know when life begins. But if the Court did not know, then it should have acted "as if" life was in the womb. A crucial role of government is to protect life. Government cannot remove a segment of the human population from its protection without adequate justification.

The burden of proof should lie with the life-taker, and the benefit of the doubt should be with the life-saver. Put another way: "when in doubt, don't." A hunter who hears rustling in the bushes shouldn't fire until he knows what is in the bushes. Likewise, a Court which doesn't know when life begins, should not declare open season on the unborn.

The burden of proof in law is on the prosecution. The benefit of doubt is with the defense. This is also known as a presumption of innocence. The defendant is assumed to be

innocent unless proven guilty. Again the burden of proof is on the entity that would take away life or liberty. The benefit of the doubt lies with the defense.

The Supreme Court clearly stated that it does not know when life begins and then violated the very spirit of this legal principle by acting as if it just proved that no life existed in the womb. Even more curious was the fact that to do so, it had to ignore the religious community and international community on the subject of the unborn.

Had the religious community really failed to reach a consensus? Although there were some intramural disagreements, certainly the weight of evidence indicated that a Western culture founded on Judeo-Christian values held abortion to be morally wrong. People with widely divergent theological perspectives (Jewish, Catholic, evangelical and fundamental Protestants) shared a common agreement about the humanity of the unborn.

The same could be said about the international legal community. Physicians around the world subscribed to the Hippocratic Oath ("I will not give a woman a pessary to produce abortion"). The unborn were protected by various international documents like the Declaration of Geneva and the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Just as there are solid medical arguments against abortion, so also there are legal arguments against abortion. *Roe vs. Wade* was a bad decision that needs to be overturned.

## **Philosophical Arguments Against Abortion**

Finally, we will conclude our discussion by looking at philosophical arguments against abortion.

A third set of arguments against abortion would be philosophical arguments. A key philosophical question is where do you draw the line? Put another way, when does a human being

become a person?

The Supreme Court's decision of *Roe v. Wade* separated personhood from humanity. In other words, the judges argued that a developing fetus was a human (i.e., a member of the species *Homo sapiens*) but not a person. Since only persons are given 14th Amendment protection under the Constitution, the Court argued that abortion could be legal at certain times. This left to doctors, parents, or even other judges the responsibility of arbitrarily deciding when personhood should be awarded to human beings.

The Supreme Court's cleavage of personhood and humanity made the ethical slide down society's slippery slope inevitable. Once the Court allowed people to start drawing lines, some drew them in unexpected ways and effectively opened the door for infanticide and euthanasia.

The Court, in the tradition of previous line-drawers, opted for biological criteria in their definition of a "person" in *Roe v. Wade*. In the past, such criteria as implantation or quickening had been suggested. The Court chose the idea of viability and allowed for the possibility that states could outlaw abortions performed after a child was viable. But viability was an arbitrary criterion, and there was no biological reason why the line had to be drawn near the early stages of development. The line, for example, could be drawn much later.

Ethicist Paul Ramsey frequently warned that any argument for abortion could logically be also used as an argument for infanticide. As if to illustrate this, Dr. Francis Crick, of DNA fame, demonstrated that he was less concerned about the ethics of such logical extensions and proposed a more radical definition of personhood. He suggested in the British journal *Nature* that if "a child were considered to be legally born when two days old, it could be examined to see whether it was an 'acceptable member of human society.'" Obviously this is

not only an argument for abortion; it's an argument for infanticide.

Other line-drawers have suggested a cultural criterion for personhood. Ashley Montagu, for example, stated, "A newborn baby is not truly human until he or she is molded by cultural influences later." Again, this is more than just an argument for abortion. It is also an argument for infanticide.

More recently some line-drawers have focused on a mental criterion for personhood. Dr. Joseph Fletcher argues in his book *Humanhood* that "Humans without some minimum of intelligence or mental capacity are not persons, no matter how many of these organs are active, no matter how spontaneous their living processes are." This is not only an argument for abortion and infanticide; it's adequate justification for euthanasia and the potential elimination of those who do not possess a certain IQ. In other writings, Joseph Fletcher suggested that an "individual" was not truly a "person" unless he has an IQ of at least 40.

In conclusion, we can see that there are many good arguments against abortion. Obviously there are a number of biblical arguments against abortion. But there are also medical, legal, and philosophical arguments against abortion. The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life.

## **Endnote**

1. H.P. Valman and J. F. Pearson, *What the Fetus Feels*, *British Medical Journal* (26 January 1980): 233-234.

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*Note from Kerby Anderson:*

*So many people ask for more information on abortion; I suggest you check out the Abortion Facts Web site at [www.abortionfacts.com](http://www.abortionfacts.com).*

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# One Christian Perspective on the Immigration Reform Debate

*Steve Cable takes a look at the immigration issue from a biblical point of view. Setting aside all the political rhetoric, what does the Bible really have to say about this topic and how should the church respond with an authentic Christian perspective.*

## Introduction

Immigration issues have garnered a lot of headlines in recent weeks. Is there a clear biblical position on immigration laws and on how Christians should respond to immigrants?

A January 2006 Gallup poll indicated that “immigration reform” ranked at the bottom of seven national issues behind the war in Iraq, healthcare, and the economy.<sup>[\[1\]](#)</sup> However, after the large rallies in April, it had moved up into the number two spot behind the war in Iraq. While more Americans are concerned about improving control of our borders than developing a comprehensive strategy for illegal immigrants, over seventy-five percent of those polled consider such a comprehensive strategy “extremely important” or “very important.” In part, this is due to a heightened awareness of the approximately twelve million illegal aliens in our country and to the intense interest in the Hispanic community. The concern also feeds on the conflicting desires for low cost labor on the one hand and protection from terrorist infiltration on the other.

At a time when the American public is becoming sensitized to the illegal immigrant issue, the evangelical community has not presented a unified front. As reported in the April 28 (2006)

edition of the *Dallas Morning News*, “At a forum . . . , conservative and liberal religious leaders lobbed Bible verses, unable to agree on what Jesus would do about the nation’s nearly 12 million illegal immigrants.”<sup>[{2}](#)</sup> Three general positions have emerged among the evangelical community.

One position promotes honoring God through obeying the law, focusing on the responsibility of the government to provide for the security of its people.

A second position focuses on our responsibility to care for the needy, particularly the alien and the stranger.

The third position assumes this is an amoral political and economic issue that the church is wise to stay clear of.

The conundrum was aptly summarized by Dr. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission:

*“We have a right to expect the government to fulfill its divinely ordained mandate to punish those who break the laws and reward those who do not. Romans 13. We also have a divine mandate to act redemptively and compassionately toward those who are in need.”*<sup>[{3}](#)</sup>

Since we are all created in the image of God, should nations place any restrictions upon our ability to move about and take up residence where we will? Certainly, if we were all Christians, Colossians 3:11 might apply, stating, “there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.” From this verse and others like it, we might argue that we should not make any distinctions between citizens and non-citizens. Yet, the Bible clearly indicates that there will be distinct nations until Jesus returns.

# Reasons for Restricted Immigration Policy

As noted above, a simple Christian perspective would welcome everyone to settle in our nation at any time. However, the Bible clearly supports the concept of national sovereignty as a means through which God works in this fallen world. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, we are called to pray for government officials, not that they would cease to exist, but that they would facilitate a society where we can follow God and share Christ in a secure, peaceful environment. Three common reasons a government may choose to control traffic across its borders and limit citizenship opportunities are as follows:

1. **National security**—A nation with enemies has a need to know that those enemies are not dwelling within their land. In Deut. 31:12-13, the foreigners dwelling among the people of Israel were required to enter into the covenant to obey God. Those that did not support God's leadership were not allowed to enter the land. Today, like never before, America must be concerned about enemies attacking from inside her border. The government has a responsibility to protect the security of her people by taking reasonable means to keep threats outside of our borders.

2. **Economic prosperity**—A perception of limited resources may cause a nation to curtail immigration in order to reserve a greater share of those resources for the existing citizens. They may say, “We have the sturdiest and most well stocked lifeboat, but if everyone abandons their inferior lifeboats and flocks to this one, we will go from prosperity and security to sinking and perishing.” Under the same motivation, it is common for nations to import foreign workers to perform low paid, menial tasks. There is biblical support for property ownership and rewards for ones labor. It is balanced by the clear teaching to proactively minister to the needy and to beware of being motivated by greed. [\[4\]](#)

3. **Cultural integrity**—A people group may want restrictions on

*immigration to protect the integrity of their historic traditions and society. Certainly, God directed the nation of Israel to ensure that all members of society worshiped the God of Abraham and did not introduce other forms of worship into society. In Exodus 12:43-49, foreigners are prohibited from participating in the Passover unless their entire household is circumcised and they covenant to obey God. America has thrived with a cultural and religious diversity, while enforcing a uniform acceptance of the Constitution and the principles of democracy, freedom, and equality.*

Although the Bible does not mandate that nations should have laws to control their borders and manage immigration, it is clear that there are biblically acceptable reasons for a national policy in this area. The two that are the clearest are national security from known enemies and protecting common cultural ideals. Greed often plays a role in establishing immigration policies, an attitude clearly prohibited by our Lord.

## **The Case for Law and Order**

Conflicting positions on immigration policy stake their claim on respect for authority at one end and on compassion for the needy at the other. Let's consider the matter of law and order.

Romans 13 states:

*Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God. . . . But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath,*

*but also for conscience' sake (vv. 1,2,4,5).[{5}](#)*

Christians are to be in subjection to governing authorities not only to avoid punishment, but also to be able to minister with a clear conscience. Peter expands on the motivation in 1 Peter 2:13-15 where he writes, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."

Thus, for Christians, obeying the law is one way honor God. God ordains authority with the responsibility to punish "the one who practices evil." For those who take the law-and-order position, these verses are a clear biblical mandate for dealing with illegal immigration. Not only should we personally obey the law, we should support our governing authorities in enforcing it.

However, those who take a different position argue our imperative to follow Christ's example takes precedence over any laws. Certainly, Jesus and the apostles did not always obey the strict direction of the ruling authorities. One notable example is found in Acts 4:19-20. When commanded not "to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus," Peter replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." Not only did they refuse to submit to the command, they encouraged others to follow their example. However, one should be careful about using these examples as a trump card to justify ignoring any laws that one believes are contrary to the teaching of Christ. Both Jesus and Paul direct us to pay our taxes, knowing full well that some of those tax dollars may be spent in ways that do not honor Christ.

As believers, we are called to obey laws that do not require us to directly disobey God.

## The Case for Compassion

Another important consideration is whether Christ's directive to show compassion to the needy should be our primary concern in establishing and enforcing immigration policy. Those who promote this case point to two primary principles in the Scriptures:

- 1. Treat the alien in our midst with fairness, remembering that we too are aliens.*
- 2. Minister to the least of these as unto Jesus Himself.*

Deuteronomy 10:18-19 states, "He . . . shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." Remembering their history as aliens dwelling in Egypt, the children of Israel were to show love for the aliens in their midst. We, too, should remember that most of us did nothing to deserve being born in America. We could just as easily be the person seeking a better life by becoming an alien in America.

Does this passage mean that we have a responsibility to care for any person who is able to cross our borders?

The Hebrew word most often translated as "alien" is *ger*. According to Vines, a *ger* "was not simply a foreigner or a stranger. He was a permanent resident, once a citizen of another land, who had moved into his new residence."<sup>[6]</sup> The Jewish law was clear that these aliens should be afforded equitable treatment under the law (e.g., Num. 15:16, Deut. 1:16). However, special provisions were also in place for the alien. Not being a member of one of the twelve tribes, the alien could not own land. Consequently, the alien was grouped

together with widows and orphans to receive a portion of the tithe (Deut. 14:28-29), access to the gleanings in the field (Deut. 24:19-22) and justice (Deut. 24:17-18). However, these provisions did not apply to the foreigner temporarily in the country for work or other purposes. These temporary visitors did not receive a food allotment and were not allowed to fully participate in society.

We know that God wants us to treat aliens fairly, but the biblical example shows a greater responsibility to those who meet the requirements to become residents.

Compassion is emphasized in Jesus' command to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and in us observation in Matt 25:40, "to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." We are called to demonstrate sacrificial love in meeting the needs of both friends and strangers. Each person we meet is created in the image of God, worthy of our love and our concern for their spiritual and physical needs. Whatever our position on immigration policy and enforcement, Christians should be at the forefront of ministering to people far from home.

## **Responding to Our Current Situation**

Is it possible within our current immigration laws to be compassionate *and* to be subject to ruling authorities at the same time? One way to answer that question is to apply the biblical guidelines reviewed earlier to the different roles in the immigration debate.

First, let's consider a *potential immigrant*. Barring a direct threat upon your life, abide by the laws of your current country and America. If you have a desire to work in America, apply through appropriate channels and use all legal means to expedite the process. Desiring more opportunity for your

family is commendable. However, choosing to break the law to achieve that goal is telling God that He cannot be trusted to provide.

Now assume you were an *illegal immigrant*. Report yourself to the appropriate authorities to obtain a hearing and abide by the results. Some argue that it is cruel to separate families. Current laws do not normally force families to be separated. Separation is the result of family members choosing to stay in the U.S. when a person is required to leave the country.

What attitude should be taken by an *employer*? Obey the employment laws. Do not knowingly hire illegal aliens and take steps to prevent accidentally hiring illegal aliens.

Finally, consider a *Christian citizen*. Reach out in love to all people regardless of their immigration status. Help them find help in dealing with the process and caring for their family. Counsel those in your flock to come into compliance with any laws they are breaking. Ask your representatives to support legislation which balances security with generosity and compassion. Most Americans desire to protect or improve their standard of living. Doing this at the expense of others is clearly contrary to biblical teaching. At the same time, lowering our standard of living by being less productive is not good stewardship either. We should promote policies that reflect a willingness to reduce our consumption to benefit others while promoting improvements across the board. What might this look like?

- Increased legal immigration for a variety of skill and educational levels, believing that we have the ingenuity to utilize these additional resources productively.
- Fair pay for all jobs with strong penalties for employers who break the laws.
- Requiring immigrants to maintain a record of gainful employment.
- Rapid deportation for those who enter illegally.

- While there is a real terrorist threat, making it difficult to enter our country surreptitiously.
- Pressuring other countries not to exploit their labor force.

Although there is no simple scriptural prescription to “fix” the immigration issue, Christians can model how to reach out in compassion and submit to authority at the same time. Prayerfully consider how God wants you to respond in this area.

## Notes

1. “Halting the Flow is American’s Illegal Immigration Priority”, Lydia Saad, *Gallup News Service*, April 13, 2006
2. Todd J. Gillman, “Christians ask: Can you love thy neighbor but deport him, too?” *Dallas Morning News*, April 28, 2006.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Luke 12:15
5. All Scripture references from the New American Standard Bible, 1995.
6. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers

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