

# Bad Blood Reconciled: A Review of Taylor Swift's "Bad Blood"

*Probe intern Sarah Withers contrasts Taylor Swift's Bad Blood song to the deep spiritual truths of the gospel of Christ.*

Naomi, a young Taylor Swift fan fighting leukemia, adopted Swift's song "[Bad Blood](#)" as her theme song during her battle with cancer. In response to her [video](#) Naomi uploaded on YouTube, Taylor Swift contributed [\\$50,000 to Naomi's medical bills](#). Naomi through her heartwarming story was able to transform the song to make it inspiring and hopeful. However, as most know, the song is not about fighting terrible cancer but instead about a broken relationship. Although Swift did not disclose the antagonist, she no longer sees reconciliation as an option. By contrasting Swift's "Bad Blood" with Christ's reconciling blood, Christians are reminded of the transformative power of the gospel to bring healing and hope to broken relationships.

## Destructive Power of Bad Blood

"Bad Blood," through the lyrics and video, paints a picture of the pain that is felt after someone is wronged in a relationship. The antagonist attacking her and "rubbing it in so deep" left Swift with a "a really deep cut." Many, if not all of us, have felt the pangs of being cut deeply with words and actions in a relationship gone wrong. A quick read through the Psalms reveals victims of broken relationships crying out in pain. The Psalmist laments, "Even my closest friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel before me."[\[1\]](#)

Not only do broken relationships hurt initially and deeply, but often the pain lingers. Swift captures this experience

through the lyrics, “Still got scars in my back from your knives, so don’t think it’s in the past, these kinds of wounds they last and they last.” Again the Psalmist writes, “I am restless in my complaint and I moan, because the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked.”<sup>{2}</sup> One thing both the Psalms and Swift can agree on is that broken relationships and betrayal are deeply painful.

For Swift, not only is the relationship broken and painful, it is irreconcilable. She notes the hopelessness of the relationship, “I don’t think we can solve them (problems)” and “in time can heal but this won’t.” This is the most upsetting part of the song.

We all have had broken relationships, yet the ones that hurt the most are the ones that turn from feelings of hurt to feelings of hate. We should hate sin and the pain it brings with it, but we are called to love even our enemies. Ephesians 6 says that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the “spiritual forces of evil.”<sup>{3}</sup> As difficult as it may be, we should guard our heart from future pain without hating the individual who hurt us. Thus, reconciliation should always be the ideal goal and in cases where reconciliation cannot or does not occur, forgiveness should still reign in our heart.

## **Healing Power of Christ’s Blood**

It seems like an impossible request to forgive someone and even move towards reconciliation with someone who betrayed and hurt us. This would be an unimaginable task if it were not for someone who did this for us first. The gospel is the perfect example of reconciliation.

When we sin, whether or not it affects anyone, we sin against God. Our most fundamental problem with sin is not that it hurts other people, but that it separates us from the love of God. Those who do not accept Christ as their savior are

outside of the effect of Christ's atoning blood and therefore are not able to experience God's love. However, Paul in Ephesians says "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."[{4}](#)

Before we can offer true love and reconciliation to others, we must first receive love and be reconciled to God. The only way to turn our bad blood against God into unity with God is through the power of Christ's redeeming blood on the cross. Colossians states, "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."[{5}](#) His blood cleanses us so that we are filled with the selfless love towards others that the Scriptures ask of us.[{6}](#)

## **Our Fight against Bad Blood**

Even for Christians who have been shown love and forgiveness, we still do not always experience an overflowing of love and forgiveness for those who wrong us. We still struggle with having bad blood towards our enemies. We still feel the pain of the broken relationships even though we are in Christ. As Christians, we look forward to a day when we will not feel pain, but while we still live in a fallen world, pain and hurt are very much part of our everyday lives.

However, the wrong that causes our pain has been or will be paid for. As Christians, if we are wronged by a believer in Christ, remember that Jesus died for those sins as well as for ours.[{7}](#) Yes, we should still lament that even believers sin and cause pain, yet justice was important enough to Christ that He died for those sins.[{8}](#) For those who sin against us and remain outside of Christ, their wrongs will be righted at the cost of their own life in eternal wrath. The hope of sharing the gospel is to offer others the redemptive power of Christ which indeed makes the gospel good news!

Looking back to the Psalms, there is a life-giving trend even within the darkness and pain. Even in Psalm 88, which is considered to be one of the darkest Psalms, the psalmist still cries out to God. In our broken relationships with others, true reconciliation must start and end with the grace and justice of God.

God knew we had bad blood and provided a Savior to change our hearts. He still continues to hear our cries of pain and sent the Holy Spirit to continue to protect our hearts from holding on to the bad blood in our relationships.

## Notes

1. Psalm 41:9 All verses are from the English Standard Version.
2. Psalm 55:2-3, see also Psalm 69.
3. Ephesians 6:12
4. Ephesians 2:13
5. Colossians 1:19-20
6. Hebrews 9:14
7. Ephesians 1:7
8. This is why I think St. Anselm was on the right track in *Cur Deus Homo*, when he argued that Jesus Christ had to become incarnate and die for our sins so that God's justice and grace could be made manifest. If God just ignored our sins, justice would not prevail—thank God He is both just and gracious through Jesus Christ!

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# How and Why We Should Biblically Analyze Songs

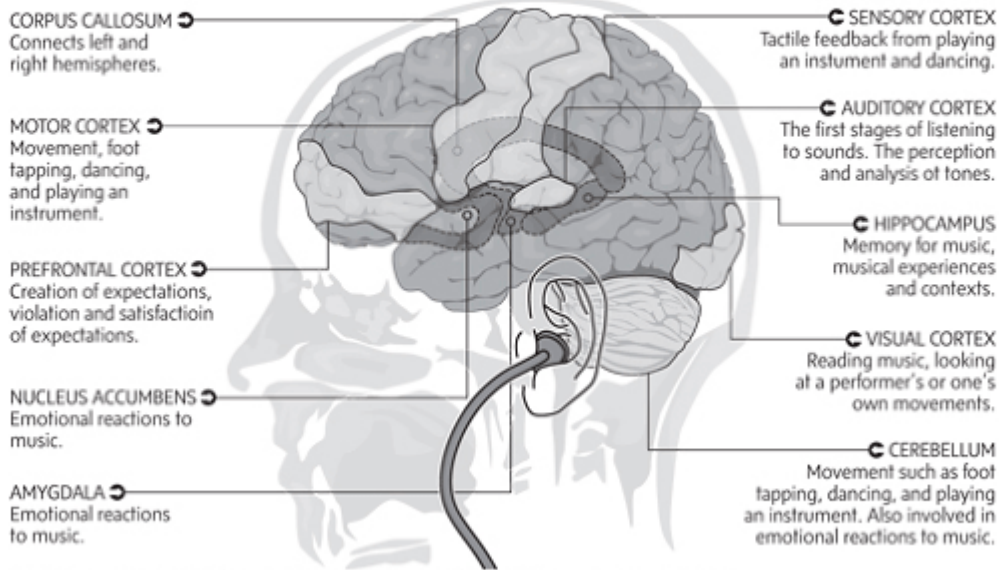
*Probe intern Sarah Withers provides insight about thinking biblically about popular songs.*

Numerous scientific studies have revealed that music is linked to relieving pain/stress, releasing endorphins, aiding coordination, increasing concentration, expanding memory, improving language skills, and lowering blood pressure, just to list a few.[\[1\]](#) Unfortunately, not all genres of music offer these benefits, so it would be quite misleading to say that critically analyzing songs can act as a remedy for migraines—however convenient and persuasive that claim might be!

While I may not be able to claim health advantages, powerful benefits can be gleaned for us and others by being aware and graciously critical of songs. I hope that I can provide how and why we should biblically analyze songs and challenge you to be a more thoughtful and gracious critical consumer of all types of music.

## Music on the mind

When we listen to music, it's processed in many different areas of our brain. The extent of the brain's involvement was scarcely imagined until the early nineties, when functional brain imaging became possible. The major computational centres include:



MIKE FAILLE/THE GLOBE AND MAIL ■ SOURCE: THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON MUSIC: THE SCIENCE OF A HUMAN OBSESSION

## How Do We Biblically Analyze a Song?

The most obvious first step to biblically analyzing a song is to actively listen to the lyrics and sometimes even watch the music video. It helps me focus and understand if I pull up the lyrics and read along as I listen. While I listen, I think about how the song makes me feel, what the song got right or wrong in its worldview, what I appreciate about the song, and any questions about possible meanings and interpretations. I also think about if or how I can relate to the song's message. Have I ever experienced, desired, or seen something similar to the song's message? If the answer is no, then maybe I could think about how seeing the songwriter's perspective could help me relate and communicate with someone with very different desires and experiences than my own.

Ultimately we biblically critique a song by shining the light of the biblical truths on it. No secular song gets everything right for the obvious reason that the gospel is not present. For some songs all that is missing is an explicit reference to the gospel, while other songs directly conflict with the

gospel. Yet, for even the more difficult songs, Christians can understand the song's message for the glory of God.

For example, Lana Del Rey's song "Born to Die"[{2}](#) provides the message that we should enjoy life because when we die there is nothing left for us. For those in Christ, that song is radically wrong about our purpose and destiny.

However, for those who are outside of Christ, that song paints a rather apt picture of their bleak destiny.[{3}](#) So yes, the song is very dark and upsetting, yet when I hear that song I can mourn for those outside of Christ and praise God that the lyrics of that song are not true for me. In that way, that song can incite worship and foster resolve to reach out to unbelievers-something Del Rey probably would never consider possible! That is the transformative power of the gospel, the greatest good news.

However, there are songs that Christians should avoid. Songs that are overly sexualized or demonic in nature may be too difficult to redeem.[{4}](#) Also some people are more affected by music than others. If you are not able to redeem the song by countering it with life-giving truths from Scripture and the song continues to bring you down, then you should not listen to it. Christians should pray for wisdom and guidance to know when to listen and engage and when to turn it off.[{5}](#)

## Why Should We Care?

Since music is so integrated into our daily lives, many of us are consumers of music whether we are intentional about it or not. [The American Academy of Pediatrics in 1996](#) (AAP) found that 14- to 16-year-olds listened to an average of 40 hours of music per week. For a more conservative number, [RAIN \(Radio and Internet Newsletter\)](#) reported that students "spend an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes a day consuming media, 2 hours 19 minutes of which is spent listening to music."[{6}](#)

While these studies focus on teens and adolescents, it is fair to say that adults also listen to a fair amount of music, whether it is through headphones at work or the radio in the car. When it comes down to it, music is very much part of our everyday life. For some it can be avoided, but by most, it is accepted and greatly enjoyed.

Musical lyrics are also sticky. It never ceases to amaze me how I can still easily sing along to songs from my childhood the second the second it plays. Yet, when discussing my project of biblically analyzing popular music, a common response is that people often do not listen to the lyrics, but rather just enjoy the melody and beat. The AAP (1996) reported that "in one study 30% of teenagers knew the lyrics to their favorite songs," which would seem to affirm that initial claim.

With those intuitions and findings, it would be easy to undermine this project as interesting but unimportant. However, the same AAP (2009) article cited the Knobloch-Westerwick *et al.* study that "although young listeners might not understand all the details in lyrics, they recognize enough to obtain a general idea of the message they bring."

Moreover, the fact that we do remember song lyrics well after we have stopped listening to them shows that we are aware of the words even if we are not actively thinking about the message. In many respects we have become passive consumers of information and entertainment, especially when it comes to music. It is in light of this passivity that we should strive to be active listeners.

Every song with words carries a message, although some are more obvious and dangerous than others. For example, current artists such as Macklemore, Hozier, Lana Del Rey, and Lady Gaga proclaim more explicit messages and agendas in their songs-something as Christians we should be aware of and ready to critique. The AAP (1996) claimed that "awareness of, and

sensitivity to, the potential impact of music lyrics by consumers, the media, and the music industry is crucial.”

Although the rate and impact of the consumption of songs can be debated, there are still benefits of being aware of and engaging with our culture through songs.

## **What Are the Benefits?**

Well, there are three main benefits to biblically analyzing songs. First, we refine our ability to enjoy music. For many this will be very counterintuitive. People I have talked with have feared that if they are too critical of the music’s message, then they will no longer be able to enjoy it. I will agree, there are some songs that might be ruined by listening critically to the lyrics. However, Christians should likely avoid listening to those songs anyway.

Even with songs we don’t like, we can still enjoy them for their musicality and benefit from some insights, however hard to find. The vast majority of songs are redeemable even though they may counter the gospel. Where God provides the songwriter with common grace insights, there is an opportunity to redeem the song. Remember Lana Del Rey’s song; I am still able to enjoy her powerful use of a darker sound and message, but I am also reminded of the hope I have in the gospel.

If we get to a point where we become cynical and antagonistic towards our music culture, we should remember that God gave us music and culture as a gift. The Psalms are examples of a great variety of songs that were written to offer the expression of truth about God, humanity, and our world. The obvious difference is that the Psalms are God-breathed and inspired—yet there are often truths that can be gleaned even from secular and popular songs. After all, we are all made in God’s image and bear His music-loving traits.

Another benefit of analyzing songs is the ability to learn

about our culture and the people influenced by it. Regardless of whether the lyrics are true, they are believed to be true by the songwriter and often by people in our culture. Part of the appeal of songs is that they are relatable. Relatability makes the song powerful and influential.

We can gain invaluable insight into the thoughts of our culture and younger generations through the lyrics of songs. Many songs provide commentary on our culture's view of alcohol consumption, drug use, violence, relationships, sexuality, freedom, and self-worth. By learning what the songs say about such topics, we can be better equipped to understand where people are coming from.

The final benefit which naturally flows from the previous one is being able to relate and engage with our culture. By engaging with themes in songs, we are ultimately practicing how to engage with people. I was talking with a group of high school students about one of Macklemore's songs called "Starting Over" which is about his relapse as an alcoholic. The song is marked with shame, a deep sense of failure, and loss of identity. Before listening to the song, I encouraged them to listen to the lyrics as if a person was talking with them. With that perspective, students would be less likely to immediately judge him as a failure, and instead would be more likely to empathize and relate as we are all failures and slaves to sin outside of Christ.

By being aware of songs, we can better engage the lies of our culture and counter them with the truths of Scripture.<sup>{7}</sup> The AAP (1996 & 2009), encourages parents to "become media-literate" which means "watching television with their children and teenagers, discussing the content with them, and initiating the process of selective viewing at an early age." Later in the article, the authors even suggest that parents should look up the lyrics and become familiar with them. Even if you are not a parent, as Christians one way we can help

correct lies of our culture is through conversations about popular music.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It is our hope and joy that we have been redeemed and my prayer that Christians will show others the light of Christ.

So, the goal of analyzing songs from a Christian perspective is not merely an academic exercise that challenges critical thought, but to move us to action. Peter claimed that Christians were saved so "that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."[{8}](#) Ultimately we should be encouraged to talk, relate, empathize, and love others. Through songs we can help others to "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."[{9}](#)

## Notes

1. Another article that was particularly helpful was from the [eMedExpert](#). However, if you just search "benefits to music" (or the like) and you will be overwhelmed by how many articles develop all the unique benefits to music.
2. The video includes sexual content, brief drug use, and a violent image at the end.
3. I should note however, that the song seems to hold the message of mere extinction at death. As Christians, we believe that souls are immortal which means even the non-believer persists. For those outside of Christ, they will experience death as eternal wrath and destruction. See John 3:36, Roman 6:23, Matthew 25:46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and Revelation 21:8.
4. To address briefly the pushback on the idea that we can or should "redeem culture": The confusion rests in the nuanced

difference in meaning of the word “redeemed.” I use the word “redeemed” in this context to mean something closer to transformed by truth, not redeemed in the sense God has redeemed believers. Yes, Scriptures never call us to “redeem culture” but God does call us to let the light of truth shine. By engaging culture with the truth of Scriptures, Christians can make aspects of culture honoring to God, thus in that sense redeeming them. For example, pornography falls under the category of “unredeemable,” meaning that there is no way someone could make pornography honoring to God. However, with different aspects of culture this task is possible and I think should be encouraged.

5. See Hebrews 5:14.

6. RAIN cited [The Kaiser Family Foundation study](#) for these statistics. The report also broke down how the kids and teens were listening to the music, finding that on average per day they listen to 41 minutes of music on their iPod and similar devices, 32 minutes of music on computers (iTunes and Internet radio), and 32 minutes listening to the radio.

7. See Ephesians 6:17-20 and 2 Corinthians 10:1-6.

8. 1 Peter 2:9.

9. Colossians 2:8

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# Human Enhancement and Christianity

*Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese says that our obsession with perfection and improvement drives the human enhancement movement. But the key is to rest instead in Christ's perfection.*

# Perfection and Human Enhancement

Americans want to be perfect and the science of Human Enhancement promises to deliver that ideal. Perfect looks, athletic ability, intelligence, greater productivity, increased longevity and even moral perfectionism are all within reach or so many think. Human Enhancement is the current fashionable term for all the new ways to alter the body and mind to make people more fit and adaptable to the ever changing pace of progress. Human Enhancement is not an organized school of thought, but a societal-wide trend aimed at achieving perfection. Drugs can be used to enhance an athlete's physical performance in order to perfect his swing or increase a student's intelligence by improving memory and attention span, creating a straight A student. Cosmetic surgeries make women more beautiful and appear younger. The right administration of certain drugs will increase empathy in the brain and help prevent spousal infidelity. Growth hormones given to children make them taller and increase their chances of success. Sex selection is now possible so that you can have the perfect boy/girl balance in your family. Eventually embryos will be screened to remove undesired genes that lead to obesity or genetic diseases and even determine hair, skin and eye color. You will be able to custom order the perfect child.



The crux of the Human Enhancement issue surrounds values of perfectionism that desire the technology necessary to make these things possible. Perfection represents a controlling obsession for many Americans. We demand perfect grades from our children. An A- can question an entire academic career. Why not an A? We demand perfection at work. Americans are the hardest workers in history, who have internalized the Protestant Work Ethic like no other people.

And most of all we want perfect bodies that defy age and sickness, epitomizing youth and vitality. Women suffer the hardest under the burden of perfection. Media is saturated with images of young beautiful blonde bodies selling things. Writer Natalia Ilyin asks in her book *Blonde Like Me* the important questions concerning beauty; “Where does our fetish for measurement come from? How do we decide that one person is more good-looking (and therefore ‘better’) than another? Why do comments made about our fat go to our bone? What happened along the way that made size six beautiful and size twenty a crisis?”[\[1\]](#)

Perfectionism reveals the age old desire of humanity to aspire to divinity. In the past we only had myths to follow, but today enhancement technology brings the realization of perfection ever closer.

## **Apollo as the Old Greek Ideal**

We derive our ideals of perfection from historical precedent and desire to master ourselves and the world around us. Our Puritan heritage is one major source for our obsession with work, thrift, education and industry. Our moral perfectionism has an ancient history we can trace as far back as the fifth century monk Pelagius who advocated moral perfection and the power of the will and works righteousness. But our obsession with bodily perfection is even older, and like so many things in the modern world it has its roots in the ancient Greeks. Ilyin notes that “Measurement is the apparatus of mankind’s search for perfection. We hear all our lives about the ‘perfect body,’ ‘perfect proportion,’ ‘perfect features.’ But what does perfect mean, really? Where do we get the idea of ‘perfect?’”[\[2\]](#)

The Greek philosopher Plato taught that perfection exists in an ideal world outside the everyday one. The perfect apple exists as an idea and common apples we come into contact with

are pale imitations of that ideal. None of the apples we see can compare but they all derive their nature as apples from the ideal.

Greek religion, too, is still present in striving for perfection. Apollo the sun god was believed to embody the perfect human form: young, blond, athletic and male. A beautiful body meant a beautiful mind. "Your blond hair meant that the purity of the sun lived within you. Apollo's blond symbolized the beauty of the power that could order and control nature. It symbolized the beauty of the rational mind."[\[3\]](#) The burden of physical perfection was not always the concern of women, but was first located in young men. However, because the Apollo Cult was homoerotic the image of perfection was transposed to women in Christian times. The beautiful blonde images that consume our culture, such as the blonde on the cover of *Shape* magazine, are really "Apollo in drag," as Ilyin states.[\[4\]](#)

The burden of female perfection reverberates in a recent song by Pink who sings to her daughter,

*Pretty, pretty please  
don't you ever ever feel  
like you're less than perfect;  
pretty, pretty please  
if you ever ever feel  
like you're nothing,  
you are perfect to me.*[\[5\]](#)

The ideal of perfection has a way of making us feel like we can never measure up.

Perfection represents an unrealistic goal in any area of life and will always produce the accompanying sense of failure. The desire for divinity as imitation of Apollo or the perfect human form, a striving towards an angelic existence, will always let us down.

# Eugenics and Human Enhancement

The goal of Human Enhancement is to improve humanity. This sounds like a noble intention, but as we uncover its meaning it appears to be fraught with complications. In the past this was known as *eugenics* or the science of human breeding. Most famously, eugenics is remembered as the basis of Nazi genocide, but it was extremely popular in the United States as well, which served as inspiration and precedent for the Nazi program. Many laws were passed in the 1890's and early 1900's preventing the "feeble-minded," or epileptic, schizophrenic, bi-polar and depressed individuals from marrying and imposing forced sterilization in order to inhibit them from passing on their negative traits.

Eugenics was discredited after the holocaust. Society abandoned it with good cause, yet eugenics is making a comeback. With the advent of biomedical technology it is now possible to continue the goal of trait selection. Prenatal testing for diseases through the procedure of amniocentesis identifies many complications such as Tay-Sachs, Down Syndrome, sickle-cell anemia, hemophilia, and cystic fibrosis, and also tells the sex of the child. Although prenatal testing can result in early treatment, women may also choose to terminate their pregnancy. This practice has already resulted in an imbalance between male over female children in some regions of India. Ethicists fear the practice will eventually lead to the termination of fetuses believed to carry the genes for obesity, homosexuality, alcoholism and like a ghost from the past, *low intelligence*, even if these genes do not actually exist.[{6}](#)

The philosopher Philip Kitcher notes two types of eugenics. The first is known as coercive eugenics and was implemented through state manipulation. Second, he identifies a new kind of eugenics called "laissez-faire eugenics,"[{7}](#) also called "liberal eugenics" because it holds the individual choice of

trait determination as sovereign. Through sex selection the perfect boy/girl balance may be achieved along with the elimination of perceived birth defects and genetic flaws, sparing parents the anguish of watching children die slow deaths. However, prenatal testing that leads to trait selection does not resolve the quandary of abortion that is currently necessary to achieve parental goals. Eugenics is grounded in values and preferences for a certain type of person justified under the rubric of "improvement." The new eugenics offers no opposition to market forces from eventually predetermining any physical characteristic thought most advantageous for success in liberal society, and may return us to the Superman ideal. History teaches the dangers of preoccupation with perfect human form, but people have no ears to hear the lessons of history. We appear destined to repeat the mistakes of the past if we do not change our values that prize strength over weakness or curb our desire for perfection in our children.

## Cyborgism

Human Enhancement adopts the cyborg image as its ideal. "Cyborg" was a term coined in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, two research scientists wanting to redesign the human body in order to make it adaptable to the inhospitable environment of outer space. It has since come to be applied to the entire human and technological merger. Cyborg is short for *cyber organism*. A cyborg is any living thing that has been adapted to a technological apparatus so that the two are now inseparable. The first animal cyborg was a rat in 1960. It had a Rose osmotic pump attached to its tail which injected chemicals into the body in order to regulate its life support system.[\[8\]](#) Cyborgism is the belief that human adaptation to technology represents the natural development of evolution. Humanity has always used some form of technology, whether fire, knife or arrow, to enhance its existence. The current

trend towards our complete absorption into a technological world represents the culmination of a long symbiotic relationship between humanity and its machines. People are, as philosopher Andy Clark says, “Natural-Born Cyborgs.”[{9}](#) This view argues that we are technological animals, meaning it is human nature to use technology and define ourselves by it.

In her famous essay *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway argues that the Cyborg is the new metaphor or ideal of human existence because it simultaneously transcends and includes all differences.[{10}](#)

Both theories argue that the lines of demarcation between humanity, nature and machine are rapidly disappearing. Like a scene out of the movie *Blade Runner* we are rapidly approaching a time where the organic and inorganic worlds will completely merge and the words “natural,” “human,” and “machine,” will no longer mean different things.

This position does not view humanity as either special in some way, or distinct from nature, or possessing a rational soul. It springs from materialism [the worldview that says there is no reality beyond the physical, measurable universe]. Clark argues that this ancient prejudice blinds us from our true technological nature.[{11}](#) Clark is right in identifying what Christians call the *imago dei* or image of God as the primary demarcation between humanity and the rest of nature. If this traditional boundary line is lost, the current ideal of “improvement” and “perfection” that leads to a higher evolutionary form can flourish unimpeded.

## **Perfection in Christ**

Human Enhancement has restored sight to the blind, brought hearing to the deaf, enabled the lame to walk, and healed diseases—things once thought only possible by miraculous powers. It promises to extend our life expectancy and further

increase communication. The realm of possibilities does appear limitless to what new technology will accomplish. However, the ideal of perfection driving our technology is based on an overestimation of human powers and the failure to recognize that our perfection has already been accomplished.

Christians can agree that human beings are technological animals. This is no different than when Aristotle said people are social animals. This just means it is human nature to be social or technological; but we disagree with the notion that we are nothing more than that. Although we were made in the perfect image of God (Gen. 1:26), that image was lost in part due to Adam's sin. We can survive in the harsh conditions of the natural world with technology, which is nothing more than extensions ourselves. But we cannot restore that image without a spiritual rebirth that only God can give us through the work of Christ which we appropriate by faith. Technological enhancement will not lead us to perfection. "Man cannot live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4). The Bible calls Jesus Christ the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45) by which it means he was the perfect man sent to restore the human race. "And having been made perfect, He became to all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:10). Humanity constantly strives to recover that lost image through its own good works and religious striving. The technological fetish of our day is simply another form of that works righteousness or humanity trying to earn its own salvation and perfection. It is the old works righteousness of the Pelagian heresy dressed up in modern garb.

You are called to find your rest in Christ, to accept who you are and not to imitate Apollo (physical form and beauty) or the Cyborg (technology and progress) in reaching for perfection, for they are redeemed in Christ as well. Christ has already accomplished perfection and we are perfected in Him; "you have been made complete [perfect] in Him" (Col. 2:10). And through Christ we can extend his example of

perfection to the world. "For I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Stop striving for a perfect ideal you can never reach. The Psalmist writes, "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:10). This is a very difficult task for perfectionists. Our charge is to accept the perfection of Christ, to accept that we have been accepted in Him!

## Notes

1. Natalia Ilyin, *Blonde Like Me: The Roots of the Blonde Myth in Our Culture* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 111.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 112.
4. Ibid., 113.
5. Pink, "Perfect" in *Greatest Hits...So Far!!!* La Face Records, 2010.
6. Philip Kitcher, *The Lives to Come: The Genetic Revolution and Human Possibilities* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 188.
7. Ibid., 19.
8. Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.
9. Ibid., 26.
10. Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the late Twentieth Century" in *Posthumanism*, ed. Neil Badmington (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 69-84.
11. Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, 26.

# The True State of American Evangelicals

*Steve Cable analyzed the data concerning 18- to 40-year-old born-again 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.”[{3}](#)

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,[{4}](#) 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.”[{5}](#)

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.”[{6}](#)

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*.[{7}](#) 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.”{8}

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.”{9} 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.”{10} 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.{11}

Standing in contrast to these eminent sociologists are the findings of George Barna and the Barna Group. Their surveys between 1995 and 2009{12} indicate that among all Americans who self-identify as being born again, less than 20% of them agree with six basic historic Christian beliefs{13} 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:

<b>Belief</b>	<b>Baylor</b>	<b>NSYR</b>	<b>Barna</b>	<b>Probe</b> <a href="#">{17}</a>
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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-again (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-again 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-again (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-again. 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-again, 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-again

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-again 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-again 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-again 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<sup>{20}</sup>) 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/mQYubb](http://bit.ly/mQYubb).

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." {3} 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.[{1}](#) 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.[{2}](#) 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.[{3}](#) Over thirty percent of them said that their coworkers condone questionable ethics by showing respect for those who achieve success using them.[{4}](#) 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.[{5}](#) A recent survey published in *Education Week* found that three out of four students admitted to engaging in "serious cheating" within the previous year.[{6}](#)

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.<sup>{11}</sup> 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*,<sup>[12]</sup> 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 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 Dredd-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 if 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](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_euphemism_of_death_with_dignity) on November 4, 2014.