Making Distinctions: A Warning Against Mixing Beliefs

Cafeteria-Style Religion

You've probably heard the term "cafeteria-style" religion. This is the religion of "a little of this and a little of that." Beliefs are chosen from a variety of theologies or religions or philosophies because they seem right or appeal to us. Rituals or practices are chosen because we like them, they suit our tastes.

Sometimes this is a matter of Christians mixing the doctrines of various Christian theological traditions that results in an odd fit. But we won't be talking about that this week. More often, and what is of more concern to us, is the way Christians sometimes mix non-Christian beliefs with Christian beliefs.

I saw this illustrated in a story published a few years ago about a young woman who had been a Methodist but became a Baptist after studying Baptist theology. She'd clearly put some thought into her decision which I applauded. However, it turned out that, along with her Baptist doctrines, she also held the belief that Christianity isn't necessarily true for everyone. She was mixing Christian doctrine with a postmodern attitude about the nature of truth. Christians mix in a variety of false beliefs with true doctrine. Some Christians read horoscopes and take them somewhat seriously. Some base their ethical decision-making on what works. Some believe in reincarnation. And some, like the woman I mentioned, believe Jesus isn't the only way to God.

This isn't a new phenomenon. The apostle Paul faced the same

kind of situation. Some Christians in his day were trying to mix Jewish and pagan beliefs into their Christianity. Paul discussed this issue in his letter to the church in Colossae. The second chapter of that letter will be the focus of our consideration (you might want to grab your Bible). In fact, may I be so bold as to ask you to read the chapter before you continue reading this? It's really more than a chapter: chapter 2, verse 1, through chapter 3, verse 4. If you have more time, go ahead and read chapter 1 also.

Paul starts chapter 2 by expressing his desire for the Colossians, that they "may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (v. 3). The believers needed to be clear on this so they would be able to spot "fine-sounding" but deceptive arguments that led away from Christ.

Greek Philosophy

What were the false doctrines being taught in Colossae? What was being taught was a mixture of elements of Jewish beliefs and Greek philosophy with Christianity. The net result was that Christ was diminished in His person and His work on our behalf. This is clear from the corrections Paul makes in chapter 2 of Colossians and from the strong Christological statement in chapter 1, verses 15-20.

Let's look first at the ideas imported from Greek thought.

From chapter 2, verses 21 to 23, we can deduce that people were being taught the pagan or Greek belief that physical matter is evil. "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" People were taught to restrict themselves from certain pleasures that God didn't forbid. More importantly, if matter is evil, how could God come as a man in a physical body like yours and mine? If God couldn't become man, then Jesus

couldn’t be the divine Son of God. You see how that would be a problem!

The Colossians were also engaging in angel worship. Look at verse 18: “Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.” Some Greek philosophers had taught that the One, or the ultimate being, was too pure to get close to evil matter. So there were many levels of lesser beings between the One and the material universe. It was a simple step to associate angels with these beings. If people couldn’t approach God, maybe they could these intermediate beings. Hence, angel worship.

Lastly, false teachers were promoting a special knowledge that apparently only a few had. Paul speaks of people puffed up with idle notions, in verse 18. He also mentions the “appearance of wisdom” in verse 23. He responds that in Christ “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (v. 3). This knowledge is available to all who are in Christ, and provides no reason for our being puffed up (1 Cor. 2:16).

These three beliefs developed into what is called Gnosticism.{1} Paul saw this as a very grave danger. Why? Just because Christians might be deprived of some rightful pleasures? Well, that was a problem. But something much more important was at stake. Because of these beliefs, the person and work of Christ was diminished.

Jewish Beliefs

What was being imported from Judaism?

In chapter 2, verses 16 and 20 through 22, Paul cautions against a wrong emphasis on traditions carried over from Judaism including dietary restrictions, and the observance of religious festivals and the Sabbath. From this we can deduce that these things were being promoted by the false teachers. Apparently, from what Paul says in verse 11, they were also

requiring circumcision.

Does this mean it is wrong to have traditions or to restrict our diet in any way? No, not at all. The point is that our standing before God is not related to such things. Christians are no longer under a legal code because Christ has taken it away and nailed it to the cross (v. 14). Paul wanted the Christians to know they were free from such things. Why? Well, the most important reason is that such works *don't work* for getting us to God. There's no reason to carry that burden on our shoulders; God put it on Christ's who has done all that needs to be done.

Not only were such things incapable of getting the Colossians to God, they couldn't even accomplish the goal of reforming people. Look at chapter 2, verse 23: "Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." Paul doesn't just say that these things don't stand us in good stead with God; they can't even make us good people. Why? Because our root problem is our fallen nature. We can observe all the practices and rituals we want, but that won't change what we are inside. And what is inside will show itself as we sin again . . . and again . . . and again.

No, our problem isn't met by observing rituals or by putting our hopes in the wrong places such as in heavenly beings or in our special knowledge. It is met in Christ in whom we have all we need. Verses 9 and 10 read: "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete . . ." Literally, "you have been filled up." It is a passive verb. We have been given what we need in Christ.

The only way to God, given our fallen nature, is through Christ. The Colossians had turned back to worthless things. And these things weren't neutral in value; they served to turn the focus off of Jesus where it belonged.

Being Thinking Christians

What was and is to be done in response to this mixing of false with true? The solution lies in first knowing what is true. Speaking of Colossians 2 verse 2, nineteenth century biblical scholar John Eadie wrote this: "'The full assurance of understanding,' [or "full riches of complete understanding" in the NIV] is the fixed persuasion that you comprehend the truth, and that it is the truth which you comprehend."{2} Why is that so important? He goes on to say that if we *don't* have the full assurance that comes from understanding, we will be more likely to abandon what we believe today for something new tomorrow; new ideas will chase away previously held convictions. If we are "'ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,'" he says, 'then such [doubtfulness] and fluctuation present a soil most propitious to the growth and progress of error."{3}

The apostles wanted the members of the churches to understand Christian beliefs. "The fixed knowledge of these things," Eadie writes, "would fortify their minds against the seductive insinuations of false teachers," who mix just enough truth with falsehood to make their teachings believable.

Imagine Paul setting on his left side the false beliefs and practices being taught in Colossae and on his right, Jesus and His finished work. Pointing to his left he says, "You think matter is evil? Then [pointing to his right now] you might as well abandon Christ altogether, because it was His deity that made it possible for Him to obtain our salvation. You believe [pointing to his left] that worshipping angels will help? [Pointing to his right] Jesus, who is the exact image of God, God in flesh, to whom we have direct access, *created* the angels! [Pointing to his left] You think keeping all these rules will make you a good person? They don't! You just keep sinning. It is in Christ [pointing to the right] that your sin can be dealt with at the root."

We can believe in all manner of things in the current “true for me” way of thinking. But if something isn’t true (in the classical sense), believing won’t make it so.

Things to Be Aware of Today

The Christians in Colossae were guilty of folding in false beliefs with true ones. To avoid doing that ourselves, we need to be thinking Christians. We need to think *biblically*. The Bible is our final authority for faith and practice. Does the particular idea or activity find support in Scripture? We need to think *theologically*. If the Bible doesn’t directly address a given idea, does it fit with what we *do* know about God, Christ, human nature, etc.,? We also need to think *logically.* We need to be able to think well, to spot contradictions between beliefs.

What false notions are we susceptible to today? I’ll name just a few.

A major issue today is *religious pluralism*. We are tempted to follow along with our culture and think that Jesus is just one of several valid ways to God.

Subjectivism is a big problem that grows out of the skepticism of our age. If I can’t know what’s really “out there,” I’ll just have to form my own beliefs based on my own thinking, feelings, desires, and circumstances. But our knowledge is too limited and our sin nature biases us in ways that lead us astray.

Pragmatic religion is also a temptation. “Does it work?” we want to know. If so, it’s right. We treat our lives like we would a machine: if what comes out at the end is good, then clearly the machine must be working correctly. This becomes an end-justifies-the-means way of living.

Therapeutic religion is also an issue today. It’s God’s job to

make us happy. We think it's more important for pastors to be counselors than theologians. We want them to fix our problems and make us happy again.

Then there's *materialism*—a greater desire for wealth and material possessions than for the kingdom of God and His righteousness. There's the temptation in an advertising age to *market* the gospel—fitting it to the sensibilities of the market rather than bringing those sensibilities under the scrutiny of the gospel.

Then there's *style over substance*—we're more concerned with being *hip* than with being *good*.

I could go on. Instead I'll invite you to look for a copy of Os Guinness's book *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds*{4} for a more extended discussion of these problems.

Even if you don't read that book, let me encourage you to become conscious of your beliefs, and to become settled in your mind about at least the very basic Christian teaching, namely, that in Christ dwells the fullness of Deity, that in Him we have been made complete, that we are made alive with him through faith. And be on your guard so that "no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy."

Notes

1. Curtis Vaughan, "Colossians," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978. (Software; 166 in hard copy)
2. John Eadie, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 111.
3. Ibid.
4. Os Guinness, Fit Bodies, *Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

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The Emerging Church

Introduction

The church, both local and universal, is always influenced by the culture in which it resides. As a result, churches in America have gone through changes that correspond to changes in the American culture. Some of the changes are innocuous and are seen as suitable by almost everyone; air conditioning and indoor plumbing come to mind. Other changes can be more controversial such as musical genre, the use of multimedia, and especially preaching styles and content. The challenge for churches is to determine what changes are acceptable and what changes compromise the message of the gospel.

A growing list of influential thinkers and pastors argue that the postmodern era in which we live mandates a significant change in how believers do church. This movement has come to be known as the *emerging church* and has acquired a considerable following as evidenced both by the number of conferences held on the subject and by the numerous Web sites devoted to the issue. The leaders of this movement have written and spoken at length regarding the necessity for change and have enumerated the types of changes that the church needs to make to survive and thrive in the years to come.

The difficulty for outsiders trying to weigh their arguments begins with trying to define the changes that have occurred in our postmodern culture. Postmodernity is horribly difficult to define. Some see it as a loss of modernity’s confidence in science and technology; others see it as something much deeper. One emerging church Web site uses a definition written

by an English professor at a major university who writes that "Postmodernism . . . doesn't lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionality, or incoherence, but rather celebrates that. The world is meaningless? Let's not pretend that art can make meaning then, let's just play with nonsense."{1}

Postmodernity is primarily an argument or protest against modernist attitudes and truth claims. The emerging church has picked up this protest by rejecting traditional ideas of authority, certainty, and rationality. Instead its emphasis is on what it calls *authenticity*. Feelings and affections matter more than logic and reason, one's experience more than propositional truth claims, and inclusion more than exclusion.

Brian McLaren is a leader among those who argue that radical change must come to the church or else our culture will deem it irrelevant. He writes, "Either Christianity itself is flawed, failing, [and] untrue, or our modern, Western, commercialized, industrial-strength version of it is in need of a fresh look, a serious revision."{2}

In this article we will consider what is good, what is not so good, and what is dangerous to the gospel of Christ in this church reform movement known as the emerging church.

What's Good About the Emerging Church?

If the emerging church is anything, it's sensitive to the culture around it. Its leaders are thoughtfully engaged in responding to what they believe are dramatic changes in our society. These changes include the rapid increase in ethnic and religious diversity and the arrival of instant local and global communication. At the same time, Western civilization has experienced a dramatic decrease in biblical literacy.

The leadership of the emerging church argues against those who are tempted to respond to these changes by clinging to a narrowly defined church tradition. They believe that

idealizing a past era and allowing nostalgia to replace the hard work of contextualizing Christianity for today's realities would be a mistake. Instead, we should discover how best to communicate the gospel to our increasingly postmodern world. In his book *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church,* D. A. Carson writes that "this is far more commendable than a cultural conservatism that acts as if the culture with which we are most comfortable (usually the one in which we grew up) is the only culture acceptable to thinking Christians, and perhaps to God himself."{3}

As I noted earlier, a key emphasis of the emerging church is authenticity. It argues that modernity has brought the church an unnecessary and unhealthy desire for absolute theological certainty which has led to an unbalanced focus on the theological propositions held by believers rather than on living an authentic Christian life. It has also led to a lack of humility regarding the limitations of language to communicate the mysteries of God's person and rule. The drive for theological precision has left the church divided and worn out, unable to offer the world a clear picture of the kingdom of God.

The emerging church is responding to what it perceives to be a lack of authenticity in our worship and Christian life in general. They would agree with Carson who writes, "Sermons are filled with clichés. There is little intensity in confession, little joy in absolution, little delight in the gospel, little passion for the truth, little compassion for others, little humility in our evaluations, [and] little love in our dealings with others."{4}

It has also rightly stressed the importance of community. Modernity offered a picture of human nature that highlighted the heroic individual. However, the Bible begins with a relational Trinity—God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit—and sets the New Testament believer within the community of the church including all the "one another"

admonitions given by its inspired authors.

The world is watching to see this community in action. As Stanley Grenz writes, “Members of the next generation are often unimpressed by our verbal presentations of the gospel. What they want to see is a people who live out the gospel in wholesome, authentic, and healing relationships.”{5}

Concerns About the Emerging Church

Among the many concerns that have been written about the emerging church, we will focus primarily on just two issues. The first is its one-dimensional portrayal of the modern era, usually seen as the time period between the Enlightenment and the late 1900s, and the other is its teaching regarding what we can confidently know as believers.

Some argue that the emerging church uses an incomplete description of the modern era and its impact on the church to build its case. D. A. Carson writes that the movement’s “distortion of modernism extends, in the case of some emerging church thinkers, to a distortion of confessional Christianity under modernism.”{6} Emerging church leaders paint a picture of the church in the modern era as having given in to the rationalistic excesses of the times. By doing so, they argue, it is guilty of committing the sin of absolutism, leading to an arrogance that resulted in a cold, emotionless orthodoxy. Drained of any passion, the church in the modern era became a shadow of what it should be. Although there are times where this in fact happened, the modern era is far too complex to reduce it, or the manifestation of the church in it, to such a simple portrayal.

Without going into too many of the names and ideas involved, it must be noted that the modern period has not been a monolith of science and reason. From Rousseau to Nietzsche, many have challenged the mechanistic model presented by

Enlightenment thinkers and offered a different view of reality and human nature. These ideas also impacted the church during this so called “modern” era. While many sought a more scientific faith and utilized the new tools of science to justify Christianity, others followed the lead of Søren Kierkegaard towards a more existential Christian life.

In its attack against modernism, the emerging church has condemned confessional Christianity as too abstract and rationalistic. Carefully constructed theologies, and those who build them, are set against a faith comprised of stories, proverbs, and mystery. Often, it is presented as one or the other, no compromise being possible. But is this necessarily the case? C. S. Lewis is one example of a Christian who defended the faith in formal, rational debates, and yet understood the power of story and the imagination.

The Problem of Knowing

This leads us into the second area of concern regarding the emerging church. How much knowledge about God, the human condition and salvation can we confidently possess? This question is directly tied to our concept of revelation. Do we have revealed propositional truth in Scripture, truth that can be understood and communicated, even cross-culturally, or are we limited to the emotions and relationships that only result from a personal encounter with God?

The most important criticism of the emerging church is its application of postmodern epistemology. Epistemology is the part of philosophy that asks, “How do you know that,” or “How do we know anything at all?”. Some in the emerging church movement have endorsed an extreme version of postmodern epistemology that creates an either/or view of knowledge that can be very manipulative.

First, they set the standard for knowing something to be true

unreasonably high. They claim that either we know something exhaustively, even omnisciently as God knows it, or else our partial knowledge can only be personal knowledge, more like an opinion rather than something that can be binding on others as well. Even worse, they argue that we have no means of testing to see how close what we think is true actually corresponds with reality itself. Since few of us would claim to have God's perspective or knowledge on an issue, they argue that we must admit that everything we claim to know is only a very limited personal perspective on the truth. In addition, what little we think we know is highly impacted, some say completely constructed, by the social group we participate in as individuals.

What this viewpoint does is make it impossible for anyone to claim that he or she knows something objectively, and that this objective knowledge is true or valid for everyone everywhere. If knowledge can only be personal knowledge, then the phrase "it might be true for you, but not for me" becomes reality for everyone and for every topic.

There are other ways of thinking about what we know that sets the standard for knowing lower and yet maintains the sense of postmodern humility that is attractive to many.

One suggestion is called the "fusion of horizons" model of knowledge. Just like everyone's view of the horizon is slightly different, everyone's understanding of an event or idea is slightly different because it's filtered through a person's experiences and perspective. For example, let's consider the case of a twenty-first century biblically illiterate person trying to understand Paul's message in Romans.{7} At first, there will be little overlap in how she and Paul understand the world. But what if she read the rest of the Bible, learned Greek, attended Bible studies, and read books about the first century Roman culture? Her understanding will never be exactly the same as Paul's, but slowly she will get closer and closer to his world and develop a clearer

picture of what Paul was attempting to communicate. She may choose to disagree with Paul, but she will understand him.

If this were not true, it would make little sense when Paul writes in 2 Corinthians, “For we do not write you anything you cannot read or understand.” The strong postmodern view of knowledge leaves us little hope that the knowledge of the gospel can be heard and understood.

Summary

Leaders of the emerging church argue that Christianity must focus more on authenticity and relationships and less on propositional truth or it will become irrelevant and ineffective. But is the focus on relationships and authenticity necessarily antithetical to propositional truth? Other church reform movements in America have worked to renew the church’s emphasis on building community and authentic worship without sacrificing truth along the way.

The Jesus People U.S.A. attracted a wide following in the 70’s because of their emphasis on relationships, commitment to communal living, and the rejection of what they perceived to be an overly materialistic culture. Although the movement included some fringe ideas, it has become part of the evangelical mainstream over the years and given churches another example of how to impact the culture with biblical truth.

Another significant movement, also driven by the need for authenticity and community, is the Fellowship Bible church movement of the ‘80s and ‘90s. Gene Getz’s 1975 book *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* gave an argument for grounding the activities of local congregations on the functions of the early church rather than on their forms. His thesis is that while the second chapter of Acts clearly communicates the critical functions of the church, the New

Testament allows considerable freedom regarding how those functions are carried out. Getz's attempt to discover the purpose of the church through what he calls the threefold lens of Scripture, history, and culture resulted in a movement that has spanned the globe and helped to shift the focus of local worship towards intimacy within small groups and authentic worship. At the time, his use of various audio/visual tools for teaching from the pulpit and meeting in non-traditional facilities seemed quite radical. But his ultimate goal was for believers to break away from the calcified forms of doing church and to experience the fellowship and community that can be generated when we take all of the "one-another's" of Scripture seriously.

Another important contributor to this discussion was Francis Schaeffer. His book *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* asked us to discern the difference between the functions of the church that are listed in Scripture and the forms that are used in different cultural settings. He wrote, "In a rapidly changing age like ours, an age of total upheaval like ours, to make non-absolutes absolute guarantees both isolation and the death of the institutional, organized church."{8} Schaeffer had a huge impact on the baby boomer generation without sacrificing the truth claims of Scripture.

Hopefully, the emerging church will find a place next to these past reform movements as it gathers attention and matures. However, if it continues to de-emphasize sound doctrine, it will find itself to be irrelevant and ineffective.

Notes

1. Mary Klages, "Postmodernism," University of Colorado, www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/pomo.html.
2. Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (Jossey-Bass, 2001), xi.
3. D. A. Carson, *Becoming Conversant with the Emerging Church* (Zondervan, 2005), 49.

4. Ibid., 50.
5. Ibid., 169.
6. Ibid., 60.
7. Ibid., 116.
8. Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (InterVarsity Press, 1970), 67.

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C.S. Lewis and the Riddle of Joy

Dr. Michael Gleghorn asks, What if nothing in this world can satisfy our desire because the object of our desire is other-worldly?

The Riddle of Joy

Over forty years after his death, the writings of C. S. Lewis continue to be read, discussed, and studied by millions of adoring fans. There seems to be something in Lewis that appeals to almost everyone. He is read by men and women, adults and children, Protestants and Catholics, scholars and laymen. A new movie, based on his best-selling children's classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe,* is expected to be a mega-hit in theatres.{1} It's difficult to think of another writer who is read (and appreciated) by such a broad spectrum of humanity as C. S. Lewis.

But what accounts for this broad, popular appeal? Doubtless many reasons could be given. Lewis wrote on such a wide variety of topics, in such a diversity of literary genres and styles, that almost anyone can find pleasure in something he

wrote. Further, he wrote for a general audience. Even when he's discussing very heady philosophical and theological topics, he remains quite accessible to the intelligent layman who wants to understand. Nevertheless, I tend to agree with Peter Kreeft, who notes that while "many virtues grace Lewis's work . . . the one that lifts him above any other apologetical writer . . . is how powerfully he writes about Joy."{2}

Now it's important to understand that when Lewis writes of Joy, he's using this term in a very particular way. He's not just speaking about a general sort of happiness, or joyful thoughts or feelings. Rather, he's speaking about a desire, but a very unique and special kind of desire. In *Surprised by Joy*, his spiritual autobiography, Lewis describes it as "an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction."{3}

But *what* did he desire? The question haunted Lewis for years. What *was* it that he wanted? Through trial and error he came to realize that he didn't simply want a *feeling*, a subjective, inner experience of some kind. Indeed, he later said that "all images and sensations, if idolatrously mistaken for Joy itself, soon confessed themselves inadequate. . . . Inexorably Joy proclaimed, 'You want—I myself am your want of—something other, outside, not you or any state of you.'"{4}

In an attempt to find the mysterious object of his desire, Lewis plunged himself into various pursuits and pleasures. But *nothing* in his experience could satisfy this desire. Ironically, these failures suggested a possible solution to Lewis. What if nothing in this world could satisfy his desire because the *object* of his desire was *other*-worldly? A radical proposal, and we turn to it now.

The Argument from Desire

What was Lewis to make of this rather mysterious, intense, and recurrent desire that nothing in the world could satisfy? Did

the desire have any *real* significance? Did anything *actually* exist that could satisfy this desire? Or was the whole thing just a lot of moonshine? Although this question haunted Lewis for years and took him down many dead-end streets in pursuit of the mysterious object of his desire, he eventually came to believe that he had discovered the answer.

In *The Pilgrim's Regress,* he wrote of his remarkable solution to the riddle of Joy—the desire we are now considering—as follows:

> It appeared to me . . . that if a man diligently followed this desire, pursuing the false objects until their falsity appeared and then resolutely abandoning them, he must come out at last into the clear knowledge that the human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given—nay, cannot even be imagined as given—in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience. This Desire was, in the soul, as the Siege Perilous in Arthur's castle—the chair in which only one could sit. And if nature makes nothing in vain, the One who can sit in this chair must exist.{5}

In other words, Lewis reasoned from this intense desire, which nothing in the world could satisfy, to an object of desire that transcended the world. He gradually became convinced that this Supreme Object of human desire is God and heaven!

Following Peter Kreeft, we can formulate the argument as follows:{6}

> *1. Every natural or innate desire we experience has a corresponding real object that can satisfy the desire.*
>
> *2. We experience an innate desire which nothing in this world can satisfy.*
>
> *3. Therefore, there must be a real object that transcends the world which can satisfy this desire.*

Now this is a valid argument in which the conclusion follows logically from the premises. So if someone wants to challenge the argument's conclusion, they must first challenge one of its premises. And, as I'm sure you can imagine, the argument has certainly had its detractors. But what sort of objections have they raised? Have they shown the argument to be unsound? And how have Lewis's defenders responded to their objections? We'll now turn to consider some of these questions.

Thus, it's important to understand that Lewis is *not* arguing that *all* our desires have real objects of satisfaction. He's claiming only that all our *natural* and *innate* desires do. Having clarified this issue, we'll return to consider objections to this first premise in a moment.

But first, what if someone objects to Lewis's second premise, namely, that *we have an innate desire which nothing in the world can satisfy*?{10} For example, what if someone admitted that they were not perfectly satisfied now, but believed they would be if only they had the best of everything money can buy? Well, unfortunately this experiment has already been tried—and has repeatedly failed. Just think of all the people who are very wealthy, but still not perfectly satisfied. Indeed, some of them are downright miserable!

But what if one of them isn't? What if someone claimed that he is perfectly satisfied right now? Admittedly, we can't really argue with such a person. We can only ask him to be honest—if not with us, at least with himself. Even so, however, this would not necessarily show that Lewis's argument is false. It may only show that the person who makes such a claim is somehow defective, like a colorblind person claiming that there is no such thing as color. If most people *experience an innate desire which nothing in the world can satisfy*, then Lewis's conclusion may still follow. But before we can be sure, we must first revisit that problematic first premise.

You'll remember that Lewis argued that *every natural or innate desire* (like our desire for food, drink, or friendship) *has a corresponding object that can satisfy the desire*. Thus, there really *are* such things as food, drink, and friends. There seems to be a correlation between our *natural* desires and objects that can satisfy them.

But there's a problem. As John Beversluis observed:

> How could Lewis have known that every natural desire has a real object before knowing that Joy has one? I can legitimately claim that every student in the class has failed the test only if I first know that each of them has individually failed it. The same is true of natural desires.{11}

In other words, why think that *every* natural desire has an object that can satisfy it? Such questions appear to raise difficulties for Lewis's argument. So how have Lewis's supporters responded?

Peter Kreeft has written:

> [T]he proposition "every natural, innate desire has a real object" is understood to be true because nature does nothing in vain, and this . . . is seen to be true by understanding the concept expressed in . . . the word "nature." Nature is meaningful . . . full of design and purpose . . . arranging a fit between organism and environment . . . desire and satisfaction . . .{12}

The Value of the Argument

In order to effectively reason from a deep, unsatisfied natural desire that nothing in the world can satisfy, to something beyond the world which can satisfy it, one must first know, or at least have good reason to believe, that *all* our natural desires *have* real objects of satisfaction. If they

don't, then maybe there's just *not* any object that can satisfy the desire we're considering.

Now, of course, someone might well say, "Look, if all the natural desires we can check on, like our desires for food, drink, sex, and knowledge, have real sources of satisfaction, then wouldn't it be reasonable to infer that in the case of this one mysterious desire, which nothing in the world can satisfy, that there's also a real source of satisfaction?" Well, yes, I think this would be quite reasonable. Of course, the conclusion is only *probable*, not *necessary*. But in some places this is all Lewis himself claimed. In *Mere Christianity* he wrote:

> The Christian says: Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists . . . If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.{13}

Now this is an interesting argument and it may suggest an additional premise which has been assumed, but not directly stated. For *why* does the Christian say that creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists? Isn't it because we believe that there's a benevolent Creator and Designer of the natural world and its creatures? And if this is true, then it seems quite plausible that things have been intentionally *designed* so that there's a match between our natural desires and sources of satisfaction. And actually, there are very good reasons, completely independent of Lewis's argument, for believing that a Creator and Designer of nature *does* exist!

So it seems that the primary value of Lewis's argument may lie in showing us that it's reasonable to believe that our Creator and Designer is also the Supreme Object of our desire. And this resonates quite well with the oft-quoted words of Augustine, "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are

restless until they rest in Thee."{14}

Notes

1. The film is scheduled to be released December 9, 2005.
2. Peter J. Kreeft, "C. S. Lewis's Argument from Desire," in *G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis: The Riddle of Joy*, eds. Michael H. MacDonald and Andrew A. Tadie (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1989), 256.
3. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harvest/HBJ, 1955), 17-18, cited in Kreeft, 253.
4. C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 220-21, cited in Kreeft, 253.
5. C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress*, (U.S.A.: Eerdmans, 1992), 204-05.
6. Kreeft, 250.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. For Kreeft's discussion see "C. S. Lewis's Argument from Desire," 267.
11. John Beversluis, *C. S. Lewis and the Search for Rational Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1985), 19, cited in Kreeft, "C. S. Lewis's Argument from Desire," 267.
12. Kreeft, 269.
13. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 105, cited in Kreeft, "C. S. Lewis's Argument from Desire," 254 (emphasis mine).
14. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1:1, cited in Kreeft, "C. S. Lewis's Argument from Desire," 263.

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The Meaning and Practice of Tolerance

Don Closson investigates the ideas surrounding the tolerance controversy and offer principles to communicate to the culture around us why absolute tolerance, or what some call hyper-tolerance, might not be a wise choice.

Introduction

One of the most damaging charges aimed at Christians today is that we and our religion are intolerant. This is an effective insult, not because some Christians are indeed intolerant, but because Christianity itself is judged to be an intolerant (meaning lacking in virtue) faith system. The weight of this accusation is compounded by the fact that few things are looked down upon more in our culture than a person or group of people who are perceived to be intolerant. Unfortunately, it is also true that there are few words or ideas that are less well defined or understood in our society than the meaning of the word *tolerance*.



Critics of Christianity, especially of conservative Christians, often equate tolerance with moral virtue and intolerance as an unqualified evil. One admittedly liberal Christian commentator writes, “Conservative Christians have adopted the warrior mentality of Onward Christian Soldiers, and intolerance is nothing to be hidden under a white robe and pointed white hood: it’s to be waved proudly as a flag demonstrating Christian rigor and personal rightness.”{1} This author argues that conservative Christians have changed the meaning of the word *tolerance* from that of a

virtue to that of a sin. She seems to imply that failure to tolerate any and every behavior or idea is a moral evil and that all intolerance is absolutely wrong, or at least that all conservative Christian intolerance is wrong. Since she is obviously intolerant of conservative right-wing Christian intolerance, we might surmise that some intolerance is morally acceptable some of the time, at least in some cases.

If all this is a little confusing, it might be because of the fog in our culture surrounding the meaning of the terms used when discussing the topic. In this article we will investigate the ideas surrounding the tolerance controversy and try to find principles that might help us to communicate to the culture around us why absolute tolerance, or what some call hyper-tolerance, might not be a wise choice.

You might be thinking that this issue doesn't really matter. Who cares if our culture thinks that Christians are intolerant? It matters because we are Christ's ambassadors, and the way that we are perceived by our neighbors can distort the message of reconciliation with God that we offer. There is no reason to add offense to the message of the Bible. Besides, there is an opportunity to help people to better understand the concept of tolerance and thus help to make a better society for all of us to live in.

We shall see that there are good arguments for promoting true tolerance, and that a better society can be built upon a common understanding of the concept.

The Meaning of Tolerance

In his book *True Tolerance*, J. Budziszewski writes, "The specific virtue of true tolerance has to do with the fact that sometimes we put up with things we rightly consider mistaken, wrong, harmful, offensive, or in some other way not worth approval."{2} The word tolerance comes from the Latin *tolerare*

which means “to bear” and carries with it the idea of a prudent, long-suffering silence. So what are we to make of a U.N. statement issued during its 1995 “Year of Tolerance” which declared tolerance to be “respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human?”{3} Do you notice what is missing? People think that tolerance includes affirmation. But affirmation is not tolerance. When you affirm or accept something, you do not need to tolerate it. Tolerance can only occur when you disagree with something.

Our current confusion has occurred because tolerance has been elevated to a place above all other virtues. Again, Budziszewski writes,

> Our most gifted thinkers no longer treat tolerance as a queenly virtue to be guarded among many others equally precious, but as a shrewish virtue that excludes all the rest. For now we are told that the meaning of tolerance is *ethical neutrality*neutrality about which things are worth the love of human beings and which traits of character are worth praising.{4}

Because many in our culture have become skeptical about knowing the difference between what is good and what is evil, they argue that we are left with only two options when it comes to tolerance. We can either be ethically neutral, choosing to value equally all ideas and actions, or be a religious fanatic who claims to have perfect moral knowledge and who tries to impose absolute moral virtues on everyone else.

Actually, ethical neutrality is an impossible and irrational position to defend. Holding the position assumes that one has answered the question, “Why should I be ethically neutral?” Yet the construction of any answer violates the very neutrality being defended.

Another problem with moral skepticism is that the act of tolerance is dependent on some concept of what is morally good. One tolerates behavior or beliefs he or she disagrees with because of a higher or more important good. For instance, even though we believe that Christianity is true and that Christ is the only answer to mankind's problems, we encourage freedom of religion because it is only by freely choosing to believe, and not by force or coercion, that someone comes to true faith. Religious intolerance and coercion can actually cause someone to claim faith in Christ when none exists.

We argue that there is a third option, what we will call "true tolerance." How does this traditional view of tolerance work?

True Tolerance

Budziszewski argues that ethical neutrality based on moral skepticism is not a reasonable option. He writes, "If a skeptic finds reasons for tolerance, he finds it not by reason of the things he is skeptical about, but by reasons of the things he is not skeptical about."{5} In other words, one is tolerant because one is not ethically neutral. Someone cannot be neutral about everything and still have a reason to be tolerant because they would be neutral about tolerance as well.

Is there another alternative? There is, what might be called the *traditional* view of tolerance, or what we will call *true tolerance*. Rather than ethical neutrality or a blind appeal to religious authority, true tolerance has to do with making judgments based on a concept of what is "good."

Again Budziszewski writes,

> True tolerance is not the art of tolerating; it is the art of knowing when and how to tolerate. It is not the forbearance from judgment, but the fruit of judgment. We may disapprove something for the love of some moral good—yet we

> may be moved to put up with it from still deeper intuitions about the same moral good or other moral goods, and on such deeper intuitions the discipline of tolerance is based.{6}

His point is that real tolerance always depends on judgment regarding what one values. It is never the result of moral skepticism. The act of tolerating something is not the heart of the issue. The key to understanding tolerance is to appreciate the process of weighing the different goals or moral ends that might be involved. These moral ends are often separated into three groups. The lowest order of ends includes health, happiness in the generic sense, good repute, peace, beauty and companionship. Next comes what can be called intrinsic goods like virtue and truth. Finally, the highest order good is the unconditional commitment to one's ultimate concerns or worldview. The confusion surrounding this topic today might be so acute because we have turned this list of moral goods on its head; our society seems to value personal happiness and peace over virtue, truth, and commitment to a faith or worldview.

Even when we do decide to put up with behavior that we disapprove of, we can do so for good or bad reasons. At worst, we might tolerate boorish behavior due to cowardice, at best because of concern for an individual's eternal well-being.

The Tolerant Society

What are some benefits that a society that has learned the virtue of true tolerance enjoys?

First, true tolerance understands that there are always limits to what should be tolerated, and that moral judgment is involved in setting these limits. Even those who endorse moral skepticism, arguing that there is no such thing as moral truth, seem to agree that society must not tolerate everything. They are quick to note their intolerance of

slavery, genocide, and other violations of human rights. It is common sense that if tolerance is in fact unlimited, it becomes self-defeating. It would fail to limit the actions of those who are devoted to the destruction of tolerance itself. Muslims who insist on using the tolerance of Western nations to impose Sharia or Islamic law are an example. The defense of a tolerant society requires that it not tolerate certain behaviors, that it learns when to be intolerant.

It has become commonplace in America to label people as intolerant for simply having strongly held beliefs and for defending them against those who hold to contrary opinions. Actually, the "person [who] never disagrees with anyone about anything even when they know that the other person is being incoherent or dishonest or simply false is not being tolerant but instead is a coward."{7} When we confront people who are dishonest or merely wrong, especially when we do so with gentleness and respect, it shows that we take them and their ideas seriously. It also recognizes that they have real moral agency and that individuals should be held responsible for reasonable moral behavior and for the ideas that they endorse. In their book *The Truth About Tolerance*, Stetson and Conti write, "Confronting people with their own destructive behavior is not a sign of intolerance but is the sign of true compassion."{8} The same can be said for confronting ideas that are false and perhaps even dangerous to society.

While true tolerance encourages open debate, it expects people to defend their views within certain guidelines. Each person is encouraged to defend his or her beliefs about what is good for humanity by using rational arguments; true tolerance expects people to try to persuade others that their views are true. However, that doesn't mean that others are expected to accept their understandings as true prior to being convinced by their arguments.

Finally, democratic governments allow or tolerate a broad spectrum of behaviors and self-determination rather than

imposing totalitarian control. They tend to encourage the open debate of public policy issues like abortion and euthanasia, even by those who hold deep religious convictions about the topic. However, democratic governments are also clear about the behaviors that they do not tolerate by establishing clear legal codes and punishments that correspond with illegal behavior.

Is There a Christian Foundation for True Tolerance?

True tolerance is built into the very fabric of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although it is popular to believe that tolerance is a modern secular concept, perhaps original to the Enlightenment thinker John Locke, political philosopher J. Budziszewski argues that it is a Christian innovation. Even though Christians are not always obedient or even aware of their heritage, the Christian tradition represents "the source of the very standard by which their intolerant acts could be judged wrong."{9}

As we mentioned above, true tolerance depends on positive beliefs, not moral skepticism in order to function and make sense. Does Christianity provide a foundation for true tolerance? Actually, it provides the necessary beliefs on a number of levels.

First, Christians are called to imitate the model that Christ Himself gave us. God incarnate came to earth as a humble child giving us the perfect picture of love and tolerance on God's behalf. The perfect and holy God who created the universe stepped into time and space among sinful and rebellious humans to show His love and to win theirs. Both believers and unbelievers have been moved by the humility and mercy Jesus displayed towards others. His instruction to love your neighbor as yourself and the fact that He offered God's love to those considered sinful and not worthy of forgiveness sets

Him apart from other religious teachers. Jesus didn't demand moral perfection to gain God's approval; He offered reconciliation based on His perfect sacrifice. Biblical Christianity recognizes the persistent human aptitude for self-centered behavior, and calls mature believers to battle against it. Paul writes, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."{10}

Secondly, Christianity offers a universal message to every tribe and nation. No distinction is made based on gender, race, or ethnicity. God is calling all people to accept His gift of salvation, and the church should reflect that multicultural reality. The Judeo-Christian tradition teaches that all people are made in the image of God and are not only important to Him but are redeemable through Christ's blood.

Finally, Christians can be tolerant of both the actions and beliefs of their neighbors because of their worldview or ultimate concerns. The task given to us by God is not to enforce a set of laws or style of worship, but to offer the message of reconciliation in Christ. Instead of separating from the sinful and dangerous culture that God has placed us into, we are sent into the world by Christ to be salt and light so that many might hear the good news and respond to the offer of grace and forgiveness by trusting in Christ's payment for sin.

Notes

1. Teresa Whitehurst, "The Intolerance of Christian Conservatives," *CounterPunch*, www.counterpunch.org/whitehurst01252005.html.
2. *True Tolerance: Liberalism and the Necessity of Judgment*, J. Budziszewski (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 7.
3. *The Truth About Tolerance*, Brad Stetson and Joseph G. Conti

(Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 141.
4. Budziszewski, xi.
5. Ibid., 10.
6. Ibid., 7.
7. Stetson and Conti, 144.
8. Ibid., 145.
9. Ibid., 39.
10. Philippians 2:3-4

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Will Winter Ever End? Groundhog Day and Modern Thought

Rick Wade takes us on a journey through the movie Groundhog Day to see what light it sheds on a modernist worldview. The protaganist's self-centered, materialistic, career-driven view of life exemplifies the modernist thinking applies to actual life. As Christians, Rick points out a number of good examples from the movie that will help us better understand this view of the world.

Its All About Me

Did you see the 1993 movie *Groundhog Day*? In this film, we meet Phil Connors, an arrogant and self-obsessed weatherman on a local TV station who is sent to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to report on the events surrounding Groundhog Day. Phil, played by Bill Murray, is rude to his co-workers, Rita the

producer (played by Andie MacDowell) and Larry the cameraman (played by Chris Elliott). He has a condescending attitude toward the people of Punxsutawney who he calls hicks. Phil is very taken with himself. He tells his coworkers that a major network is interested in him, and at one point calls himself the talent. But now Phil is stuck in this awful assignment (too insignificant for someone of his stature) and only wants to finish up and get back to Pittsburgh. Unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately as things turn out), the team is trapped by a blizzard and forced to stay in Punxsutawney. The next day, however, something bizarre happens: Phil awakens to the same music on the radio and the DJs saying the same things as the morning before. Its February 2nd, Groundhog Day, all over again.

And thus begins Phil Connors nightmare. Every morning Phil awakens to February the second again . . . and again and again. We arent told how many times this happens, but it happens often enough that he is able to go from not being able to play the piano at all to being an excellent jazz pianist. What does Phil do with this strange situation?

Phil's responses to his circumstances illustrate some modern ways of thinking and one distinctly *un*modern way. I'd like to use this film to focus on these philosophies. This won't be a film review or an exercise in film criticism. *Groundhog Day* will simply serve as a mirror to hold up to modern thought.

In Phil Connors we see what Michael Foley, professor of early Christian thought at Baylor, calls a typical modern.{1} He is self-centered, materialistic, egotistical, and career-driven. He exemplifies what sociologist Craig Gay calls modern mans desire for *autonomy* and . . . what might be called the *will-to-self-definition.*{2} Gay quotes Daniel Bell who says that self-realization and even self-gratification have become the master principles of modern culture.{3}

This describes Phil, but not only Phil. What is more obviously

true to moderns than the idea that one must look out for number one? Modernists want to define themselves. Were the captains of our own lives, and were our own number one concern.

But with this strange turn of events, Phil, the one who likes to think of himself as on the rise, finds himself stuck in one place. Every day he faces the same routine. Nothing he does seems to matter, for time is no longer progressing. The past doesnt matter, for yesterday was like today. And as far as he knows, tomorrow will be the same.

What Goes Around . . . Goes Around

When Phil finally accepts his predicament, he asks his new drinking pals, Gus and Ralph, a question: What would *you* do, he asks, if you were stuck in one place, and every day was exactly the same, and nothing that you did mattered? This question sets the stage for what follows in the film as Phil discovers over and over that nothing he did yesterday matters; nothing carries over.

But one can see something deeper going on here than simply an illustration of a boring, repetitive life. Perhaps not incidentally it also serves on the larger scale to describe the situation many people face. The situation of Phil going nowhere is a subtle illustration of a major philosophical shift in modern times, namely, the abandonment of a *teleological* view of the world.

What do I mean by that? *Teleology* is the theory of purpose, ends, goals, final causes.{4} Before Christ, Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle taught that there was design behind the universe; its forming wasnt just an accidental occurrence. In the West, with the rise of Christian theology, there came the understanding of the universe as made by God for a purpose. That is what *teleology* is: the idea of

design with a goal in mind.

In modern times, however, that understanding is gone. We are taught that the universe is an accident of nature, and hence that we are, too. We werent put here for a purpose; there is no goal to life beyond what we choose. Any meaning we have in life is meaning we supply ourselves. When this idea really sinks in, the ramifications are truly alarming. We want to have purpose; people with no sense of purpose have nothing to move toward. This idea was the root of the despair of existential philosophy. It drove thinkers such as Jean Paul Sartre to teach that the burden is on us to form our own lives, that to *not* do so is to live inauthentic lives. Although the existentialists tried to transcend this sense of meaninglessness, they werent successful. The sense of loss that comes with thinking we have no purpose reflects what we know deep down because of being made in Gods image: we were made by Someone for some purpose. To not have purpose necessarily diminishes our lives.

Phil Connors life no longer has purpose. He is stuck in one place going nowhere, and it isnt a happy situation.

So what does he do? He looks to Rita for help. You're a producer, he says. Think of something. Rita advises him to see a doctor. In modern times we typically look to science for the answer, in this case medical science. First, a medical doctor is unable to find anything wrong with Phil. Then a psychiatrist finds Phils problem to be beyond his abilities. Science is supposed to be modern mans savior, but here medical science fails. Technology fails Phil, too. The highways are closed because Phils own weather forecast is wrong he predicted the blizzard wouldnt hit Punxsutawneyso he cant drive back to Pittsburgh. Long distance phone service is down so he is unable to call home. So Phil is stuck. This modern man cannot be rescued by modern means.

What is Phils next move? He simply takes his hedonistic self-

preoccupation to new levels. Its Feb. 2nd yet again, and Phil is out drinking with Gus and Ralph and reflecting on his predicament. After imbibing quite a bit, they get in a car to leave. As they drive away, Phil asks Gus and Ralph, What if there were no tomorrow? Gus responds that there would be no consequencesno hangovers! They could do anything they wanted! Phils eyes brighten. He can do whatever he wants! It's the same things your whole life, he says. Clean up your room. Stand up straight. Pick up your feet. Take it like a man. Be nice to your sister. . . . Im not going to live by their rules anymore!

And thus begins Phils hedonistic binge.

Its All About Me . . . With a Vengeance

What does he do with this newfound freedom? When Phil realizes that there are no consequences to his actionssince there is no tomorrowhe indulges his every whim in a sort of hedonistic binge. He eats like a glutton, seduces a woman, robs an armored car and buys a fancy car with the money.

Then he sets his eyes on the real prize: Rita, the producer. Day after day (or Feb. 2nd after Feb. 2nd!) he collects tidbits of information from Rita about herself and about what her ideal man would be like. He then tries to fit the image himself in order to ingratiate himself to her with the hope of seducing her.

Michael Foley says that in this Phil becomes Machiavellis prince.{5} In his book on political philosophy called *The Prince,* Machiavelli said a prince should always *appear* to be virtuous because that is what people expect. However, he said, the prince shouldnt actually concern himself with *being* virtuous, for that would often work against his own interests.

> *A prince should not necessarily avoid vices such as cruelty or dishonesty if employing them will benefit the state. Cruelty and other vices should not be pursued for their own sake, just as virtue should not be pursued for its own sake: virtues and vices should be conceived as means to an end. Every action the prince takes must be considered in light of its effect on the state, not in terms of its intrinsic moral value.{6}*

This is Phils attitude. He wants Rita, so he pretends to be the good man she desires. The end justifies the means, right?

As a society we have lost any sense of going somewhere. In the West, weve been taught to live for the moment, to savor the experiences of today. Yesterday is gone, and there is no ultimate tomorrow before us which will draw together the pieces of our lives into a meaningful conclusion. The world came about by accident and is going nowhere. In fact, were told its winding down to some cosmic death. The utopian vision of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was crushed by World War I. Following the devastation of the next World War, existentialist philosophers said we should create our own sets of values. Increasing or at least maintaining our personal peace and prosperity now seems to be our highest ambition because, quite frankly, we have nothing else to hope for. What is left to do but enjoy ourselves as much as we can while here? Our national moral consensus goes little further than dont hurt other people unnecessarily, and we are left to our own ideas about what constitutes necessity. If there is nothing to hope for, today is all we have, so we pad our own nest and enjoy what we can out of life. I am the center of my universe, and its your duty to not interfere.

To be honest, there is nothing wrong with enjoying the experiences life offers (given the limits of biblical morality

and wisdom, of course). I recently read Francis Meyes book *Under the Tuscan Sun* made into a movie starring Diane Lane. The movie barely scratches the surface of the pleasures of life in Tuscany described in the book: preparing and enjoying wonderful food; preparing the olive trees for next years harvest, and at harvest time discerning when and how quickly to pick to avoid mildew; picking herbs like sage and rosemary from plants growing in front of the house for seasoning the evenings dinner; choosing the best local wine for the main course at dinner; taking in the smells and sights of a small Italian town; discovering a portion of an ancient Roman road or a wall built by the Etruscans; enjoying the company of friends and loved ones outdoors in warm weather, or gathered around the hearth in winterthe riches of such experiences have been lost to many in modern times.

Problems come, however, when *I* become the center of my ultimately purposeless world, when other people become objects to enjoy or reject as I might a certain food. Its bad enough when we become the centers of our own worlds. We go further than that and expect to be the centers of *others* worlds as well! For some reason, we expect the lives of others to revolve around ours. But while we are crafting our own worlds, others are crafting theirs. What if my plans dont fit theirs or vice versa?

Phil tried repeatedly to win Ritas affection to satisfy his own desires. Night after night Phil tries to woo her, and night after night she slaps him in the face when she realizes what hes up to. Phil cant manipulate Rita the way he wants to.

Phil is so much the center of his world that, at one point in the film, Phil the weatherman said he creates the weather! But of course he doesnt. He cant even predict it perfectly. If Phil cant control the weather which has no will of its own, how can he possibly control Rita who does? He could have learned something from Jim Careys character, Bruce Arnold, in *Bruce Almighty* who could not manipulate the free will of his

girlfriend Grace to regain her love.

It Has to Stop

So Phil cannot have what he really wants. What happens when one realizes that there is nothing lasting to hold onto? That is, if one can get hold of it at all? In the mid-twentieth century, beginning with the despair that comes from believing that there are no fixed and eternal values, existentialists tried to infuse individual lives with value by saying we create values ourselves. Other people, however, simply fell into despair and stayed there. Thats what happened to Phil Connors. First he tried to solve his problem through medical science. Then he accepted the situation and tried to find fulfillment in the pursuit of pleasure. When that failed, he was lost.

A life with no tomorrow, and where yesterday and today dont matter, has no meaning because it has no explanation. But an explanation is what we crave. The discovery that there is no explanation is at the heart of what the existentialists called the *absurd.* Albert Camus said that a world that has no reason leaves a person feeling like a stranger. His exile is without remedy, wrote Camus, since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.{7} As a result, for some peopleor perhaps for manythe question that arises is, Why live at all? There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, said Camus, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy.{8}

Even before Feb. 2nd, Phils life was absurd; he just didnt know it. His past wasnt forming his future, and he had no sure promised land before him anyway. He would be what he made of himself (a very modern idea), but he didnt seem to be doing a

very good job. One of the key characteristics of the modern mind is the idea that the past is to be discarded in favor of the future because things just have to get better over time. There were such high hopes in modernity! But while Phil had hopes for tomorrow, he really was going nowhere. The repetition of Feb. 2nd only mirrored his real life.

The absurdity of Phils situation descended upon him on one of his many Feb. 2nds. Having tried to enjoy a life of no consequences, and having been rejected by Rita, Phil falls into despair. In his umpteenth report on Groundhog Day festivities he expresses his despair clearly. You want a prediction about the weather, you're asking the wrong Phil, he says referring to the groundhog. I'll give you a winter prediction: It's gonna be cold, it's gonna be grey, and it's gonna last you for the rest of your life.

Phil could only think of one thing to do. Remember that if the groundhog, Punxsutawney Phil, sees its shadow, winter will last another forty days. Phil reasons that, if winter is to end, the groundhog cant be allowed see its shadow again. So Phil the weatherman decides that Phil the groundhog must die. There is no way this winter is *ever* going to end, Phil tells Rita, as long as that groundhog keeps seeing his shadow. I don't see any way out of it. He's got to be stopped. And I have to stop him. Here the parallel between the two Phils is made clear. To bring an end to winter, both the season and his own personal winter, Phil kidnaps the groundhog and drives off a cliff, killing them both. Neither Phil will now awaken to see his shadow again.

Or so he thought. The next morning, promptly at 6 AM, Phil awakens yet again to another Groundhog Day. A look of despair crosses his face. He gets out of bed, climbs into the bathtub with an electric toaster and electrocutes himself. But Feb. 2nd comes yet again. Phil tries many different ways to end it all. Later he tells Rita I've been stabbed, shocked, poisoned, frozen, hung, electrocuted, and burned. He keep trying to end

his winter but he cant.

Although Camus raised the question of suicide, he didnt argue for it. He tried to persuade readers that there can be good reasons for living even though life as a whole has no meaning. But Phil, and many people in real life, have decided there is no reason to go on. Some dont go as far as suicide, but their nihilistic lives reflect the same idea: there is no meaning, nothing matters, nothing is of any value.

Is there any way out of this mess?

Phils Redemption

Phil Connors first two responses to his predicamenthedonism and despairwere failures. Once more he turns to Rita for help. He tries to prove to her he really is repeating the same day over and over. After seeing several convincing evidences that something strange really is going on, she offers to spend a day with him just to observe. Near the end of an enjoyable day, Rita takes a positive view and tells Phil that maybe what hes experiencing isnt a curse at all. It depends on how you look at it, she says.

With that little bit of encouragement, Phils whole attitude changes. He now sees Rita not as an object to possess, but as a person of intrinsic value. Before, he wanted to use her; now he appreciates her. As she sleeps he whispers to her that he doesnt deserve someone like her. Now Phil has a purpose. Before he bettered himself to fool Rita; now his ambition is to be worthy of her.

So Phil sets about improving himself. He betters himself morally; Michael Foley sees here a turn toward an ethics of virtue. Phil begins doing good things for other people such as giving money and food to an old man who lives on the streets, changing a tire for a woman, saving a mans life, giving tickets to *Wrestlemania* to a pair of young newlyweds, catching

a boy who falls out of the tree (who never thanks him, Phil notes!). Because he keeps repeating Feb. 2nd, Phil performs these good acts again and again. He also betters himself intellectually and artistically. And in the end, Phil wins Ritas affections.

Conclusion

In this simple film about a weatherman from Pittsburgh, we can see illustrated a few modernistic approaches to life. Having found himself in a purposeless existence, Phil looked for his salvation in science and in hedonistic pleasure seeking. Not finding it there, he fell into despair. With the encouragement of an upbeat lady as he called Rita, Phil decided to make himself a better man.

Several different religions have tried to claim the message of *Groundhog Day* as their own. Buddhists see Phil as the bodhisattva who must return to help others better themselves so they may all escape the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Jews see Phil as being returned to earth to do good works to help bring the world to perfection.

For evangelical Protestants this might sound suspiciously like works salvation. But *Groundhog Day* isnt a Christian film; we shouldnt look for more in it than it offers. As I said at the beginning, it holds up a mirror to modern thought, and shows the failure of some contemporary beliefs.

Nonetheless, the film still offers us a reminder. In our zeal to proclaim salvation by faith alone, its possible that we relegate the biblical admonitions to live good lives to too low a level. Our tickets are punched; we have our seats in heaven. As for now . . . well, you know how some say Its easier to receive forgiveness than permission. Maybe we just dont concern ourselves enough with living virtuous lives.

Groundhog Day illustrates the vacuousness of some modern

ideas. But it also reminds us that living a good life *does* have its rewards: we are better people for the effort, and we become more attractive to people around us.

Notes

1. Michael P. Foley, "Phil's Shadow," *Touchstone* 17, no. 2 (April, 2004): 12.
2. *Craig M. Gay, The Way of the (Modern) World: Or, Why It's Tempting to Live As If God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 184.
3. Daniel Bell "The Return of the Sacred: The Argument on the Future of Religion," in *British Journal of Sociology* 28, no. 4 (1977): 424, quoted in Gay, 192.
4. Dagobert D. Runes, ed., *Dictionary of Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1983), s.v. "Teleology," by Wilbur Long.
5. Foley, 13.
6. Sparknotes, "The Prince," www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/prince/themes.html.
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8. Ibid., 3.

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Why We Shouldn't Hate Philosophy: A Biblical Perspective

Michael Gleghorn examines the role of philosophy in a Christian worldview. Does philosophy help us flesh our our

biblical perspective or does it just confuse our understanding?

A Walk on the Slippery Rocks

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

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

> *What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic? . . . I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic . . . Christianity. After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research.{1}*

Should Christians, then, hate and reject all philosophy? Should we shun it, despise it, and trample it underfoot? Doesn't the Bible warn us about the dangers of philosophy and urge us to avoid it? In thinking through such questions, it's important that we be careful. Before we possibly injure ourselves with any violent, knee-jerk reactions, we may first want to settle down a bit and ask ourselves a few questions. First, what exactly is philosophy anyway? What, if anything, does the Bible have to say about it? Might it have any value for the Christian faith? Could it possibly help strengthen or support the ministry of the church? Are there any potential benefits that Christians might gain from studying philosophy? And if so, what are they? These are just a few of the

questions that we want to consider.

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

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

Beware of Hollow and Deceptive Philosophy

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

> *For many years we have each been involved, not just in scholarly work, but in speaking evangelistically on university campuses with groups like . . . Campus Crusade for Christ . . . Again and again, we have seen the practical value of philosophical studies in reaching students for Christ. . . The fact is that there is tremendous interest among unbelieving students in hearing a rational presentation and defense of the gospel, and some will be ready to respond with trust in Christ. To speak frankly, we do not know how one could minister effectively in a public way on our*

university campuses without training in philosophy.{3}

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

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

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

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

What does it mean to be "taken captive"? When men are taken captive in war, they are forced to go where their captors lead them. They may only be permitted to see and hear certain things, or to eat and sleep at certain times. In short, captives are under the *control* of their captors. This is what Paul is warning the Colossians about. He's urging them to not let their beliefs and attitudes be *controlled* by an alien,

non-Christian philosophy. He's not saying that philosophy in general is bad or that it's wrong to study philosophy as an academic discipline.

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

Is Worldly Wisdom Worthless?

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

We must remember that Paul himself had at least some knowledge of both pagan philosophy and literature – and he made much use of reasoning in personal evangelism. In Acts 17 we learn that while Paul was in Athens "he *reasoned* in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there" (v. 17; NIV). On one occasion he spent time conversing and disputing with some of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers (v. 18). Further, when it suited his purposes, Paul could quote freely (and accurately) from the writings of pagan poets. In Acts 17:28 he cites with approval both the Cretan poet Epimenides and the Cilician poet Aratus, using them to make a *valid theological point about the nature of God and man* to the educated members of the Athenian Areopagus. Thus, we should at least be cautious before asserting that Paul was opposed to *all* philosophy and human wisdom. He obviously wasn't.

But if this is so, then in what sense has God made foolish the

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

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

The Value of Philosophy (Part 1)

Moreland and Craig observe that "throughout the history of Christianity, philosophy has played an important role in the life of the church and the spread and defense of the gospel of Christ."{7}

John Wesley, the famous revivalist and theologian, seemed well-aware of this fact. In 1756 he delivered "An Address to the Clergy". Among the various qualifications that Wesley thought a good minister should have, one was a basic knowledge of philosophy. He challenged his fellow clergymen with these questions: "Am I a tolerable master of the sciences? Have I gone through the very gate of them, logic? . . . Do I

understand metaphysics; if not the . . . subtleties of . . . Aquinas, yet the first rudiments, the general principles, of that useful science?”{8} It’s interesting to note that Wesley’s passion for preaching and evangelism didn’t cause him to denigrate the importance of basic philosophical knowledge. Indeed, he rather insists on its importance for anyone involved in the teaching and preaching ministries of the church.

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

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

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

the help of his friends in the philosophy department!

The Value of Philosophy (Part 2)

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

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

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

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

was the pagan culture surrounding it.{13}

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

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

Notes

1. Tertullian, "The Prescriptions Against the Heretics," trans. S.L. Greenslade, in *Early Latin Theology* (Vol. V in "The Library of Christian Classics"; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 31-32; cited in Hugh T. Kerr, ed., *Readings in Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 39.
2. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13.
3. Ibid., 4-5.
4. Ibid., 18.
5. Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 487.

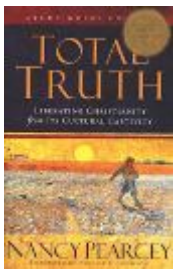
6. Craig and Moreland, 19.
7. Ibid., 12.
8. John Wesley, “An Address to the Clergy,” delivered February 6, 1756. Reprinted in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3d ed., 7 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1996), 6:217-31; cited in Craig and Moreland, 4.
9. See Craig and Moreland, 14-17. I have relied heavily on their observations in this, and the following, section of this article.
10. Ibid., 15.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 16.
14. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1949), 50; cited in Craig and Moreland, 17.

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Total Truth – The Importance of a Christian Worldview

Total Truth *is a book about worldview, its place in every Christian’s life, and its prominent role in determining our impact on a culture that has hooked itself to the runaway locomotive of materialism and is headed for the inevitable cliff of despair and destruction.*

Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity



"This is a book of unusual importance by an author of unusual ability."{1} This is a strong recommendation from any reviewer, but when the reviewer is best-selling author and Darwinian critic, Phillip Johnson, people pay attention. As well they should. Nancy Pearcey's *Total Truth* is probably the most significant book of 2004. I pray its influence and impact will be felt for decades.

This is a book about worldview, its place in every Christian's life, and its prominent role in determining our impact on a culture that has hooked itself to the runaway locomotive of materialism and is headed for the inevitable cliff of despair and destruction.

While the concept of worldview has wiggled its way into the consciousness of some in the Christian community, it remains largely a buzzword used in the context of political discussions and fundraising for Christian parachurch organizations. But politics only reflects the culture, so working to change the political landscape without changing the way we think is not as productive as some thought it would be.

One of the extreme threats to Christianity in this country is the effect of the culture on our youth and, consequently, on the future of the church in America. Pearcey says, "As Christian parents, pastors, teachers, and youth group leaders, we constantly see young people pulled down by the undertow of powerful cultural trends. If all we give them is a 'heart' religion, it will not be strong enough to counter the lure of attractive but dangerous ideas…. Training young people to develop a Christian mind is no longer an option; it is part of their necessary survival equipment."{2}

Here at Probe Ministries we have recognized this threat for all of our thirty-two years of ministry. We continue the fight with our Mind Games conferences, Web site, and radio ministries. We address young people particularly in our week-long summer Mind Games Camp. Students are exposed to the competing worldviews and challenged to think critically about their own faith, to be able to give a reason for the hope that they have with gentleness and respect.

In the rest of this article we will look at the four parts of Pearcey's *Total Truth*. In Part 1, she documents the attempts to restrict the influence of Christianity by instituting the current prisons of the split between sacred and secular, private and public, and fact and value. In Part 2 she deftly shows the importance of Creation to any worldview and summarizes the new findings of science which strongly support Intelligent Design. In Part 3, she peels back the shroud of history to discover how evangelicalism got itself into this mess. And in Part 4, she revisits Francis Schaeffer's admonition that the heart of worldview thinking lies in its personal application, putting all of life under the Lordship of Christ.

The Sacred/Secular Split

In the first part of the book, Pearcey explores what has become known as the sacred/secular split. That is to say that things of religion, or the sacred, have no intersection with the secular. Another way of putting it is to refer to the split as a private/public split. We all make personal choices in our lives, but these should remain private, such as our religious or moral choices. One should never allow personal or private choices to intersect with your public life. That would be shoving your religion down someone else's throat, as the popular saying goes.

One more phrase of expressing the same dichotomy is the

fact/value split. We all have values that we are entitled to, but our values are personal and unverifiable choices among many options. These values should not try to intersect with the facts, that is, things everyone knows to be true. The creation/evolution discussion is a case in point. We are told repeatedly that evolution is science or fact and creation is based on a religious preference or value. The two cannot intersect.

The late Christopher Reeve made this split quite evident in a speech to a group of students at Yale University on the topic of embryonic stem cell research. He said, "When matters of public policy are debated, no religions should have a place at the table."{3} In other words keep your sacred, private values to yourself. In the public square, we can only discuss the facts in a secular context.

Far too many Christians have bought into this line of thinking or have been cowered into it. Pearcey tells of a man who was a deacon in his church, taught Sunday School, tithed generously and was looked upon as a model Christian. Yet his job at the law firm was to investigate the contracts with clients no longer wanted by the firm to see what loopholes were available to get them out of the contract. He saw no link between his Christian faith and his work.{4}

We fall into these thinking traps because we don't understand worldviews in general and the Christian worldview in particular. Pearcey outlines a threefold test of any worldview to help get a grasp on what they mean for thought and life: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. Every worldview has some story of where everything came from – Creation. Then each worldview proceeds to tells us that something is wrong with human society – the Fall – and then each worldview offers a solution – Redemption. Using this tool you will be better able to diagnose a worldview and whether it speaks the truth.

The Importance of Beginnings

The second part of Pearcey's book discusses the vitally important controversy over evolution and how it is taught in our schools. There is a clear philosophical filibuster masquerading as science in classrooms around the country.

In the opening chapter of this section, she tells the all too familiar story of a religious young man who is confronted with evolution in the seventh grade. Seeing the immediate contradiction between this theory and the Bible, the young man receives no help from teachers or clergy. He is left thinking that his "faith" has no answers to his questions. By the time he finishes school in Harvard, he is a committed atheist.{5}

The same story is repeated thousands of times every year. The faith of many young people has been wrecked on the shoals of Darwinism. Whoever has the power to define the story of creation in a culture is the *de facto* priesthood and largely determines what the dominant worldview will be.

On *Probe* we have discussed the problems of evolution and the evidence for Intelligent Design numerous times. Now Pearcey makes the case that this is far more than a scientific discussion. It is at the heart of the culture war we are immersed in. Darwinism has had a far reaching impact on American thought, and we need a better grasp of the issue to better fight the battle we are in.

To show the prevalence of naturalistic Darwinian thinking Pearcey quotes from a Berenstain Bears book on nature titled *The Bears Nature Guide*. "As the book opens, the Bear family invites us to go on a nature walk; after turning a few pages, we come to a two-page spread with a dazzling sunrise and the words spelled out in capital letters: Nature… is all that IS, or WAS, or EVER WILL BE."{6} Clearly this is presented as scientific fact and should not be doubted.

Pearcey guides the reader through a well presented description of the major problems with the evidence concerning Darwinism. But more importantly, she clearly shows that the problem is not just the evidence. Most Darwinists accept the meager evidence because their worldview demands it. Naturalism requires a naturalistic story of creation, and since they are convinced of naturalism, some form of evolution must be true. She quotes a Kansas State University professor as saying, "Even if all the data point to an intelligent designer, such an hypothesis is excluded from science because it is not naturalistic."{7}

Pearcey goes on to show that Darwinism has continued to progressively influence nearly all realms of intellectual endeavor. From biology to anthropology to ethics to law to philosophy to even theology, Darwinism shows its muscle. Darwinism is indeed a universal acid that systematically cuts through all branches of human thought. We ignore it at our peril.

How Did We Get in This Mess?

Nancy Pearcey titles the third section of her book, "How We Lost Our Minds." She begins with a typical story of conversion from sin of a young man named Denzel. As Denzel seeks to grow and understand his newfound faith, he is stymied by leaders who can't answer his questions and is told to just have faith in the simple things.

When Denzel gets a job, he is confused by those from other religions and cults who all seem to have answers for people's questions. Only the Christians are unable to defend themselves from skeptics and believers of other stripes. Eventually he finds work at a Christian bookstore and finds the nectar he has been hungry for. But he had to look and look hard. Denzel has learned that many in the evangelical movement have a largely anti-intellectual bias.

Where did that come from? Today one can still hear preachers of various stripes make fun of those of higher learning whether philosophers, scientists, or even theologians. The root of this anti-intellectualism is found in the early days of our country. America was founded by idealists and individualists. Many had suffered religious persecution and were looking for someplace to practice their faith apart from ecclesiastical authority. The democratic ideals of the original colonies and the newly independent United States of America seemed like just the right place.

When the early American seminaries became infected with the theological liberalism spawned by the Enlightenment, many rebelled against any form of church hierarchy, believing it couldn't be trusted. With the opening of the great frontiers, great opportunities for evangelism sprouted at the same time. Out of this came the First Great Awakening. The early revivalists directed their message to individuals, exhorting them to make independent decisions, Jonathan Edwards being a notable exception. Emotional and experiential conversions brought bigger crowds. Some began to even see a formula that brought about large numbers of conversions.

There arose a suspicion that Christianity had become hopelessly corrupted sometime after the apostolic age. The task at hand was to leapfrog back 1,800 years to restore the original purity of the church. Suddenly, the great works of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and others were seen as unnecessary.{8} Evangelicals were cut off from their historical and theological roots. The evangelical movement as a whole became focused on rugged American self-interest and self-assertion, a strong principle of Darwinian naturalism.

This is still evident today in the prevalence of church-hoppers. Many view their church through an individualistic grid which says if the church leadership doesn't do things the way I would prefer and doesn't listen to me, I will take my family and go elsewhere.

The roots of anti-intellectualism run deep and find surprisingly fresh support from Darwinian naturalism. So how do we recover?

Living It Out

In the final chapter of *Total Truth*, Pearcey rings out a call to authenticity, not just with respect to the intellectual underpinnings of the Christian worldview, but also to how we live it out.

On the final page she cites a Zogby/Forbes poll that asked respondents what they would most like to be known for. Intelligence? Good looks? Sense of humor? Unexpectedly, fully one half of all respondents said they would most like to be known for being authentic.

Pearcey concludes: "In a world of spin and hype, the postmodern generation is searching desperately for something real and authentic. They will not take Christians seriously unless our churches and parachurch organizations demonstrate an authentic way of life – unless they are communities that exhibit the character of God in their relationships and mode of living."{9}

For most of the chapter Pearcey highlights examples of both sides of this call, people and ministries who claim Christ but use the world's naturalistic methods, particularly in fund-raising, marketing, and focusing on a personality rather than the message. She also points to people such as Richard Wurmbrand and Francis Schaeffer who lived out their Christian worldview without flashy results and hyped conferences and campaigns.

Most of us at Probe Ministries were heavily influenced by Francis Schaeffer, his ministry at L'Abri Switzerland, and his books. Many Christians whose youth spanned the turbulent '60s and '70s found Schaeffer a glowing beacon of truth and

relevance in a world turned upside down by protests, drugs, war, crime, racism, and skepticism. Essentially, Schaeffer believed the gospel to be total truth. If that was the case, then living by a Christian worldview ought to be able to give real answers to real questions from real people.

We believe that what the postmodern world is searching for, what will most satisfy its craving for authenticity, is the person of Jesus Christ. They can only see Him in our lives and our answers to real questions. Our Web site at Probe.org is filled with the total truth of the Christian worldview. In our "Answers to E-Mail" section you can see authenticity lived out as we answer real questions and attacks with truth, respect, and gentleness.

We're certainly not perfect. We have much to learn and correct as we search out the answers to today's questions. We struggle with the funding and marketing of our ministry using methods that work but do not manipulate, coerce, or misrepresent who we are and what we do. Nancy Pearcey has challenged all of us in ministry, no less those of us at Probe Ministries, to always put Jesus first, people second, and ministry third.

Notes

1. Phillip Johnson, in the Foreword to Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 11.
2. Pearcey, 19.
3. Christopher Reeve quoted by Pearcey, 22.
4. Pearcey, 97-98.
5. Ibid., 153-154.
6. Ibid., 157.
7. Ibid, 168.
8. Ibid., 280-281.
9. Ibid., 378.

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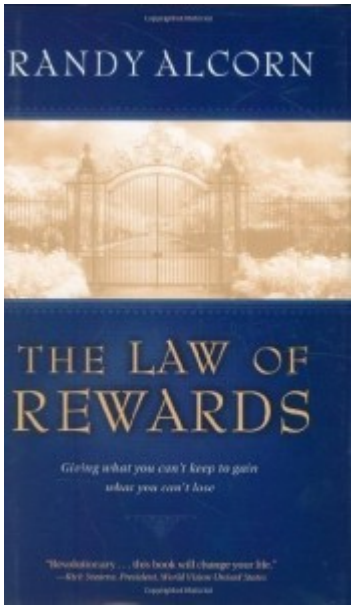
The Law of Rewards

Dr. Michael Gleghorn explore the biblical doctrine of eternal rewards. The Bible promises believers heavenly rewards for earthly obedience.

Introducing the Law of Rewards



The hit movie *Gladiator* begins with a powerful scene. Just before engaging the German barbarians in battle, General Maximus addresses some of his Roman soldiers. “Brothers,” he says, “what we do in life echoes in eternity.” Although Maximus was a pagan, his statement is entirely consistent with biblical Christianity, particularly the Bible’s teaching on eternal rewards.



In *The Law of Rewards*,{1} Randy Alcorn writes: “While our faith determines our eternal destination, our behavior determines our eternal rewards”{2}. The Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by God’s grace, through personal faith in Christ, apart from any works whatever (Eph. 2:8-9). But it also teaches, with equal clarity, that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that we may be recompensed for what we have done in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). This judgment (which is only for believers) is not to determine whether or not we are saved. Its purpose is to evaluate our works and determine whether we shall receive, or lose, eternal rewards (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

Alcorn writes, “Our works are what we have done with our resources—time, energy, talents, money, possessions.”{3} The apostle Paul describes our works as a building project. At the judgment seat of Christ the quality of our work will be tested with fire. If we have used quality building materials (gold, silver, precious stones), then our work will endure and we will be rewarded by the Lord. If we have used poor building materials (in this case, wood, hay, or straw), then our work will be consumed and we will suffer the loss of rewards (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

This raises some important questions. What are we doing with the resources that God has entrusted to us? Are we seeking to build God’s kingdom, in God’s way, empowered by God’s Spirit? Or are we merely engaged in empire-building for our own glory? Are we investing our resources in reaching the world for Christ, making disciples, and helping the poor and needy? Or are we only concerned with satisfying our own immediate wants and desires?

It’s here that the worldview dimensions of our subject can be most clearly seen. Most of us would probably find it difficult to use our resources in the service of God or our fellow man if we thought that this life was all there is and that death is the end of our personal existence. But Christianity says that there’s more – a *lot* more. And if Christianity is true, then Maximus was right: “What we do in life echoes in eternity.” Randy Alcorn has observed, “The missing ingredient in the lives of countless Christians today is *motivation*. . . . The doctrine of eternal rewards for our obedience is the neglected key to unlocking our motivation.”{4}

Questioning Our Motivation

Is the desire for eternal rewards a proper or legitimate motivation for serving Christ? Isn’t it somewhat shallow, maybe even selfish, for our service to Christ to be motivated

by a desire for heavenly rewards? Furthermore, shouldn't we serve Christ simply because of who He is, rather than for what we can get out of it? To some people, the promise of eternal rewards sounds like a crass appeal to our baser instincts. But is it?

Before we jump to any unwarranted conclusions and possibly overstate the case, we may first want to take a step back, take a deep breath, and remind ourselves of a few things. In the first place, as Randy Alcorn observes, "it wasn't *our* idea that God would reward us. It was *his* idea!"{5} If we search the pages of the New Testament, we repeatedly find promises of heavenly rewards for earthly obedience. Indeed, Jesus himself urges our obedience in light of future rewards (Luke 6:35). Not only that, in Matthew 6:20 he *commands* us to store up for ourselves "treasures in heaven." Now this leads to an interesting little twist. In John 14:21 Jesus says, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." We *could* make the argument, then, that the one who does *not* seek to store up treasures in heaven is being disobedient to Christ's command and demonstrating a lack of love for him!

In a somewhat similar vein, Alcorn wrote:

> It is certainly true that desire for reward should not be our only motivation. But it is also true that it's a fully legitimate motive encouraged by God. In fact, the two most basic things we can believe about God are first that he exists, and second that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6). If you don't believe God is a rewarder, you are rejecting a major biblical doctrine and have a false view of God.{6}

Of course, we must always remember that the Lord knows the motivations of our hearts – and these will be taken into account at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 4:5). In addition, Jesus solemnly warns us: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you

do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:1).

The biblical picture of rewards, then, would seem to go something like this. The Lord is absolutely worthy of our obedience and service, whether we ever personally profit from it or not (e.g. see Luke 17:10). Nevertheless, the Lord is a rewarder of those who seek Him and He commands us to seek His rewards as well! And when one really thinks about it, "Hearing our Master say, 'Well done' will not simply be for our pleasure but for *his*!"{7}

The Life God Rewards

What kind of life does God reward? For what sort of works will believers be rewarded when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ? The simplest answer to this question, and the most general, is that we will be rewarded for everything we've done that was motivated by our love for the Lord and empowered by His Spirit. Indeed, Jesus said that we would even be rewarded for simply giving a cup of cold water to someone because he is a follower of Christ (Matt. 10:42).

But the Bible specifically mentions many other things for which we can also be rewarded. The New Testament describes as many as five different crowns which will be given to believers for various works of faithfulness, obedience, discipline, and love. For example, there is the *imperishable crown* (1 Cor. 9:25), which appears to be rewarded for "determination, discipline, and victory in the Christian life."{8} There is the *crown of righteousness* which, according to Paul, will be awarded by the Lord "to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). There is the *crown of life*, "given for faithfulness to Christ in persecution or martyrdom."{9} In the book of Revelation, Jesus tells the church in Smyrna, "the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the

point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (2:10; see also James 1:12). Additionally, there is the *crown of rejoicing* (1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 4:1), "given for pouring oneself into others in evangelism and discipleship."{10} And finally, there is the *crown of glory* (1 Pet. 5:4), "given for faithfully representing Christ in a position of leadership."{11}

Of course, as Alcorn observes, "There's nothing in this list that suggests it's exhaustive."{12} Indeed, as we've already seen, the Bible seems to say that we will be rewarded for every act of love and service which we did for the glory of God. But there's another side to this discussion which we dare not overlook. The Bible not only indicates that we can gain rewards; it also warns us that we can lose them as well.

Paul compared the Christian life to an athletic competition in which our goal is to win the prize. This is why, he told the Corinthians, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Cor. 9:27). The Bible suggests that the works of some believers will be completely consumed at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15). Tragically, these believers will enter heaven without any rewards from their Lord. To avoid this catastrophe, let us heed Paul's advice and "run in such a way as to get the prize" (1 Cor. 9:24).

Power, Pleasures, and Possessions

What should we think about power, pleasures, and possessions? Are they merely temptations that should be avoided, or genuine goods that can be legitimately sought and desired? Although some may find it surprising, each of these things *is* good—at least considered simply in itself. Each finds its ultimate source in God. And each existed *before* sin and evil corrupted His good creation. God has always been *powerful*. He clearly

took *pleasure* in His work of creation, repeatedly describing it as "good" (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). And as the Creator of all that exists (other than himself, of course), everything ultimately belongs to God (1 Cor. 10:26). Indeed, the Bible sometimes describes Him as the "*possessor* of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:19). Clearly, then, there's nothing inherently wrong with power, pleasures, or possessions.

So why have these things gained such tainted reputations? Probably because they've so often been misused and abused by sinful men and women. Indeed, describing sin and evil as the misuse, abuse, perversion or corruption of some good gift of God is part of a long and venerable tradition in the history of philosophy and theology. And one doesn't have to look very far to find plenty of examples of man's sinful misuse of power, pleasures, and possessions. Just turn on the evening news, or read the local paper, and you'll find many such examples. But we must always remember that it's the *misuse* of these things that is sinful and wrong; the things in themselves are good and desirable. And this is confirmed by the teaching of Scripture.

Consider the kind of rewards God offers us. For faithful and obedient service now, He promises power, pleasures, and possessions in eternity! Jesus made it clear that those who are faithful with the little things in this life, will be rewarded with great power and authority in the next (Luke 19:15-19). He taught that those who invest their time, talents, and treasures in building God's kingdom here and now are laying up great treasures in heaven for themselves in the hereafter (Matt. 6:19-21; 19:21). And pleasures? The psalmist wrote of God, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever" (16:11).

Randy Alcorn has written, "God has created us each with desires for pleasure, possessions, and power."{13} We want these things "not because we are sinful but *because we are human.*"{14} Although our sinfulness can, and often does, lead

us to misuse these things, we've seen that they're actually good gifts of God. "Power, possessions, and pleasures are legitimate objects of desire that our Creator has instilled in us *and* by which he can motivate us to obedience."{15} May we faithfully serve the Lord, trusting him as "the Rewarder of those who diligently seek him."{16}

Investing in Eternity

A Christian worldview must be fleshed-out in the rough and tumble world of our daily lives if we're going to be salt and light to the surrounding culture. Now, as always, true disciples must be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (Jas. 1:22).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his followers:

> Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 6:19-21).

Many of us read these verses and only hear Jesus' command not to store up treasures on earth. But if this is all we hear, then we're missing the main point that Jesus is trying to make. As Alcorn observes, the central focus of this passage "is not the renunciation of earthly treasures but the accumulation of heavenly treasures. We're to avoid storing up unnecessary treasures on earth not as an end in itself, but as a life strategy to lay up treasures in heaven."{17} In a sense, Jesus is calling us to adopt a long-term investment strategy.

Think about the fate of all our earthly treasures. Isn't Jesus right? Won't they either wear out, break down, rust, become outdated, or get stolen? And even if none of this happens, we

can't hold on to earthly wealth forever, can we? "Either it leaves us while we live, or we leave it when we die."{18} So is it really smart to pour all our time and energy into the accumulation of earthly treasures? Is this really a wise investment strategy?

We've been discussing issues raised by Randy Alcorn's excellent book, *The Law of Rewards*. I can think of no better way to conclude than with this powerful and thought-provoking citation:

> Gather your family and go visit a junkyard or a dump. Look at all the piles of "treasures" that were formerly Christmas and birthday presents. Point out things that people worked long hours to buy and paid hundreds of dollars for, that children quarreled about, friendships were lost over, honesty was sacrificed for, and marriages broke up over. Look at the remnants of gadgets and furnishings that now lie useless after their brief life span. Remind yourself that most of what you own will one day end up in a junkyard like this. And even if it survives on earth for a while, you won't. . . . When you examine the junkyard, ask yourself this question: 'When all that I ever owned lies abandoned, broken, useless, and forgotten, what will I have done with my life that will last for eternity?{19}

Notes

1. Much of the material for this article comes from Randy Alcorn, *The Law of Rewards* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003). If you're interested in exploring this topic further, you may also want to read Bruce Wilkinson (with David Kopp), *A Life God Rewards: Why Everything You Do Today Matters Forever* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2002).
2. Alcorn, 7.
3. Ibid., 6.
4. Ibid., 99-100.
5. Ibid., 105.

6. Ibid., 116.
7. Ibid., 92.
8. Ibid., 91.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 92.
13. Ibid., 111.
14. Ibid., 112.
15. Ibid., 113.
16. Ibid., 121.
17. Ibid., 22.
18. Ibid., 23.
19. Ibid., 23.

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Making Moral Choices – From A Biblical Worldview Perspective

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

Love and Biblical Morality

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

the person of Jesus Christ (John 10:30, Hebrews 1:1-4).

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

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

Biblical morality is also based upon love that has its source in God. Jesus was asked by the teachers of the law which was the most important commandment. "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

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

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

The apostle Paul teaches that love is "the law of Christ" and thereby supreme and sufficient (Galatians 5:14; 6:2). He also

teaches that love is the foundation of Christian obedience. Even if we manifest the gifts of the Spirit and do good works, they do not profit us unless they are done in love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

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

Knowing God's Will

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

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

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

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

The Bible provides boundaries and barriers to our moral actions. We are to stay within those moral boundaries. Paul,

writing to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:6), told them “Do not go beyond what is written.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christian Liberty

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

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

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

The first principle is that Christians are not to have a judgmental attitude toward one another in regard to issues that are morally neutral. Paul says in Romans 14:3 that the "one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat" nor should the "one who does not eat . . . judge the one who eats." In other words, whether you participate in or refrain from a morally neutral activity, you should not be judgmental of the other person.

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

Second, each Christian must decide what is right or wrong for him or her. Paul teaches that if you believe a particular

action to be wrong for you, then it is wrong. He says in Romans 14:4, “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

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

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

A key test of Christian obedience is whether a person can do so “for the Lord” (Romans 14:6). Christians are to “live for the Lord” because “we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8). If one cannot participate in an activity while serving the Lord, then he or she should refrain. Paul says that “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

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

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

At the same time there is a balance between enjoying our

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

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

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

Honesty and Biblical Morality

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

The Old Testament calls upon the people of God to deal honestly with one another. Leviticus 9:35 says “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity.”

Likewise, Proverbs 11:1 warns that “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord.” Believers are to use honest weights and be honest in their dealings with others.

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

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

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

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

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

In the Old Testament, oaths and vows were used many times. Abraham (Genesis 21:22-34), Jacob (Genesis 25:33; 28:20), Joseph (Genesis 50:5), Joshua (Joshua 6:26), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:11), Saul (1 Samuel 14:24), David (1 Samuel 20:17), Ezra (Ezra 10:5), and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:25) all swore oaths or

vows. The swearing of these oaths and vows underscores the seriousness of telling the truth and following up on one's commitment.

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

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Restoring the Sacred

The Loss of the Sacred

There are several ways to define modernism. One way is this: modernism was an attempt to remove the sacred from society and to replace it with a mechanistic naturalism. Everything was to be understood and explained in scientific terms.

The late philosopher of religion Mircea Eliade wrote this:

The completely profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos [that is, the cosmos with the sacred removed] is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit . . . desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies.{1}

Profane, here, is another word for *secular*. It is contrasted with *sacred.* My *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *sacred* as "connected with God or a god or dedicated to a religious

purpose and so deserving veneration." It is closely related to *sanctified* which means "holy" which means "dedicated or consecrated to God."{2}

Ours is obviously a secular society. Everything open for public discussion is to be explained with no reference to the sacred; there is no acknowledged connection to God. It seems the only time the sacred makes it into the news is when there is a tragedy and reporters talk about people praying, or when a famous religious person, such as the Pope, dies.

Once upon a time in the West, our society operated as though God mattered. Now, such views are considered quaint relics of the past which shouldn't be allowed to invade the public square. The late Christopher Reeve in a speech about stem cell research at Yale University said that "our government should not be influenced by any religion when matters of public policy are being debated."{3} Religion is to be a private affair only.

The late theologian and missionary Lesslie Newbigin, after spending four decades in India, said this about the West:

The sharp line which modern Western culture has drawn between religious affairs and secular affairs is itself one of the most significant peculiarities of our culture, and would be incomprehensible to the vast majority of people.{4}

Why should this matter to us? Among other reasons is the simple unfairness in a democracy of "religious people" not being able to bring *their* worldviews into public debates while the nonreligious can. I can think of two explanations for this idea. First, it's thought that religion necessarily creates unreasonable *bias* whereas irreligion doesn't. Religious belief removes our ability to be objective, it is thought. People who think this way need to catch up with current philosophy! There are no value-free facts, and no perspectives that do not begin with unprovable assumptions.{5}

Second, it's thought that religious biases are likely to be *destructive* because of their "intolerant" character. This is a popular mantra today; it is trotted out with all the authority of unassailable fact. Didn't the events of 9/11 prove it? Responding to the observation that people see those horrible events as illustrating what religious monotheism causes, writer Os Guinness noted that "In the last century, more people were killed by secularist intellectuals, in the name of secularist ideologies, than in all the religious persecutions and repressions in Western history combined."{6} If the twentieth century is a good witness, there is greater danger from secular powers than from religious ones.

Beyond that, though, is a problem Christians have individually and corporately. When so much of our time is spent in a realm in which our Christian beliefs aren't welcomed, we begin to forget their importance for all of life. So we start thinking from a secular perspective. In addition, we even find it easier to let our Christian beliefs be shaped by non-Christian thinking.

In her latest book, *Total Truth,*{7} Nancy Pearcey has reminded us of the importance of destroying the divide between the sacred and the secular in our thinking. But it can't stop with our thinking; the sacred needs to be an integral part of our lives. As part of that process it would be good to be reminded of just what we mean by the sacred.

Sacredness

As noted earlier, *sacred* means to be dedicated or devoted to God. It involves a separation of purpose: something is separated from the use of the world for the use of God.

The idea of sacredness is reflected in a number of ways in the various religions of the world. There are holy books and places and festivals. The sacred is reflected in religious

architecture. Islamic mosques, for example, are designed to point people to Allah. Muslim writer Hwaa Irfan speaks of "sacred geometry [which] is the science of creating a space, writing or other artwork, which reminds one of the greatness of Allah."{8} In the past, Christianity too, of course, was conscious of the sacred in its architecture. Medieval era churches were built for the purpose of "signifying the sacred," of reflecting something about God. The furnishings of churches were designed to aid in this focus.

Old Testament

What does the Bible tell us about sacredness or holiness?{9} In the Old Testament it refers primarily to God. "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts" Isaiah said (6:3). In Old Testament times, God showed Himself to be set apart from His created order through such events as Moses being told to remove his shoes before the burning bush because he was standing on holy ground (Ex. 3:5). Later, at Sinai, God called Moses up onto a mountain to teach him His laws, far away from the people signifying His separateness from a fallen world (Ex. 19). His separation from unclean things was reflected also through His laws (e.g., Lev. 11:43, 44). Anyone who would approach God, who would "ascend His holy hill," according to the Psalmist, must have "clean hands and a pure heart" (24:4).

The word *holy* was applied to other things that were separated by God, such as the nation of Israel (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 20:26), the Sabbath (Ex. 16:23), the tabernacle with both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (Ex. 26:33), and the various feasts and special observations, such as the Day of Atonement (Ex. 30:10). This even extended to objects used for worship. For example, there was special incense that was too holy to be used by people for themselves (Ex. 30:37). In the Old Testament, then, we find God using things and events to teach His people about His holy nature.

New Testament

What do we find in the New Testament? Again, the primary reference is to God. All three members of the Trinity are said to be holy. Peter repeated God's admonition recorded in Lev. 11:44—"Be holy because I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). He called Jesus "the Holy One of God" (Jn. 6:69). And, of course, the Spirit is called the Holy Spirit (e.g., Lk. 2:26).

Whereas in the Old Testament, God's separateness from creation and the unclean was the emphasis, in the New Testament the moral dimension comes to the fore (although the moral wasn't absent from the Old Testament). In the Old Testament the concern is more with external matters; in the New Testament the focus is on the internal. The writer of Hebrews says we were "made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10). This doesn't mean we've fully "arrived" in our personal sanctification. Paul says we're to "purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1). The shift in emphasis between Testaments doesn't indicate a change in the meaning of holiness or its importance. For example, God's people are called saints—holy ones or sanctified ones—in both Testaments (e.g., Ps. 34:9; Acts 9:13). However, in the Old Testament times, God used external matters, which could be seen, to teach about the inward change He desired.

Does this mean that we no longer think about events and physical things as holy as in the Old Testament? Certainly not in the same way Old Testament saints did. We no longer have the Temple and the sacrificial system and the Aaronic priesthood. All things are God's, and all things are to be offered up to Him with a pure heart. There should be no sacred/secular split in the sense that some things are under God's jurisdiction and some aren't. However, we might find that, just like the Israelites, certain items or observances might help in directing us to God or reminding us of His

character.

Secularism—The Loss of the Sacred

Contrasted with *sacred* is the idea of *secular.* The root of the word "secular" is interesting. It comes from a Latin word that means "time." James Hitchcock says "to call someone secular means that he is completely time-bound, totally a child of his age, a creature of history, with no vision of eternity. Unable to see anything in the perspective of eternity, he cannot believe that God exists or acts in human affairs."{10} A secular society, then, is one which is tied to time, to the temporal, with no reference to the eternal, to God.

We shouldn't think that there was no distinction between the sacred and the secular in the West until modern times. In the Medieval era, there was secular music and poetry. However, there was an increasing turn to the secular following the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century writers such as Voltaire were openly espousing secularism. If religion was the cause of such terrible things as the wars of the sixteenth century, it should be removed from the public square.

Over time, secularism gradually encroached on almost all areas of human life. In the university in the nineteenth century, a movement began to remove religion from its central place in education and segregate it to its own department. In the workplace, *efficiency* became a watchword; because religion could disrupt the workplace, it was to be left at home. By the twentieth century buildings and art and law and . . . well, you name it; all areas of human life were now to be thought of in secular terms and developed according to the methods of science. Life would be much improved, it was thought, if we were freed from the narrowness of religion to make of ourselves what we would. Humanism was the fundamental worldview, and secular humanism at that. The name given to

this era was “modernism.”

What has this gotten us as a society? We’re free to construct our reality any way we wish now that God is supposedly dead. But what have we done with our freedom? Henry Grunwald, former ambassador to Austria and editor-in-chief of Time, Inc. said this:

Secular humanism . . .stubbornly insisted that morality need not be based on the supernatural. But it gradually became clear that ethics without the sanction of some higher authority simply were not compelling. The ultimate irony, or perhaps tragedy, is that secularism has not led to humanism. We have gradually dissolved—deconstructed—the human being into a bundle of reflexes, impulses, neuroses, nerve endings. The great religious heresy used to be making man the measure of all things; but we have come close to making man the measure of nothing.{11}

What the Loss of the Sacred Means for Us

Life in a secular world

What does it mean to live in a secular society? How does it color our Christian experience? How does it affect the way we make decisions? The way we spend our money and time? The way we relate to people?

In 1998, Craig Gay published a book titled *The Way of the Modern World: Or, Why It’s Temping to Live As if God Doesn’t Exist.*{12} In the introduction, he addresses the question why there needs to be another book on modernism. He gives a couple of reasons. First, he says, is the possibility of unfruitfulness. He points to the Parable of the Sower in Matthew as a biblical example. Could any ineffectiveness on our part or the part of our churches be traced back to accommodation to the secular mind? Could our many church programs and strategies be found wanting because we are using

modern methods which run counter to the ways of God? Our private lives have become divided: Monday through Friday are for money-making endeavors; Saturday is for working around the house or going to the lake; Sunday is for religion. We live bifurcated lives.

Second is "the threat of apostasy and spiritual death." Think of the proverbial frog in the pot of water slowly coming to a boil, and then think about how easy it is to adopt the notion that "you only go around once" and the modernistic solution of getting all the "toys" we can *while* we can . . . and gradually not only *look* like the world but become card-carrying members of it.

The sacred brought down to the secular

The late Francis Schaeffer taught many of us the meaning and significance of "secular humanism," and, as a result of such teaching, evangelicals have taken on the project of integrating the sacred and the secular in more and more areas of their lives. Much of this has been good. Determining to let one's Christian beliefs inform all aspects of life is hard in itself; in a secular culture that doesn't care for such things, it's a major challenge. As noted earlier, it is an uphill battle living as a Christian in our secular society, so one should be cautious about criticizing the sincere efforts of fellow believers.

In my opinion, however, some or many of us have unconsciously pulled a "switcheroo." In our efforts to tear down the divide between sacred and secular, we have been guilty to a significant extent of bringing the sacred down to the secular rather lifting all of life up to the secular, as it were. We live so much of our lives in the "lower story" as Nancy Pearcey calls it (following Schaeffer) that we have simply baptized as Christian attitudes and ways of life that are questionable. We've secularized the sacred rather than vice versa.

Ask yourself this: Besides things internal to you—attitudes, beliefs, etc.—what externals in your life clearly reflect the divine? How does the sacred color your life? What habits of life, objects or tools, what signifiers of the sacred, are part of your life?

Restoring the Sacred, *Not* the Sacred-Secular Split

In so far as this describes us, we need to make the conscious decision to bring about change. The first order of business is to re-acknowledge the sacredness of God. Then we must recognize that *we* are sanctified, set apart. We are to be drawn up to God, and one significant area in which this should be seen is in worship. Think of worship as the sanctified being drawn up to the Sanctifier. In another place I wrote this:

> *The object of one's worship reflects back on the worshipper. Those who worship things lower than themselves end up demeaning themselves, being brought down to the level of their object of worship. But those who worship things higher are drawn up to reflect their object of worship. To worship God is to be drawn up to our full height, so to speak. We are ennobled by worshipping the most noble One.{13}*

Two thoughts to add which might seem contradictory at first. In response to the secularization of our society, it is our responsibility to bring God back into all the affairs of our lives, even the mundane. In our *private* lives that will be easier to do than in our *public* lives simply because we don't set all the rules for the latter. For example, a person working for a financial institution probably won't be able to insist that the boss leads the office in prayer before work each morning. However, there *are* ways we can bring a Christian view of the world and godly morality into the workplace. We

want God to be over the full sweep of our lives such that we don't have a brick wall dividing our lives in two.

Along with that, however, we might find it helpful to bring into our lives some kinds of signifiers of the sacred, some kinds of objects or places or routines or *something* that will provide reminders to us that the world we see isn't all there is. Christians have used symbols for ages to remind them of the "otherness" of God. Art has made a big comeback in recent decades as a means of portraying truths about God and a Christian view of life and the world. Such things aren't prescribed in Scripture. What *is* prescribed, of course, is the rejection of idolatry. Therefore, anything we use as an aid must remain just that—an aid, not the object of our faith.

Thomas Molnar argues that a strong Christian belief in the supernatural needs worship symbols such as prayer, ritual, a sense of the sacred community, sincere piety, and the élan (enthusiastic energy) of the clergy."{14} He believes that the only way the church can remain strong in a pagan environment is to "remain unquestionably loyal" to both the intellectual component—doctrine—and the sacred component which employs symbolic forms.{15} The intellectual component gives us an understanding of our faith and our world. By being renewed, it enables us to "test and approve what God's will is" (Rom. 12:2). The symbolic component can help us focus on and learn about God. Things like visual aids, postures, particular times set aside for a focus on God, along with Bible reading and prayer, can be very beneficial, as long as they don't lead to idolatry or a diminished or altered view of God.

We don't have the law with all its stipulations about the Temple and its furnishings, sacrifices, and special feasts. In my opinion, however, to simply set all such things aside *because* they aren't required by law is short-sighted. Human nature hasn't changed; if sacred signifiers were helpful to the Israelites, maybe they would be to us, too.

To give people a list of things to do that goes beyond clear scriptural exhortation to such practices as prayer, learning God's Word, gathering together as a body, and participating in the sacraments or ordinances would be to overstep our boundaries. The most I can do, then, is ask you think about it. Consider how you can restore a clear sense of the sacred in your life. Not just any sacredness *per se,* of course, but a sense of the presence of the One who is truly sacred and of the significance of the sacred for how you live.

Notes

1. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 13.

2. *The Pop-up New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Selectsoft Publishing, 1992.

3. Christopher Reeve, "Stem Cells and Public Policy" Yale University, April 3, 2003. Accessed from www.yale.edu/opa/v31.n25/story7.html on 4/6/2005. The offending statement was reported in Mitch Horowitz, "Ambassador of the Miraculous" on Horowitz' Web site at www.mitchhorowitz.com/christopher-reeve.html (Accessed 4/6/2005).

4. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 31.

5. Thomas Kuhn got the ball rolling with respect to science, the supposed bastion of objectivity, with his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970; first published in 1962). For philosophical treatments see Arthur F. Holmes, *Fact, Value, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Thomas Nagel, The View from Nowhere (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986); and Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002).

6. Mary A. Jacobs, "Q&A With Os Guinness: Standing in Defense of 'One True God'," *Dallas Morning News*, March 26, 2005.

7. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004).

8. Hwaa Irfan, "Sacred Geometry of Islamic Mosques," Islamonline.net www.islamonline.net/English/Science/2002/07/article02.shtml, accessed 4/7/2005.

9. I am indebted for much of what follows to Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Theological Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), s.v., "Holiness."

10. James Hitchcock, *What Is Secular Humanism? Why Humanism Became Secular, and How It Is Changing Our World* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1982), 10-11. I highly recommend this book for a history of secular humanism through the 1970s.

11. Henry Grunwald, "The Year 2000," *Time*, March 30, 1992, 75, quoted in Garber, 54.

12. Craig Gay, *The Way of the Modern World: Or, Why It's Temping to Live As if God Doesn't Exist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

13. Rick Wade, "Christianity: The True Humanism" Probe Ministries, 2000. Available on the Web at www.probe.org/christianity-the-true-humanism/.

14. Thomas Molnar, *The Pagan Temptation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 79.

15. Molnar, 81.

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