

# The Games We Play

*Game-playing and competition can and should be seen as a healthy part of a life that seeks to glorify God in all things.*

## Games and a Christian Worldview

Ten seconds are left in the game. The Wolves lead by two points. The Bobcats cross midcourt, knowing they must score or they will miss the playoffs. Smith stumbles! Jones grabs the ball and races toward the Wolves' basket for a lay-up. Smith tackles him like a linebacker! Both of them slide across the floor and run into the wall behind the basket. It looks as if Jones may be injured! Players from both teams are shouting at each other. The referee has thrown Smith out of the game!

Does this sound like something you may have seen during a high school, college, or professional basketball game? Or perhaps you have read about a similar incident. Actually, such an event took place in my experience. (The names have been changed to protect the guilty.) I was playing for my church team in a church league. I was the one who was tackled.

Does such an incident represent a Christian worldview of games? Surely most of us would answer with an emphatic, "No!" Unfortunately, though, too many Christians approach games with attitudes that appear to leave their Christian convictions out of the picture. Too many of us can tell stories involving Christians and games that don't align with a Christian worldview. Many times I was the one who allowed athletic intensity to overcome moral conviction in the midst of competition, and I have seen many friends do the same. Why? What is it about games that can encourage some of our more ungodly characteristics?

On the other hand, can sports bring out some of our more godly

characteristics? Can God be glorified through games? There have been times in my life when the exhilaration and concentration that can accompany games have included thankfulness to God. He gives me joy when I express my thankfulness to Him as I hit or throw a baseball, catch a football, shoot a basketball, volley a tennis ball, or hit a golf ball.

Arthur Holmes has written that “play is all-pervasive. It does not lie just on the fringes of life, as if games were spare parts we don’t really need in the main business of the day.”[\(1\)](#) If true, such a statement indicates the importance of our subject. It is worthy of our attention. Some even believe play is the defining characteristic of humans. “Nietzsche went so far as to reduce all of life and thought to masks in a play, taking nothing seriously except the will to power—in effect, the will to win— that all of life is a biologically driven power play.”[\(2\)](#) A Christian, of course, does not agree with this perspective, but the Christian does live in a world that tends to agree with Nietzsche’s dictum. The “will to power” definitely is translated into “the will to win” for many. Indeed, the phrase is often elaborated to mean “the will to win at all costs.” Vince Lombardi, the coach of the Green Bay Packers during their period of NFL domination, is famous for the statement: “Winning isn’t the main thing, it’s the only thing.” But, can the Christian play, win or lose, and not agree that winning is the only thing? If the answer is, “Yes!,” the believer must realize that he has accepted a challenge to be Christ’s ambassador even on the field of play.

## **A Brief History of Games**

“That was an Olympian effort!” “Those mountains have an Olympic grandeur.” Such expressions indicate some of the ways in which ancient games and their impact are part of our consciousness. Games were part of all ancient cultures. For some, games were more sedentary than for others, but a sense

of play permeates man's history. The Greeks, who first held the Olympic Games and others that were similar, organized these events approximately 3,500 years ago. All of them were dedicated to certain gods and were integrated with religious ceremonies. The competitors were originally amateurs whose only reward was a wreath or garland. Eventually, though, the rigorous training that was required led to their professional status. They received adulation in their cities, as well as substantial prizes and monetary rewards.[\(3\)](#) As we will see, the New Testament contains metaphors relating to these games and competitors.

When the Romans became the dominant world power, they rejected the Greek emphasis on athletic skill because of the public nakedness of the competitors.[\(4\)](#) Such a response is ironic in light of the brutal games that soon came into vogue in the empire. Gladiatorial combat to the death, fights with beasts, even naval battles were staged in the arenas. The circus Maximus in Rome, where important chariot races were held, probably held up to 250,000 people. "By A.D. 354 the games claimed 175 days out of the year."[\(5\)](#) Such popularity is indicative of a significant difference between the Greek and Roman attitudes about games. "The Greeks originally organized their games for the competitors, the Romans for the public. One was primarily competition, the other entertainment."[\(6\)](#) The Roman thirst for barbaric spectacle and entertainment ultimately prompted the outrage of early church leaders. They "denounced the games and similar amusements because of idolatry, immodesty, and brutality. It was, in fact, the opposition of Christianity that brought them to an end."[\(7\)](#) Such a response may prove to be appropriate in our time. But for the moment I propose we simply consider what Scripture contains to guide us in an appraisal of the games played by both Christians and non-Christians.

The Old Testament contains few references to games, even though evidence of them can be found in all areas of the

ancient Near East. "Simple and natural amusements and exercises, and trials of wit and wisdom, were more to the Hebrew taste."[\(8\)](#) The biblical text does mention children's games, sports such as running, archery, stone-lifting, high leaping, games of chance and skill, story-telling, dancing, the telling of proverbs, and riddles. In addition, wrestling probably was part of Hebrew life.[\(10\)](#)

It is of special interest to note the joyous prophetic picture of Zechariah 8:5: "And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets" (NASB). "The promise of the kingdom, as Lewis Smedes observes, is of restored playfulness." Evidently play and games have a place in God's plan for His people:

*Scripture begins with life in a garden and ends with a city at play; so play—art and celebration and fun and games, and a playful spirit—is part of our calling, part of the creation mandate. It is not the play of self-indulgence, nor of shed responsibility, but of gladness and celebration in responsible relationship to God."*[\(11\)](#)

## Games and the New Testament

Can you picture the Apostle Paul as a sportswriter? Imagine him sitting in a stadium pressbox observing the athletes compete. Then imagine him writing his observations and opinions of what transpired. The next morning you purchase a newspaper and turn to the sports section. There you find an account of the previous day's game under Paul's byline. Does this sound farfetched, out of character, ludicrous? Actually such a scenario is not far removed from Paul's knowledge of the games of his day. In several portions of his letters, one can find metaphors relating to athletic preparation and competition. The same is true for the writer of Hebrews. These New Testament writers evidently were aware of Greek and Roman games and realized they could be used to teach valuable

lessons to their readers. Their awareness is evidence that they were enmeshed in the surrounding culture, which was filled with indicators of the importance of games and competition in the ancient world.

These games “were so well known in Palestine and throughout the Roman Empire in the time of Christ and the apostles that they cannot be passed over in silence.” [\(13\)](#) Archaeological remains indicate stadiums of various types in many cities including Jerusalem, Jericho, Caesarea, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, and Tarsus, the city of Paul’s early life. “The early Christians, therefore, whether of Jewish or gentile origin, were able to understand, and the latter at any rate to appreciate, references either to the games in general, or to details of their celebration.” [\(14\)](#) A brief survey of particular New Testament passages will provide us with a foundation for an analysis of games in contemporary life.

Some of the most intriguing athletic metaphors in all of Paul’s writings are found in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. He uses Greek terminology and images that stem directly from the athletic contests of his day, especially the triennial Isthmian Games held in Corinth. These terms and images include running a race to win, receiving a prize, competition, discipline in preparation for competition, concentration, abiding by the rules, and even boxing. Variations on these themes can be found in Galatians 2:2 and 5:7; Philippians 2:16 and 3:14; 2 Timothy 2:5 and 4:7. In Hebrews 12:1 the author of Hebrews echoes Paul’s metaphors by encouraging Christians to “run with endurance the race that is set before us.” In verse 2 he even refers to Jesus as the one who set the pace and has already covered the course.

These passages are worthy of many sermons and extensive commentary. Since that is not possible in this short essay, let’s consider a few insights from these biblical metaphors that are most germane to our subject.

First, there is no blanket condemnation of games. The metaphors carry the positive weight of someone who respected athletic endeavors. Second, there is much to learn about the Christian life when we compare it with games. Games can be seen and experienced in ways that correlate with Christian principles such as discipline, concentration, and perseverance. Third, these passages should not be gleaned in an uncritical manner. Surely Paul rejected many aspects of the games, such as the pagan religious emphases. Fourth, the physical body was not rejected as unimportant. Gnosticism, which was a prominent heresy of New Testament times, taught that the body was unimportant or even sinful. In contrast, these verses take the importance of the body for granted. It is God's creation.

## Contemporary Views of Games

The Super Bowl. The Final Four. College Bowl Games. The Olympics. The NBA Finals. The World Series. Little League Baseball. The Masters. The World Cup. The list of such sports-related titles could fill several pages of this essay because our culture is saturated with games. This infatuation takes a great deal of our time, attention, and money. An objective observer, in my opinion, would conclude that humans are obsessed with games. Current predictions and opinions of this infatuation vary from the skeptical to the optimistic. Alvin Toffler, writing in 1970, predicted that, "Leisure-time pursuits will become an increasingly important basis for differences between people, as the society shifts from a work orientation toward greater involvement in leisure. We shall advance into an era of breathtaking fun specialism." [\(15\)](#) Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the great basketball player of the recent past, stated, "Modern sports is getting to be like professional wrestling; something is going awry." [\(16\)](#) According to Robert Higgs, author of *God in the Stadium*, "Professional sports is getting warped, and they carry a somber message to society in our contemporary times." [\(17\)](#) He

continued along this theme by suggesting that “the idea of play and fun and enjoyment of the natural gifts of games is being warped by this incredible drive for money.”[\(18\)](#) In comparing the games with a prize, such as the Super Bowl, Higgs concluded: “The more emphasis you put on the cultural prize, the bigger you make those prizes, the less regard and appreciation of the gift of the game itself, it seems to me.”[\(19\)](#)

Do any of these opinions concur with your estimation of games? Are you one of the skeptics? If so, that probably is a sign that you have at least begun to ask if games are occupying the proper place in your life, your family’s life, and the life of the culture at large. Before we become too cynical, though, let’s consider more optimistic analyses.

In his book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch draws a fascinating parallel between sports and our need for traditions and order. He believes that an intelligent sports spectator is one of the keys to a retention of the positive nature of games. He writes: “One of the virtues of contemporary sports lies in their resistance to the erosion of standards and their capacity to appeal to a knowledgeable audience.”[\(20\)](#) Michael Novak, who has written a thought-provoking book entitled *The Joy of Sports*, juxtaposes European and American traditions around the place of sports in America’s history. He believes that the “streets of America, unlike the streets of Europe, do not involve us in stories and anecdotes rich with a thousand years of human struggle. Sports are our chief civilizing agent. Sports are our most universal art form. Sports tutor us in the basic lived experiences of the humanist tradition.”[\(21\)](#) Novak continues his praise with a statement that echoes the Apostle Paul: “Play provides the fundamental metaphors and the paradigmatic experiences for understanding the other elements of life.”[\(22\)](#) Is there a “happy medium” between the skeptical and optimistic views of games? Or should we bring the two views together in order to

find a wise perspective? Perhaps a coupling of the two views provides creative positive tension that enables us to better evaluate the place of games in the Christian life.

## Christians in a Competitive World

*"I believe that God made me for a purpose. For China. But He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure. To give it up would be to hold Him in contempt. . . . To win is to honor Him."* [\(23\)](#)

These poignant phrases are from *Chariots of Fire*, one of the truly great films. They were spoken by the actor who portrayed Eric Liddell, a great athlete and a great Christian. He is talking with his sister, who is pleading with him to fulfill his commitment to their mission in China. He was to fulfill that commitment, but first he considered it his duty to run in the 1924 Paris Olympics for the glory of God. When I first saw the film I wept with joy and gratitude because of the film's portrayal of a man who understood and appreciated God's gift to him. In my estimation the film, and this scene in particular, contains a clear and eloquent statement of a Christian worldview as it applies to games, play, sports, or athletics. With Eric Liddell's words in mind, we will offer principles that can help us establish a foundation for a Christian's involvement in games. First, "play is best seen as an attitude, a state of mind rather than as a distinguishable set of activities." [\(24\)](#) One doesn't have to be involved in play to play; work can include an attitude of play as well.

Second, "play is not the key to being human, but being human is the key to play." [\(25\)](#) And being human includes a free spirit that is "celebrative and imaginative because of the possibilities God has for us in this world." [\(26\)](#)

Third, play should instill "an attitude that carries over into all of life, finding joyful expression in whatever we do,



productive or not.” [\(27\)](#)

Fourth, play should be seen as an act of worship. “It is the religious meaning of life that gives purpose and meaning to both work and play. A responsible relationship to God includes play.” [\(28\)](#)

Some of you may be saying, “OK, I can think on these things in solitude or in group discussion, but what about principles that will help me when I’m actually involved in games? How should I play?” Application on the field is a challenge for many of us. Even Albert Camus, the existentialist writer, said that sports provided him with his “only lessons in ethics.” [\(29\)](#) Thomas Aquinas “expressed three cautions that we would do well to observe nowadays. First, do not take pleasure in indecent or injurious play.” Think of a sold-out football stadium of people screaming their approval as an opponent lies immobile on the field. Such a reaction surely does not align with a Christian attitude toward games. “Second, do not lose your mental or emotional balance and self-control.” This may be one of the most challenging cautions. When we lose self-control during games, we are damaging what we say outside of games about our relationship with Christ. “Third, do not play in ways ill-fitting either the hour or the person.” [\(30\)](#) When we play and how we honor God in the process speak loudly about the place of games in our lives. So when we hear “Play ball!” or “Let the games begin!” or “Take your mark!,” let us remember, whether as participants or spectators, that God can honor our games, but He requires a playful attitude that honors Him.

## Notes

1. Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a worldview* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 226.
2. Ibid.
3. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “Athletic Games

and Contests.”

4. Ibid.

5. *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v. “Games.”

6. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

7. *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopaedia*.

8. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v. “Games.”

9. Ibid.

10. *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. “Games.”

11. Lewis Smedes, quoted in Holmes, *Contours of a worldview*, 230.

12. Ibid., 231.

13. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*.

14. Ibid.

15. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam, 1970), 289.

16. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, quoted by Robert Higgs, on *Mars Hill Tapes*: May/June 1996, vol. 21, Ken Myers, ed. (Charlottesville, Va.: Mars Hill Tapes, 1996).

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Warner, 1979), 190.

21. Michael Novak, *The Joy of Sports* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 27.

22. Ibid., 34.

23. David Puttnam, producer, *Chariots of Fire* (Burbank, Calif.: Warner Home Video, 1991).

24. Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a World View*, 224.

25. Ibid., 228.

26. Ibid., 231.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 228.

29. Albert Camus, quoted in Michael Novak, *The Joy of Sports*, 172.

30. Thomas Aquinas, quoted in Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a World View*, 231.

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## Answering the Big Questions of Life

*Sue Bohlin presents a Naturalistic, a Pantheistic, and a Christian perspective on the five major questions all of us should ask about life. Knowing the answers to these questions is critical to living a meaningful, fulfilling life on this earth. She concludes by demonstrating that only a Christian worldview provides consistent answers to all of these questions.*



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

One of the most important aspects of Probe's "Mind Games" conference is teaching students to recognize the three major world views—Naturalism, Pantheism, and Theism—and the impact they have both on the surrounding culture as well as on the ideas the students will face at the university. Because we come from an unapologetically Christian worldview, I will be presenting the ideas of Christian theism, even though Judaism and Islam are both theistic as well.

In this essay I'll be examining five of the biggest questions of life, and how each of the worldviews answers them:

- Why is there something rather than nothing?
- How do you explain human nature?
- What happens to a person at death?
- How do you determine right and wrong?
- How do you know that you know?[\[1\]](#)

## Why Is There Something Rather than Nothing?

The most basic question of life may well be, **Why is there something rather than nothing?** Why am I here? Why is anything here at all?

Even Maria Von Trapp in the movie *The Sound of Music* knew the answer to this one. When she and the Captain are singing their love to each other in the gazebo, she croons, "Nothing comes from nothing, nothing ever could."

But naturalism, the belief that says there is no reality beyond the physical universe, offers two answers to this basic question. Until a few years ago, the hopeful wish of naturalism was that matter is eternal: the universe has always existed, and always will. There's no point to asking "why" because the universe simply *is*. End of discussion. Unfortunately for naturalism, the evidence that has come from our studies of astronomy makes it clear that the universe is

unwinding, in a sense, and at one point it was tightly wound up. The evidence says that at some point in the past there was a beginning, and matter is most definitely not eternal. That's a major problem for a naturalist, who believes that everything that now is, came from nothing. First there was nothing, then there was something, but nothing caused the something to come into existence. Huh?

Pantheism is the belief that everything is part of one great "oneness." It comes from two Greek words, *pan* meaning "everything," and *theos* meaning "God." Pantheism says that all is one, all is god, and therefore we are one with the universe; we are god. We are part of that impersonal divinity that makes up the universe. In answering the question, **Why is there something rather than nothing**, pantheism says that everything had an impersonal beginning. The universe itself has an intelligence that brought itself into being. The "something" that exists is simply how energy expresses itself. If you've seen the *Star Wars* movies, you've seen the ideas of pantheism depicted in that impersonal energy field, "The Force." Since the beginning of the universe had an impersonal origin, the question of "why" gets sidestepped. Like naturalism, pantheism basically says, "We don't have a good answer to that question, so we won't think about it."

Christian Theism is the belief that God is a personal, transcendent Creator of the universe—and of us. This worldview showed up on a T-shirt I saw recently:

"There are two things in life you can be sure of.

1. There is a God.
2. You are not Him."

Christian Theism answers the question, **Why is there something rather than nothing**, by confidently asserting that first there was God and nothing else, then He created the universe by simply speaking it into existence. The Bible's opening

sentence is an answer to this most basic of questions: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

## How Do You Explain Human Nature?

Another one of the big questions of life is, **How do you explain human nature?** Why do human beings act the way we do? What it really boils down to is, Why am I so good and you're so bad?

During World War II, a young Jewish teenager kept a journal during the years she and her family hid from the Nazis in a secret apartment in a house in Amsterdam. Anne Frank's diary poignantly explored the way she tried to decide if people were basically good or basically evil. Acts of kindness and blessing seemed to indicate people were basically good; but then the next day, Anne would learn of yet another barbarous act of depravity and torture, and she would think that perhaps people were basically bad after all. After reading her diary, I remember carrying on the quest for an answer in my own mind, and not finding it until I trusted Christ and learned what His Word had to say about it.

Naturalism says that humans are nothing more than evolved social animals. There is nothing that truly separates us from the other animals, so all our behavior can be explained in terms of doing what helps us to survive and reproduce. Your only purpose in life, naturalism says, is to make babies. And failing that, to help those who share your genes to make babies. Kind of makes you want to jump out of bed in the morning, doesn't it?

Another answer from naturalism is that we are born as blank slates, and we become whatever is written on those slates. You might mix in some genetic factors, in which case human nature is nothing more than a product of our genes and our

environment.

Pantheism explains human nature by saying we're all a part of god, but our problem is that we forget we're god. We just need to be re- educated and start living like the god we are. Our human nature will be enhanced by attaining what pantheists call "cosmic consciousness." According to New Age thought, the problem with humans is that we suffer from a collective form of metaphysical amnesia. We just need to wake up and remember we're god. When people are bad, (which is one result of forgetting you're god), pantheism says that they'll pay for it in the next life when they are reincarnated as something less spiritually evolved than their present life. I had a Buddhist friend who refused to kill insects in her house because she said they had been bad in their previous lives and had to come back as bugs, and it wasn't her place to prematurely mess up their karma.

The Christian worldview gives the most satisfying answer to the question, **How do you explain human nature?** The Bible teaches that God created us to be His image-bearers, which makes us distinct from the entire rest of creation. But when Adam and Eve chose to rebel in disobedience, their fall into sin distorted and marred the sacred Image. The fact that we are created in God's image explains the noble, creative, positive things we can do; the fact that we are sinners who love to disobey and rebel against God's rightful place as King of our lives explains our wicked, destructive, negative behavior. It makes sense that this biblical view of human nature reveals the reasons why mankind is capable of producing both Mother Teresa and the holocaust.

## **What Happens after Death?**

In the movie *Flatliners*, medical students took turns stopping each other's hearts to give them a chance to experience what happens after death. After a few minutes, they resuscitated the metaphysical traveller who told the others what he or she

saw. The reason for pursuing such a dangerous experiment was explained by the med student who thought it up in the first place: **"What happens after death?** Mankind deserves an answer. Philosophy failed; religion failed. Now it's up to the physical sciences."

Well, maybe religion failed, but the Lord Jesus didn't. But first, let's address how naturalism answers this question.

Because this worldview says that there is nothing outside of space, time and energy, naturalism insists that death brings the extinction of personality and the disorganization of matter. Things just stop living and start decomposing. Or, as my brother said when he was in his atheist phase, "When you die, you're like a dog by the side of the road. You're dead, and that's it." To the naturalist, there is no life after death. The body recycles back to the earth and the mental and emotional energies that comprised the person disintegrate forever.

Pantheism teaches reincarnation, the belief that all of life is an endless cycle of birth and death. After death, each person is reborn as someone, or something, else. Your reincarnated persona in the next life depends on how you live during this one. This is the concept of karma, which is the law of cause and effect in life. If you make evil or foolish choices, you will have to work off that bad karma by being reborn as something like a rat or a cow. If you're really bad, you might come back as a termite. But if you're good, you'll come back as someone who can be wonderful and powerful. New Age followers sometimes undergo something they call "past lives therapy," which regresses them back beyond this life, beyond birth, and into previous lives. I think it's interesting that people always seem to have been someone glamorous like Cleopatra and never someone like a garbage collector or an executioner!

Christian Theism handles the question, **What happens to a**



**person at death**, with such a plain, no-nonsense answer that people have been stumbling over it for millenia. Death is a gateway that either whisks a person to eternal bliss with God or takes him straight to a horrible place of eternal separation from God. What determines whether one goes to heaven or hell is the way we respond to the light God gives us concerning His Son, Jesus Christ. When we confess that we are sinners in need of mercy we don't deserve, and trust the Lord Jesus to save us from not only our sin but the wrath that sin brings to us, He comes to live inside us and take us to heaven to be with Him forever when we die. When we remain in rebellion against God, either actively disobeying Him or passively ignoring Him, the consequences of our sin remain on us and God allows us to keep them for all eternity—but separated from Him and all life and hope. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). But it is a delightful thing to fall into the arms of the Lover of your soul, Who has gone on ahead to prepare a place for you! Which will you choose?

## **How Do You Determine Right and Wrong?**

One of the big questions in life is, How do you determine right and wrong? Steven Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show one day. He asked the studio audience to close their eyes and point north. When they opened their eyes, there were several hundred arms pointing in wildly different directions. Then Mr. Covey pulled out a compass and said, "*This* is how we know which way is north. You can't know from within yourself." He used a powerful object lesson to illustrate the way Christian theism answers this big question in life.

Naturalism says that there is no absolute outside of ourselves. There is no final authority because space, time and energy are all that is. There is no such thing as right and wrong because there is no right- and wrong-giver. So

naturalism tries to deal with the question of ethics by providing several unsatisfying answers. One is the belief that there is no free choice, that all our behaviors and beliefs are driven by our genes. We are just as determined in our behavior as the smallest animals or insects. Another is the belief that moral values are determined from what is; the way things are is the way they ought to be. If you are being abused by your husband, that's the way things are, so that's the way they ought to be. Even worse is the concept of arbitrary ethics: might makes right. Bullies get to decide the way things ought to be because they're stronger and meaner than everybody else. That's what happens in totalitarian regimes; the people with the power decide what's right and what's wrong.

Pantheism says that there is no such thing as ultimate right and wrong because everything is part of a great undifferentiated whole where right and wrong, good and evil, are all part of the oneness of the universe. Remember "Star Wars"? The Force was both good and evil at the same time. Pantheism denies one of the basic rules of philosophy, which is that two opposite things cannot both be true at the same time. Because Pantheism denies that there are absolutes, things which are true all the time, it holds that all right and wrong is relative. Right and wrong are determined by cultures and situations. So murdering one's unborn baby might be right for one person and wrong for another.

Theism says that there is such a thing as absolute truth, and absolute right and wrong. We can know this because this information has come to us from a transcendent source outside of ourselves and outside of our world. Christian Theism says that the God who created us has also communicated certain truths to us. He communicated generally, through His creation, and He communicated specifically and understandably through His Word, the Bible. We call this revelation. Christian Theism says that absolute truth is rooted in God Himself, who is an

Absolute; He is Truth. As Creator, He has the right to tell us the difference between right and wrong, and He has taken great care to communicate this to us.

That's why Steven Covey's illustration was so powerful. When he pulled out a compass, he showed that we need a transcendent source of information, something outside ourselves and which is fixed and constant, to show us the moral equivalent of "North." We are creatures created to be dependent on our Creator for the information we need to live life right. God has given us a compass in revelation.

## **How Do You Know That You Know?**

This question generally doesn't come up around the cafeteria lunch table at work, and even the most inquisitive toddler usually won't ask it, but it's an important question nonetheless: How do you know that you know?

There's a great scene in the movie *Terminator 2* where the young boy that the cyborg terminator has been sent to protect, is threatened by a couple of hoodlums. The terminator is about to blow one away when the young boy cries out, "You can't do that!" The terminator—Arnold Schwarzenegger—asks, "Why not?" "You just can't go around killing people!" the boy protests. "Why not?" "Take my word for it," the boy says. "You just can't." He knew that it was wrong to kill another human being, but he didn't know how he knew. There are a lot of people in our culture like that!

Naturalism, believing that there is nothing beyond space, time and energy, would answer the question by pointing to the human mind. Rational thought—figuring things out deductively—is one prime way we gain knowledge. Human reason is a good enough method to find out what we need to know. The mind is the center of our source of knowledge. Another way to knowledge is by accumulating hard scientific data of observable and measurable experience. This view says that the source of our

knowledge is found in the senses. We know what we can perceive through what we can measure. Since naturalism denies any supernaturalism (anything above or outside of the natural world), what the human mind can reason and measure is the only standard for gaining knowledge.

Pantheism would agree with this assessment of how we know that we know. Followers of pantheism tend to put a lot of value on personal experience. The rash of near- and after-death experiences in the past few years, for example, are extremely important to New Agers. These experiences usually validate the preconceptions of pantheistic thought, which denies absolutes such as the Christian tenet that Jesus is the only way to God. The experiences of past- lives therapy have persuaded even some Christians to believe in reincarnation, even though the Bible explicitly denies that doctrine, because personal experience is often considered the most valid way to know reality.

Christian Theism says that while human reason and perception are legitimate ways to gain knowledge, we cannot depend on these methods alone because they're not enough. Some information needs to be given to us from outside the system. An outside Revealer provides information we can't get any other way. Revelation—revealed truth from the One who knows everything—is another, not only legitimate but necessary way to know some important things. Revelation is how we know what happened when the earth, the universe and man were created. Revelation is how we know what God wants us to do and be. Revelation is how we can know how the world will end and what heaven is like. Revelation in the form of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only way we can experience “God with skin on.”

Naturalism's answers are inadequate, depressing, and wrong; pantheism's answers are slippery, don't square with reality, and wrong; but Christian theism—the Christian worldview—is full of hope, consistent with reality, and it resonates in our souls that it's very, very right.

## Notes

1. These questions are taken from James W. Sire's book *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, Ill.:InterVarsity Press), 1977.

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# Slogans – A Biblical Worldview Response

*Jerry Solomon considers many popular slogans to see how they are designed to influence our thinking. Taking a biblical, Christian worldview, he finds that many popular slogans are promoting vanity, immediate gratification, or materialism. Ends that are not consistent with an eternal Christian life view. As he points out, we do not have to let these slogans control our thinking.*

Let's try an experiment. I'll list several slogans, some from the past, others from more contemporary times, but I'll leave out one word or phrase. See if you can supply the missing word or phrase. Here are some examples:

"Give me liberty or give me. . ."

"Uncle Sam wants . . ."

"I have a . . ."

"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask . . ."

"Just do . . ."

"Life is a sport; . . ."

"Gentlemen prefer . . ."

"Image is . . ."

"Coke is . . ."

"You've come a long way, . . ."

“This is not your father’s . . .”

“You deserve a break . . .”

Well, how did you fare with my experiment? Unless you’ve been living in a cave for many years, you probably were able to complete several of these phrases. They have become a part of “The fabric of our . . .” Yes, the fabric of our lives. In most cases these slogans have been written to promote a product. They are catchy, memorable maxims that help the listener or reader associate the statement with a commodity, thus leading to increased sales. Advertisers spend millions of dollars for such slogans, an indicator of their importance.

## **Double Meanings**

Often a slogan contains a double entendre intended to attract us on at least two levels. For example, an ad for toothpaste from several years ago asks, “Want love?” Obviously, the advertiser is playing upon a universal need. All of us want love. But the initial answer to the question is “Get . . . Close Up.” Of course a couple is pictured in close embrace with vibrant smiles and sweet breath as a result of their wise use of the product. The implication is that they are sharing love, but only as a result of using the love- giving toothpaste. Another example, again from several years in the past, states “Nothing comes between me and my Calvins.” The double meaning is obvious, especially when the slogan is coupled with the accompanying picture of a young girl. No doubt the companies that hired the ad agencies for such campaigns were very pleased. Their sales increased. The fact that I am even using these illustrations is indicative of their success in capturing the attention of the consumer.

## **Slogans and the Christian**

But the marketplace is not the only arena where slogans are found. Christians often use them. Many contemporary churches strive to attract the surrounding population by utilizing

various adjectives to describe themselves. For example, words such as “exciting,” “dynamic,” “friendly,” or “caring” are used as part of a catchy slogan designed to grab the attention of anyone who would see or hear it. And such slogans are supposed to be descriptive of how that particular church wants to be perceived. This applies especially to those congregations that are sometimes called “seeker sensitive.” The idea is that there is a market in the surrounding culture that will be attracted to the implications of the slogan. One of the foundational tenets of our ministry at Probe is that the Christian should think God’s thoughts after Him. Then, the transformed Christian should use his mind to analyze and influence the world around him. One of the more intriguing ways we can experience what it means to have a Christian mind is by concentrating on the content of the slogans we hear and see each day. In this article we will examine certain slogans in order to discover the ideas imbedded in them. Then we will explore ways we might apply our discoveries in the culture that surrounds us.

## **Slogan Themes: Vanity**

“Break free and feel; it reveals to the world just how wonderful you are.” “Spoil yourself.” “Turn it loose tonight; don’t hold back.” “You deserve a break today.” “Indulge yourself.” “Have it your way.” These slogans are indicative of one of the more common emphases in our culture: vanity. The individual is supreme. Selfishness and self-indulgence too often are the primary indicators of what is most important. Such phrases, which are the result of much thought and research among advertisers, are used to play upon the perceptions of a broad base of the population. A product can be promoted successfully if it is seen as something that will satisfy the egocentric desires of the consumer.

Christopher Lasch, an insightful thinker, has entitled his analysis of American life *The Culture of Narcissism*. Lasch has

written that the self-centered American “demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire.” [\(1\)](#) We will return to the subject of immediate gratification later, but the emphasis of the moment is that slogans often focus on a person’s vanity. The individual is encouraged to focus continually on himself, his desires, his frustrations, his goals. And the quest that is developed never leads to fulfillment. Instead, it leads to a spiraling sense of malaise because the slogans lead only to material, not spiritual ends.

One of the more famous slogans in the Bible is “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” This exclamation is found in Ecclesiastes, an Old Testament book full of application to our subject. King Solomon, the writer, has left us with an ancient but very contemporary analysis of what life is like if self-indulgence is the key. And his analysis came from personal experience. He would have been the model consumer for the slogans that began this essay today: “Break free and feel.” “Spoil yourself.” “Turn it loose.” “You deserve a break today.” “Indulge yourself.” But he learned that such slogans are lies. As Charles Swindoll has written:

*In spite of the extent to which he went to find happiness, because he left God out of the picture, nothing satisfied. It never will. Satisfaction in life under the sun will never occur until there is a meaningful connection with the living Lord above the sun.* [\(2\)](#)

Solomon indulged himself physically and sexually; he experimented philosophically; he focused on wealth. None of it provided his deepest needs.

So what is Solomon’s conclusion in regard to those needs? He realizes that we are to “fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). How would the majority of this country respond if a slogan



such as “Fear God and keep His commandments!” were to suddenly flood the media? It probably wouldn’t sell very well; it wouldn’t focus on our vanity.

One of the Lord’s more penetrating statements concerning vanity was focused on the man who is called the rich young ruler. Douglas Webster has written that

*It is sad when Jesus is not enough. We are told that Jesus looked at the rich young ruler and loved him. But the love of Jesus was not enough for this man. He wanted it all: health, wealth, self- satisfaction and control. He knew no other way to see himself than the words we use to describe him a rich young ruler. [\(3\)](#)*

Perhaps this analysis can apply to us too often. Is Jesus enough, or must our vanity be satisfied? That’s a good question for all of us.

## **Slogan Themes: Immediate Gratification**

“Hurry!” “Time is running out!” “This is the last day!” “You can have it now! Don’t wait!” These phrases are indicators of one of the more prominent themes found in slogans: instant gratification. This is especially true in regard to much contemporary advertising. The consumer is encouraged to respond immediately. Patience is not a virtue. Contemplation is not encouraged.

Not only do we have instant coffee, instant rice, instant breakfast, and a host of other instant foods, we also tend to see all of life from an instant perspective. If you have a headache, it can be cured instantly. If you need a relationship, it can be supplied instantly. If you need a new car, it can be bought instantly. If you need a god, it can be provided instantly. For example, a few evening hours spent with the offerings of television show us sitcom dilemmas solved in less than half an hour; upset stomachs are relieved

in less than thirty seconds; political candidates are accepted or rejected based upon a paid political announcement. About the only unappeased person on television is the “I love you, man!” guy who can’t find a beer or love.

You’re a consumer. Be honest with yourself. Haven’t you been enticed to respond to the encouragement of a slogan that implies immediate gratification? If you hear or see a slogan that says you must act now, your impulse may lead you to buy. At times it can be difficult to resist the temptation of the moment. The number of people in serious debt may be a testimony to the seriousness of this temptation. The instant credit card has led to instant crisis because of a thoughtless response to an instant slogan. When we hear “Act now!” or “Tomorrow is too late!” we can be persuaded if we are not alert to the possible consequences of an unwise decision.

One of the most respected virtues is wisdom. The wise man or woman is held in high esteem. This is especially true for the Christian. The Bible tells us of the lives of many people: some wise, some unwise. The wise person is portrayed as someone who patiently weighs options, who seeks God’s counsel, who makes decisions that extend far beyond instantaneous results. The unwise person is portrayed as one who acts without sufficient thought, who doesn’t seek God’s counsel, who makes decisions that may satisfy for the moment but not the future. So the contemporary Christian should strive to become wise in the face of the slogans that surround him. He should realize that the supposed benefits of products cannot be compared to wisdom. As Scripture states:

*How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her (Proverbs 3:13-15, NASB).*

Let's develop our own slogan. Perhaps something like, "Wisdom now; decisions later!" would be a good antidote to the messages we hear and see so often. Also, let's implant the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, especially patience and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). And let's reinforce our thought life with the truth that things of value are not achieved instantly. That reminds me of another slogan: "Rome was not built in a day." And how Rome was built is not nearly as valuable as how our lives are built.

## **Slogan Themes: Materialism**

In the early sixteenth century an Augustinian monk declared *Sola Fide!*, "Faith Alone!", a slogan that had been used by many before him. But Martin Luther issued this proclamation in opposition to certain theological and ecclesiastical emphases of his time. Instead of teaching that faith could "make" one righteous, he insisted that only God can "declare" one to be righteous based upon Christ's victory on the cross. Eventually he came to believe that the church needed reformation. And as the saying goes, "The rest is history."

In the late twentieth century it appears that the most important slogan is *Sola carnalis*, "The flesh alone!" or "The physical alone!" Put in a contrary manner: "What you see is what you get!" Material things are usually the focus of our attention. Non material or spiritual things generally are not part of our consciousness. The impression is that life can be lived properly through the purchase of products. Or, life is to be lived as if this is the only one you've got; there is no heaven or hell, no sin, no sacrifice for sin, no judgment. As the old commercial says, "You only go around once in life, so grab for all the gusto you can get." And the slogan of a more recent commercial relates that "It doesn't get any better than this!" as friends share the events of a wonderful day together in a beautiful setting while drinking just the right beer. Of course, there is a measure of truth in each of these slogans.

We should live life with gusto, and we should enjoy times of companionship with friends. But from a Christian standpoint, these ideas should be coupled with a sober understanding that this life is not all there is.

Jesus often spoke directly to those who would deter Him from His mission, which required His brutal sacrifice. For example, Satan sought to tempt Jesus by focusing on material things. But the Lord rejected Satan's enticements by focusing on things that transcend this life. And His rejections always began with a powerful, eternally meaningful slogan: "It is written," a reference to the truth of Scripture. On another occasion, after Jesus showed "His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things," Peter proclaimed, "This shall never happen to You." Jesus replied that Peter was setting his mind on man's interests, not God's. Then followed a haunting statement that has become a crucial slogan for those who would be Christ's disciples: "If any one wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." This conversation came to a conclusion when Jesus asked two rhetorical questions: "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:21-26)

Do those questions sound trite? Have we heard and read them so often that we don't consider their implications? If we are immersed in the concepts of today's slogans, such questions should be sobering. Referring back to our previous examples, Jesus' questions contain answers that say no, it is not true that "You only go around once." And yes, it does get better than this. We are more than physical beings destined for dirt. We are spiritual and physical beings destined for life in heaven or hell. And for the believer in Christ this life is to be lived with "the life to come" in mind.

## Are We Slaves of Slogans?

“Remember the Alamo!” “No taxation without representation!” “I shall return!” “I have not yet begun to fight!” “Never give up!” These memorable slogans are the stuff of legends. They represent a level of commitment that led many to give their lives for a cause or country. Are the slogans of today any less intense? No doubt many new ones are entering the consciousness of those who have been at the center of the tragic conflicts in Bosnia, Lebanon, and other centers of violent conflict. Strife seems to create powerful slogans.

But what of the strife that is found on the battlefield of our minds? Slogans are indicative of the war that is a part of the life of the mind. (It is fascinating to note that the etymology of the word slogan stems from the Gaelic *slaugh-garim*, which was a war cry of a Scottish clan.)

No doubt I could be accused of exaggerating the impact of slogans. But let’s remember that enormous amounts of money are spent to encourage us to respond to the messages they contain. For example, commercials shown during the most recent Super Bowl cost the sponsors approximately \$1,000,000 per 60 second spot. Such sums surely would not be spent if there weren’t a significant payoff. And it is not as if slogans were hidden in some underground culture; we are flooded with them at every turn. As one writer has put it: “Commercial messages are omnipresent, and the verbal and visual vocabulary of Madison Avenue has become our true *lingua franca*.” [\(4\)](#) We may be at the point where we can communicate with one another more readily through the use of advertising slogans because they provide a common ground. But what is that common ground? Is it compatible with a Christian worldview? The answer to both questions in our secularized culture is usually “No!”.

We have emphasized three themes that are readily found in contemporary slogans: vanity, immediate gratification, and materialism. Of course, there are many more subjects, but

these serve to demonstrate that the *lingua franca*, the current common ground, is one that should be carefully weighed against the precepts of Scripture. The Christian worldview cannot accept such themes.

A disciple of Christ is challenged not only to consider the implications of slogans in the marketplace, but in the church as well. We can be swayed by the same ideas that drive those who formulate the slogans of commercialism. Douglas Webster offers these penetrating comments:

*Public opinion has become an arbiter of truth, dictating the terms of acceptability according to the marketplace. The sovereignty of the audience makes serious, prayerful thinking about the will of God unnecessary, because opinions are formed on the basis of taste and preferences rather than careful biblical conviction and thoughtful theological reflection. Americans easily become “slaves of slogans” when discernment is reduced to ratings.* [\(5\)](#)

Surely none of us would like to be described as a “slave of slogans.” We want to believe that we are capable of sorting out the messages we hear so often. Yes, we are capable through the Lord’s guidance. But as Webster has written, we must be sober enough to be sure that we are not being led by taste and preferences. Instead, we should implant careful biblical conviction and thoughtful theological reflection in our lives. And I hasten to add that such thinking should apply to us both individually and within our churches.

Perhaps the most fitting way to conclude our discussion of slogans is with another slogan: “To God be the glory in all things!” Such a thought, if made the center of our lives, surely will demonstrate the power of slogans.

## **Notes**

1. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life*

- in An Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner, 1979), 23.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, Texas: Word, 1985), 16.
3. Douglas D. Webster, *Selling Jesus: What's Wrong with Marketing the Church* (Downers Grove, Ill: 1992), 68.
4. Rogier van Bakel, "This Space for Rent," *Wired* (June 1996), 160.
5. Webster, 29.

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## Worldviews

*A worldview is like a pair of glasses through which we view the world. Everyone has one. Jerry Solomon examines the basic worldviews and some of the beliefs and questions that they involve.*



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

A friend of mine recently told me of a conversation he had with a good friend we will call Joe. Joe is a doctor. He is not a Christian. This is how the conversation went: "Joe, you're an excellent doctor. You care deeply about your patients. Why do you care so much for people since you believe we have evolved by chance? What gives us value?" Joe was stunned by the question and couldn't answer it. His "worldview" had taken a blow.

The concept of a worldview has received increasing attention for the past several years. Many books have been written on the subject of worldviews from both Christian and non-Christian perspectives. Frequently speakers will refer to the

term. On occasion even reviews of movies and music will include the phrase. All this attention prompts us to ask, “What does the term mean?” and “What difference does it make?” It is our intent to answer these questions. And it is our hope that all of us will give serious attention to our own worldview, as well as the worldviews of those around us.

## What is a Worldview?

What is a *worldview*? A variety of definitions have been offered by numerous authors. For example, James Sire asserts that “A worldview is a set of presuppositions (or assumptions) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously) about the basic makeup of our world.”<sup>{1}</sup> Phillips and Brown state that “A worldview is, first of all, *an explanation and interpretation of the world* and second, *an application of this view to life*. In simpler terms, our worldview is a *view of the world* and a *view for the world*.”<sup>{2}</sup> Walsh and Middleton provide what we think is the most succinct and understandable explanation: “A world view provides a *model of the world* which guides its adherents *in the world*.”<sup>{3}</sup> With the realization that many subtleties can be added, this will be our working definition.

## The Need for a Worldview

Worldviews act somewhat like eye glasses or contact lenses. That is, a worldview should provide the correct “prescription” for making sense of the world just as wearing the correct prescription for your eyes brings things into focus. And, in either example, an incorrect prescription can be dangerous, even life-threatening. People who are struggling with worldview questions are often despairing and even suicidal. Thus it’s important for us to give attention to the formulation of the proper worldview. Arthur Holmes states that the need for a worldview is fourfold: “the need to unify thought and life; the need to define the good life and find hope and meaning in life; the need to guide thought; the need



to guide action.”[\[4\]](#) Yet another prominent need for the proper worldview is to help us deal with an increasingly diverse culture. We are faced with a smorgasbord of worldviews, all of which make claims concerning truth. We are challenged to sort through this mixture of worldviews with wisdom. These needs are experienced by all people, either consciously or unconsciously. All of us have a worldview with which we strive to meet such needs. The proper worldview helps us by orienting us to the intellectual and philosophical terrain about us.

Worldviews are so much a part of our lives that we see and hear them daily, whether we recognize them or not. For example, movies, television, music, magazines, newspapers, government, education, science, art, and all other aspects of culture are affected by worldviews. If we ignore their importance, we do so to our detriment.

## Testing Worldviews

A worldview should pass certain tests. First, it should be rational. It should not ask us to believe contradictory things. Second, it should be supported by evidence. It should be consistent with what we observe. Third, it should give a satisfying comprehensive explanation of reality. It should be able to explain why things are the way they are. Fourth, it should provide a satisfactory basis for living. It should not leave us feeling compelled to borrow elements of another worldview in order to live in this world.

## Components Found in All Worldviews

In addition to putting worldviews to these tests, we should also see that worldviews have common components. These components are self-evident. It is important to keep these in mind as you establish your own worldview, and as you share with others. There are four of them.

First, **something exists**. This may sound obvious, but it really

is an important foundational element of worldview building since some will try to deny it. But a denial is self-defeating because all people experience cause and effect. The universe is rational; it is predictable.

Second, **all people have absolutes**. Again, many will try to deny this, but to deny it is to assert it. All of us seek an infinite reference point. For some it is God; for others it is the state, or love, or power, and for some this reference point is themselves or man.

Third, **two contradictory statements cannot both be right**. This is a primary law of logic that is continually denied. Ideally speaking, only one worldview can correctly mirror reality. This cannot be overemphasized in light of the prominent belief that tolerance is the ultimate virtue. To say that someone is wrong is labeled intolerant or narrow-minded. A good illustration of this is when we hear people declare that all religions are the same. It would mean that Hindus, for example, agree with Christians concerning God, Jesus, salvation, heaven, hell, and a host of other doctrines. This is nonsense.

Fourth, **all people exercise faith**. All of us presuppose certain things to be true without absolute proof. These are inferences or assumptions upon which a belief is based. This becomes important, for example, when we interact with those who allege that only the scientist is completely neutral. Some common assumptions are: a personal God exists; man evolved from inorganic material; man is essentially good; reality is material.

As we dialogue with people who have opposing worldviews, an understanding of these common components can help us listen more patiently, and they can guide us to make our case more wisely.

# Six Worldview Questions

Have you ever been frustrated with finding ways to stir the thinking of a non-Christian friend? We are confident the following questions will be of help. And we are also confident they will stir your thinking about the subject of worldviews.

We will answer these questions with various non-Christian responses. Christian responses will be discussed later in this article.

First, **Why is there something rather than nothing?** Some may actually say something came from nothing. Others may state that something is here because of impersonal spirit or energy. And many believe matter is eternal.

Second, **How do you explain human nature?** Frequently people will say we are born as blank slates, neither good nor evil. Another popular response is that we are born good, but society causes us to behave otherwise.

Third, **What happens to a person at death?** Many will say that a person's death is just the disorganization of matter. Increasingly people in our culture are saying that death brings reincarnation or realization of oneness.

Fourth, **How do you determine what is right and wrong?** Often we hear it said that ethics are relative or situational. Others assert that we have no free choice since we are entirely determined. Some simply derive "oughts" from what "is." And of course history has shown us the tragic results of a "might makes right" answer.

Fifth, **How do you know that you know?** Some say that the mind is the center of our source of knowledge. Things are only known deductively. Others claim that knowledge is only found in the senses. We know only what is perceived.

Sixth, **What is the meaning of history?** One answer is that

history is determined as part of a mechanistic universe. Another answer is that history is a linear stream of events linked by cause and effect but without purpose. Yet another answer is that history is meaningless because life is absurd.{5}

The alert Christian will quickly recognize that the preceding answers are contrary to his beliefs. There are definite, sometimes startling differences. Worldviews are in collision. Thus we should know at least something about the worldviews that are central to the conflict. And we should certainly be able to articulate a Christian worldview.

## Examples of Worldviews

In his excellent book, *The Universe Next Door*, James Sire catalogs the most influential worldviews of the past and present. These are Christian Theism, Deism, Naturalism, Nihilism, Existentialism, Eastern Pantheism, and New Age or New Consciousness.{6}

Deism, a prominent worldview during the eighteenth century, has almost entirely left the scene. The Deist believes in God, but that God created and then abandoned the universe.

Nihilism, a more recent worldview, is alive among many young people and some intellectuals. Nihilists see no value to reality; life is absurd.

Existentialism is prominent and can be seen frequently, even among unwitting Christians. The Existentialist, like the Nihilist, sees life as absurd, but sees man as totally free to *make himself* in the face of this absurdity.

Christian Theism, Naturalism, and New Age Pantheism are the most influential worldviews presently in the United States. Now we will survey each of them.

# Christian Theism

Let's return to the six questions we asked earlier and briefly see how the Christian Theist might answer them.

Question: **Why is there something rather than nothing?** Answer: There is an infinite-personal God who has created the universe out of nothing.

Question: **How do you explain human nature?** Answer: Man was originally created good in God's image, but chose to sin and thus infected all of humanity with what is called a "sin nature." So man has been endowed with value by his creator, but his negative behavior is in league with his nature.

Question: **What happens to a person at death?** Answer: Death is either the gate to life with God or to eternal separation from Him. The destination is dependent upon the response we give to God's provision for our sinfulness.

Question: **How do you determine what is right and wrong?** Answer: The guidelines for conduct are revealed by God.

Question: **How do you know that you know?** Answer: Reason and experience can be legitimate teachers, but a transcendent source is necessary. We know some things only because we are told by God through the Bible.

Question: **What is the meaning of history?** Answer: History is a linear and meaningful sequence of events leading to the fulfillment of God's purposes for man.

Christian Theism had a long history in Western culture. This does not mean that all individuals who have lived in Western culture have been Christians. It simply means that this worldview was dominant; it was the most influential. And this was true even among non-Christians. This is no longer valid. Western culture has experienced a transition to what is called Naturalism.

# Naturalism

Even though Naturalism in various forms is ancient, we will use the term to refer to a worldview that has had considerable influence in a relatively short time within Western culture. The seeds were planted in the seventeenth century and began to flower in the eighteenth. Most of us have been exposed to Naturalism through Marxism and what is called Secular Humanism.

What are the basic tenets of this worldview? First, God is irrelevant. This tenet helps us better understand the term Naturalism; it is in direct contrast to Christian Theism, which is based on *supernaturalism*. Second, progress and evolutionary change are inevitable. Third, man is autonomous, self-centered, and will save himself. Fourth, education is the guide to life; intelligence and freedom guarantee full human potential. Fifth, science is the ultimate provider both for knowledge and morals. These tenets have permeated our lives. They are apparent, for example, in the media, government, and education. We should be alert constantly to their influence.

After World War II “Postmodernism” began to replace the confidence of Naturalism. With it came the conclusion that truth, in any real sense, doesn’t exist. This may be the next major worldview, or anti-worldview, that will infect the culture. It is presently the rage on many of our college campuses. In the meantime, though, the past few decades have brought us another ancient worldview dressed in Western clothing.

## New Age Pantheism

Various forms of Pantheism have been prominent in Eastern cultures for thousands of years. But it began to have an effect on our culture in the 1950s. There had been various attempts to introduce its teachings before then, but those attempts did not arouse the interest that was stirred in that

decade. It is now most readily observed in what is called the New Age Movement.

What are the basic tenets of this worldview? First, all is one. There are no ultimate distinctions between humans, animals, or the rest of creation. Second, since all is one, all is god. All of life has a spark of divinity. Third, if all is one and all is god, then each of us is god. Fourth, humans must discover their own divinity by experiencing a change in consciousness. We suffer from a collective form of metaphysical amnesia. Fifth, humans travel through indefinite cycles of birth, death, and reincarnation in order to work off what is called "bad karma." Sixth, New Age disciples think in terms of gray, not black and white. Thus they believe that two conflicting statements can both be true.

On the popular level these tenets are presently asserted through various media, such as books, magazines, television, and movies. Perhaps the most visible teacher is Shirley MacLaine. But these beliefs are also found increasingly among intellectuals in fields such as medicine, psychology, sociology, and education.

## Conclusion

We have very briefly scanned the subject of worldviews. Let's return to a definition we affirmed in the beginning of this article: "A worldview provides a model *of the world* which guides its adherents *in the world*." If your model of the world includes an infinite-personal God, as in Christian Theism, that belief should provide guidance for your life. If your model rejects God, as in Naturalism, again such a belief serves as a guide. Or if your model asserts that you are god, as in New Age Pantheism, yet again your life is being guided by such a conception. These examples should remind us that we are living in a culture that puts us in touch constantly with such ideas, and many more. They cannot all be true.

Thus some of us may be confronted with the need to think more deeply than we ever have before. Some of us may need to purge those things from our lives that are contrary to the worldview of Christian Theism. Some of us may need to better understand that our thoughts are to be unified with daily life. Some of us may need to better understand that the good life and hope and meaning are found only through God's answers. Some of us may need to let God's ideas guide our thoughts more completely. And some of us may need to let God's guidelines guide our actions more fully.

Paul's admonition to the believers in ancient Colossae couldn't be more contemporary or helpful in light of our discussion. He wrote:

*See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ (Col. 2:8).*

## Notes

1. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988), 17.
2. W. Gary Phillips and William E. Brown, *Making Sense of Your World* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 29.
3. Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1984), 32.
4. Arthur F. Holmes, *Contours of a Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 5.
5. Sire, 18.
6. Ibid.



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# Preparing Students for College

In Colossians 2:8 Paul states that a Christian should

*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.*

This verse has particular application for the young person who is about to engage in the intellectual and social combat that can be found on many of our campuses. Our colleges and universities are often “hotbeds” for non-Christian thought and life. The following examples bring this to our attention.

A sociology professor asked her students, “How many of you believe that abortion is wrong? Stand up.” Five students stood. She told them to continue standing. She then asked, “Of you five, how many believe that it is wrong to distribute condoms in middle schools?” One was left standing. The professor left this godly young lady standing in silence for a long time and then told her she wanted to talk with her after class. During that meeting the student was told that if she persisted in such beliefs she would have a great deal of difficulty receiving her certification as a social worker.

During the first meeting of an architecture class the students were told to lie on the floor. The professor then turned off the lights and taught them how to meditate.

At a church-related university a Christian student was surprised to learn that one requirement in an art class was to practice yoga.

At another church-related university a professor stated that "communism is infinitely superior to any other political-economic system."

In an open declaration on the campus at Harvard, the university chaplain announced that he is homosexual.

As part of the resident assistant training at Cornell University, students "were forced to watch pornographic movies of hard core gay and lesbian sex."(1)

At St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, students who believe that homosexuality is an unhealthy behavior are actually discouraged from applying to the social work program."(2)

In a nationwide survey of adults, 72% of the people between the ages of 18 and 25 rejected the notion of absolute truth.(3)

George Keller, chair of the graduate program at the University of Pennsylvania, has described many college professors in the following manner.

Most scholars have lost interest in the fundamental questions about character, people's deepest beliefs, moral sense and values. They have become procedural and instrumental and many believe that they are value-free. They carry around all sorts of "faiths"—in the basic goodness of human nature, in humankind's ability to master all of Nature's processes and secrets, that more knowledge will result in a more harmonious society, that people can be made better by restructuring institutions or by smaller or larger government—without acknowledging the existence of these deep faiths.(4)

These are but a few of the many illustrations and statistics that could be cited as indications of contemporary college life. Are your students ready for such things? The following suggestions may be applied to help them in their preparation.

# Develop a Christian Worldview

The first suggestion is to help them develop a Christian worldview. A worldview is a system of beliefs about the world and ourselves that influences the way we live. What system of beliefs do your students embrace, and does that system influence their total life? For example, if young people claim to be a Christian, that assertion implies that they believe certain things and those things should influence all aspects of their lives, including their intellects.

College campuses are “hotbeds” for a multitude of worldviews. This does not necessarily mean there is an “openness” to the variety of ideas. Academic and religious prejudice are very much alive. But it does mean that students should be prepared for the reality of this diversity. For example, they need to realize that the majority of their professors will be naturalists who leave God out of everything and have contempt toward those who think otherwise. So how can students begin to think with a Christian worldview? James Sire has suggested a series of questions that can help determine what your students’ worldviews may be.(5) These questions are unusual and challenging, but my experience has shown me that once students begin to concentrate, the majority of them respond.

## 1. Why is there something rather than nothing?

*Some say that something came from nothing. Others believe in an impersonal beginning. Or some assert that matter is eternal. Christians believe in a beginning caused by a personal God.*

## 2. How do you explain human nature?

*One answer is that we are born neither good nor evil. Another answer is that we are born good, but society causes us to behave otherwise. Or others contend that we are evolved social animals who have instinctive traits that cause*

*internal conflict. The Christian faith affirms that we are created in the image of God—but have a fallen nature.*

### **3. What happens to us at death?**

*Some believe that death brings individual extinction. Others presume that we are reincarnated. Christianity affirms that believers will spend eternity in heaven with God.*

### **4. How does one determine right and wrong?**

*Among the views held by non-Christians are these: ethics are cultural or situational; there is no free choice; “oughts” are derived from an “is”; or might makes right. The Christian position is that standards of conduct are revealed by God.*

### **5. How do you know that you know?**

*Many trust in the mind as the center of knowledge. Others trust in the senses; we know only what is perceived. The Christian understands there are some things we know only because we are told. God has revealed Himself.*

### **6. What is the meaning of history?**

*Some say there is no meaning. Some believe history is progressing to a heaven on earth. The Christian sees that we are being prepared for life with a loving and holy God.*

If you can encourage your students to consider such questions, they will be much more secure in the college environment.

## **The Mind is Important**

The second suggestion is to lead young people to understand that the mind is important in a Christian's life. The Bible puts significant stress on the mind. For example, Jesus

responded to a scribe by stating the most important commandment:

*The foremost is, "Hear O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12:29-30)*

John Stott has written that "God certainly abases the pride of men, but he does not despise the mind which he himself has made." (6) Your college-bound students should be encouraged to see their minds as vital aspects of their devotion to God.

## **Make Christian Beliefs Their Own**

Third, help your student make Christian beliefs their own. Too often Christian young people spend their pre-college years repeating phrases and doctrines without intellectual conviction. They need to go beyond clichés. It will be much better for them to do this with you rather than a professor or another student who may be antagonistic toward Christianity.

Paul realized that his young friend Timothy had become convinced of the truth of Christianity. Paul wrote to Timothy, saying "continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them" (2 Tim. 3:14). Paul praised the early Christians of Berea for the way they examined the truth. He wrote, "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

If a student has ownership of his beliefs he is going to be much better prepared for the questions and doubts that can arise while interacting with contrary ideas.

## From the “What” to the “Why”

Fourth, encourage students to go beyond the “What?” to the “Why?” of their beliefs. As young people enter the last few years of secondary education, they begin to think more abstractly and begin to ask “Why?” more frequently. Paul Little speaks to this.

*“Doubt is a word that strikes terror to the soul and often it is suppressed in a way that is very unhealthy. This is a particularly acute problem for those who have been reared in Christian homes and in the Christian Church.”(7)*

The apostle Peter affirms the need to find answers to tough questions in 1 Peter 3:15. He writes, “Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.” If students are going to live and think as Christians on campus, they will be asked to defend their faith. Such an occasion will not be nearly as threatening if they have been allowed to ask their own questions and receive answers within the home and church.

## Breaking the Sacred-Secular Barrier

The fifth suggestion is to help students begin to break down the sacred/secular barrier.

“All truth is God’s truth” is a maxim that should be understood by all Christians. To deny this is to deny a unified worldview and tacitly to deny the truth.(8) Arthur Holmes has addressed this with insightful comments:

“If the sacred-secular distinction fades and we grant that all truth is ultimately God’s truth, then intellectual work can be God’s work as much as preaching the gospel, feeding the hungry, or healing the sick. It too is a sacred task.”(9)

The first chapter of Daniel offers wonderful insights into this issue. Daniel and his friends were taught all that the University of Babylon could offer them, but they “graduated” with their faith strengthened. They entered an ungodly arena with the understanding that the truth would prevail.

## **Expose Them to Christian Scholarship**

The sixth suggestion is to familiarize your student with Christian scholarship. “Christian students have available many books on Christianity and scholarship; they need to read these if they are seeking a Christian perspective in their studies.”(10) When I began my college career in the early 60s I had no idea there were Christian scholars who had addressed every academic discipline I might study. It wasn’t until many years later that this ignorance was alleviated. Christian students need to know there is help. A Christian scholar has written something that will help them sort out the many issues that come their way.

Admittedly, this is probably the most difficult of the suggestions we have offered to this point. You may not know where to turn for resources. Begin with your pastor. If you don’t get the response you need, call a nearby seminary or Christian college that you trust. Or call Probe Ministries and purchase one of our college prep notebooks. These notebooks contains numerous bibliographies.

## **Ask First, “Is it True?”**

The last suggestion is to teach them to ask first, “Is it true?” not “Does it work?” Of course the truth about any subject should be applied. But the student should first be as sure as possible that it is the truth that is being applied.

There are things that are absolutely true, and the student needs to understand that, especially in a collegiate atmosphere that tends to deny truth. Jesus said, “If you abide

in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). He also said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). The Christian student who is dedicated to Christ has insights to the truth that many of his professors, tragically, may never possess.

## **How Do We Teach These Things?**

In reading the preceding suggestions you may have begun to wonder how you could relate such ideas. The subsequent recommendations may be of help.

First, do role playing with your students occasionally. This can be done either with an individual or a group of youth.

For example, if you are working with a group, find someone from outside your church or school that the students do not know. This person should have a working knowledge of the ways in which non-Christians think. Introduce him to the group as a sociology professor from a nearby college or university. Tell the students you recently met the professor in a restaurant, at a lecture he was delivering, or devise some other scenario. Also mention that the professor is doing research concerning the beliefs of American teenagers and he would like to ask them some questions. Then the "professor" is to begin to ask them a series of blunt questions regarding their beliefs. The six worldview questions we discussed earlier in this pamphlet are apropos. The idea of all this is to challenge every cliché the students may use in their responses. Nothing is to be accepted without definition or elaboration. Within ten minutes of the closing time for the meeting the pseudo-professor should tell them his true identity and assure them that he is also a believer. After the students gasp, tell them you are planning a teaching series on apologetics so that they can be better prepared for the issues that were raised during the role play.



Second, write to the colleges and universities that are of interest to your students. Ask to receive a catalog that includes course descriptions. Look through these descriptions and discuss the worldviews that are espoused. For example, the majority of course descriptions within the sciences are going to emphasize evolution. Read what is stated and talk about the assumptions that are inherent in the synopses, as well as the things that are left out that a Christian may want to consider.

Third, show your students, by example, how to ask good questions. For instance, if naturalist professors begin to decry the moral condition of society, they are borrowing such a position from a worldview other than their own. Thus it may be legitimate to ask what brings them to the conclusion that rights and wrongs exist and how do they determine the difference? More role playing in this regard can be effective.

Fourth, send your student to a Probe Mind Games College Prep Conference. Or, better yet, organize one in your own community. We at Probe have begun to travel around the country to help older youth, their parents, and college students prepare for contemporary college life. If you are interested in this possibility, simply call us at 1-800-899-7762. God has been blessing this wing of our ministry, and we would be honored to share it with you and help in any way we can.

But whether it is through Probe, or through your energies, let's do what we can to help our students prepare for the intellectual challenges of college life.

## Notes

1. J. Stanley Oakes, "Tear Down the System," *The Real Issue*, November/December 1993), 11.
2. Ibid.
3. George Barna, *What Americans Believe* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1991), 83.

4. George Keller, quoted in "Examining the Christian University," D. Ray Hostetter, *Messiah College President's Report* (September 1993), 3-4.
5. James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, Ill.:InterVarsity, 1988), 18.
6. John R. W. Stott, *Your Mind Matters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1972), 10.
7. Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Downers Grove, Ill.:InterVarsity, 1968), 5.
8. Arthur Holmes, *All Truth Is God's Truth* (Downers Grove, Ill.:InterVarsity, 1977), 16.
9. Ibid., 27.
10. Brian J. Walsh, and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision* (Downers Grove, Ill.:InterVarsity, 1984), 185.

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# **Wealth and Poverty – A Biblical Perspective**

Questions surrounding the biblical perspective on wealth and poverty are important to Christians for two reasons. First, a biblical view of wealth is necessary if we are to live godly lives, avoiding asceticism on the one extreme and materialism on the other. Second, a biblical view of poverty is essential if we are to fulfill our responsibilities to the poor.

## **A Biblical View of Wealth**

Our materialistic culture is seducing Christians into an economic lifestyle that does not glorify God. The popularity of television programs such as "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" and the veneration of social groups such as the

glamorous “yuppies” testify to our society’s materialistic values, values that many Christians have adopted.

Even within the Christian community, believers are bombarded with unbiblical views of wealth. At one extreme are those who preach a prosperity gospel of “health and wealth” for all believers. At the other extreme are radical Christians who condemn all wealth and imply that *rich Christian* is a contradiction in terms.

What, then, is the truly biblical view of wealth? At first glance, the Bible seems to teach that wealth is wrong for Christians. It appears even to condemn the wealthy. After all, both Jesus and the Old Testament prophets preached against materialism and seemed to say at times that true believers cannot possess wealth. If this is so, then all of us in Western society are in trouble, because we are all wealthy by New Testament standards.

But a comprehensive look at the relevant biblical passages quickly reveals that a biblical view of wealth is more complex. In fact, Scripture teaches three basic principles about wealth.

First, wealth itself is not condemned. For example, we read in Genesis 13:2 that Abraham had great wealth. In Job 42:10 we see that God once again blessed Job with material possessions. In Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, wealth is seen as evidence of God’s blessing (Deut. 8; 28; Prov. 22:2; Eccles. 5:19).

But even though wealth might be an evidence of God’s blessing, believers are not to trust in it. Proverbs, Jeremiah, 1 Timothy, and James all teach that the believer should not trust in wealth but in God (Prov. 11:4; 11:28; Jer. 9:23; 1 Tim. 6:17; James 1:11; 5:2).

Second, when wealthy people in the Bible were condemned, they were condemned for the means by which their riches were

obtained, not for the riches themselves. The Old Testament prophet Amos railed against the injustice of obtaining wealth through oppression or fraud (4:11; 5:11). Micah spoke out against the unjust scales and light weights with which Israel defrauded the poor (6:1). Neither Amos nor Micah condemned wealth *per se*; they only denounced the unjust means by which it is sometimes achieved.

Third, Christians should be concerned about the effect wealth can have on our lives. We read in Proverbs 30:8-9 and Hosea 13:6 that wealth often tempts us to forget about God. Wealthy believers may no longer look to God for their provision because they can meet their basic needs. We read in Ecclesiastes 2 and 5 that people who are wealthy cannot really enjoy their wealth. Even billionaires often reflect on the fact that they cannot really enjoy the wealth that they have. Moreover, Proverbs 28:11 and Jeremiah 9:23 warn that wealth often leads to pride and arrogance.

So the Bible does not condemn those who are wealthy. But it does warn us that if God blesses us with wealth, we must keep our priorities straight and guard against the seductive effects of wealth.

## **A Biblical View of Poverty**

The Bible classifies the causes of poverty into four different categories. The first cause of poverty is oppression and fraud. In the Old Testament (e.g., Prov. 14:31; 22:7; 28:15) we find that many people were poor because they were oppressed by individuals or governments. Many times, governments established unjust laws or debased the currency, measures that resulted in the exploitation of individuals.

The second cause of poverty is misfortune, persecution, or judgment. In the book of Job we learn that God allowed Satan to test Job by bringing misfortune upon him (1:12-19). Elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps. 109:16; Isa. 47:9;

Lam. 5:3) we read of misfortune or of God's judgment on a disobedient people. When Israel turned from God's laws, God allowed foreign nations to take them into captivity as a judgment for their disobedience.

The third cause of poverty is laziness, neglect, or gluttony. Proverbs teaches that some people are poor because of improper habits and apathy (10:4; 13:4; 19:15; 20:13; 23:21).

The final cause of poverty is the culture of poverty. Proverbs 10:15 says, "The ruin of the poor is their poverty." Poverty breeds poverty, and the cycle is not easily broken. People who grow up in an impoverished culture usually lack the nutrition and the education that would enable them to be successful in the future.

## **Poverty and Government**

While government should not have to shoulder the entire responsibility for caring for the poor, it must take seriously the statements in Leviticus and Proverbs about defending the poor and fighting oppression. Government must not shirk its God-given responsibility to defend the poor from injustice. If government will not do this, or if the oppression is coming from the government itself, then Christians must exercise their prophetic voice and speak out against governmental abuse and misuse of power.

Government must first establish laws and statutes that prohibit and punish injustice. These laws should have significant penalties and be rigorously enforced so that the poor are not exploited and defrauded. Second, government must provide a legal system that allows for the redress of grievances where plaintiffs can bring their case to court for settlement.

A second sphere for governmental action is in the area of misfortune. Many people slip into poverty through no fault of

their own. In these cases, government must help to distribute funds. Unfortunately, the track record of government programs is not very impressive. Before the implementation of many of the Great Society programs, the percentage of people living below the poverty level was 13.6 percent. Twenty years later, the percentage was still 13.6 percent.

We need a welfare system that emphasizes work and initiative and does not foster dependency and laziness. One of the things integral to the Old Testament system and missing in our modern system of welfare is a means test. If people have true needs, we should help them. But when they are lazy and have poor work habits, we should admonish them to improve. Our current welfare system perpetuates poverty by failing to distinguish between those who have legitimate needs and those who need to be admonished in their sin.

## **Poverty and the Church**

The church has the potential to offer some unique solutions to poverty. Yet ever since the depression of the 1930s and the rise of the Great Society programs in the 1960s, the church has tended to abdicate its responsibility toward the poor to the government.

### **A Cooperative Effort**

In the Old Testament, there were two means to help the poor. The first was through the gleaning laws listed in Leviticus 19:9-10 and Deuteronomy 24:19-22. As farmers reaped their crops, they would leave the corners of their fields unharvested, and anything that fell to the ground was left for the poor.

The second method used to help the poor was the tithe. In Leviticus 27:30 we find that the tithe provided funds both for the church and for the poor. The funds were distributed by the priests to those who were truly needy.

In the New Testament, the church also had a role in helping to meet the needs of the poor. In 1 Corinthians 16, Paul talks about a collection that was sent from the churches to the Jerusalem believers. We also find many scriptural admonitions calling for Christians to distribute their resources to others compassionately (2 Cor. 9:7; 1 Tim. 5:9-10; 6:18; James 1:27).

These verses concerning the gleaning laws and the tithe seem to indicate that both the government and the church should be involved in helping the poor. Ideally, the church should be in the vanguard of this endeavor. Unfortunately, the church has neglected its responsibility, and government is now heavily involved in poverty relief.

I believe poverty relief should be a cooperative effort between the government and the church. As I noted above, government can provide solutions to exploitation and oppression by passing and enforcing just laws. It can also provide solutions to economic misfortune through various spending programs. But it cannot solve the problems of poverty by addressing injustice and misfortune alone. Poverty is as much a psychological and spiritual problem as it is an economic problem, and it is in this realm that the church can be most effective. Although salvation is not the sole answer, the church is better equipped than the government to meet the psychological and spiritual needs of poverty-stricken people. Most secular social programs do not place much emphasis on these needs and thus miss an important element in the solution to poverty.

## **Breaking the Cycle of Poverty**

As I stated earlier, one of the causes of poverty is the culture of poverty. People are poor because they are poor. An individual who grows up in a culture of poverty is destined for a life of poverty unless something rather dramatic takes place. Poor nutrition, poor education, poor work habits, and poor family relationships can easily condemn an individual to

perpetual poverty.

Here is where the church can provide some answers. First, in the area of capital investment, churches should develop a mercies fund to help those in need. Christians should reach out to those in poverty by distributing their own financial resources and by supporting ministries working in this area. Such an outreach provides churches with a mechanism to meet the physical needs of the poor as well as a context to meet their spiritual needs.

A second solution is for Christians to use their gifts and abilities to help those caught in the web of poverty. Doctors can provide health care. Educators can provide literacy and remedial reading programs. Businesspeople can impart job skills.

This kind of social involvement can also provide opportunities for evangelism. Social action and evangelism often work hand in hand. When we meet people's needs, we often open up opportunities to reach them for Jesus Christ.

This leads to a third solution. Christian involvement can lead to spiritual conversion. By bringing these people into a relationship with Jesus Christ, we can break the culture of poverty. Second Corinthians 5:17 says that we become new creatures in Jesus Christ. Being born again can improve attitudes and family relationships. It can give new direction and the ability to overcome handicaps and hardships.

A fourth area of Christian involvement is to call people to their biblical task. Proverbs 6:6 says, "Go to the ant, you sluggard, observe her ways and be wise"; we see here that we are to admonish laziness and poor habits that lead to poverty. In the New

Testament, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of their church rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). Christians should gently but firmly admonish those



whose poverty is the result of poor work habits to begin taking responsibility for their own lives.

The church can help those addicted to alcohol or other drugs to overcome their dependencies. Christians can work to heal broken families. Dealing with these root causes will help solve the poverty problem.

## **The Christian Lifestyle**

What, then, does this biblical view of wealth and poverty have to say about the way Christians should live? A brief survey of Scripture shows godly people living in a variety of different economic situations. For example, Daniel served as secretary of state in pagan administrations and no doubt lived an upper-middle-class lifestyle. Ezekiel lived outside the city in what might have been considered a middle-class lifestyle. And Jeremiah certainly lived a lower-class lifestyle.

Which prophet best honored God with his lifestyle? The question is of course ridiculous. Each man honored God and followed God's leading in his life. Yet each lived a very different lifestyle.

Christians must reject the tacit assumption implicit in many discussions about economic lifestyle. There is no ideal lifestyle for Christians. One size does not fit all. Instead, we must seek the Lord to discern His will and calling in our lives.

As we do this, there are some biblical principles that will guide us. First, we should acknowledge that God is the Creator of all that we own and use. Whether we are rich or poor, we must acknowledge God's provision in our lives. We are stewards of the creation; the earth is ultimately the Lord's (Ps. 24:1).

Second, we should "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). We must recognize and avoid the

dangers of wealth. Greed is not an exclusive attribute of the rich, nor is covetousness an exclusive attribute of the poor. Christians must guard against the effect of wealth on their spiritual lives. There is nothing wrong with owning possessions. The problem comes when the possessions own us.

Third, Christians must recognize the freedom that comes with simplicity. A simple lifestyle can free us from the dangers of being owned by material possessions. It can also free us for a deeper spiritual life. While simplicity is not an end in itself, it can be a means to a spiritual life of service.

Here are a few suggestions on how to begin living a simple lifestyle. First, eat sensibly and eat less. This includes not only good nutrition, but occasional times for prayer and fasting. Use the time saved for prayer and meditation on God's word. Use the money saved for world hunger relief.

Second, dress modestly. This not only obeys the biblical injunction of dressing modestly, but avoids the Madison Avenue temptation of having to purchase new wardrobes as styles change. A moderate and modest wardrobe can endure the drastic swings in fashion.

Third, give all the resources you can. This includes both finances and abilities. Wesley's admonition to earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can is appropriate here.

Look for opportunities to give the resources God has blessed you with. If God has blessed you with wealth, look for opportunities to give it away prudently. If God has blessed you with great abilities, use them for His glory.

# Jesus: The Divine Xerox – Reasons to Believe

*Probe's founder Jimmy Williams provides a compelling set of reasons to believe that Jesus is in fact the Son of God. By asking questions one would expect of God on this earth, we see that Jesus is the only one who fulfills them all. Jesus' characteristics are His own apologetic.*

You know, today when you walk across the campus and begin to talk about the New Testament, the claims of Christ, and how He is relevant to high school or college life, often you get this expression of amazement, as if you have committed intellectual suicide, because you actually believe His claims. Some tell us that becoming a Christian involves a blind leap with little or no evidence to support it. In fact, the blinder the leap and the more lacking the evidence, the more noble the faith. It is certainly true that any philosophy or belief cannot be proved; I would not try and insult anyone's intellect by saying I could *prove* to him that Jesus Christ is God. However, I think when we look into the history of this unique person, we see some things that have to grasp the mind of any thinking man and impress upon him the strong consideration that Jesus may be who He claimed to be...namely, God incarnate in human flesh.

Now whatever we may say about Jesus Christ, most everyone would agree that in the person of Christ we view one of the most unique personalities of all the centuries—whether He is God or not. The unbeliever, atheist, Moslem, Hindu and Buddhist alike all generally agree on this one central fact, that Jesus Christ is indeed a unique personality.

“Here was a man born of a peasant woman in an obscure village. He grew up in another obscure military camp town where He worked as a carpenter's son. He never wrote a book; He possessed neither wealth nor influence. He never ran for

political office; He never went more than 200 miles from His home town; He never even entered a big city. In infancy He startled a king; in childhood He puzzled doctors; in manhood He ruled the course of nature and hushed the sea to sleep. During the last three years of His life He became an itinerant preacher, roaming the land of His birth, healing the sick and comforting the poor. At the end of this three years of ministry the tide of public opinion began to turn against Him. He was betrayed by one of His closest friends and arrested for disturbing the status quo. All of His followers deserted Him; one denied Him three times. He went through six trials, each of which was a mockery of jurisprudence. Prior to one of the trials He was beaten to the point of death with leather strips imbedded with studs of iron. A crown of thorns was then rammed down upon His head, tearing the flesh so that blood poured down the side of His face. The Roman procurator officiating at His trial was nervous. The uniqueness of this man made Pilate want to wash his hands of the whole affair. But the crowds cried for His death.

"As the Roman procurator brought this insignificant, now mutilated and beaten carpenter's son before the crowds, he hurled a challenge to them which has resounded across twenty centuries: he said, "Behold the man." Pilate was impressed. He had never before seen such quiet dignity, intrepid courage, noble majesty. Never had any other who had stood before his bar carried himself as this One. The Roman was deeply impressed, and avowed his captor's uniqueness. But the mob shouted, 'Crucify Him.' So He was taken outside the gates of the city and nailed to a cross to die the death of a common criminal.

"Yet the story doesn't end here. For something happened after that strange, dark day that has changed the entire course of human history. He came forth from the tomb in resurrection power. His greatness has never been paralleled.

He never wrote a book, yet all the libraries of the country could not hold the books that have been written about Him. He never wrote a song, and yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all the songwriters combined. He never founded a college, but all the schools put together cannot boast of having as many students. Every seventh day the wheels of commerce cease their turning and multitudes wind their way to worshiping assemblies to pay homage and respect to Him. The names of the past proud statesmen of Greece and Rome have come and gone. The names of the past scientists, philosophers, and theologians have come and gone, but the name of this man abounds more and more. Though over 1900 years lie between the people of this generation and the time of His crucifixion, He still lives. Herod could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him. He stands forth upon the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory.

“Never had any other who had stood before his bar carried himself as this One. The Roman was deeply impressed, and avowed his captor’s uniqueness. But the mob shouted, ‘Crucify Him.’ So He was taken outside the gates of the city and nailed to a cross to die the death of a common criminal. Still today He is the cornerstone of history, the center of human progress. I would be well within the mark when I say that all the armies that have ever marched, all the navies that have ever sailed, all the parliaments that have ever sat, and all of the kings that have ever reigned, put together, have not influenced the course of man’s life on this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life, Jesus of Nazareth. History has been called His story. He split time: B.C., before Christ; A.D., *Anno Domini*, in the year of our Lord.{1}

When, some 20 centuries ago, Pontius Pilate said, “Behold the man,” I doubt that he had any idea of who it was that stood before him. He certainly wouldn’t have dreamed that this humble peasant would launch a movement (indeed, already had)

that would change the course of Western civilization. In view of the claims that He made and the impact He had upon history, it behooves us to "Behold the man." Who was He? Those who knew Him best were convinced that He was God. What do you say? I am convinced that the only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from a fair examination of the evidence is that He was and is, indeed, God, the Saviour of the world. Let's consider some of these evidences together.

I would like to consider several lines of historical evidence that suggest that Jesus Christ is God. The first line of evidence is:

## **Because the Hypothesis Fits the Facts.**

Now what I would like to do in terms of presenting the first line of evidence for His claim that He is God is to ask the question, "What would God be like, if God became a man?" If the facts about Jesus Christ fit the answers to the above question—pre-eminently so, uniquely so, we will have offered evidence, that He may be who He claimed to be. So I would like to suggest four things that I think we would all agree would characterize God if God became a man.

**If God were a man, we would expect His words to be the greatest words ever spoken.**

What is great literature or great oratory? The masterpieces of one generation often appear stilted and artificial to another. The words which endure are the words which have something to say about that which is universal in human experience, that which doesn't change with time.

Statistically speaking, the Gospels are the greatest literature ever written. They are read by more people, quoted by more authors, translated into more tongues, represented in more art, set to more music, than any other book or books written by any man in any century in any land. But the words

of Christ are not great on the grounds that they have such a statistical edge over anybody else's words. They are read more, quoted more, loved more, believed more, and translated more because they are the greatest words ever spoken. And where is their greatness? Their greatness lies in the pure, lucid spirituality in dealing clearly, definitively, and authoritatively with the greatest problems that throb in the human breast; namely, Who is God? Does history have meaning? Does He love me? Does He care for me? What should I do to please Him? How does He look at my sin? How can I be forgiven? Where will I go when I die? How must I treat others?

This amazing purity of the words of Christ became more real to me in a forceful way while I was studying the Greek language in graduate school. The New Testament is written in Greek. I was taking a course called Rapid Greek Reading in which we did nothing but read the Greek New Testament and recite in class. We read about eight pages of Greek a week or about the equivalent timewise of 600 pages of English. We struggled night and day while reading the Gospels in order to be able to read them out loud in class directly from the Greek text to our professor. It was sometimes humorous to hear one another struggle with the text of Matthew or Luke. The interesting thing was that when reading one of the Gospels aloud, we would stumble and toil with the sections where Matthew was simply recounting narrative, but as soon as Matthew began to quote the words of Christ the struggle ceased. His words were the easiest to translate. They were so simple and yet profound. To labor with the narrative portions and then come to the words of Christ was like moving from the intensity of the hurricane to the calm serenity of the eye of the storm. It was the difference between sailing on rough tempestuous seas and on a glassy lake at eventide.

Certainly, no mere man could impregnate such simple words with such sublime thoughts. Consider the volumes of truth stored up in the phrase, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto

you”{2}, and “Whosoever would find his life, must lose it”{3}. Libraries could be filled with works which simply develop those concepts.

No other man’s words have the appeal of Jesus’ words. They are the kind of words we would expect God to utter if God were a man.

The second line of evidence is:

**If God were a man, we would expect Him to exert a profound power over human personality.**

One of the greatest impacts among human beings is the impact of personality upon personality. Most human beings are rather ordinary in their impact upon other human beings. I can’t think of anyone in my life whose personality has made an impact upon me; strong influence, yes, but impact, no. Periodically in history a Churchill, Hitler, or a Caesar comes along and impact is made. Certainly, if God were a man, His personality would be so dynamic it would have unprecedented impact on His contemporaries. Is this the case with Jesus of Nazareth? We find most emphatically that it is. Whether Jesus be man or God, whether the Gospels be mainly fiction or fancy, certainly a historic person named Jesus made such an impact on a small band of men as to be unequaled by far in the entire annals of the human race. Consider for a moment the historic nucleus from which Christianity sprang: Peter, a weak-willed fisherman; John, a gentle dreamer; Thomas, who had a question mark for a brain; Matthew, a tax collector; a few peasants and a small cluster of emotional women. Now I don’t want to minimize the character of these men, but seriously, does this rather heterogeneous group of simple folk look like the driving force that could turn the Roman Empire upside down, so that by 312 A.D., Christianity was the official religion of the Empire? Frankly they do not. The impact of the personality of Christ upon these people turned them into flaming revolutionaries who launched a movement that has changed the history



of Western Civilization.

The amazing thing is that these men were the very ones who ate with Him, slept with Him, and lived with Him for over three years and still concluded that He was God. How could a person live with someone for that period of time and come to that conclusion unless it were a valid conclusion? You could spend less than an hour with the greatest saint mankind has ever produced and be thoroughly convinced that he was not God. How could you spend three years with a mere man and become absolutely convinced that He was God, in fact, be so convinced that you would be willing to die a martyr's death to punctuate your belief? Listen for a moment to the traditional deaths of the apostles: Matthew, martyred by the sword in Ethiopia; Mark, dragged through the streets of Alexandria until dead; Luke, hanged on an olive tree in Greece; John, put in a caldron of boiling oil but escaped death and died in exile on the island of Patmos; Peter, crucified upside down (he said he wasn't worthy to be crucified in the same manner as His Lord); James, beheaded in Jerusalem; Philip, hanged against a pillar in Phrygia; James the Less, thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and beaten to death down below; Bartholomew, flayed alive; Andrew, bound to a cross where he preached to his persecutors till he died; Thomas, run through by a spear in India; Jude, shot to death with arrows; Barnabas, stoned to death by Jews in Salonica; and Paul, beheaded at Rome by Nero. Even more incredible is the fact that James and Jude, our Lord's own brothers, believed that He was God. You may for a time, be able to pull the wool over the eyes of those outside your own family, but certainly your own brothers would not swallow such an unbelievable claim unless there were unimpeachable reasons to do so.

Christ's personality had a tremendous impact upon these men. And after nearly two thousand years the impact is not at all spent. Daily there are people who have tremendous revolutionary experiences which they attribute to personal

encounters with Jesus Christ.

The personality of Jesus, then, is without parallel. It is unique and incomparable. Wherever He is, He is the Master. When surrounded by hungry multitudes or by hating Pharisees, when questioned by clever theologians or besought by stricken sinners, whether examined by stupid disciples or by a Roman governor, He is the Master.

If God were robed in human flesh, then He would possess a personality that would have revolutionary impact, indeed, unique impact, upon His contemporaries. Like no other man in history, Jesus made that kind of unique and revolutionary impact.

**If God were a man, we would expect supernatural acts.**

If God were a man, not only would we expect His words to be the greatest ever spoken, and the impact of His personality to be unique, but we would also expect that His life would be characterized by wonderful deeds. We would expect Him to do the things that only God could do. Now obviously the very act of God becoming a man involves something supernatural. But if God became a man, it makes sense that He was going to convince men that He was indeed who He claimed to be, that men deserved to see Him do things that only God could do—namely miracles, suspensions of natural law. Everything about the life of Jesus Christ confronts us with the miraculous. At the outset of His ministry He appeared at a wedding feast and turned water into wine. He demonstrated His power over disease by healing the nobleman's son and the lame man at the pool of Bethesda and many more. He fed 5000 people and said, "I am the bread of life." He walked on the water. He claimed to be the light of the world; then He healed a man who had been blind since birth. One of His most startling claims was made to the despondent sister of Lazarus (Lazarus had been dead for four days) when He said, "I am the resurrection and the life." Then He said, "Lazarus, come forth," and the dead man came out of

the tomb. Someone has noted it was a good thing Jesus called Lazarus by name or all the dead since the dawn of time would have come forth. When Christ made these astounding claims, more than ordinary means were necessary to impress men with their truthfulness.

Now there's a funny kind of thinking going on today concerning miracles. It all started with a fellow by the name of Hume. Paradoxically, this may surprise you, Hume was an orthodox Christian. But, Hume said some things about miracles that have been used as an attack on miracles. Hume argued that miracles are the most improbable of all events. Ever since Hume's essay, it has been believed that historical statements about miracles are the most intrinsically improbable of all historical statements. Now, what then is the basis of probability? What makes a miracle a more probable or a less probable event? Hume says, and so do other secular critics today, that *probability rests upon what may be called the majority vote of our past experiences*. The more often a thing is known to happen, the more probable it is that it should happen again; and the less often, the less probable. He goes on to say, the majority vote of our past experience is firmly against miracles. There is in fact, "uniform experience" against miracles. A miracle is, therefore, the most improbable of all events. It is always more probable that the witnesses were lying or mistaken than that a miracle occurred.

Now here is the foolishness in Hume's whole argument. We must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely "uniform experience" against miracles, if they have *never* occurred, then there is no such thing as a miracle. But, that is exactly the point in question. Is there absolute uniform experience against miracles? We only know that the majority vote of past experience is against miracles if we know that all reports of miracles are false. And, we can know all the reports to be false *only* if we know already that miracles have never occurred. This is a circular argument. Let me repeat it again.

The critic of miracles today says with Hume, "We know that all historical reports of miracles are false because miracles never happen, and we know that miracles never happen because all historical reports of them are false." Get that? We know that miracles have never happened, because all reported instances of them are false, and we know that all reported instances of them are false (such as the Bible) because we know that miracles never happen.

Very frequently today we hear or get the impression that brilliant scholars, after examining all the evidence, have scientifically proven that miracles never happen. This is totally untrue. The rejection of the miraculous is not their conclusion; it is their starting point, their presupposition. It's interesting to note that as you study the literature of the first and second century, even some of the literature of the critics of Christianity grant the miracles. In fact, it was not until the 19th century that the major attacks against the miracles began when the omniscient modern critics got on the scene and began to look back 2,000 years and say miracles never happened. But, the attackers of the first century generally grant them. In *Jesus and His Story* by Ethelbert Stauffer, a professor of New Testament at the University of Erlangen—and not an evangelical scholar—cites the following: "In 95 A.D. Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus of Lydda speaks of Jesus' magic arts." {4} "In 100 A.D.—Jewish ritual denunciation—'Jesus practiced magic and led Israel astray.'" {5}

In the second century (according to F. F. Bruce) Celsus, a philosophic critic of Christianity, acknowledged his miracles but attributed them to sorcery. {6}

Josephus, a first century Jewish historian, also acknowledges the fact that Jesus performed miracles in his *Antiquities of the Jews*. A basic principle of evaluation of evidence states that when enemies agree on a common point, it may be regarded as certain that the point is commonly accepted. Stauffer

states this with clarity in *Jesus and His Story*:

The sharper the clash, the wider the gulf, the more vital does this alteration of testimony and counter-testimony become to the historical investigator. For if a confrontation of witnesses yields statements that agree on some points, then these points must represent facts accepted by both sides.{7}

In addition to the testimony of the secular historians, we have in the four gospel documents themselves, the personal testimony of hundreds of eyewitnesses that the miracles of Christ are true events. All of the evidence we have indicates that He is indeed God manifest in the flesh.

**If God were a man, we would expect Him to be sinless and incomparably holy and divine.**

Here lies, perhaps, one of the most convincing evidences for the deity of Christ. No man has ever lived such a noble, pure, and sinless life. Those who knew Him for three years, said "He was without sin." {8} The Roman centurion commented as Christ hung on the cross, "Surely, this was the Son of God." {9} Paul, the brilliant intellect of the first century, perceived, "He knew no sin." {10} Pilate called Him, "that just man," and said, "I find no fault in Him." {11} He Himself claimed to be sinless and challenged the religious leaders of His day to find fault in Him. {12}

There is no comparison between the person of Christ and the most saintly of the saints of the human race. To them confession of sin and painfully laborious efforts toward saintliness were daily fare. In fact, the closer they came to God, the more vivid became their consciousness of their sinfulness.

But Jesus never appears to us as One who struggled to obtain saintliness. He never felt the need to confess a sin, and yet He pointed out the sin in others and urged them to confess.

Christ never admitted a need of repentance. We can't even imagine Him dying the death of saintly Augustine of daily confession and repentance. Jesus possessed perfect sinlessness and purity, not by struggle, privation, asceticism, or pilgrimage. It was by His birth and nature.

The greatest saints of other religions are not even in the same category as Christ. Mohammed, for instance, was apparently a neurotic. Gandhi, whom many have acclaimed as the most saintly man of the century, does not even compare with Jesus Christ. Gandhi himself claimed that he didn't even know God and that the reason for it was his own sinfulness. He said, "It is a constant source of sorrow to me that I am so far separated from the one whom I know to be my very life and being; and it is my own wretchedness and sin that separates me from him." {13} How different this is from the words of Jesus, "I and the Father are one," {14} or "He who has seen me has seen the Father," {15} or even more direct, "All men should honour me, even as they honour the Father. He that does not honour me does not honour the Father which sent me." {16} Can you even imagine Calvin, Luther, Paul, or any other great saint making a claim such as this? Frankly, I cannot.

Jesus Christ is not a great man among great men. He is uniquely the greatest man of all history. His divine quality of life can be verified from the mouth of the atheist, infidel, and unbeliever, not to mention the enormous testimony from the Christian Church. Thinking men the world over who have examined the evidence will all agree that Jesus of Nazareth is the greatest personality of the centuries. He is the greatest teacher, leader, and influence for good in the history of the human race.

Rousseau, the French Deist said of him,

If the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus were those of a God. Shall we say the Gospel history is mere invention. My friend, it is not

such that men invent. And the facts concerning Socrates, of which no one entertains any doubt, are less attested than those concerning Jesus Christ.{17}

He goes on to say a little later that "the facts concerning Jesus of Nazareth are so striking, so amazing, so utterly inimitable, that the invention of them would be more astonishing than the hero."{18}

Byron, the profligate poet, whose philosophy of life was eat, drink, and be merry said, "If ever a man were God, or God were man, Jesus was both."{19}

Renan, the skeptic, who wrote a classic life of Christ in which he tried to prove the myth of the Gospels, nevertheless concluded with this last line: "Whatever surprises the future may bring, one thing is certain, Jesus will never be surpassed."{20}

When exiled on the lonely isle of St. Helena, the emperor Napoleon was once discussing Christ with General Bertrand, a faithful officer who had followed him into banishment and who did not believe in the deity of Jesus. Napoleon said,

I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and whatever other religions, the distance of infinity. Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and His will confounds me. Between Him and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a being by Himself.{21}

If God were a man, we would expect Him to be sinless and incomparably Holy and Divine. We see that the hypothesis fits the facts of the life of Jesus Christ. Should we now conclude something other than Jesus is God? The Apostle John said, "No man has ever seen God, but the only begotten Son, who is at

the Father's side, has made Him known.”{22} Jesus is the Divine Xerox of the invisible God. The Original is invisible, but His earthly Reproduction is visible for all to behold in the unprecedented life of Jesus of Nazareth.

## Notes

1. Author unknown, although a portion of this essay is attributed to Dr. James Allan Francis.
2. Matt. 7:12.
3. Luke 9:24.
4. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 1959), p. 9.
5. Ibid., p. 10.
6. F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents; Are They Reliable?* (5th ed. rev.; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1960), p. 68.
7. Stauffer, p.x.
8. 1 Pet. 2:22.
9. Matt. 27:54.
10. 2 Cor. 5:21.
11. Luke 23:14.
12. John 8:45-47; 10:37-39.
13. Fritz Ridenour, *So What's the Difference?* (Glendale, California: G.L. Publications, 1967).
14. John 10:30.
15. John 14:9.
16. John 5:23.
17. John Ballard, *The Miracles of Unbelief* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1908), p. 251.
18. Ibid.
19. Lord Byron.
20. Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (New York: Carolton Publishers, 1863).
21. Frank Mead, *Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations* (Westwood: Fleming H. Revell, 1965), p. 56.
22. John 1:18.



