Depression

Jerry Solomon offers a compassionate, holistic examination of depression from a Christian perspective, with helpful suggestions for those who long to help.

One Person's Story

Depression—a word that is used frequently in our time. Does it apply to you, someone you love, or someone you know? Since 17 percent of the population suffers from major depression at some point in their lives,{1} it is probable you have been touched by it in some way. Perhaps the following account will "ring true" in light of your experiences. (This story really happened, but the name of the character has been changed.)

For many years Stan, an evangelical Christian, struggled with varying degrees of depression. These bouts were incapacitating on occasion, irritating or highly frustrating sometimes, but always persistent in their visits. Eventually the struggle came to a crisis point. He was not able to respond to any emotional stimulus that was offered; he had totally isolated himself from family, friends, and work. In retrospect he realized this isolation was done purposefully. The true causes of his struggle had never been addressed, and he was tired of pulling himself out of one depressed state only to find another staring him in the face. So he refused to repeat the pattern that had plagued him for so many years. It was time to find the root causes, instead of repeatedly dodging them.

After talking with a good friend who was a counselor, he decided he should consider admitting himself to a psychiatric hospital. He immediately contacted such a place and entered the "first phase," or initial analysis prior to admittance. This analysis indicated he should become a patient. The next day he became part of an extraordinary program of discovery that was to last more than three weeks. In fact, those weeks

were so extraordinary, he will tell you they provided the impetus for dramatic, positive change in his life and thought.

During those days of concentration, Stan dealt with several important issues that subsequently have led to a more stable life. First, he faced the trauma of abuse he had experienced. Second, through the ministry of a compassionate chaplain and a counselor, he realized he was weary of learning about God, without at the same time knowing God in the personal way the Bible frequently indicates. He was hungry to couple Biblical precepts with personal experience. Third, the sense of community among those in the hospital with him led him to consider the social "games" he had been playing in his evangelical Christian setting outside the hospital. Even though many of the patients were not Christians, that did not deter them from intimacy, trust, and truth. There were no hidden agendas, no political posturing, no hypocritical fronts. They listened to one another, cried together, encouraged one another, challenged one another, laughed together, and even disciplined one another. Fourth, Stan was challenged to consider whether he should take medication in light of his trust in God's healing power. He was put on medication that is still part of his life after eight years. Fifth, he was led to consider his thought life, especially as it applied to expectations he had of himself.

Unfortunately, there are many Christians who continue to wrestle with what Winston Churchill called the "black dog" of depression. They struggle without finding help. This essay is offered with the hope that it will encourage those who need help, and that it will prompt many to respond with patience and love to those who are depressed.

Who Suffers with Depression?

Some have said depression is "the common cold of emotional disorders, and it appears to be on the rise. People of both genders get depressed, although women are twice as likely as

men to suffer from major depressive disorders."{2} Who are these people? As we will see, they are both famous and infamous people; they are normal people; they are even people we know from the Bible.

Depression can be described as "a condition of general emotional dejection and withdrawal; sadness greater and more prolonged than that warranted by any objective reason."{3} Dejection, withdrawal, sadness, and other similar terms are familiar to many. Vincent Van Gogh, Abraham Lincoln, Edgar Allen Poe, Marilyn Monroe, Rod Steiger, Mike Wallace, and many other notable people have struggled with depression. In 1972 Senator Thomas Eagleton acknowledged his depression, and the Democrats dropped him as the Vice Presidential candidate. In 1995 Alma Powell, the wife of General Colin Powell, revealed her history of depression, and her husband urged others to get help.{4} Martin Luther and Charles Spurgeon, two great men in the history of the church, frequently lived with the dark shadow of despondency.

Even some great biblical characters wrestled with depression. At one point in his life, Moses wanted to die (Exodus 32:32). While struggling with his suffering, Job "cursed the day of his birth" (3:1). He said, "I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" (7:11). In addition, he cried, "My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me" (17:1). Elijah was incapacitated with depression soon after he had been an integral player in one of the great demonstrations of God's power (I Kings 19). After Jonah witnessed the astounding grace of God among the wicked Ninevites, he angrily said, "Death is better to me than life" (Jonah 4:3). The great prophet Jeremiah declared, "Why did I ever come forth from the womb to look on trouble and sorrow?" (Jeremiah 20:18)

The amazing prophecy of Isaiah 53:3 states that the Suffering Servant, the Lord Jesus, was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." *Sorrows* and *grief* can refer to both physical and

mental pain, which could include depression.{5} Consider the thoughts of Lydia Child, the 19th century abolitionist, in light of Isaiah 53:

Whatever is highest and holiest is tinged with melancholy. The eye of genius has always a plaintive expression, and its natural language is pathos. A prophet is sadder than other men; and He who was greater than all the prophets was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."{6}

A well-known spiritual says, "No one knows the trouble I've seen," a sentiment that is understood by those who are depressed. J.B. Phillips, author of the classic *Your God is Too Small*, dealt with depression all his life. In one of his many letters, he offered these comments to one who also was struggling: "As far as you can, and God knows how difficult this is, try to relax in and upon Him. As far as my experience goes, to get even a breath of God's peace in the midst of pain is infinitely worth having."{7}

We have seen that depression has been experienced since ancient times. No one is immune, but, praise God, those in His family are not alone. The Lord Himself is with us.

Depression: Symptoms and Explanations

- *I feel so tired!*
- *I feel weak; my arms are heavy.*
- *I feel so agitated!*
- *I feel anxious about everything, it seems.*
- *I feel so fearful—of death, of tomorrow, of people.*
- *I can't concentrate!*
- *I can't remember things I used to remember.*
- *I can't face people; I want to be alone.*
- *I'm not interested in sex anymore.*
- *I can't sleep!*
- *I sleep to escape!*
- *I only eat because I have to.{8}* • *I hate myself!*

- *I feel angry all the time!*
- *Everything and everyone is stupid!*

Such comments are familiar to those who are dealing with depression. Usually these phrases are not descriptive of what is objectively true, but they are descriptive of how a depressed person is responding to his predicament. One who hears them can be tempted to dismiss the one who made the statements with well-meaning but trite responses that betray a lack of understanding. It often is difficult for someone who has not wrestled with depression to understand.

So how can we understand? Why does a person get depressed? There is no simple answer to this question, contrary to what some people think. As Dr. John White has written, "Depression has many faces. It cannot be relieved on the basis of one simple formula, arising as it does by numerous and complex mechanisms, and plummeting sometimes to depths where its victims are beyond the reach of verbal communication. There are mysteries about it which remain unsolved. No one theoretical framework is adequate to describe it."{9} It is meaningful for a Christian to understand this. Sometimes a response to the depressed can focus on a principle without regard for the person. For example, the 17th century English bishop Jeremy Taylor wrote: "It is impossible for that man to despair who remembers that his Helper is omnipotent."{10} This assumes that remembering something will automatically change one's thoughts and feelings. The person who is depressed doesn't necessarily make that connection. Mentally healthy people have reasonable thought processes, but they are not the norm in a depressed person's clouded life. "Mental health is like physical health. We are all vulnerable to its loss."{11} A truly depressed person is not mentally healthy.

As we have stated, there is no one all-encompassing answer to the "Why?" of depression. But there are a number of models that suggest answers.

- Aggression turned inward, or unexpressed anger.
- Object loss, as in the loss of a parent.
- Loss of self-esteem.
- Incorrect thinking.
- Learned helplessness, or inability to respond to unpleasant experiences.
- Loss of reinforcement, as in lack of sympathy.
- Loss of role status, as in loss of power or prestige.
- Loss of meaning of existence.
- Impairment of brain chemistry, as in neurotransmitters.
- Neurophysiological malfunction of brain cells.{12}

When we ponder these models in the light of a Christian worldview, we find that none of them can stand alone. Each one taken separately reduces us to only one element, whereas a Christian worldview sees man holistically. Man is not to be seen solely as a product of his past, his thought life, his societal conditioning, or his biology. The one who is depressed should be approached as Christ would: as a whole person made in God's image.

Depression and the Whole Person

"What is man, that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" These memorable phrases from Psalm 8 pose crucial questions in regard to the subject of depression. The answers we give to such questions will provide a beginning point for responding to those who are depressed. As Leslie Stevenson has written, "The prescription for a problem depends on the diagnosis of the basic cause."{13} A Christian is challenged to consider a prescription for depression that sees both the material and immaterial aspects of a total person. Such considerations lead to concerns as to whether one should take medication, submit to some type of psychological analysis, or simply trust God to provide healing. Or, as a prominent Christian psychiatrist asks, "Is [depression] a disease of the mind or of the body?"{14} Is it both/and, or

either/or? These are issues that tend to stir controversy among Christians. Too frequently the controversy is focused on "clumsy clichés, …subtly damning exhortations, breezy banalities, and the latest idiocy in pop psychology. Or else…unnecessary pills."{15}

The history of the church demonstrates that one of the reasons for such a response is found in an ancient struggle between Greek and Hebrew influences. More often than not we tend to side with the Greeks and divide humans "into a less important physical part (body and brain) and a more important immaterial part (mind and soul)."{16} This unbiblical division creates problems, because "just as music is more than the orchestra that plays it, so I am more than my body."{17} I am also more than my mind and soul.

When this unity of human nature is ignored two extreme views can be found among Christians. "One is that we submit to all suffering, sickness, pain&mdashwhether mental or physical—as from God."{18} The other asserts that "through the exercise of faith and by the power of Jesus' name we can banish every sickness, every difficulty. Sickness, tragedy, pain must be resisted, for all come from Satan. Unhappiness is a sign of defeat and unbelief."{19} This means that seeking help from physicians, psychologists, or psychiatrists "is a tacit admission that the resources in Christ and the Scripture are inadequate."{20} Both of these views are too simplistic, but there are certainly elements of the truth in them. How can we reconcile them?

Quite simply and obviously, the one who is depressed should be treated as a whole person. Consider the statements of John White, a practicing Christian psychiatrist, author of a thought-provoking book on depression and suicide entitled *The Masks of Melancholy*, and many other books. He wrote:

> I will no more treat mind as distinct from body than body as distinct from mind. By the grace of God I will treat

> persons, not pathology, sinners rather than syndromes, and individuals rather than illnesses. And however primitive our weapons may be, there are effective weapons and we must use them.{21}

As one who has fought with depression, I have come to realize the wisdom of Dr. White's comments. The treatment I have received has come from family, friends, physicians, psychologists, and psychiatrists who understand how God has created us. Their compassionate, godly responses to my struggle have been instrumental in my recovery. To paraphrase the apostle Paul, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of [them]" (Philippians 1:3). They were the Lord's servants in my time of need.

Responding to Depression

Sarah's husband has been isolating himself from her for several weeks. He won't communicate with her. He doesn't eat much. He shows no emotion other than a sense of sadness and gloom. He sits in the dark for hours. He has called his office several days to report he is taking a sick day. He does none of the things he once did that gave him a sense of joy and accomplishment. He shows no interest in making love with her. He has disappeared for hours in his car and will not say where he has been. Sarah wonders if she has done something to upset him and is desperate to get him to talk with her so she can discover what is happening.

Perhaps this scenario is familiar to you or someone you know. How can we respond to such a crisis? How can we help the one who is depressed?

First, understand the difference between someone who is sad or disheartened and someone who is truly depressed. Sadness or a "blue mood" are experienced by most of us. Depression is much more debilitating and long-lasting. There are at least three levels of depression. One can be called *major depression*,

which “is manifested by a combination of symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, sleep, eat, and enjoy once pleasurable activities.” Another, called *dysthymia*, is less severe but keeps one “from functioning at ‘full steam’ or from feeling good.” The third level is called *manic-depressive*, or bipolar depression. This “involves cycles of depression and elation or mania.”{22}

Second, if you believe someone is struggling continually with depression, encourage him or her to seek help. Suggest that your friend see a trusted pastor, counselor, or physician. The earlier you can suggest this, the better.

Third, at the first sign of depression, encourage conversation and then listen carefully. The deeper a person sinks into a depressed state, the more difficult it is to talk with anyone, even those she loves most. Make yourself available and gently pursue communication as often as you can. But leave time for silence when you are with her.

Fourth, give emotional support that indicates you are taking the person seriously. “Do not accuse the depressed person of faking illness or of laziness, or expect him or her ‘to snap out of it’.”{23}

Fifth, be an encourager. Affirm the one who is depressed with statements of truth about his character and abilities, as well as your love for him.

Sixth, if he will let you, pray for him in his presence.

Seventh, if you hear remarks about suicide, take them seriously and seek advice from an expert.

Eighth, act as a “mental mirror.” She probably isn’t thinking reasonably and is in need of gentle reminders of a clearer image of the world and herself.

Ninth, don’t chastise him if he expresses anger, even anger at

God. Listen carefully to discover why he is angry and help him begin to think how he can best express that anger.

Tenth, on a larger scale, do what you can to develop an atmosphere in your church that allows one who is depressed to find trust, truth, and compassion.

These ten suggestions, as helpful as they can be, do not constitute the ultimate response to the depressed. We need to remember that ultimate healing rests in the hands of our loving God, who makes all things new.

Notes

1. Clark E. Barshinger, Lojan E. LaRowe, and Andres Tapia, "The Gospel According to Prozac," *Christianity Today* (14 August, 1995), 35.
2. Siang-Yang Tan, "The ABCs of Depression: A Review of the Basics," *Christian Counseling Today* (Fall 1995), 10.
3. *The Random House Unabridged Dictionary*, 1967.
4. "Fighting the Stigma," *Newsweek* (20 May 1996), 22-23.
5. F. Duane Lindsey, *The Servant Songs* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 116.
6. The New Dictionary of Thoughts, 1936 ed., s.v. "Melancholy."
7. Vera Phillips and Edwin Roberstson, *J.B. Phillips: The Wounded Healer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 110.
8. John White, *The Masks of Melancholy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982), 77-82.
9. Ibid., 18.
10. The New Dictionary of Thoughts, s.v. "Despair."
11. White, 25.
12. Ibid., 103-125.
13. Leslie Stevenson, *Seven Theories of Human Nature* (New York: Oxford, 1987), 6.
14. White, 53.

15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 41.
17. Ibid., 45.
18. Ibid., 47.
19. Ibid., 49.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 220.
22. National Institute of Mental Health, “Depression: What you need to know” (Indianapolis: Eli Lilly, n.d.), 1-3.
23. Ibid., 9.

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Worship

Jerry Solomon examines the history and purpose of worship, some contemporary hindrances to worship, and suggestions concerning renewal in corporate worship.

Definitions of Worship

During a 1954 interview A.W. Tozer, a great pastor and editor of the Alliance Witness, was asked what he thought would awaken the church from its complacency. This was his response: “In my opinion, the great single need of the moment is that light-hearted superficial religionists be struck down with a vision of God high and lifted up, with His train filling the temple. The holy art of worship seems to have passed away like the Shekinah glory from the tabernacle. As a result, we are left to our own devices and forced to make up the lack of spontaneous worship by bringing in countless cheap and tawdry activities to hold the attention of the church people.”(1) John MacArthur, a more contemporary preacher and writer, wrote this indictment in 1993: “In the past half decade, some of

America’s largest evangelical churches have employed worldly gimmicks like slapstick, vaudeville, wrestling exhibitions, and even mock striptease to spice up the Sunday meetings. No brand of horseplay, it seems, is too outrageous to be brought into the sanctuary. Burlesque is fast becoming the liturgy of the pragmatic church.”(2)

These stinging analyses, whether we agree with them or not, remind us that the biblically based Christian is challenged to consider worship, along with all facets of life, in light of the culture in which he or she lives. Worship should be included in the total worldview of each individual Christian. It is a significant part of a believer’s life. With this in mind, we will reflect on the meaning and history of worship, hindrances to worship, and the content of worship. And we will offer our own analyses and suggestions.

As is true with many terms used among Christians, the word “worship” can become a cliché devoid of significant content if we don’t stop to consider its meaning. “Our English word means worthship,’ denoting the worthiness of an individual to receive special honor in accordance with that worth.”(3) The Hebrew and Greek terms found in the Bible “emphasize the act of prostration, the doing of obeisance.”(4) Warren Wiersbe offers a broad definition based upon these concepts. He writes, “Worship is the believer’s response of all that he is—mind, emotions, will, and body—to all that God is and says and does. This response has its mystical side in subjective experience, and its practical side in objective obedience to God’s revealed truth. It is a loving response that is balanced by the fear of the Lord, and it is a deepening response as the believer comes to know God better.”(5) A more narrow definition may sound like this: “Worship is pure adoration, the lifting up of the redeemed spirit toward God in contemplation of His holy perfection.”(6)

Do these definitions describe worship as you experience it with your gathered church and in your daily life? If so, you

are blessed. If not, perhaps you need to evaluate the place of worship in your life. Perhaps you need to consider honestly if you have allowed yourself to become accustomed to traditions that have confused true worship. Perhaps you have approached worship with the idea it applies only on Sunday mornings. Or maybe you have never stopped to consider the importance of worship.

The History of Worship

What comes to mind when you think of worship? Is it a formal occasion? Is it a joyous occasion? Does it contain certain rituals? Are you involved? Are you praising God? Are you learning? Are you hearing from God? Are you in contemplation? Are you singing? Are you praying? Are you alone, or with other people?

Perhaps you can answer some or all of these questions in the affirmative. And you probably can add other elements to what is contained in worship in your experience. But have you ever considered what worship may have looked like when the early church gathered? Were these elements included, or did it look very different? A very brief survey of the history of worship will help us begin to evaluate the purpose and content of worship today. Our ancestors had to wrestle with what worship entails long before our time. We can and should learn from them.

The worship patterns of the Jewish synagogue served as the model for the first Christians. As Robert Webber has written, “It must be remembered that the early Christians came into worship from a different perspective from modern Christians. We accept the Old because we have been informed by the New. But they accepted the New because they had been informed by the Old.”(7) The promises and prophecies of the Old Testament had been fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah. Thus Jesus set the stage for the first acts of worship among the early believers by giving new meaning to the ancient ritual of the Passover

meal. Acts 2:46 tells us that the earliest form of Christian worship was a meal—"breaking bread in their homes."(8) Believers were remembering the Last Supper just as the Jews remembered the Passover. Eventually churches became too large to accommodate these shared meals, so a single table with the elements of bread and wine became the focus. Thus "the central act of Christian worship in the history of the church has always been the Communion."(9)

By the second century worship began to look more like what most of us include in our churches. Justin Martyr, an apologist and pastor, wrote of two major parts: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. The liturgy of the Word consisted of lessons from the Old and New Testaments, a sermon, prayers, and hymns. The liturgy of the Eucharist included a kiss of peace; offering of bread, wine, and water; prayers and thanksgiving over the bread and wine; remembrance of Christ's death, including the narrative of the institution of the Last Supper, and a command to continue in it; an Amen, said by all the people; Communion; then the reserved portions were taken by the deacons to those who were absent.(10)

It is unfortunate that by the late medieval period this twofold form of worship was overcome by pomp and ceremony that crowded out its meaning. But even the Reformers of the sixteenth century insisted on maintaining both Word and Sacrament. Their intent was to restore both elements to their primitive simplicity, and in the process the Scriptures were to be given an authoritative place.(11) Most evangelicals attempt to sustain the traditions of the Reformers. But what is the purpose of all this for the gathered church, and the individual believer?

The Purpose of Worship

Why should we worship God? Quite simply, we should worship Him because of who He is—God. In Revelation 4 and 5 we see descriptions that should provide impetus for our worship. He

“is the only God, the highest, the Lord God, the heavenly King, the almighty God and Father, the Holy One.”(12) To put it succinctly, “in worship we simply tell God the truth about Himself.”(13) Each day of our lives we tell God the truth about Himself, if we are thinking and living through the grid of a Christian worldview.

I have a good friend who is a physicist. Years ago his job included the consistent use of a sophisticated electron microscope. This impressive device allowed him to take pictures of the microscopic things he was studying. From these pictures he developed a wonderful slide presentation that served to remind us of the order and complexity that exists beyond what we can see with the naked eye. When we viewed these remarkable images, we responded in worship. Why? Because our worldview prompted us to contemplate the One who created such awesome things. We were filled with wonder. In our response we were telling God the truth about Himself. We were worshiping.

After his death friends of the great French thinker, Blaise Pascal, “found stitched into the lining of his doublet a scrap of parchment with a rough drawing of a flaming cross. Around that cross was the following poem,”(14) entitled “Fire”:

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob,
Not of the philosophers and the learned.
Certitude. Joy. Certitude. Emotion. Sight. Joy.
Forgetfulness of the world and of all outside of God.
The world hath not known Thee, but I have known Thee.
Joy! Joy! Joy! Tears of joy.
My God, wilt Thou leave me?
Let me not be separated from Thee for ever.(15)

In this unforgettable refrain we hear the heart of a man in worship. Pascal was responding to the very personal presence of God in his life by pouring out his heart. His contemplation led to worship. Jonathan Edwards, the great American

philosopher- theologian of the eighteenth century, shared one of his experiences of worship in his *Personal Narrative*, which was published after his death.

> *The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception . . . which continued near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud.(16)*

The full account of this encounter indicates that Edwards experienced worship during a time of contemplation and prayer. He sought to focus on God, and God responded in a dramatic way, just as was true for Pascal.

Such experiences don't have to be descriptive only of a few. We can apply at least two things from them. First, as with my physicist friend, our lives should include a sense of wonder. And wonder should lead to worship. As Thomas Carlyle wrote, "The man who cannot wonder, who does not habitually wonder and worship, is but a pair of spectacles behind which there is no eye."(17) Second, as with Pascal and Edwards, we need times of contemplation and prayer. Thoughts about God, and prayer to God can lead to a personal encounter with the One we worship.

Some Contemporary Hindrances to Worship

As of July 3, 1997, I will have known my wife for 30 years. During that time my love for her has become enriched through many experiences. If you were to ask me why I love her, I might respond by telling you what I receive from her. Or I might give you analyses of marriage fit for an essay. I might even attempt to persuade you to believe in marriage as I do. None of these responses would be wrong, but they would be incomplete, and they wouldn't focus on the primary subject: my wife, the object of my love. The lover would have hindered true praise of the loved one.

The same can be said frequently of us as we consider worship in our lives. If we aren't careful, we can hinder worship, both individually and corporately, by emphasizing things that may be good, but don't give us a complete picture of what worship entails. There are at least three words that can describe these hindrances: pragmatism, intellectualism, and evangelism.

Pragmatism as a hindrance to worship. First, pragmatism has led many to find ways of getting what they want, instead of what they need. This means the worship "customer" is sovereign. "The idea is a basic selling principle: you satisfy an existing desire rather than trying to persuade people to buy something they don't want."(18) Many churches are growing numerically through such strategies, but is worship taking place? It's my conviction that the answer is "No." People may be coming, but numbers are not the issue. Worship is done among regenerated Christians who are concentrating on who God is, not on what we want. Paradoxically, what we truly want, communion with God, takes place when we pursue what we truly need.

Intellectualism as a hindrance to worship. Second, intellectualism is not a substitute for worship. Coming from one who believes strongly in the importance of intellect in the Christian life, this may be surprising. But I have come to realize that worship is not a glorified Bible study. This does not mean that the preaching of Scripture is not a key ingredient of worship, but the one who is preaching is responsible to share in light of worship. As Warren Wiersbe has written, "There is much more to preaching than passing along religious information. It must reveal, not mere facts about God, but the Person of God Himself."(19) Wiersbe continues: "When preaching is an act of worship, the outline is to the text what a prism is to a shaft of sunlight: it breaks it up so that its beauty and wonder are clearly seen."(20) Such comments also apply to our private times of

Bible study. Our minds are to be used in study, but what is studied includes worship of the One who has communicated with us.

Evangelism as a hindrance to worship. Third, evangelism is not the ultimate reason for worship. Non-believers who are in attendance at a time of worship certainly can be touched by the Spirit, but worship implies the believer's response to God. A non- believer cannot worship the true and living God. Thus an "altar call" should not be the primary focus. Instead, the church should be called to focus on the One who has called them into His family. Then they take what they have heard, seen, and experienced into the surrounding world.

Let's reconsider such hindrances as we seek to worship God, who will be glorified in the process.

The Content of Worship

"I know that Thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted" (Job 42:2). "I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Thy wonders. I will be glad and exult in Thee; I will sing praise to Thy name, O Most High" (Ps. 9:1 2). "The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands" (Ps. 19:1). "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. 6:3). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Peter 1:3). "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns" (Rev. 19:6).

What do these Scriptures have in common? They are statements of worship; they are inspired statements from men to God. And for the moment it's our hope that they serve to stimulate us

to contemplate the content of worship.

One of the most pointed scriptural statements concerning worship is found in Jesus' well-known encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:23 24). Jesus told her:

> *But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*

Earlier (vs. 21) Jesus had told the woman that the place of worship was unimportant. One doesn't worship just on a particular mountain, in Jerusalem, or any other place. We are free to worship God anywhere. So then He told her what is important.

First, the spirit of worship is important. We are to render "such homage to God that the entire heart enters into the act."(21) Whether we are in a time of private praise and adoration, or gathered with the church in corporate proclamation, we are to respond to who God is from the spirit, from the whole of our innermost being. Second, we are to do "this in full harmony with the truth of God as revealed in his Word."(22) The concept of responding to God in spirit can give rise to confusing individual expressions if those expressions are not guided by Scripture. There must be balance between spirit and truth. One without the other is not complete. "As some see it, a humble, spiritual attitude means little. According to others, truth or doctrinal soundness is of no importance. Both are one-sided, unbalanced, and therefore wrong. Genuine worshipers worship in spirit and truth."(23)

These comments began with quotes from biblical writers who wrote their statements of worship. It's striking to note how those statements contain not only the truth of God, but the truth about God. Truth permeates their worship. But it's also striking to note the spirit with which those expressions were

shared. They are from the heart. They penetrate our lives; they are alive with true worship. As we read and hear such expressions they should encourage us to worship God in spirit and truth. And thus the content of our worship will be pleasing to Him.

Concluding Suggestions Concerning Corporate Worship Renewal

We have discussed several aspects of worship: its definition, history, purpose, hindrances, and content. To conclude we will focus on five suggestions that can be applied to corporate worship in the contemporary church.

First, consider how time is allotted when the church gathers for worship. As churches grow they tend to break into various times of worship. Thus the available time for worship is decreased. One group needs to be released from the worship center in time for another to enter. As a result, often there is a feeling of being rushed. And this feeling of being rushed is exacerbated because so much of the available time is spent with things that may be good, but are not conducive to worship. Announcements may concern good things, for example, but they take time from the true intent of the gathered church.

Second, consider how much attention is given to worship by the leadership of the church. The pastor, staff, and other leadership should demonstrate that worship has a very high priority. There should not be a question of how much energy has been given to preparation for worship on the part of the leadership.

Third, consider who is the leader of worship and why. It is my conviction that the pastor should be the one who calls the body to worship and leads it by example. Much is communicated to the congregation when the primary earthly leader implores the people to give their undivided attention to the reason for

their gathering. In addition, much is communicated when the pastor is involved in worship beyond just the delivery of a sermon, no matter how good it may be. Having served on a church staff for many years, I know some of the time implications of this suggestion. But I believe if the church makes worship the priority, the pastor should provide the leadership for it. Fourth, consider what has priority in worship. Quite simply, the question is whether or not God has priority. Or do other things tend to crowd the allotted time and distract from the true intention? For example, it may be good to let a visiting relative of a church member sing a solo, but has someone talked with this person in order to discuss the reason for any solos within the time of worship? Remember, worship is to be God- centered, not man-centered.

Fifth, consider the place of style versus substance in worship. It appears to me that the "style" of worship is not the issue as much as the substance. In other words, if the people are called to worship God with integrity and concentration on Him, the style is secondary. This applies regardless of whether the style is liturgical/traditional, contemporary, or something in between. But if the style overshadows substance, true worship may be thwarted. It is a wise church that brings both style and substance together in a manner that pleases God.

These five suggestions and the thoughts that have preceded them have been offered with the hope that you have been stimulated to consider the importance of worship in your life. The worshiping Christian in a worshiping church is a person who is continually empowered to impact the world for the glory of God. May you be among those empowered people!

Notes

1. A.W. Tozer, *Keys to the Deeper Life* (Grand Rapids, Mich.:Zondervan, 1957), 87-88.
2. John MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Wheaton,

Ill.:Crossway, 1993), xvii-xviii.
3. Everett F. Harrison, “Worship,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids, Mich.:Baker, 1960), 560.
4. Ibid.
5. Warren Wiersbe, *Real Worship* (Nashville, Tenn.: Oliver Nelson, 1986), 27.
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7. Robert E. Webber, *Common Roots* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 84.
8. Ibid., 83.
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10. Ibid., 80-81.
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12. Ibid., 85.
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14. Peter Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1993),
15. Blaise Pascal, *Fire*, quoted in Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture*, 13.
16. Jonathan Edwards, *Personal Narrative*, quoted in Toon, *The Art of Meditating on Scripture*, 13-14.
17. Thomas Carlyle, quoted in Tryon Edwards, *The New Dictionary of Thoughts* (New York: Standard, 1936), 713.
18. MacArthur, *Ashamed of the Gospel,* 49.
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Generation X – How They Fit in the Christian Community

Generation X! Are you familiar with this phrase? It is highly probable that you have heard or read the phrase at least once. What does it bring to your mind? Does it provoke fear, confusion, despair, misunderstandings, or is it just another in a long line of such expressions used to label youth? Generation X has quickly entered our vocabulary as an easily recognizable moniker for the children of another definable generation: the "baby boomers." Thus this generation of teenagers also has come to be known as the "baby busters." "Xers" and "busters" normally don't elicit positive thoughts about our youth. Is this a legitimate response? Or are we maligning a significant portion of our population with such terms?

In 1991 a Canadian named Douglas Coupland published a novel entitled *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*. Coupland's book "is the first major work to take twentysomethings seriously, even if the book is humorous and fictional."{1} Thus he is the originator of the phrase that presently describes a particular generation. But he is just one of many who have given thought to youth culture, both present and past.

A Brief History of American Youth

It seems that youth have always received the attention of adults. Teenagers, as they have come to be called, have been analyzed, diagnosed, and reprimanded because older generations just don't know what to make of them. "Juvenile delinquents," "the beat generation," "hippies," "yuppies" and numerous other titles have been used to describe certain generational distinctives. "The contemporary youth crisis is only the latest variation on centuries-old problems."{2} For example,

in the 1730s in New England youth activities such as "night 'walking' and 'company- keeping,' also known as 'revels,' helped produce some of the highest premarital pregnancy rates in American history."{3} And during the early nineteenth century, student riots became a tradition on many campuses such as Brown, North Carolina, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, and Columbia. These riots included "boycotting classes, barricading college buildings, breaking windows, trashing the commons and/or chapel, setting fires around or to college buildings, beating faculty members, and whipping the president or trustees."{4} Such behavior—almost two hundred years ago—probably reminds us of what took place on many campuses during the Vietnam War years.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, youth became the focus of the burgeoning social sciences. "An intellectual enterprise struggled to redefine what 'youth' was or ought to be. That concept was labeled 'adolescence' and has prevailed ever since."{5} It is especially interesting to note that these early social scientists didn't discover adolescence, they invented it. "Adolescence was essentially a conception of behavior imposed on youth, rather than an empirical assessment of the way in which young people behaved."{6} This is important when we understand that the world view premises of the social scientists "came from Darwinian recapitulation theory: the individual life-course replicated the evolutionary progress of the entire race. Adolescence was a distinct 'stage' through which each person passed on the way from childhood (the 'primitive' stage) to adulthood (the 'civilized' stage). Adolescence therefore was transitional but essential, its traits dangerous but its labor vital for attaining maturity. Squelching it was just as bad as giving it free rein."{7} The fruit of such concepts can be seen in the "lifestyles" that are now so ingrained in our cultural fabric.

The Web of Adolescence

What do the "lifestyles" of adults have to do with adolescents? "Since 'lifestyle' has come to define not just doing but their very being, adults have now become dependent on the very psychological experts who wove the web of adolescence in the first place. The classic youth tasks of 'growth,' 'finding oneself,' and preparing for one's life-work have become the American life-work, even into the golden years' of retirement."{8} Thus the concerns we have for our youth are concerns we have for ourselves. The "web of adolescence" touches all of us. As George Barna has stated, "taking the time to have a positive impact [on our youth] is more than just 'worth the effort'; it is a vital responsibility of every adult and a contribution to the future of our own existence."{9} The importance of this cannot be overemphasized as we contemplate the sometimes-puzzling segment of our population called "Generation X."

Who Are These People?

What is a "Generation Xer" or a "baby buster"? What is the "doofus generation" or "the nowhere generation"? These phrases, and many others, may be used to characterize the present generation of youth. Not very encouraging phrases, are they? More frequently than not, adults always have evaluated youth in pessimistic terms. Even the ancient Greeks were frustrated with their youth.

Today the descriptions are especially derogatory. "Words used to describe them have included: whiny, cynical, angry, perplexed, tuned out, timid, searching, vegged out—the latest lost generation."{10} Are these terms accurate, or do they reek of hyperbole? As is true with most generalizations of people, there is a measure of truth to them. But we make a grave mistake if we allow them to preclude us from a more complete consideration of this generation. As George Barna has

written: “You cannot conduct serious research among teenagers these days without concluding that, contrary to popular assumptions, there is substance to these young people.”{11} Having served among and with youth of this generation for many years, I emphatically concur with Mr. Barna. Generation Xers consist of “41 million Americans born between 1965 and 1976 plus the 3 million more in that age group who have immigrated here.”{12} Most of them are children of the “baby boomers,” who comprise over 77 million of the population. This dramatic decrease in the number of births has left them with the “baby buster” label. Their parents have left a legacy that has produced a “birth dearth” and its accompanying social consequences. There are at least six contributors to this population decline.

First, the U.S. became the site for the world’s highest divorce rate. Second, birth control became increasingly prominent with the introduction of the pill. Women began to experience more freedom in planning their lives. Third, a college education was more accessible for more people, especially for women who began to take more influential positions in the work force. Fourth, social change, including women’s liberation, encouraged more women to consider careers other than being homemakers. Fifth, abortion reached a rate of over 1.5 million per year. Sixth, the economy led many women to work because they had to, or because they were the sole breadwinner.{13}

So we can see that this generation has entered a culture enmeshed in dramatic changes, especially regarding the family. These changes have produced certain characteristics, some positive, others negative, that are generally descriptive of contemporary youth.

How Do You Describe a “Buster”?

How do you describe someone who is labeled as a “baby buster”? We may be tempted to answer this question in a despairing

tone, especially if we haven't taken time to see a clear picture of a "buster." Consider the following characteristics:

First, they are serious about life. For example, the quality of life issues they have inherited have challenged them to give consideration to critical decisions both for the present and future. Second, they are stressed out. School, family, peer pressure, sexuality, techno-stress, finances, crime, and even political correctness contribute to their stressful lives. Third, they are self-reliant. One indicator of this concerns religious faith; the baby buster believes he alone can make sense of it. Fourth, they are skeptical, which is often a defense against disappointment. Fifth, they are highly spiritual. This doesn't mean they are focusing on Christianity, but it does mean there is a realization that it is important to take spiritual understanding of some kind into daily life. Sixth, they are survivors. This is not apparent to adults who usually share a different worldview concerning progress and motivation. This generation is not "driven" as much as their predecessors. They are realistic, not idealistic.{14}

Do these characteristics match your perceptions? If not, it may be because this generation has received little public attention. And what attention it has received has leaned in a negative direction because of inaccurate observation. The baby busters' parents, the baby boomers, have been the focus of businesses, education, churches, and other institutions simply because of their massive numbers and their market potential. It's time to rectify this if we have the wisdom to see the impact busters will have in the not-too-distant future.

What About the Church and Busters?

Let's survey a few other attributes of Generation X as we attempt to bring this group into sharper focus. These attributes should be especially important to those of us in the Christian community who desire to understand and relate to

our youth.

Because of “the loneliness and alienation of splintered family attachments” this generation’s strongest desires are acceptance and belonging.{15} Our churches need to become *accepting* places first and *expecting* places second. That is, our youth need to sense that they are not first *expected* to conform or perform. Rather, they are to sense that the church is a place where they can first find *acceptance*. My years of ministry among youth have led me to the conclusion that one of the consistent shortcomings of our churches is the proverbial “generation gap” that stubbornly *expects* youth to dress a certain way, talk a certain way, socialize in a certain way, etc., without *accepting* them in Christ’s way.

Another important attribute of this generation is how they learn. “They determine truth in a different way: not rationally, but relationally.”{16} Closely aligned with this is the observation that “interaction is their primary way of learning.”{17} In order for the church to respond, it may be necessary to do a great deal of “retooling” on the way we teach.

Lastly, busters are seeking purpose and meaning in life. Of course this search culminates in a relationship with the risen Jesus. It should be obvious that ultimately this is the most important contribution the church can offer. If we fail to respond to this, the greatest need of this generation or any other, surely we should repent and seek the Lord’s guidance.

Listening to Busters

Let’s eavesdrop on a conversation taking place on a college campus between a Generation X student and a pastor:

Pastor: We have a special gathering of college students at our church each Sunday. It would be great to see you there.

Student: No, thanks. I’ve been to things like that before.

What’s offered is too superficial. Besides, I don’t trust institutions like churches.

Pastor: Well, I think you’ll find this to be different.

Student: Who’s in charge?

Pastor: Usually it’s me and a group of others from the church.

Student: No students?

Pastor: Well, uh, no, not at the moment.

Student: How can you have a gathering for students and yet the students have nothing to do with what happens?

Pastor: That’s a good question. I haven’t really thought much about it.

Student: By the way, is there a good ethnic and cultural mix in the group?

Pastor: It’s not as good as it could be.

Student: Why is that?

Pastor: I haven’t really thought about that, either.

Student: Cliques. I’ve noticed that a lot of groups like yours are very “cliquish.” Is that true at your church?

Pastor: We’re trying to rid ourselves of that. But do you spend time with friends?

Student: Of course! But I don’t put on a “show of acceptance.”

Pastor: I appreciate that! We certainly don’t want to do that! We sincerely want to share the truth with anyone.

Student: Truth? I don’t think you can be so bold as to say there is any such thing.

Pastor: That’s a good point. I can’t claim truth, but Jesus can.

Student: I’m sure that’s comforting for you, but it’s too narrow for anyone to claim such a thing. We all choose our own paths.

Pastor: Jesus didn’t have such a broad perspective.

Student: That may be, but he could have been wrong, you know. Look, I’m late for class. Maybe we can talk another time, as long as you’ll listen and not preach to me.

Pastor: That sounds good. I’m here often. I’ll look for you. Have a great day!

This fictitious encounter serves to illustrate how baby busters challenge us to find ways of communicating that transcend what may have been the norm just a few years ago.

New Rules

George Barna has gleaned a set of “rules” that define and direct youth of the mid- and late-90s:

Rule #1: Personal relationships count. Institutions don’t.

Rule #2: The process is more important than the product.

Rule #3: Aggressively pursue diversity among people.

Rule #4: Enjoying people and life opportunities is more important than productivity, profitability, or achievement.

Rule #5: Change is good.

Rule #6: The development of character is more crucial than achievement.

Rule #7: You can’t always count on your family to be there for you, but it is your best hope for emotional support.

Rule #8: Each individual must assume responsibility for his or her own world.

Rule #9: Whenever necessary, gain control and use it wisely.

Rule #10: Don't waste time searching for absolutes. There are none.

Rule #11: One person can make a difference in the world but not much.

Rule #12: Life is hard and then we die; but because it's the only life we've got, we may as well endure it, enhance it, and enjoy it as best we can.

Rule #13: Spiritual truth may take many forms.

Rule #14: Express your rage.

Rule #15: Technology is our natural ally.{18}

Now let's consider how parents and other adults might best respond to these rules.

What Do They Hear From Us?

Try to put yourself into the mind and body of a contemporary teenager for a moment. Imagine that you've been asked to share the kinds of things you hear most often from your parents or adult leaders. Your list may sound something like this:

- "Do as I say, not as I do."
- "I'm the adult. I'm right."
- "Because I said so, that's why."
- "You want to be *what*?"
- "This room's a pig sty."
- "Can't you do anything right?"
- "Where did you find him?"
- "You did *what*?"
- "Do you mind if we talk about something else?"

• “I’m kind of busy right now. Could you come back later?”

These statements sound rather overwhelming when taken together, don’t they? And yet too many of our youth hear similar phrases too frequently. As we conclude our series pertaining to the youth of Generation X, let’s focus on how we might better communicate and minister to them. In his book *Ten Mistakes Parents Make With Teenagers*, Jay Kesler has shared wise advice we should take to heart and consistently apply to our lives among youth.{19}

Advice to Parents and Other Adults

• Be a consistent model. We can’t just preach to them and expect them to follow our advice if we don’t live what we say. Consistency is crucial in the eyes of a buster.
• Admit when you are wrong. Just because you are the adult and the one with authority doesn’t mean you can use your position as a “cop out” for mistakes. Youth will understand sincere repentance and will be encouraged to respond in kind.
• Give honest answers to honest questions. Youth like to ask questions. We need to see this as a positive sign and respond honestly.
• Let teenagers develop a personal identity. Too often youth bare the brunt of their parents’ expectations. In particular, parents will sometimes make the mistake of living through their children. Encourage them in their own legitimate endeavors.
• Major on the majors and minor on the minors. In my experience, adults will concentrate on things like appearance to the detriment of character. Our youth need to know that we know what is truly important.
• Communicate approval and acceptance. As we stated earlier in this essay, this generation is under too much stress. Let’s make encouragement our goal, not discouragement.
• When possible, approve their friends. This one can be especially difficult for many of us. Be sure to take time to

go beyond the surface and really know their friends.
• Give teens the right to fail. We can't protect them all their lives. Remind them that they can learn from mistakes.
• Discuss the uncomfortable. If they don't sense they can talk with you, they will seek someone else who may not share your convictions.
• Spend time with your teens. Do the kinds of things they like to do. Give them your concentration. They'll never forget it.

This generation of youth, and all those to come, need parents and adults who demonstrate these qualities. When youth receive this kind of attention, our churches will benefit, our schools will benefit, our families will benefit, and our country will benefit. And, most importantly, I believe the Lord will be pleased.

Notes

1. William Dunn, *The Baby Bust: A Generation Comes of Age* (Ithaca, N.Y.: American Demographics Books, 1993), 112.
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3. Ibid., 19.
4. Steven J. Novak, *The Rights of Youth: American Colleges and Student Revolt, 1798-1815*(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1977), 17-25. Quoted in Schultze, *Dancing in the Dark*, 23.
5. Schultze, 33.
6. Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York:Basic Books, 1977), 243. Quoted in Schultze, *Dancing in the Dark*, 35.
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8. Ibid., 45.
9. George Barna, *Generation Next: What You Need to Know About Today's Youth* (Ventura,Calif.: Regal, 1995), 11.
10. Dunn, x.
11. Barna, 18.
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13. Ibid., 16.
14. Barna, 18-21.
15. Jan Johnson, “Getting the Gospel to the Baby Busters,” *Moody Monthly* (May 1995): 50.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 51.
18. Barna, 108-15.
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Culture and the Bible

This is not a Christian culture. We are living in an environment that challenges us to continually evaluate what it means to live the Christian life. So how do we respond? The answer begins with the Bible. Our view of culture must include biblical insights. In this essay we will strive to investigate selected passages of Scripture pertaining to culture.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

The Golden Calf and the Tabernacle: Judging Culture

Chapters 31-39 of Exodus provide a unique perspective of culture and God’s involvement with it. On one hand the work of man was blessed through the artistry of Bezalel, Oholiab, and other skilled artisans as they cooperated to build the tabernacle (35-39). On the other hand, the work of man in the form of the golden calf was rejected by God (31-34). This

contrast serves to suggest a guideline with which we can begin to judge culture.

Chapter 31:1-11 contains God's initial instructions to Moses concerning the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness. Two important artisans, Bezalel and Oholiab, are recognized by God as being especially gifted for this work. These men were skilled,(1) creative people who were able to contribute significantly to the religious/cultural life of the nation of Israel. But at this point in the narrative the scene changes dramatically.

While Moses was on the mountain with God, the people became impatient and decided to make a god, an idol. This prompted an enraged response from both God and Moses. The end result was tragic: three thousand were slain as a result of their idolatry.

Then the attention of the people was directed toward the building of the tabernacle. Chapters 35-39 contain detailed accounts from God pertaining to the tabernacle, and the subsequent work of the skilled artisans, including Bezalel and Oholiab. The finished product was blessed (39:42-43).

In this brief survey of a portion of Israel's history we have seen two responses to the work of man's hands: one negative, the other positive. The people fashioned a piece of art, an idol; the response was negative on the part of God and Moses. The people fashioned another piece of art, the tabernacle; the response was positive and worthy of the blessing of both God and Moses. Why the difference in judgment? The answer is deceptively simple: the intent of the art was evaluated. And it was not a matter of one being "secular" and the other "sacred." Art, the cultural product, was not the problem. "Just as art can be used in the name of the true God, as shown in the gifts of Bezalel, so it can be used in an idolatrous way, supplanting the place of God and thereby distorting its own nature."(2)

Art is certainly a vital element of culture. As a result, we should take the lessons of Exodus 31-39 to heart. Our evaluation of culture should include an awareness of intent without being overly sensitive to form. If not, we begin to assign evil incorrectly. As Carl F.H. Henry says, “The world is evil only as a fallen world. It is not evil intrinsically.”(3)

These insights have focused on certain observers of cultural objects as seen in art: God, Moses, and the people of Israel. In the first case God and Moses saw the golden calf from one perspective, the people of Israel from another. In the second case all were in agreement as they observed the tabernacle. The people’s perception changed; they agreed with God’s intent and aesthetic judgement. The lesson is that our cultural life is subject to God.

Entering the Fray

How do you react when you’re out of your comfort zone: your surroundings, friends, and family? Do you cringe and disengage yourself? Or do you boldly make the best of the new locality?

The first chapter of Daniel tells of four young men who were transported to a culture other than their own by a conquering nation, Babylonia. Their response to this condition provides us with insights concerning how we should relate to the culture that surrounds us. Daniel, of course, proves to be the central figure among the four. He is the focus of our attention.

Several facets of this chapter should be noted. First, Daniel and his friends were chosen by the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, to serve in his court. They were chosen because of their “intelligence in every branch of wisdom … understanding … discerning knowledge … and ability for serving in the king’s court” (v. 4). Second, they were taught “the literature and language of the Chaldeans” (v. 4). Third,

Daniel “made up his mind” that he would not partake of the Babylonian food and drink (v. 8). Fourth, “God granted Daniel favor and compassion” with his superiors even though he and his friends would not partake of the food (v. 9-16). Fifth, “God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom” (v. 17). Sixth, the king found Daniel and his friends to be “ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm” (v. 20).

This synopsis provides us with several important observations. First, evidently there was no attempt on the part of Daniel and his friends to totally separate themselves from the culture, in particular the educational system of that culture. This was a typical response among the ancient Jews. These young men were capable of interacting with an ungodly culture without being contaminated by it. Evangelicals are often paranoid as they live within what is deemed an unchristian culture. Perhaps a lesson can be learned from Daniel concerning a proper response. Of course such a response should be based on wisdom and discernment. That leads us to our second observation.

Second, even though Daniel and his companions learned from the culture, they did so by practicing discernment. They obviously compared what they learned of Babylonian thought with what they already understood from God’s point of view. The Law of God was something with which they were well acquainted. Edward Young’s comments on v. 17 clarify this: “The knowledge and intelligence which God gave to them … was of a discerning kind, that they might know and possess the ability to accept what was true and to reject what was false in their instruction.”(4) Such perception is greatly needed among evangelicals. A separatist, isolationist mentality creates moral and spiritual vacuums throughout our culture. We should replace those vacuums with ideas that are spawned in the minds of Godly thinkers and doers.

Third, God approved of their condition within the culture and

even gave them what was needed to influence it (v. 17).

Evangelicals may be directed by God to enter a foreign culture that may not share their worldview. Or, they may be directed to enter the culture that surrounds them, which, as with contemporary western culture, can be devoid of the overt influence of a Christian worldview. If so, they should do so with an understanding that the Lord will protect and provide. And He will demonstrate His power through them as the surrounding culture responds.

The World in the New Testament

In and *of*: two simple words that can stimulate a lot of thought when it comes to what the Bible says about culture, or the world. After all, we are to be in the world but not of it. Let's see what the New Testament has to say.

The terms *kosmos* and *aion*, both of which are generally translated "world," are employed numerous times in the New Testament. A survey of *kosmos* will provide important insights. George Eldon Ladd presents usages of the word:(5)

First, the world can refer to "both the entire created order (Jn. 17:5, 24) and the earth in particular (Jn. 11:9; 16:21; 21:25)."(6) This means "there is no trace of the idea that there is anything evil about the world."(7) Second, "kosmos can designate not only the world but also those who inhabit the world: mankind (12:19; 18:20; 7:4; 14:22)."(8) Third, "the most interesting use of kosmos … is found in the sayings where the world – mankind – is the object of God's love and salvation."(9)

But men, in addition to being the objects of God's love, are seen "as sinful, rebellious, and alienated from God, as fallen humanity. The kosmos is characterized by wickedness (7:7), and does not know God (17:25) nor his emissary, Christ (1:10)."(10) "Again and again … the world is presented as

something hostile to God."(11) But Ladd reminds us that "what makes the kosmos evil is not something intrinsic to it, but the fact that it has turned away from its creator and has become enslaved to evil powers."(12)

So what is the Christian's responsibility in this evil, rebellious world? "The disciples' reaction is not to be one of withdrawal from the world, but of living in the world, motivated by the love of God rather than the love of the world."(13) "So his followers are not to find their security and satisfaction on the human level as does the world, but in devotion to the redemptive purpose of God" (17:17, 19).(14)

The apostle Paul related that "`worldliness' consists of worshipping the creature rather than the creator (Rom. 1:25), of finding one's pride and glory on the human and created level rather than in God. The world is sinful only insofar as it exalts itself above God and refuses to humble itself and acknowledge its creative Lord."(15) The world is seen as it should be seen when we first worship its creator.

This summary of *kosmos* contributes several points that can be applied to our survey. First, the world is hostile toward God; this includes the rebellion of mankind. Second, this hostility was not part of the original created order; the world was created good. Third, this world is also the object of God's redemptive love and Christ's sacrifice. Fourth, the world is not to be seen as an end in itself. We are always to view culture in the light of eternity. Fifth, we are to be about the business of transforming the world. "We are not to follow the world's lead but to cut across it and rise above it to a higher calling and style."(16) Or, as Ronald Allen says: "Ours is a world of lechery and war. It is also a world of the good, the beautiful, and the lovely. Eschew lechery; embrace the lovely– and live for the praise of God in the only world we have!"(17)

We are in need of a balance that does not reject beauty, but

at the same time recognizes the ugly. Our theology should entail both. The world needs to see this.

Corinthians and Culture

“You’re a Corinthian!” If you had heard that exclamation in New Testament times you would know that the person who said it was very upset. To call someone a Corinthian was insulting. Even non- Christians recognized that Corinth was one of the most immoral cities in the known world.

Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians contains many indications of this. The believers in Corinth were faced with a culture which resembled ours in several ways. It was diverse ethnically, religiously, and philosophically. It was a center of wealth, literature, and the arts. And it was infamous for its blatant sexual immorality. How would Paul advise believers to respond to life in such a city?

That question can be answered by concentrating on several principles that can be discovered in Paul’s letter. We will highlight only a few of these by focusing on certain terms.

Liberty is a foundational term for Christians entering the culture, but it can be misunderstood easily. This is because some act as if it implies total freedom. But “The believer’s life is one of Christian liberty in grace.”(18) Paul wrote, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything” (6:12, 10:23). It must be remembered, though, that this liberty is given to glorify God. A liberty that condones sin is another form of slavery. Thus, “Whether … you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (10:31). In addition, we must be aware of how our liberty is observed by non-believers. Again Paul wrote, “Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God” (10:32).

Conscience is another term that figures prominently in how we enter the culture. We must be very sensitive to what it means to defile the conscience. There must be a sensitivity to what tempts us. “The believer who cannot visit the world without making it his home has no right to visit at his weak points.”19 As a result, we need to cultivate the discipline that is needed to respond to the ways the Spirit speaks through our conscience.

Yet another term is brother. In particular, we should be aware of becoming a “stumbling block” to the person Paul calls a “weaker brother.” This does not mean that we disregard what has been said about liberty. “A Christian need not allow his liberty to be curtailed by somebody else. But he is obliged to take care that that other person does not fall into sin and if he would hurt that ther person’s conscience he has not fulfilled that obligation.”(20) This requires a special sensitivity to others, which is a hallmark of the Christian life.

On many occasions the Probe staff has experienced the challenge of applying these principles. For example, some of us speak frequently in a club in an area of Dallas, Texas called “Deep Ellum.” The particular club in which we teach includes a bar, concert stage, and other things normally associated with such a place. Some refer to the clientele as “Generation Xers” who are often nonconformists. We can use our liberty to minister in the club, but we must do so with a keen awareness of the principles we have discussed. When we enter that culture, which is so different from what we normally experience, we must do so by applying the wisdom found in God’s Word to the Corinthians.

Encountering the World

How do you get a hearing when you have something to say? In particular, how do you share the truth of God in ungodly surroundings?

Paul's encounter with Athenian culture (Acts 17:16-34) is illustrative of the manner in which we can dialogue with contemporary culture. His interaction exhibits an ability to communicate with a diversity of the population, from those in the marketplace to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. And he exhibits an understanding of the culture, including its literature and art. Paul was relating a model for how we can relate our faith effectively. That is, we must communicate with language and examples that can be understood by our audience.

Verse 16 says that Paul's "spirit was being provoked within him as he was beholding the city full of idols." We should note that the verb translated "provoked" here is the Greek word from which we derive the term paroxysm. Paul was highly irritated. In addition, we should note that the verb is imperfect passive, implying that his agitation was a logical result of his Christian conscience and that it was continuous. The idolatry which permeated Athenian culture stimulated this dramatic response. Application: the idolatry of contemporary culture should bring no less a response from us. Materialism, Individualism, Relativism, and Secularism are examples of ideologies that have become idols in our culture.

Verses 17 and 18 refer to several societal groups: Jews, God-fearing Gentiles, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, as well as the general population, namely "those who happened to be present." Evidently Paul was able to converse with any segment of the population. Application: as alert, thinking, sensitive, concerned, discerning Christians we are challenged to confront our culture in all of its variety and pluralism. It is easier to converse with those who are like-minded, but that is not our only responsibility.

In verse 18 some of the philosophers call Paul an "idle babbler" (i.e., one who makes his living by picking up scraps). Application: we should realize that the Christian worldview, in particular the basic tenets of the gospel, will

often elicit scorn from a culture that is too often foreign to Christian truth. This should not hinder us from sharing the truth.

The narrative of verses 19-31 indicates that Paul knew enough about Athenian culture to converse with it on the highest intellectual level. He was acutely aware of the "points of understanding" between him and his audience. He was also acutely aware of the "points of disagreement" and did not hesitate to stress them. He had enough knowledge of their literary expressions to quote their spokesmen (i.e., their poets), even though this does not necessarily mean Paul had a thorough knowledge of them. And he called them to repentance. Application: we need to "stretch" ourselves more intellectually so that we can duplicate Paul's experience more frequently. The most influential seats in our culture are too often left to those who are devoid of Christian thought. Such a condition is in urgent need of change.

Paul experienced three reactions in Athens (vv. 32-34). First, "some began to sneer" (v. 32). They expressed contempt. Second, some said "We shall hear you again concerning this" (v. 32). Third, "some men joined him and believed" (v. 34). We should not be surprised when God's message is rejected; we should be prepared when people want to hear more; and we can rejoice when the message falls on fertile soil and bears the fruit of a changed life.

Conclusion

We have seen that Scripture is not silent regarding culture. It contains much by way of example and precept, and we have only begun the investigation. There is more to be done. With this expectation in mind, what have we discovered from the Bible at this stage?

First, in some measure God "is responsible for the presence of culture, for he created human beings in such a way that they

are culture-producing beings."(21) Second, God holds us responsible for cultural stewardship. Third, we should not fear the surrounding culture; instead, we should strive to contribute to it through God- given creativity, and transform it through dialogue and proclamation. Fourth, we should practice discernment while living within culture. Fifth, the products of culture should be judged on the basis of intent, not form. Or, to simply further:

> We advance the theory that God's basic attitude toward culture is that which the apostle Paul articulates in I Corinthians 9:19-22. That is, he views human culture primarily as a vehicle to be used by him and his people for Christian purposes, rather than as an enemy to be combatted or shunned.(22)

Let us use the vehicle for the glory of God!

Notes

1. The word "skill," which is frequently employed to describe artisans in these chapters (NASB), is from the Hebrew word *hakam*, meaning "wise." One of its main synonyms is *bin*, basically meaning "discernment". Thus, the skillful person is one who, in the minds of the Israelites, was also "wise" and "discerning" in his artistry.
2. Gene Edward Veith, *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 31.
3. Carl F.H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 420.
4. Edward J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949), 48-49.
5. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974). In particular, see chapters 17 and 29.
6. Ibid., 225.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 226.
10. Ibid.
11. Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Carl F.H. Henry, eds. *Baker's*

Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), s.v. “World, Worldliness,” by Everett F. Harrison.
12. Ladd, 226.
13. Ibid., 227.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 400.
16. R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1985), 209.
17. Ronald B. Allen, *The Majesty of Man: The Dignity of Being Human* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1984), 191.
18. Henry, 420.
19. Ibid., 428.
20. F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 243.

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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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Education Beyond the Classroom

What comes to mind when you think of education? School buildings? Libraries? Textbooks? Curricula? Teachers? Most of us probably associate education with at least one of these things, and surely many more could be added. But does education take place outside of such formal settings? Can curricula be found beyond that of the normal course of study? And can teachers be found who are teaching outside of the classroom?

If we simply consider the amount of time students spend outside of class the answer to these questions would surely be a resounding “Yes!” And if we add the strong probability that many of the hours spent outside the class are consumed by various media, for example, we can see another strong reason to answer in the affirmative. Students are virtually suffocated with ideas when they leave the confines of the school building. For many their education has just begun when the last bell rings each day. In fact, many students use whatever mental energy they have to learn only those things that interest them outside of school.

Educational Sources: Parents

What are some of the sources from which students learn? Let’s begin with parents. After years of ministry among youth I am convinced that students want to learn from their parents. In fact, some are desperate for their parents’ wisdom. Thankfully, I have seen the wonderful effects of respect between parents and children. The children are taught the most important truths of life in the home and those truths are accepted because there is a large measure of respect for the parents. Such an atmosphere is patiently developed through the parents’ concentrated, time-consuming dedication to their children. And I hasten to add that I have observed this in single parent as well as blended families. The result is that children who are raised in such a home will usually compare what they are taught outside the home with what they are taught in the home. And the lessons they learn from parents outweigh other lessons.

Unfortunately, though, this situation is much too rare. Many students, including those raised in Christian homes, are left alone to discover what they can without the guidance of parents. When we realize that “true, meaningful communication between parent and child … occupies only about two minutes each day”(1) there should be reason for concern. That amounts

to slightly more that 12 hours per year. If that is compared to the amount of time spent in school, for example, what the parents teach in that brief time can be overwhelmed with contrary ideas. Students spend much more time learning at school per week than they do with parents per year! This situation should be seriously considered by Christians when evaluating the current educational climate. If Christian parents are not willing to educate their children there may not be much room for complaining about what is learned outside the home. Children have always needed parental guidance and they always will.

One of the most important directives for the ancient Jews applies to parental responsibility for the education of their children. Deuteronomy 6:4-7, the revered Shema, states that "(5) You shall love the LORD your God will all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (6) And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; (7) and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." This strategic passage was reemphasized by the Lord Jesus (Mark 12:28-30). What a student learns outside of class should begin at home.

Educational Sources: What is Heard, Read, and Seen

Where and by whom is a student educated outside the school and home? Actually the question should use both past and present tenses. Since we are concentrating on education outside the classroom, it's important to realize that students are constantly being educated, whether they are aware of it or not. Education does not just apply to some type of formal education; it is very much a part of daily life. The Christian student who is attempting to think God's thoughts after Him is profoundly aware of this. He lives in a world of ideas, and

ideas have consequences. Those ideas are so much a part of life that it’s as if they’re a portion of the air we breathe. Students should be conscious of this, but the same is true for all of us. All of us are students.

So where do we find the teachers? There are at least three other sources: what is heard, what is read, and what is seen.

First, what is heard? One morning as I went to the front yard to get the newspaper I heard a loud, repetitive noise that sounded as if it were a woodpecker hammering on metal. When I located the source I realized to my amazement that indeed it was a woodpecker pecking on a metal light covering near our house. My curiosity was aroused so I pursued an answer to my crazy woodpecker question. It turns out that the bird could have heard his prey inside the covering, but couldn’t distinguish for the moment the difference between wood and metal.

The point of this illustration is that the wondrous nature of nature had provided a teachable moment. God’s creation abounds with such opportunities to observe the variety He has given us. And such moments are part of our daily lives.

But most students hear from more obvious sources: peers, radio, television, movies, music, etc. These sources provide a profusion of ideas. They are teachers. And just as in the formal classroom, the student should be listening carefully to see if the lessons should be considered, discarded, or believed.

The second source focuses on what is read. Some studies indicate that people are not reading any longer. This is curious in light of the growth of enormous bookstores filled with many obscure and weighty titles. Be that as it may, the printed word still has an impact. Most students give some attention to reading. Words still have meaning, in spite of the efforts of those who would use words to say that words are

meaningless. This is especially true for the Christian student. If he doesn't revere the Bible to the point of reading and understanding it as the foundation of his education, he is like a ship without a rudder. The ship is afloat but it's at the mercy of the sea and its currents.

The last of our sources concerns what we see. Since a large percentage of students spend an enormous amount of time viewing television, movies, magazines, and other media, this is a major educational element. Images abound in their lives. This challenges the Christian student to be especially alert to the multitude of ideas that come through her eyes and into her mind.

Educators beyond the classroom are continually vying for the minds of students. Let's do what we can to lead our students through this maze of ideas.

The Curriculum

One of the major elements of a formal education is the curriculum. This curriculum is usually set for students in the primary grades, it contains some flexibility in middle school, more flexibility in high school, and significant flexibility in college. Regardless of the educational level a student attains, his formal education includes variety. The same is true outside the classroom. The education he receives there includes a varied curriculum. And that curriculum can be found in varied places, from conversations with those with whom he works, to his magazine subscriptions, to the movies he rents. Let's consider several ideas that generally are found in the educational curriculum outside the classroom.

Man is the Measure of All Things

First, man is the measure of all things. That is, man is the focus of what is taught. This course is called naturalism. God either doesn't exist, or He may as well not exist because He

has nothing to say to us that has meaning. Thus man is left alone to create meaning, value, morality, religion, government, education, and all other aspects of life. This is probably the most influential way of thinking in this country.

Think, for example, of the television programs you may have seen lately. Now consider whether or not those programs included the presence and guidance of a deity, whether the God of the Bible or not. With rare exceptions, the education one receives through such sources doesn't include any concept of God. Instead, man deals with all problems in his own way, through his own ingenuity. Of course the student usually isn't able to see the long term results of such decisions. As wonderful as the resolution may appear at the end of a program, the ultimate consequences may be disastrous.

Pleasure is the Highest Good

The second portion of the curriculum is based upon the idea that pleasure is the highest good. This course is called hedonism. Perhaps one of the more obvious places to find this is in your local grocery store. The "textbooks" that are found in the magazine rack near the checkout island contain this message in abundance. The articles, advertisements, and pictures emphasize the supremacy of pleasure above virtues such as self-control and sacrifice. Take a moment sometime just to scan the articles and emphases that are highlighted on the front covers of these magazines. For example, the contents of a recent teen-oriented publication for girls include: "Look Hot Tonight," "Stud Shopping Tips," "Love Stories: Secrets of Girls Who Snagged Their Crush," "Hunky Holidays: Meet the 50 Most Beautiful Guys in the World," and "The Ultimate Party Guide." All these titles revolve around the idea that pleasure is the highest good.

True Spirituality Has Many Sources

Third, true spirituality has many sources. This course is called syncretism. Current spiritual emphases have led many

students to believe that it doesn't matter what path you take as long as you are on a path. A trip to a large book store will demonstrate this. For example, you can find many books that contain many ideas about angels, but most of them have nothing to do with biblical doctrine. Or you can find a section dedicated to an assortment of metaphysical teachings, none of which align with biblical teaching. When confronted with such variety the student can be tempted to believe that true spirituality can be found in many places. The Christian student must realize this isn't possible if his allegiance is to Christ as Lord of all.

What Works is Good

The fourth idea is that what works is good. This course is called pragmatism. This is a particularly attractive part of the curriculum for Americans. And this certainly includes the American Christian student. But it's a deceptively attractive course. It may lead to results, but at what cost?

I think of a revealing scene in the disturbing Academy Award-winning movie A Clockwork Orange. A young British hoodlum in a futuristic England is programmed to abhor the violence that he continually practiced with his gang. This abhorrence is brought about by forcing him to watch scenes of horrible violence while his eyes are forced open. When he is brought before an audience to demonstrate the change, his programmer tempts him with several opportunities to do violence while the audience watches. He resists the temptations. After the demonstration a clergyman protests by saying that the "boy has no moral choice." He was manipulated. The programmer scoffs at this claim and states that the result of the experiment is good because "the point is that it works." "It has relieved the ghastly congestion in our prisons."

These first four parts of the curriculum are naively optimistic. They describe either present or future existence positively because of supreme confidence in man and his

abilities. Other portions of the curriculum are not so optimistic. In fact, they can be frighteningly pessimistic at times.

There is No Meaning

A fifth aspect of the curriculum denies meaning. This course is called existentialism, and sometimes nihilism. The “big” questions of life are asked, but no answers are found. Then the response is either total denial of hope, which should logically lead to suicide, or living by simply acting in the face of absurdity. These perspectives can be found, for example, in some contemporary music and movies. The songs of Nine Inch Nails, the moniker for a musician named Trent Reznor, sometimes contain ideas that are indicative of this. The movies of Woody Allen often contain characters and scenes that depict a search for meaning with no conclusions other than individual acts.

There is No Truth

The last portion of the curriculum is closely connected to what we have just discussed. This course can be called postmodernism. We are living in a culture that increasingly denies an encompassing paradigm for truth. This can be demonstrated by considering what Francis Schaeffer meant by the phrase “true truth.” That is, there is no “big picture” to be seen and understood. We only have individuals and communities who have their own “little truths.” And nothing connects those truths to something bigger than themselves and more lasting than what might work at the moment. This can be heard, seen, and read incessantly. There are too few teachers in the culture’s curriculum who are sharing ideas that are connected to or guided by “true truth.” The ultimate outcome of such thinking can be devastating. Chaos can reign. Then a sense of desperation can prompt us to accept the “truth” of whoever may claim to be able to lead us out of the confusion. Germany experienced this under the reign of Hitler. We should

not be so smug as to think it could not happen to us.

Responding to the Curriculum

Man is the measure of all things! Pleasure is the highest good! True spirituality has many sources! What works is good! There is no meaning! There is no truth! These are the ideas that permeate the education a student receives outside the classroom. How can a Christian deal with such a curriculum? Some suggestions are in order.

First, the student should be encouraged to understand that God is the measure of all things, not man. God is an eternal being who is the guide for our lives, both temporal and eternal. Thus we don't first ask what man thinks, we ask what God thinks. So this means that the student must decide on his primary textbook. Is it the Bible, or some other text?

Second, the student should be led to realize that God's will is the highest good, not pleasure. This is very important for the contemporary Christian to understand in light of the sensuous nature of our culture. A student easily can get the idea that God is a "kill joy" because it may seem that everyone is having a good time, but he can't because of God's restrictions. If he can understand that God's ideas lead to true freedom and joy, the student can more readily deal with this part of the curriculum.

Third, the student should be challenged to realize that true spirituality is found only through a relationship with the risen Jesus. Jesus lives in us through the indwelling of His Spirit. And this indwelling is only true for the reborn Christian. Yes, there are many spiritual concepts alive in this culture. Many people are searching for something that will give meaning beyond man's ideas. There is a spiritual hunger. But if we try to relieve that hunger through ideas that come from man's perceptions of spirituality, we are back where we started: man is the measure of all things.

Fourth, the student should be taught that what works is not always good. Satan can make evil work for a time, but he is the father of lies, and lies lead to spiritual and moral decay.

Fifth, the student should be led to believe that life has meaning. The Christian can see the world around him with the eye of hope because God is in control. As chaotic as things may appear, there is a purpose, there is a plan. People have meaning, past events have meaning, present events have meaning, and future events will have meaning. Christ has died to give us salvation, and He has risen from the dead to give us hope for the present and the future. A student whose mind is infused with meaning will be able to handle the despair around him, and he can share his secure hope in the midst of such despair.

Sixth, the student should be guided to think in terms of the big picture. Imagine a puzzle with thousands of pieces. Now think of attempting to assemble the puzzle without having seen the picture on the box top. That would surely be a frustrating experience. You would have individual pieces but no guide to fit the pieces together. Many attempt to live this way. But the Christian student has the box top. He can begin to put the puzzle of life together with God’s picture in mind.

So, does education take place beyond the classroom? Certainly! May God guide us to help students learn the proper lessons.

Notes

1. J. Kerby Anderson, *Signs of Warning, Signs of Hope* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), p. 136.

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Marriage Reminders

Numerous books, essays, magazine articles, radio and television commentaries, and sermons have been dedicated to the subject of Christian marriage. In light of the tragic divorce rate and the continuing struggles that are experienced by many couples, this is not surprising. Marriage is a subject that has immediate application to a large portion of the population. The comments that are offered in this essay are not necessarily intended to provide new perspectives. They are intended to serve as reminders to all of us, no matter what our marital state may be. After all, few of us can stay "on track" at all times. We sometimes need a gentle or not-so-gentle nudge to return to what God intends for His creation: marriage.

Foundational Truths About Marriage

The first reminder focuses on what we will call "foundational truths." These truths are found in two passages in the first two chapters of Genesis.

The first passage is Genesis 1:26-28. It states that both the man and woman were created in God's image. Among many results of such a statement, this affirms the dignity of both sexes among all mankind. Human beings are the zenith of creation; men and women are blessed uniquely by God.

The second passage is Genesis 2:18-25 which asserts several truths that are applicable to the marriage union. First, the woman was fashioned from the fiber of the man, and she was created as an equal but opposite helper for him. Upon observing the newly created woman, the man reacted in a way that indicates he recognized her very special significance. We

can only imagine his joy and excitement when he first caught a glimpse of her. Second, God affirms the marital union by commanding that couples are to leave their parents. The priorities are changed; a new family is to be formed. Third, the couple is to cleave together and become one flesh, an affirmation of the sexual union in marriage.

But it is to be much more than simply a sexual union; it is to be a holistic union, a union of the total person, both material and immaterial, a “oneness.”

These two passages from Genesis should spur us to better appreciate how highly God values marriage and how we should as well. The fact that we are made in God’s image means we should “reverence” and “respect” each other. If it is true that my spouse is made in God’s image, that should prompt me to treat her with great respect and honor. She is not an accidental being; she is specially related to the Creator of the universe. When I treat her with reverence I am paying homage to God.

Second, God’s foundational instructions should lead us to live with our spouses with a sense of commitment that transcends any other earthly relationship. If we are to leave our parents, if we are to cleave to our spouses, and if we are to be one flesh, then we must remember that such concepts are unique. Thus I am giving myself to the most important person in my life. I don’t think of returning to my parents physically or emotionally; I don’t cleave to anyone else the way I cleave to my wife; I am not one flesh with anyone other than her. And the beauty of all this is that God has related these commands for our good. They constitute the first steps to marital fulfillment.

Biblical Symbiosis

Our second marriage reminder centers on what we call “biblical symbiosis.” An illustration of symbiosis from the animal

kingdom may be helpful here. There is, for example, a particular species of fish that spends its life in close proximity to the mouth of a shark. In fact, it eats from the shark's teeth. (This keeps the shark from making too many visits to the dentist.) This is an illustration of symbiosis, or "two different organisms living in close association or union, especially where such an arrangement is advantageous to both." On the other hand, most of us have had to deal with the irritating results of a mosquito's attack. The mosquito is an example of parasitism, "a relationship in which one organism lives off another and derives sustenance and protection from it without making compensation."

Which of these two illustrations should serve as an example of Christian marriage? Surely most of us would reply that symbiosis, not parasitism, should be the correct model. Unfortunately, this model is not always lived out among spouses. The results of a parasitic relationship are devastating, to which many can testify.

The Bible, of course, provides insights that remind us of how the proper model for marriage should be constructed. First, Galatians 3:28 asserts that there is "neither male nor female" and all are "one in Christ Jesus." And 1 Peter 3:7 states that the husband should treat his wife as "a fellow-heir of the grace of life." Thus Christian couples should remember that they are spiritual equals with sexual differences.

Second, we should follow Christ's model. The Lord put Himself in subjection to His earthly parents (Luke 2:51-52) as well as the heavenly Father. He adapted Himself to earthly orders. Even though He was total deity, He humbled Himself for our benefit (Phil. 2:1- 11). In addition, 1 Corinthians 11:3 indicates that Christ modeled the concept of "necessary headship" in that "God is the head of Christ."

Third, we need to be reminded that all things are subjected to Christ (Eph. 1:22-23). This includes His body, the church, of

which the Christian couple is a part. Thus a proper view of authority and subjection begins with our allegiance to Christ, the head of the church.

Several thoughts come to mind in regard to these Biblical perspectives, and all of them revolve around the attitude and character of Christ Himself.

Wouldn’t it be odd to think that Christ views us based upon whether we are male or female? He didn’t die for males before females, or vice-versa. In our relationship to Him there is no sexual distinction. The Christian couple should take this to heart; there is not to be a “lording over” each other; there is to be no spiritual pride.

It is clear that both spouses are to remember that subjection is the responsibility of all Christians. The Lord has demonstrated this most perfectly. The couple begins with this foundation; then they discover how to combine subjection with a proper view of authority within the family, a concept we will discuss in the next portion of this essay.

Let’s return to our definition of symbiosis: “Two different organisms living in close association or union, especially where such an arrangement is advantageous to both.” Christian marriage should be composed of two different people in a loving union that is based upon subjection first to Christ and then one another. And surely such an arrangement will prove to be advantageous to both.

Responsibilities

What’s a wife to do? What’s a husband to do? Does the Bible provide specific guidelines for each? The answer is a resounding, “Yes!” Our continuing review of “Marriage Reminders” brings us to the third reminder, which we will simply call “responsibilities.”

The wife’s responsibility is most succinctly stated in

Ephesians 5:22-24. The term “subjection” is the summary word for her. She is to submit to her husband. Before we continue, though, it is important to note that the verb for subjection is found in verse 21; then it is implied in verse 22. And verse 21 states that all Christians are to “be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.” As we stressed earlier, subjection applies to all of us. But verse 22 does stress that the wife is to have a particular attitude toward her husband.

There is another very important element of this verse that is not stressed often enough. We cannot honestly approach this verse without emphasizing the latter part of it: “as to the Lord.” The wife’s subjection is first of all to the Lord, then to her husband, because this is the Lord’s pragmatic plan for marriage. She is to respect the headship of her husband because this is God’s idea, not her husband’s. This is not demeaning. It is Godly. Her self-esteem is not based upon her husband; it is based upon her place in the sight of God. There is an important analogy here. She is to recognize that her husband is said to be her head “as Christ also is the head of the church” (verse 23). The wife should recognize this analogy and realize that her husband has been compared to the compassionate and perfect Christ. He has a grave responsibility, and she needs to encourage him by following God’s design for her.

Compared to the wife’s responsibility, the husband has a sobering and challenging one. His role is also outlined in Ephesians, verses 5:25-33. The most important aspect of this role can be found in the Greek term “agape” (love), which is used to describe how a husband is to respond to his wife. It is important to note that the word is used in the imperative mood. Thus it is a strong command which involves action, not just “feeling.” This love is demonstrated, just as God demonstrated His love by giving His son (John 3:16). Also, a humbling analogy is given. The husband is to “agape” his wife as Christ “loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” This

entails action and sacrifice. The husband is to show his wife that he loves her because she is worth sacrificing himself on her behalf. What an awesome responsibility—a responsibility that should be humbling for those husbands who would use their authority as head of the home to treat their wives in a tyrannical manner. This does not imply that the husband's authority is weakened. The husband is still in a position of headship, but that headship should be used to treat his wife as a "fellow-heir of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). As with the wife's role, the husband's role demonstrates God's pragmatic plan for marital life.

So the responsibilities are clear: the wife is to submit "as to the Lord;" the husband is to love as Christ loved.

Communication

Most married couples are in need of another very important reminder. That is, their relationship requires communication. The joy of marriage stems from a commitment that is communicated. This vital principle can be related in many ways. We will share three of them.

First, the couple must learn to talk with one another. Perhaps that sounds simple, but don't let its simplicity fool you. Actually too many couples have experienced and are experiencing a deteriorating relationship because they have lost their ability to relate verbally. In my many years of experience in the ministry it has become obvious that one of the major flaws in Christian marriages is a lack of conversation involving anything beyond the absolute necessities. Too many couples don't really know each other. They are often total strangers.

Each spouse has a need to express the deepest longings of the heart and soul with his or her lifetime companion. Sometimes this requires a great deal of effort and courage, especially for a partner who is not accustomed to being vulnerable. But

the effort required offers wonderful results. Sharing words that contain a spouse's thoughts, ideas, complaints, doubts, fears, expectations, plans, dreams, joys, and even frustrations can lead to a deepening bond that in turn leads to a stronger marriage.

This type of communication requires concentration. It should be done without interference. Each spouse should give undivided attention to the other. If one is talking, the other must listen. That's the only way this form of communication can be successful.

Second, couples need to be reminded to communicate better sexually. God has given us the freedom to experience the joy of expressing marital commitment by "becoming one flesh." This rich phrase is certainly meant to refer to sex in marriage, but we cannot forget that the type of sex that we are designed to experience involves more than just a physical act. It also involves the most intimate form of human communication. The Song of Solomon, for example, is full of expressions that indicate the beauty of communication that include, but also transcend the physical. Proverbs 5:15-19 contains many expressions of intimacy, such as forms of the words "rejoice," "satisfaction," and "exhilaration" which emphasize both the physical and non-physical aspects of sexual intimacy. 1

Thessalonians 4:4 states that a spouse is "to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor," words that entail something beyond the physical. It would be difficult, for example, for a man to honor his wife sexually without communicating love, appreciation, patience, compassion, and many other attitudes that are much-needed by his spouse.

Third, most marriages can benefit from communication that is unspoken and nonsexual. Meaningful glances, unexpected flowers, cards sent for no reason other than as an expression of love, a gentle touch; these are the ways of communicating that can sometimes mean the most. They are the types of things

that are stored in a couple's memory bank to be withdrawn again and again.

It is helpful to note that nonverbal communication often leads to or reinforces verbal and sexual communication. A certain glance can be very romantic to some; an unexpected flower can remind one of a very special day; a card can spur significant verbal communication.

The couple that learns to communicate verbally, sexually, and nonverbally will experience the joy of marriage.

Little Things Mean a Lot

"Little things mean a lot" is a maxim with a lot of meaning for marriage. Most husbands and wives can benefit from being reminded of this. The following lists include some of those "little things." They are offered with the hope that they will encourage you to consider which of them could be helpful in your marriage. Wives, in particular, are usually deeply touched and encouraged through such things. And husbands can certainly be positively affected when their wives take the time to do the little things that mean so much.

We begin with suggestions for wives.

- *Pray for your husband daily.*
- *Show him you love him unconditionally.*
- *Tell him you think he's the greatest.*
- *Show him you believe in him.*
- *Don't talk negatively to him or about him.*
- *Tell him daily that you love him.*
- *Give him adoring looks.*
- *Show him that you enjoy being with him.*
- *Listen to him when he talks with you.*
- *Hug him often.*
- *Kiss him tenderly and romantically at times.*
- *Show him that you enjoy the thought of sex.*

- *Show him you enjoy meeting his sexual needs.*
- *Take the sexual initiative at times.*
- *Express interest in his interests.*
- *Fix his favorite meal at an unexpected time.*
- *Demonstrate your dedication to him in public.*
- *Do things for him he doesn't expect.*
- *Show others you are proud to be his wife.*
- *Rub his back, legs, and feet.*
- *Stress his strengths, not his weaknesses.*
- *Don't try to mold him into someone else.*
- *Revel in his joys; share his disappointments.*
- *Show him your favorite times are with him.*
- *Show him you respect him more than anyone.*
- *Don't give him reason to doubt your love.*
- *Leave "I love you" notes in unexpected places.*
- *Give him your undivided attention often.*
- *Tell him he is your "greatest claim to fame."*
- *Let him hear you thank God for him.*

Now here are suggestions for husbands.

- *Say "I love you" several times a day.*
- *Tell her she is beautiful often.*
- *Kiss her several times a day.*
- *Hug her several times a day.*
- *Put your arm around her often.*
- *Hold her hand while walking.*
- *Come up behind her and hug her.*
- *Always sit by her when possible.*
- *Rub her feet occasionally.*
- *Give her a massage occasionally.*
- *Always open doors for her.*
- *Always help her with chairs, etc.*
- *Ask her opinion when making decisions.*
- *Show interest in what she does.*
- *Take her flowers unexpectedly.*

- *Plan a surprise night out.*
- *Ask if there are things you can do for her.*
- *Communicate with her sexually.*
- *Show affection in public places.*
- *Serve her breakfast in bed.*
- *Train yourself to think of her first.*
- *Show her you are proud to be her husband.*
- *Train yourself to be romantic.*
- *Write a love note on the bathroom mirror.*
- *Call during the day to say "I love you."*
- *Always call and tell her if you will be late.*
- *Let her catch you staring lovingly at her.*
- *Praise her in front of others.*
- *Tell her she is your "greatest claim to fame."*
- *Let her hear you thank God for her.*

Of course these lists are not exhaustive. The number of things that can be done to build up a marriage may be limitless. When our imaginations are active, we can discover exciting and uplifting ways to experience the wonder of marriage.

In summary, we have seen that marriage needs to be built on God's foundational truths, that marriage should be a relationship that blesses each partner, that specific responsibilities are given to the wife and husband, that communication is one of the important building blocks of a strong marriage, and lastly we have been reminded that "little things mean a lot."

May God bless us as we strive to put these reminders into practice.

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Why Care about Theology?

What is your response when you hear the word *theology*? Some people tend to cringe and think that such a word is of use only to the seminary student or, at the most, their pastor. Have you given much thought to how this word may apply to your life? If so, please continue your pursuit by thinking along with us. If not, we hope to encourage you to begin to take theology a little more seriously than you may have before.

Just what is theology? Literally, it is derived from a combination of two Greek terms meaning "a word about God." Eventually it was employed to refer not only to a study of the nature and attributes of God, but to the whole range of Christian doctrine. Augustus H. Strong, a theologian of the early twentieth century, offered a definition that is even broader. He wrote, "Theology is the science of God and of the relations between God and the universe."(1) So theology is concerned with a very wide range of subjects, such as the Bible, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, man, salvation, angels, the church, and the end times. Or, we can even say our theology pertains to all of life.

Sound theology is very important in the life of a Christian. History shows us this has always been true. From heresies in the very early church, through the upheaval of the Reformation, to the "Jesus Seminar" of more recent times, Christians have been challenged to give serious attention to matters of theology. And there are important reasons for each of us to devote increased attention to it at this time in history. Historic orthodox theology is currently being questioned, if not attacked, from both outside and inside our churches and institutions. Several examples will demonstrate this.

Contemporary Illustrations

A few years ago an infamous movie entitled *The Last Temptation of Christ* drew national and international attention because of its blasphemous caricature of Christ. The non-orthodox reports of the Jesus Seminar, a gathering of various scholars, have received the attention of both theological journals and popular magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. The conjectures of New Age advocates such as Shirley MacLaine include heretical views of God, Christ, and other facets of theology. Process theologians, who teach at many seminaries, teach a doctrine of God that includes the idea that "the world can be thought of as the body of God," and the notion of a changing God who is as dependent on the world as the world is on Him.(2) Recent books from within evangelical circles include titles such as *The Openness of God*, which "asserts that such classical doctrines as God's immutability, impassibility and foreknowledge demand reconsideration."(3) More orthodox evangelical writers have written such books as *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology*? Obviously, the title indicates that the author is concerned about what he believes is a collapse of theology.(4) *The Body*, a book by Charles Colson, decries what Colson sees as a drift to a consumer-oriented church that, among other things, isn't concerned about matters of theological truth(5).

Such illustrations serve to alert us to the need for more theological reflection, not less. These are challenging times for theology!

Who Are the Theologians?

Do you know anyone who can be called a theologian? You probably immediately begin to think of a seminary professor or an erudite pastor you may know. But is it possible *you* can be called a theologian? If someone were to ask you what you believe about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation,

and many other doctrines, chances are you would answer their questions. Thus you are stating your theology; you are, at some level, a theologian. There are certainly “professional” theologians who spend their lives thinking about and teaching theology, but theology is not just for schools and seminaries; it is for life. It is for you and every other member of Christ’s body, the church.

In the fairly recent past in this country theology was spoken of in both the academy and the church. David Wells, a contemporary professional theologian who is concerned about recapturing such unity, has written that at one time theology encompassed three essential elements: “(1) a confessional element, (2) reflection on this confession, and (3) the cultivation of a set of virtues that are grounded in the first two elements.”(6) “Confession, in this understanding, is what the Church believes. It is what crystallizes into doctrine.” Thus we are to confess our theology based on the inspired Word of God, the Bible. Then we are to wrestle intellectually with what it means to hold such theology in the present world. Finally, we are to wisely apply the truth found in the first two steps.(8) It appears that too often such steps are lacking among all but a few contemporary Christians.

For more than two years my wife and I visited worship services at many churches in the Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas metroplex, which some refer to as a major part of the “Bible belt.” The churches represent a wide spectrum of denominational affiliations, and some are non-denominational. Our visits left us with many impressions, some of which are very positive. But one of several concerns is that too many of these churches emphasized appeasement rather than proclamation. That is, there was concern for relating to the “seeker” at the expense of teaching the believer; or there was an emphasis on “how to” sermons that contained little doctrinal substance; or there was stress on what is called contemporary Christian music coupled with lyrics that were often void of meaning; or there

were statements of trite cliches that can do little, if anything, to lead the church to maturity. In other words, much was done to appease the “wants” of the people and little was done that would give the impression that theology is important in these churches.

On the other hand, those few churches that were the exceptions to such emphases boldly stated theological truth and genuinely worshipped God in the process. Their praise had meaning; their prayers were directed to the holy and sovereign God; their sermons contained truth that encouraged the church toward maturity; and even though individual “wants” were not stressed, true needs were met because theology for all of life had been proclaimed.

Which of these accounts is descriptive of your church? Does your church summon you to theological maturity? Or are you caught in a web of appeasement? The writer of Hebrews implored his readers to “press on to maturity” (Heb. 6:1). May God help us do the same!

Theology in the World

A 1994 *U.S.News & World Report* poll of religious beliefs in the U.S. indicates that “about 95 percent of Americans say they believe in God or a universal spirit, and about 60 percent say they attend religious services regularly.”(9) In addition, “more than 80 percent, including 71 percent of college graduates, believe the Bible is the inspired word of God.”(10) And “68 percent of Americans are members of a church or synagogue.”(11) But do such statistics mean that sound theology plays a significant part in our lives? For example, could it be “that the surprising growth of church membership rolls in recent decades may signify the ascendancy of shallower, less demanding forms of religion with wider appeal?”(12) We believe the answer to this question is, “Yes!” It appears that too many Christians are unwilling to face the demands of theological thinking, and shallowness is the

result. Good theology requires contemplation, study, and even debate. It is demanding, and it is certainly not shallow.

Since we are living in a culture that believes “anything goes,” distinctive statements concerning our theology are increasingly necessary. Most people are willing to accept you as a Christian if your beliefs (i.e., your theology) are not narrow. If you are willing, for example, to state that Christianity is one of many legitimate paths to salvation, you will be accepted. But if you state that the gospel is the only path to salvation, you may be labeled as a narrow-minded bigot. Although a large majority of the people in this country claim to be religious, a large portion of that majority is still thinking within a relativistic worldview that attempts to reject absolutes. The exclusive claims of Christianity don’t fit within such a worldview.

This was brought out clearly for me during an open forum in the lobby of a dormitory on a large state university campus. For more than two hours one of my colleagues and I attempted to answer questions concerning Christianity from approximately a hundred college students. Their questions led us in many directions. We discussed social, political, apologetic, and many other issues. But the subject that disturbed them most was salvation through Jesus Christ. When I declared that Jesus was the only way to God, many of the students expressed their strong disagreement and even anger. One student was indignant because he realized that my statement concerning Christ logically meant that his belief in an American Indian deity was wrong. Even some Christian students were uncomfortable with my assertion. They had an uneasiness about it because it seemed to be too intolerant. Thus I had to quickly remind them that Christ himself said He is the only way to God. I was not making a claim about Christ; I was simply telling them what He said about himself.

Those Christian students are indicative of the need for more demanding thought concerning theology. To claim to be a

Christian and at the same time be immersed in the shallow pond of theological tolerance is antithetical. Perhaps the non-Christian students have an excuse; they don't know better. But the Christian students should know better; they need training in theology. And the same is true for all of us.

An Example of the Need

People continue to seek Jesus. But which Jesus? Is it the Jesus who was born of a virgin, who performed awesome miracles, who claimed to be God, who died on a cross for our sins, who rose from the dead, who ascended into heaven, who said He would return? Or is it the Jesus who died as a disillusioned revolutionary peasant? Or is it the Jesus who was a great religious teacher on a par with Buddha?

All these questions are very old, but at the same time they are very contemporary. And they indicate that theology, in this case the theology of Christ, continues to be important. As Christians, we are still challenged to think theologically. Long-held, foundational, orthodox theology is being contested, not just within academia, but in more public venues. Let's consider a prominent example.

In 1991 a book was published by the title of *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*.(13) John Dominic Crossan, the author, then published a second book in 1994 entitled, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*.(14) Then the third book in his trilogy about Jesus, *The Essential Jesus: Original Sayings and Earliest Images*,(15) was also published in 1994. Such titles are filled with indications that Crossan is anything but a believer in an orthodox doctrine of Christ. Jesus may have been a Mediterranean Jewish peasant, but was He something much more? The second title indicates that the author believes there is need for a new biography of Jesus, so he has provided it. And the third title boldly asserts that the "original sayings" of Jesus have been isolated from all other sayings so that we can discover the "essential" Jesus.

I have brought Crossan and his books to our attention because he is a prominent member of what is called the Jesus Seminar. This much-publicized seminar is composed of scholars who "used to meet regularly to discuss and vote on the originality of Jesus' sayings (198592) and are now evaluating his actions and deeds in a similar manner."(16)

Crossan's view of Jesus is exposed in a meandering passage that follows his perspective of the surrounding Roman Empire in which Jesus lived. He writes:

> *Jesus lived, against the systemic injustice and structural evil of that situation, an alternative open to all who would accept it: a life of open healing and shared eating, of radical itinerancy, programmatic homelessness, and fundamental egalitarianism, of human contact with discrimination, and of divine contact without hierarchy. He also died for that alternative. That is my understanding of what Jesus' words and deeds were all about.(17)*

Please note that Crossan has painted a picture of Jesus as a revolutionary whose primary concern was with things of this life. In fact his last phrase, "divine contact without hierarchy" (a confusing idea), is as close as he comes to stating that Jesus was anything more than a political radical. There is no mention of Jesus as the sacrificial Savior who takes away sin and gives eternal life.

In light of the fact that such perspectives are in vogue, and in light of the fact that they are taught to future pastors and professors, can we afford to leave theology in the back rooms of our minds?

Practical Theology

A recent book asserts that God "learns something from what transpires" in this world. The same text also asserts that "God comes to know events as they take place," and that we

should see God “as receptive to new experiences and as flexible in the way he works toward his objectives in the world.”(18)

What is your reaction to such statements? If you have a reaction at all, you are to be commended. You are thinking theologically. As was true with me, your doctrine of God may have been challenged, and you may want to ask the author various questions. Those questions would probably have a lot to do with how you perceive God in your daily life. For example, you may want to ask if God is somehow dependent on you. If so, in what way?

Such thoughts demonstrate that theology is practical. If we stop a few minutes and concentrate, it is not difficult to see that our theology affects us, whether we are conscious of it or not. Let’s consider a few questions that can lead us to see how this is true.

1. If God used His awesome imagination to create the universe out of nothing, what is implied when the Bible states that humans are made in His image?
    We can also use our God-given imaginations to create, not out of nothing, but out of what God supplied.

2. Is the Holy Spirit a person or a thing?
    The Holy Spirit is a person within the godhead, the triunity. As a person, He interacts with us daily, and we can be filled with “Him,” not “it.”

3. If I accept Christ’s sacrificial death for me, can my

salvation be taken away?

No! “You have been saved” (Eph. 2:8) for eternity. You are secure as a member of God’s family.

4. Was Jesus literally resurrected from the dead?

Yes! He has conquered death for us. “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54).

5. What is man’s nature?

Man is made in God’s image. But his image has been marred; thus our very nature inclines us to sin. Yet, though our genes, society, and other factors may influence us to sin, God holds us personally responsible to accept or reject His gracious offer of sin’s remedy in Christ.

6. Do angels really exist?

Yes! Evil angels are in league with Satan and are actively opposed to God’s purposes. Good angels are doing the bidding of God in the spiritual realm. Both evil and good angels can serve to remind us that there is both a physical and a spiritual dimension.

7. Is the church a building?

No! The church is the redeemed people of God, of all the ages, living and dead; the church is also called the “body of Christ.” As such it is a living, dynamic carrier of the grace and power of God.

8. Is Jesus returning in power and authority for His church? Yes! The truth of this brings security and hope in the midst of a troubled world.

In a cursory way these questions have touched the major categories of theology. It is our hope that you will study such categories seriously. What you believe about them is important to you and those who follow after you. Theology matters!

Notes

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3. Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), cover notes.
4. David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth*: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology? (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993).
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7. Ibid., 99-100.
8. Ibid.
9. Jeffery L. Sheler, "Spiritual America," *U.S.News & World Report* (4 April 1994), 50.
10. Ibid.
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13. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco:

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16. Ibid., 22.
17. Ibid., 12.
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Television – A Christian Response

Years ago I witnessed something that has been written indelibly in my memory. The occasion was a week-long summer conference for high school students on the campus of a major university. I was serving as the leader of one of the groups at this conference. In fact, I was given the elite students. They were described as the "Advanced School" because they had attended the conference previously, and they had leadership positions on their respective campuses.

Each of our teaching sessions, which were usually focused on matters of worldviews, theology, cultural criticism, and evangelism, began with music. Before one memorable session the music leader began to play the theme music from various television shows of the past. To my great surprise the students began to sing the lyrics to each of the tunes with great gusto. They were able to respond to each theme without hesitation; the songs were ingrained in their memories. Obviously they had heard the themes and watched the programs

numerous times during their relatively young lives. Whether it was “Gilligan’s Island,” “The Beverly Hillbillies,” “Green Acres,” “Sesame Street,” or a host of others, they knew all of them. Whereas many of these bright students could not relate a good grasp of biblical content, they had no problem recalling the content of frivolous television programs that were not even produced during their generation.

The Rise and Influence of TV

In a short period of time television has cemented itself in our cultural consciousness. As you read the following titles of television programs certain memories will probably come to mind: “The Milton Berle Show,” “I Love Lucy,” “The Steve Allen Show,” “The $64,000 Question,” “The Millionaire,” “Leave It To Beaver,” “Gunsmoke,” “The Andy Griffith Show,” “Candid Camera,” “As the World Turns,” “The Twilight Zone,” “Captain Kangaroo,” “Dallas,” “Happy Days,” “Let’s Make a Deal,” “The Tonight Show,” “Sesame Street,” “M*A*S*H*,” “All in the Family,” “The Cosby Show,” “Monday Night Football.”

Perhaps you remember a particular episode, a certain phrase, an indelible scene, a unique character, or, as with my high school friends, the title tune. These television programs, and a litany of others, have permeated our lives. It is difficult, if not impossible, to find a more pervasive, influential conduit of ideas and images than television. For a large segment of the population “television has so refashioned and reshaped our lives that it is hard to imagine what life was like before it.”(1)

This powerful medium began to gather the attention of the population soon after World War II. “By 1948, the number of stations in the United States had reached 48, the cities served 23, and sales of TV sets had passed sales of radios.”(2) But it was not until “1952 . . . that TV as we know it first began to flow to all sections of the United States.”(3) Interest was so intense that “by 1955 about two-

thirds of the nation's households had a set; by the end of the 1950s there was hardly a home in the nation without one."(4) And by 1961 "there were more homes in the United States with TV than with indoor plumbing."(5) Such statistics have continued to increase to the point where "99 percent of all households possess at least one TV, and most have two or more."(6)

So the middle- to late-twentieth century has included the development of one of the most dramatic and powerful methods of communication in recorded history.

Can TV Be Redeemed?

But as with all media, the Christian should weigh carefully the use and abuse of TV. Some are quick to call it an "idiot box" while continuing to watch it endlessly. Others, borrowing from a famous poem by T.S. Eliot, may disparagingly refer to TV as a "wasteland." Still others, as with certain evangelists, may claim that TV is the most powerful tool yet devised for the spreading of the gospel.(7)

But whether your perception of TV is negative or positive, the Christian must understand that the medium is here to stay, and it will continue to have a significant influence on all of us, whether we like it or not. And whether we are discussing TV or any other media, it is the Christian's responsibility "to maintain an informed, critical approach to all media while joyfully determining how best to use every medium for the glory of God."(8)

There is no doubt this is a challenging endeavor, because at first glance it may be difficult to picture ways in which TV can be used legitimately for God's glory. Perhaps many of us tend to have what may be called the "Michal Syndrome." Michal, King David's wife, rebuked David for dancing before the ark of God. She had concluded that the "medium" of dancing in this manner was shameful. But Scripture obviously demonstrates that

she was the one to be rebuked in that she “had no child to the day of her death” (2 Samuel 6:12 23). We will do well to heed at least one of the lessons of this story and be cautious if we are tempted to reject TV outright as a potentially unredeemable avenue of expression.

This is an important thought in light of the fact that many highly esteemed thinkers have espoused pessimistic analyses of TV. For example, Malcolm Muggeridge, the great English sage, wrote: “Not only can the camera lie, it always lies.”(9) In fairness we must add that Muggeridge added balance in his critique and even agreed to be interviewed on William Buckley’s “Firing Line,” but his skepticism continues to be well-chronicled. Jacques Ellul has written in the same vein. Neil Postman, another respected critic, wrote an oft-quoted book entitled *Amusing Ourselves To Death* in 1985. In his volume Postman argues that Aldous Huxley’s belief that “what we love will ruin us” is a perfect description of TV.(10) More recently Kenneth Myers, an insightful cultural critic, also has concluded that it is highly doubtful that the medium can be redeemed(11) (that is, brought under the Lordship of Christ and conformed to His teachings). Such gloomy perspectives continue to be expressed by many of those who study media.

On the other hand, such viewpoints have been questioned, if not rejected, by many other well-qualified critics. Their analyses of TV usually are based upon a more optimistic view of technology. Clifford Christians, a communications scholar, writes: “I defend television. Contrary to Postman and Ellul, I do not consider it the enemy of modern society, but a gift of God that must be transformed in harmony with the redeemed mind.”(12) Quentin Schultze, another communications scholar, believes that many Christian intellectuals “are comfortable with printed words and deeply suspicious of images, especially mass-consumed images.”(13) David Marc, an American Civilization professor, offers a provocative outlook by relating that the “distinction between taking television on

one’s own terms and taking it the way it presents itself is of critical importance. It is the difference between activity and passivity. It is what saves TV from becoming the homogenizing, monolithic, authoritarian tool that the doomsday critics claim it is.”(14) We must view TV with an active mind that responds with a Christian worldview. We are responsible for what TV communicates to us.

How Should We Respond to TV?

So it is obvious there are great disparities of opinion among those who think about TV more than most of us. How can we humbly approach the subject while considering both positions? I propose that we reflect on an answer to this question by giving attention to several facets of a response.

TV and Communication

First, we should remember that as with many contemporary forms of communication and entertainment, the Bible does not include explicit insights about TV. We are left to investigate applicable passages and gather perspectives based upon our study. Let’s consider some of those passages and see if we can discover needed insights.

Neil Postman relates an intriguing thought regarding the second of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth” (Exod. 20:4, NASB). Postman’s response to this verse is that “it is a strange injunction to include as part of an ethical system unless its author assumed a connection between forms of human communication and the quality of a culture.”(15) Postman’s statement strongly suggests that the ways in which we communicate significantly influence our lives. He continues by stating that “iconography thus became blasphemy so that a new kind of God could enter a culture.”(16)

There is much food for thought in such statements. First, it is true that the "author," in this case God via the personality of Moses, was emphasizing the importance of "forms of communication." But it is a misapplication of the text to conclude anything more than that it is not permissible for man to form visual images of God. Second, it is also true that "forms of communication" are connected to the "quality of a culture." But again it is a mis- application to conclude that visual images cannot be a positive or beneficial part of that quality. Third, it is not true that "iconography thus became blasphemy" for the people of God. If that were so it would make a mockery of the tabernacle and temple that were so important in the cultural and religious life of the Israelites (in particular, see Exod. 31 and 35-40). Both structures contained icons that were representative of God's revelation, and they were filled with images that were pleasing to the eye. There was an aesthetic dimension. Of course the icons were not representative of God Himself, but they were representative of His actions and commands. They symbolized God's presence and power among His people.

The point of this dialogue with Postman and his analysis of the second commandment is that he has related one of the more prominent biases against TV. That is, TV is an image-bearer, and thus it is inferior to forms of communication that are word-bearers. Even if we were to concede that this is true, it does not follow that the inferiority of TV means that it cannot be a legitimate form of communication. It simply means that it may be inferior to other forms. Steak may be superior to hamburger, but that doesn't mean steak should be our only food.

Let's reverse the emphasis upon the superiority of written communication by considering a contrast between reading the letters of the apostle Paul and actually being in his presence and hearing him expound upon them. Most of us would probably say that actually hearing Paul is superior to reading him, but

few of us would say that reading his letters is not a worthwhile enterprise. If we follow Postman's reasoning, and the reasoning of other critics, we may be tempted to conclude that the issue of inferiority/superiority could lead us to reject reading Paul because that does not provide the same level of communication as would his actual presence. Television may be inferior to other things in our lives, but that doesn't mean it must excluded.

The Cultural Mandate and TV

Second, we should analyze TV in light of the cultural mandate. Clifford Christians has related that Christians "often seem to be aliens in a strange land." That is, we are living in a secularized society that makes it increasingly difficult to assert biblical principles. But he goes on to draw a parallel between the ancient Israelites in their Babylonian captivity to our present condition. He quotes the prophet Jeremiah: "Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens, and eat their produce…. And seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare…. For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'" (Jeremiah 29:4,7,11).

This passage can serve to remind us that we are to "convert cultural forms, not…eliminate them wholesale."(17) The Israelites were forced to live in a culture not their own, but they were still enjoined to "cultivate" it. In the same sense we should be cultivating the medium of television.

TV Is Still In Its Infancy

Third, we should give thought to the fact that TV is still in its childhood. As a result, it is possible that it has not yet realized its potential beyond the banalities that we tend to associate with it at the present time. A study of the history of various media indicates that all of them have proceeded

through stages of development, and that is still true. For example, even though drama was born in ancient Greece, its development had to wait to a great extent until Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Era. During this period, the theater began to acquire its present form, and many were outraged. It was a suspicious and inferior form of communication in the opinion of the learned and pious. And with this development came the idea of a "spectator" who observed the action and dialogue on the stage. This manner of communication or entertainment led the London city fathers to eradicate it from the city into the suburbs. Thus the famous Globe theater was built on the south side of the Thames and not in the walled city.(18)

So it could be that many of us, like the London city fathers, are too impatient, or we are biased toward certain media. We often cry that there is reason to be impatient or biased because of the TV content that has become so much a part of our lives. Yes, there is too much violence, sex, secularism, and there are too many vapid plots and insipid dialogue. But our concerns about content should not automatically lead us to assume that the medium is irredeemable. Perhaps we have not allowed TV the time it may need to attract its most creative and redeeming champions. And again, this is where the Christian should enter armed with the cultural mandate. The Christian who seeks to communicate through TV should understand its peculiarities and surpass the unimaginative, superficial, narcissistic productions offered by too many contemporary Christians.

TV and Visual Literacy

Fourth, we should give consideration to the possibility that many of us are visually illiterate. Just as the disciples of Jesus were frequently "parable illiterate," we may have need for more insights as to how to react to TV. This may sound strange since such a great percentage of the population spends so much time with TV. Unfortunately, most of us don't "view" TV. Instead, we "watch" TV. That is, we don't often engage in

a mental, much less verbal, discussion with the images and dialogue.

The critical viewer of television has the difficult job of translating the tube's images into words. Then the words can be processed by the viewer's mind, evaluated and discussed with other viewers. This is a crucial process that all Christians must engage in if they hope to be discerning users of the tube.(19)

Much of current television is designed to appeal to the emotions, as opposed to the intellect. The frenetic style of MTV, for example, is increasingly used for everything from commercials to news programs. Unless we want to leave TV as a medium that only applies to our emotions, we must find ways to interact intellectually with what TV delivers. And perhaps more importantly, we need to encourage a new generation to become visually literate to the point that they will begin to affect the use of the medium.

Good Decisions About TV

Fifth, many of us need to make decisions prior to spending time with the medium. This should be done not only for ourselves, but for our children and grandchildren. Perhaps a good rule for turning on the tube is to "map out" what may be worthy of our attention each day. Of course this means that we will have to spend a few minutes to read about what is available. But surely this will prove to be beneficial. Instead of automatically activating the power switch as part of a daily routine, regardless of what may be "on" at the time, selectivity should be routine.

Television is with us and will continue to exert its influence in ways that are difficult to predict at the present time. The proliferation of cable TV, the increasing interest in satellite systems, the unfolding of futuristic technology, virtual reality, and a host of other developments will

probably force us to give even more attention to TV than we have to this point in its history.

So as Christians it appears that we will continue to have the same dilemma: do we reject the medium, or do we redeem it? Since we are called to glorify God in all we do, it appears we should not leave TV out of this mandate. Let us commit ourselves to the redemption of television.

Notes

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12. David Marc, "Understanding Television," *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 1984), 35-36.
13. Postman, 9.
14. Ibid.
15. Christians, 5.
16. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Creators* (New York: Random House, 1992), 308 9.
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Is It Just Entertainment?

The Christian enters the world of entertainment equipped with the knowledge of the clear biblical statements of God's will. He then applies that knowledge to the decisions he makes in regard to entertainment.

Picture a grocery store in your mind. There are many aisles filled with a variety of products. Fresh fruit, vegetables, canned foods, bread, cereal, meat, dairy products, frozen foods, soap, and numerous other items can be found. When we shop in such a store we need to be aware of certain things. These may include the price, size, weight, variety, brand, quality, and freshness. After analyzing all of this, we are left with the most important part of the shopping trip—the decision! We must decide which of the products we will buy.

Our world is a lot like a grocery store. There are a variety of ideas (worldviews) to be considered. Those ideas can be seen and heard through television, music, movies, magazines, books, billboards, and bumper stickers, and other sources. In a sense, we are shopping in the grocery store of ideas. As Christians, we need to be aware of the products. We need to consider what is being sold. Then we need to decide if we should make a purchase.

Most of us want to be physically healthy. Unfortunately, sometimes we don't eat as if that were true. The same is true of our minds. We want to be mentally healthy. But too often we don't "eat" as if that were true! Our minds are often filled with things that are unhealthy. This can be especially true of the entertainment we choose.

How can we become more aware of the products and make the right purchases when we “go shopping” in the world of entertainment? It is our intent to help answer this question.

A Christian is usually encouraged to think of God’s Word, the Bible, as the guide for life. Of course the challenge of such a position is found in practice, not theory. Living by the tenets of Scripture is not always an easy thing. And we can be tempted to think that God’s ideas are restrictive, negative, and life- rejecting. The “don’ts” of biblical teachings can appear to overshadow a more positive, life-affirming perspective.

Does God Intend for Us to Enjoy Life?

Think of a series of three questions. First, if you make the Bible your standard for living, do you think that means life will be dull? Some Christians tend to live as if the answer is “yes.” This certainly applies to entertainment. It appears that we are to be so separate from the world that we can’t enjoy any part of it. Second, if you wrote a song, a poem, a novel, or if you painted a picture, sculpted a statue, etc., do you think you would know best how it should be sung, read, or understood? Of course the answer is “yes.” It came from your mind and imagination. You “brought it to life.” Third, if God created all things and knows everything about you, do you believe He knows how to bring true joy into your life? Again, the answer is obviously “yes.” You came from His mind and imagination. He “brought you to life.” He knows best how you should be sung, read, and understood. And He relays that information through His word, the Bible. He wants you to enjoy life, but with His guidelines in mind.

What is God’s Will for Entertainment?

Just what are those guidelines? What is God’s will for us concerning entertainment?

Before this question is answered, it is important to understand that the Bible clearly teaches God's will for much of life. Too often we tend to think of pursuing God's will for reasons that include such things as a particular occupation or marriage partner, and other such important decisions that are not stated clearly in Scripture. But the Bible frequently teaches the will of God for daily living in obvious ways. The following passages demonstrate this:

- A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool is arrogant and careless (Prov. 14:16).
- Flee immorality (1 Cor. 6:18a).
- Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things (Phil. 4:8).

Obviously various types of contemporary entertainment are not mentioned in these verses. The Bible "does not endeavor to specify rules for the whole of life."(1) Thus we are challenged to make decisions about entertainment based upon the application of biblical principles. The Christian must know the "principles for conduct: which apply here, which do not, and why. Then he must decide and act. Thus, by this terrifying and responsible process, he matures ethically. There is no other way."(2) In fact, this process signifies our continual spiritual growth, or sanctification. As Hebrews 5:14 states: "Solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil." Most of us probably don't think of "training our senses," but such a concept surely should be a part of our thinking continually. And the application of such training to entertainment should be clear.

Years ago I had an opportunity to demonstrate the use of "trained senses" when I attended a heavy metal rock concert at the invitation of a sixteen-year-old friend. He was a new

Christian then, and we were spending a lot of time together. He had entered his new life after years of attachment to a certain popular rock musician who was the main act of the concert.

During the evening the musicians heavily emphasized the themes of sex, drugs, and violence, and the crowd of adolescents and pre- adolescents was encouraged to respond, and did. After awhile I asked my friend how Jesus would respond to what we heard and saw. His response indicated that for the first time he had begun to think about this form of entertainment—which had been very important to him—with Christian principles in mind.

Perhaps the most succinct statement of Christian ethical principles is found in 1 Corinthians 10:31: "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." Can you think of anything more than "whatever" or "all"? These all-encompassing words are to be applied to all of life, including our entertainment choices. My young friend made this discovery that night.

What Types of Entertainment are Evil?

What types of entertainment are evil? A simple answer to this is, "None!" For example, the rhythm of rock music is not evil; television is not evil; movies are not evil; video games are not evil; novels are not evil, etc.

Of course it is possible for some to claim, for instance, that pre-marital sex is legitimate entertainment. But the clear admonition of Scripture forbids such activity. And the underlying point is that sex is not intrinsically evil. The one who is engaged in such activity is taking what is good and misusing it for evil. So evil does not reside in sex, rock music, television, etc. Types of entertainment are conduits for good or evil. People are evil. People who provide entertainment and people who use it can abuse it. A basic

premise of theology is that man has a sin nature. We are prone to abuse all things. As Genesis 8:21 states, The intent of man's heart is evil from his youth.

What About Content?

So the Christian is free to make entertainment a part of his life with an understanding that evil resides in people, not forms. But caution and discernment must be applied. We must be alert to the importance of our minds and what they can absorb through entertainment.

Perhaps we need to stop doing some of the things we normally do while listening to music, watching television, etc., so we can concentrate on the ideas that are entering our minds. We might be amazed at the ideas we'll notice if we take the time to concentrate. For example, an old TV commercial says, "Turn it loose! Don't hold back"! We may want to ask what "it" refers to, and we may want to know what is to be "held back." Such a commercial is a thinly-veiled espousal of hedonism, an ancient philosophy that says pleasure is the ultimate good. Ideas are powerful, and they have consequences, even when they come from something as seemingly innocuous as a TV commercial.

Consider the following illustration. Think of your mind as a sponge. A sponge absorbs moisture not unlike the way your mind absorbs ideas. (The difference is you are making choices and the sponge is not.) In order to remove the moisture, you must squeeze the sponge. If someone were to do the same with your "sponge brain," what would come out? Would you be embarrassed if the Lord were to be present? Biblical teaching says He is always present. If we honor Him, we'll enjoy life in the process.

If we are using our minds and thinking Christianly about entertainment we will be more alert concerning content. All entertainment is making a statement. A worldview, or philosophy of life, is being espoused through what we read,

hear, or watch. Movies, for example, can range from the introspective existential comedies of Woody Allen to the euphoric pantheistic conjectures of Shirley MacLaine. We are challenged to respond to such content with our Christian worldview intact.

Are We in a Battle?

We must take care of our minds. A battle is taking place in the marketplace of ideas. Entertainment can be seen as one of the battlefields where ideas are vying for recognition and influence. As 2 Corinthians 10:5 states, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” And Colossians 2:8 warns us: “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.”

What About the Conscience?

The place of the conscience should also be considered. We must be aware of the possibility of defiling our conscience (1 Cor. 8:7). As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:12, “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable.” The believer who cannot visit the world without making it his home has no right to visit it at his weak points.(3) It is the responsibility of each of us to be sensitive to what the conscience is telling us when we encounter those weak points and respond in a way that honors God.

Thus I suggest three steps in cultivating sensitivity to our consciences. First, we should consider what our conscience is relating prior to the entertainment. Is there something about what we’ve heard or seen that brings discomfort? If so, it may be a signal to stay away from it. Second, consider the conscience during the entertainment. If we’re already watching

and listening, are we mentally and spiritually comfortable? If not, we may need to get away from it. Unfortunately, too often the tendency is to linger too long and in the process we find that what may have disturbed us previously is now taken for granted. Third, consider the conscience after the entertainment. Now that it's over, what are we thinking and feeling? We should be alert to what the Lord is showing us about what we have just made a part of our lives.

What Do Others Say?

In addition to an awareness of the conscience, we may benefit from what others have to say. Perhaps the advertising will provide information that will prove to be of help before we decide to participate. Frequently ads will tell us things about the content and the intent of the producers. Also, we may find it beneficial to be alert to what friends may say. The things we hear from them may indicate warning signs, especially if they are Christian friends who are attempting to apply biblical principles to their lives. In addition, some objective critics can offer insightful comments. There are ministries around the country, for example, dedicated to analyzing the latest movies. And there are others that attempt to cover a broader spectrum of entertainment from a Christian perspective. You may benefit from subscribing to their publications.

Of course this encouragement to consider what others say cannot exempt us from personal responsibility. To rely completely on others is an unhealthy practice that can lead to mental and spiritual stagnation. Each of us must be mentally and spiritually alert to the content of entertainment.

Isn't It "Just Entertainment"?

Maybe you've heard someone say, "It's just entertainment"! Is this true?

The principles we have affirmed can lead to several common objections. Our answers to these objections can help us gain additional insight into how we think about contemporary entertainment.

First, some may say that what has been shown in a movie or some other entertainment is "just reality." But is reality a legitimate guideline for living? Do we derive an "ought" from an "is"? Saying that reality has been portrayed says nothing about the way things ought to be from God's perspective. Reality needs analysis and it often needs correction.

Second, a common statement is, "I'm just killing time." The person who says this may be doing exactly that, but what else is being killed in the process? The Christian redeems time; he doesn't kill it. As Ephesians 5:15-16 states, "Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil."

Third, "It won't affect me" is a common objection. Tragically, these can be the proverbial "famous last words" for some. Ted Bundy, a serial killer who was executed for his crimes, began to look at pornography when he was very young. If you had warned him of the potential consequences of his actions in those early years, he probably would have said it wouldn't affect him. We can't predict the outcome of our actions with absolute clarity. In addition, we may not recognize the consequences when they appear because we have been blinded subtly over a period of time.

Fourth, others may say, "There's nothing else to do." This is a sad commentary on contemporary life. If that is true, then God has done a poor job of supplying us with imagination. Spending hours watching TV each day, for instance, says a great deal about our priorities and use of our God-given abilities and spiritual gifts.

Fifth, young people in particular tend to say, "Everybody's

doing it." It is highly doubtful that is true. More importantly, though, we must understand that God's principles don't rely on democracy. We may be called to stand alone, as difficult as that may be. Sixth, some may say, "No one will know." Humanly, this is absurd. The person who says this knows. He's somebody, and he has to live with himself. And if he is a Christian his worldview informs him that God knows. Is he trying to please God or himself?

Seventh, "It's just entertainment" can be the response. No, it's not just entertainment. We can't afford to approach contemporary entertainment with the word just. There is too much at stake if we care about our minds, our witness, and our future.

So what should we do? Should we become separatists? No, the answer to the challenge of entertainment is not to seclude ourselves in "holy huddles" of legalism and cultural isolation. Should we become consumers? No, not without discernment. As we said in the beginning of this series, when it comes to entertainment, we should be as selective in that "grocery store of ideas" as we are in the food market. Should we become salt and light? Yes! We are to analyze entertainment with a Christian worldview, and we are to "infect" the world of entertainment with that same vision.

Notes

1. Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1957), 419.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 428.

Additional Reading

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