

# Why Empires Fall

*Kerby Anderson looks at six insightful books and videos exploring alarming parallels between the U.S. and failed empires of history.*

## Collapse of Empires

If you study world history, you realize that empires come and go. In this article I want to look at what has happened to some of the major empires because we can also learn about what is happening today in our country. I will be quoting from recent books that have documented the decline and fall of empires.

First, I will merely quote from a recent YouTube video<sup>[1]</sup> that describes a pattern in history that has destroyed three global superpowers in the last 500 years: Spain, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Today, the U.S. is following a similar pattern.



In 1590, Spain was the richest empire on earth. Spain controlled half the world's gold and silver. Spain's military dominated Europe. Their currency was accepted everywhere. Yet within 80 years, the Spanish government was bankrupt.

The Spanish coin that was supposed to be pure silver became 50% copper, then 75% copper. By 1600 Spanish coin contained barely any silver. Inflation exploded. Spain went into a debt spiral and borrowed constantly. Manufacturing declined. Agriculture stagnated.

In 1914, Britain ruled the largest empire in human history. At the time, it was said that the sun never set on British empire. Britain controlled 25% of the land surface. The pound sterling was the global reserve currency. Yet within 40 years, the empire was gone. The currency collapsed.

Britain had too many military commitments around the world. They won World War I, but at a terrible cost. By 1931, Britain had to abandon the gold standard. The pound lost 25% of its value overnight.

In 1991, the Soviet Union still seemed dominant. It was another superpower. It had nuclear weapons, global influence, and satellites spanning the globe. Yet the Soviet Union ceased to exist 900 days later due to economic implosion.

The idea that nations follow a pattern as they collapse isn't new. Decades ago, I did a week of radio programs on [“The Decline of a Nation.”](#) A decade later, I did another week on [“When Nations Die”](#) because of a book that was published with that title.

What is new is how this video explains the seven stages of collapse and applies them to previous empires. But the key point of the video is the reality that America has already completed five of the seven stages. We aren't approaching the pattern but are within it.

As I often suggest, we can resolve some of these issues, but the first step is to admit that we are following this pattern of collapse. Below we will be looking at some of the reasons other empires fell and connect it to what is happening in our world today.

## End of Everything

Now we will look at the book by Victor Davis Hanson, *The End of Everything: How Wars Descend into Annihilation*.[{2}](#)

In his book he provides four historical examples: the city-state of Thebes, ancient Carthage, Byzantine Constantinople, and the Aztec Empire. The leaders believed their illustrious pasts would be enough to prevent their destruction. Alexander the Great, Roman Scipio, Muslim Mehmet, and the Spanish conquistador Cortés proved them wrong.

He explains that the leveling of Thebes by Alexander the Great, the erasure of Carthage by Scipio, the conquest and transformation of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet, and the obliteration of the Aztecs all marked the end of cultures and civilizations.

Alexander, for example, brought an end to classical Greece. The fall of Constantinople marked the end of the Mediterranean world as the nexus of European commerce. And the largest Christian cathedral in the West became the greatest mosque in the Islamic world.

The book is a warning to us today, but I also realize that few people will read his book. That is why I would encourage you to watch his five-minute video summary produced by Hillsdale College.[{3}](#)

He says his book “is about the existential destruction of the losing side in a war. This is very rare in history. It doesn’t happen very often. But when it does, it should enlighten us how it does why it does, and can it happen again?”

He explains that he wrote his book “not just as a historical journey to document the rare cases of a targeted nation being completely destroyed, but as a warning that human nature doesn’t change.” We naively assumed that globalization would create a common humanity and bring an end to global conflict. Instead, he “noticed that there were more and more existential threats coming from autocratic regimes.”

He reminds us that the same mentalities and delusions that doomed the Thebans, Carthaginians, the Byzantines, and the Aztecs are still with us today. Even as they were about to be slaughtered, some may still have been thinking, “It cannot happen here.”

He wants us to be aware that what happened in the past could happen in the future. We need to learn from the past and protect ourselves in the future. This is a sobering call for

contemporary readers to heed the lessons of obliteration, lest we blunder into catastrophe once again. He reminds us that the world needs a strong America so that we can prevent “the end of everything.”

## Peak Human

Let’s now turn to examine the book *Peak Human*,[{4}](#) written by historian Johan Norberg.

His book explains what we can learn from the rise and fall of “golden ages.” He describes seven of humanity’s greatest civilizations from ancient Athens and the Roman Republic to Renaissance Italy, the Dutch Republic, and today’s Anglosphere.

Each had their golden age and contributed to our world today. Ancient Greece gave us democracy and the rule of law. From the Muslim world came algebra and modern medicine. The Dutch Republic gave us economic ideas and some of the greatest artistic movements.

He explained that he picked these civilizations because each of them exemplifies what can be described as a golden age. This was a period of innovations that revolutionized many fields and sectors in a short period of time. The characteristics are cultural creativity, scientific discoveries, technological achievements, and economic growth.

He laments that human history is a long list of deprivations and horrors. But it is also the source of the knowledge, institutions, and technologies that have set most of humanity free from such horrors. It requires raw material, but the citizens needed to be free to experiment and innovate, without being subject to feudal lords, centralized governments, or raving armies.

In a recent interview with John Stossel[{5}](#), he talked about how Rome inspired our form of government, a republic with a

system of checks and balances. “There is a reason why we have a Senate, and they meet in the Capitol,” Norberg explained. “We borrow these ideas from the Romans.”

Of course, these empires fell. “The emperors wanted to become popular by handing out free stuff to people. Originally, this started small. You just handed the very poor means of subsistence. But it was popular, so the group that lived on the public’s expense grew larger all the time.”

Eventually the ever-expanding system of entitlements became too much. Norberg observed, “Romans could conquer the world, but they couldn’t do entitlement reform.” To pay for this, the Roman emperors devalued their currency by putting less gold and silver in each coin. He concluded that, “Inflation was much worse than barbarian invaders.”

This sounds like our world today. Modern governments, including our own, make more financial promises than they can keep. To pay for it, they print more money. We have been living in a golden age, but the question before us today is whether it will continue.

## Loss of Moral Values

In this section we will look at an essay by Allen Mashburn who reminds us that “Societies That Surrender Moral Foundation Historically Self-Destruct.”[\[6\]](#)

This is not a new idea. Decades ago, I did a week of radio programs on “[The Decline of a Nation](#).” A decade later, I did another week on “[When Nations Die](#)” because of a book that was published with that title. And more recently I even did [a week of programs](#) based on a book that compared America to Rome.

The reason for Mashburn’s article were several events that took place during Pride Month. He “never envisioned a day where transvestites would lecture us on human biology, or sterilizers would pose as health professionals advocating for

human rights. It seems that our nation has descended into a state of utter madness, where men can now claim pregnancy and the number of genders rivals the alphabet.”

Those issues are just a few of the many legitimate concerns which point to the well-documented decline and fall of other civilizations. Greece tolerated and even celebrated immoral behavior. And “the decline of the Roman Empire can be attributed to the abandonment of strong familial bonds and moral values in favor of weakness and laxity.” He observes that the similarity between Rome and America is alarming.

Of course, the pattern we recognize in Greece and Rome can be seen in other civilizations in the past. That would include the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians, and even the nation of Israel. In Isaiah 5:20 we read that God pronounced judgment on Israel. “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

Of course, there is another side of this equation. Mashburn reminds us that “whenever a nation upholds high moral standards, it reaches the pinnacle of success.” Yes, it is true that nations decline when they lose a moral foundation for society. But they also flourish when it upholds morality and integrity while also supporting and encouraging strong families.

He also quotes from the book, *Christians in the Wake of the Sexual Revolution*, by Randy Alcorn. He warns that unless our country experiences spiritual repentance and undergoes a profound reversal of moral values, we risk inviting the same judgment that befell Sodom and Gomorrah.

That is why Christians should devote themselves to daily prayers for our nation’s spiritual and moral well-being. The only way to reverse this downward moral spiral is for a spiritual revival and spiritual repentance in this country.

# America's Expiration Date

Finally, we will look at a book by Cal Thomas, *America's Expiration Date*.[\[7\]](#)

He asks, what is America's future? The book came out years ago but has a new preface and is more relevant today. [He was on my radio program](#) to talk about the fall of empires and the future of the United States.

He begins with an observation by Sir John Glubb, who wrote *The Fate of Empires and the Search for Survival*. He noticed an interesting historical fact. The average age of a nation or empire's greatness is only 250 years. Most nations lose their way in a relatively short amount of time.

Using that ruler, Cal Thomas gives us a history lesson of the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, the Arab Empire, the Spanish Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire, and the Russian Empire. He concludes with the United States.

Each empire fell for different reasons, but they are lessons to us today. Sometimes they fell because they became too prosperous and thus too apathetic. Sometimes they fell because the empire was over extended. Most had a period of decadence and decline. The Spanish empire was so riven with conflict, they were never invaded because other countries saw nothing worth conquering.

Persia's decline was due to class struggle. The common people, who were not part of the upper class, began organizing riots and revolts. Kings became greedy and started stealing from the nation's wealth rather than sharing the wealth with the people. The social structure collapsed.

As we have discussed above, Rome's fall was gradual. The familiar saying, "Rome wasn't built in a day." Neither was it destroyed in a day. As the Roman empire grew, more money

needed to be provided to the military. The empire's infrastructure suffered. And the common people suffered because the ruling class cared more about what was on the next horizon than what was at home.

He does believe that there is still time to resurrect the republic, but the answer can't be found in politicians. Our future doesn't depend on the White House, but instead is dependent on what we do in our house.

Cal Thomas ends his book with valuable suggestions. First, set standards of decency and morality for your yourself and your family. Reevaluate the education of your children. Don't send them to schools or universities that have largely become propaganda centers for secular progressives. Gather with other believers to worship, celebrate, and to encourage one another. Daily obey the call to "go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19), often witnessing with words and actions.

### Notes

1. The 7-Stage Collapse Pattern, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb39CeK\\_yWg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wb39CeK_yWg).
2. Victor Davis Hanson, *The End of Everything: How Wars Descend into Annihilation*, NY: Basic Books, 2024.
3. Victor Davis Hanson, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8c0EuIUTT](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8c0EuIUTT).
4. Johan Norberg, *Peak Human*, London: Atlantic Books, 2025.
5. John Stossel, *Golden Ages*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=opHnY8tjzug](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=opHnY8tjzug)
6. Allen Mashburn, "Societies That Surrender Moral Foundation Historically Self-Destruct," [amgreatness.com/2023/07/06/societies-that-surrender-moral-foundation-historically-self-destruct/](http://amgreatness.com/2023/07/06/societies-that-surrender-moral-foundation-historically-self-destruct/).
7. Cal Thomas, *America's Expiration Date*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020.



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# Spiritual Abuse

*Kerby Anderson provides an overview of what makes churches and organizations spiritually and emotionally unhealthy and hurtful.*

In some ways, this article on spiritual abuse is an update on [a previous article on Abusive Churches](#). However, this article also provides a biblical perspective on the broader issue of spiritual abuse occurring in our country today.

Many church leaders became aware of the prevalence of abusive churches more than four decades ago when Professor Ronald Enroth wrote his best-selling book, *Churches That Abuse*. A few years later he followed up with a book on *Recovering from Churches that Abuse*.



More than three decades ago, Dr. Pat Zukeran wrote a week of Probe radio programs based on the first book by Ronald Enroth. The transcript of that program is still one of the top ten most popular articles based on the number of Internet searches that land on them each year.

That response to this important subject isn't unique. For example, thousands have also purchased the book by Stephen Arterburn *Toxic Faith*. The same is true of Ken Blue's book *Spiritual Abuse* and Philip Keller's book *Predators in Our Pulpits*. June Hunt with Hope for the Heart has also written a helpful booklet on *Spiritual Abuse*.

Jesus addressed the issue of spiritual abuse many times when he confronted the Pharisees. In Matthew 23, he proclaims seven woes to the Scribes and Pharisees. He concludes with: "You

serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" He describes them this way in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires."

Paul also addresses various aspects of spiritual abuse and legalism within the church. He warns us about legalism by teaching that no works of the law can justify us (Romans 3:20). Instead, the "law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2).

Spiritual abuse can occur when someone is in a position of spiritual authority misuses that authority to control or manipulate another Christian. It may take the form of using religious works to control. It may involve misusing Scripture or twisting biblical concepts. Churches or Christian organizations may be guilty of teaching false doctrine. Even churches that teach sound doctrine may be guilty allowing worship leaders to bring music into the church with bad theology.

Spiritual abuse can also occur when someone in a position of spiritual authority fails to act. Many of the recent church scandals took place because church leaders or denominational leaders failed to act on or report incidents of sexual harassment or sexual abuse.

## **Characteristics of Abusive Churches**

The book, *Churches That Abuse*, lists eight characteristics of abusive churches. You might compare that list to your own church and to other churches you know.

1. Abusive churches have a control-oriented style of leadership. The leader may be arrogant and dogmatic. The leader often is portrayed as more in tune spiritually with God. Thus, these leaders often are not accountable to anyone.

2. Second, the leader of an abusive church often uses manipulation to gain complete submission from their members. These tactics may involve guilt, peer pressure, and intimidation. The leader may even suggest that divine judgment from God will result if you question them.

3. There is a rigid, legalistic lifestyle involving numerous requirements and minute details for daily life. Members are pressured to give a certain amount of time and money to the church. Often members drop out of school, quit working, or neglect their families to meet a church-designated quota.

4. Abusive churches tend to change their names, especially once they are exposed by the media. Often this is done because the church received bad publicity or was involved in a significant scandal.

5. Abusive churches are often denouncing other churches because they see themselves as superior to all other churches. The church leadership sees itself as the spiritual elite and the "faithful remnant." They are the only ones "faithful to the true gospel."

6. Abusive churches have a persecution complex and view themselves as being persecuted by the world, the media, and other Christian churches. Because they see themselves as a spiritual elite, they also expect persecution from the world and even feed on it.

7. Abusive churches specifically target young adults between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. Often, they target youth who are less experienced but looking for a cause. Sometimes an abusive church becomes surrogate parents to these young adults.

8. Members of abusive churches have a great difficulty leaving and often involves social, psychological, or emotional pain. Church members are often afraid to leave because of intimidation and social pressure. If they leave, they may be

stalked and harassed by members of the abusive church.

## Leaving an Abusive Church

For many of the reasons previously discussed, it is difficult for members to [leave an abusive church](#). There is significant emotional and spiritual damage that results. Often, former members of an abusive church not only leave the church, but they leave God.

The emotional damage is significant. One author suggested that victims of church abuse or other forms of spiritual abuse suffer PTSD(post-traumatic stress disorder). They find it difficult to trust others, whether leaders in a church or other leaders in their life.

Victims of abusive churches also find it difficult to find the right church. That is why Ronald Enroth in his second book and Ken Blue in his book talk about discerning good from abusive. Here are a few questions worth considering.

1. Does the church leadership invite dialogue and solicit advice from others in the church who are not part of the elite group of leaders? Dogmatic and authoritarian pastors are threatened by diverse opinions whether from members or from people outside the church.

2. Is there a system of accountability or is all the power located in one person? Dogmatic and authoritarian pastors are not accountable to anyone. They may have a board of elders who merely “rubber stamp” any decisions.

3. Does the church encourage independent thinking and encourage members to develop discernment? Abusive church leaders attempt to get all its members to conform. There is a very low tolerance (sometimes no tolerance) for alternative perspectives even about insignificant programs and minor policies about how to run the church.

4. Is family commitment strengthened? Many churches (not just abusive churches) often demand so much of members that they begin to neglect their families. If parents are made to feel guilty for going to their children's school events when it might conflict with a routine church meeting or activity, something is wrong.

5. Is the individual church member growing spiritually or on the edge of burnout? If you have to constantly attend a myriad of church meetings and meet a quota (time, talent, treasure) in order to be given church approval, something is wrong.

When someone leaves an abusive situation, it becomes difficult to trust others. That is also true when leaving an abusive church. Going to a different church or study group can be difficult and even frightening. But these questions help in choosing a church or organization that will help you grow spiritually.

## **Enabling Behavior and a Biblical Response – Part 1**

There are no perfect churches because there are no perfect people. Sometimes I will hear someone say they are looking for the perfect church. A good response I have heard is: "If you find the perfect church, don't join it because you will ruin it. You aren't perfect."

Every church has its problems, and pastors have a sin nature. But it does seem that we are also guilty of enabling behavior inside the church that isn't healthy. Here are just a few statements I have gleaned from various sources.

Christians today often enable spiritual abuse from leaders because we value charisma over character. A pastor or leader is often given a platform not because of character but because he is a dynamic preacher.

Jesus warned His disciples (Matthew 20:25-28) that leaders should not exercise authority over people. Instead, whoever wants to become great must lower himself to be a servant. Paul even warns (2 Timothy 4:3) there will be a time when followers “will not endure sound doctrine.” Instead, they will want “to have their ears tickled” by eloquent speakers, who may not even have sound doctrine.

Paul reminds Timothy (1 Timothy 3:2-3) that a leader in the church should be “must be above reproach . . . sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.”

Peter (1 Peter 5:2-3) instructs the church that leadership should “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

Christians today also enable spiritual abuse when they value the institution over individuals. We have seen this in our numerous radio programs involving church sexual abuse. Churches and denominations have been too quick to cover up sexual abuse scandals and intimidate victims. Time and again we hear them worrying about their reputations or the reputation of the church or denomination.

Christians today enable spiritual abuse when they value division over unity. Pastors and Christian leaders who are denouncing other churches or denominations can make us feel good about our church and denomination. But it doesn't bring unity. Paul teaches in Ephesians 4:3-6 to “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one

baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

## **Enabling Behavior and a Biblical Response – Part 2**

Christians today enable spiritual abuse when they value performance over character. Churches are often quicker to remove a pastor teaching heresy than to remove a pastor with character deficits. We should address heresy. Peter warns (2 Peter 2:1) that there will be “false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves.”

But some churches or denominations may have pastors or church leaders who have good theology but poor character. One example in the New Testament can be found in a man named Diotrephes (3 John 9-12). John plans to confront him because he is self-willed (likes to put himself first) and rebellious (does not acknowledge authority) and a slanderer (talking wicked gossip). Some commentators have called him the first “church boss” because he uses power for ungodly ends within the church.

But notice that John says nothing about him having bad theology. In his previous letters (1 John and 2 John), he does call out the unbiblical teaching of the false teachers. The problem with Diotrephes was not theology but psychology. For all we know, he might have been a good Bible teacher, but his behavior is the problem. How many churches have turned a blind eye to character problems with a pastor because he was a good preacher and brought people into the church?

Christians today enable spiritual abuse when they value anger and outrage over grace and meekness. Too often we reward

candidates who raise their voice and point their fingers by electing them to office. We may enjoy a pastor who pounds the pulpit and condemns society, but is that what is required of a church leader?

Christians should not be enabling this behavior, they should be confronting this behavior and even condemning this behavior. This first step should be to follow the instructions of Jesus (Matthew 18:15-17) to go directly to a person engaging in spiritual abuse (after prayer and reflection). If he listens to you, “you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along.” If this is happening in society, we should speak out against spiritual abuse and abusive churches.

An important response to spiritual abuse is biblical truth. As believers we should proclaim the truth. Truth means freedom, not bondage. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

### **Additional Resources**

Stephen Arterburn, *Toxic Faith*, Nashville, Tenn.: Oliver Nelson Publishing, 1991.

Ken Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

Ronald Enroth, *Churches that Abuse*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1992.

Ronald Enroth, *Recovering from Churches that Abuse*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1994.

June Hunt, *Spiritual Abuse: Religion at Its Worst*, Dallas: Hope for the Heart, 2015.



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# Cohabitation and Living Together – A Biblical, Christian Worldview Perspective

*Kerby Anderson takes a hard look from a biblical perspective at a common practice among Americans, cohabitation. Not only does he find it counter to biblical instruction for Christians, he finds that living together in a sexual relationship reduces the probability of a long-lasting marriage later on.*



*The original version of this updated article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

More than twenty years ago, I did a week of radio programs on cohabitation and cited a study done by the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University. Sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead came to this conclusion: “Cohabitation is replacing marriage as the first living together experience for young men and women.”[\[1\]](#)

What was true then is true today, but there is even more evidence of changing attitudes as well as additional social research on cohabitation. A survey by Pew Research asked American adults when it was acceptable to live together. Two thirds (69%) said it was acceptable “even if they don’t plan to get married.” Another 16 percent said it was acceptable “only if they planned to get married.” Only 14 percent said it was “never acceptable.”



That may explain why living together has gone from rare to routine in the secular world, but also explains why so many Christian couples also see living together as acceptable. In the 1960s and 1970s, only about a half million were living together. One study from a few years ago, estimated that over 18 million Americans were cohabiting, and nearly a quarter of them were people over the age of 50 years old.{2}

Another reason to revisit the social phenomenon of cohabitation is to remind couples that the “premarital cohabitation effect” still exists. The effect is the research finding from decades ago that living together before marriage increases your likelihood of marital struggles and even divorce. Scott Stanley with the Institute for Family Studies acknowledges that it may be counterintuitive “that living together would not improve one’s odds for a successful marriage. And yet, whatever else is true, there is scant evidence to support this believe in a positive effect.”{3} We will look at the latest research data below.

Since such a high percentage of American adults believe it is acceptable for an unmarried couple to live together, they have developed new legal documents to establish financial and medical obligations to one another. Several cohabiting couples will draft a cohabitation agreement.{4} Such an agreement supposedly ensures certain rights or obligations in the relationship that would typically be legally conferred upon marriage.

Although some people will say that a cohabiting couple is “married in the eyes of God,” that is not true. They are not married in God’s eyes because they are living contrary to biblical statements about marriage. And they are not married in their own eyes because they have specifically decided *not* to marry.

Cohabitation is without a doubt changing the cultural landscape of our society. That is why we look at the social,

psychological, and biblical aspects of cohabitation in this article.

## Test-drive Relationships and Other Myths

No doubt you have heard couples justify cohabitation by arguing that they need to live together before marriage to see if they were compatible. First, that argument does not justify cohabitation. Second, it is fallacious since so many couples living together never plan to get married.

Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher wrote *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*.[\[5\]](#) It not only makes the case for marriage; it also challenges contemporary assumptions about cohabitation.

The thesis of the book is simple. Back in the 1950s, the rules were clear: first love, next marriage, and only then the baby carriage. But the social tsunami of the 1960s changed everything. The Pill, the sexual revolution, feminism, mothers in the workplace, no-fault divorce, and the rise of illegitimate births changed our views of marriage and family. The authors marshal the evidence to show that marriage is a good thing. As the subtitle says, married people are happier, healthier, and better off financially.

Nevertheless, the conventional wisdom is that you should “try before you buy.” In fact, one of the oft-repeated questions justifying living together is: “You wouldn’t buy a car without a test-drive, would you?”

The problem with such questions and slogans is they dehumanize the other person. If I decide not to buy a car, the car doesn’t feel rejected. When you test-drive your car, you don’t pack your personal luggage in the trunk. And rejecting a car model doesn’t bring emotional baggage into the next test-driving experience. The car doesn’t need psychological counseling so that it can trust the next car buyer. Frankly,

test-driving a relationship is only positive if you are the driver.

Research has shown that those who cohabit tend to view marriage negatively because it involved the assumption of new responsibilities that contrasted with their former freedoms. On the other hand, those marrying through the conventional route of dating and courtship did not feel constrained by marriage but liberated by marriage.

Consider the contrast. A couple living together has nearly everything marriage has to offer (including sex) but few commitments or responsibilities. So, cohabiting people feel trapped when they enter marriage. They must assume huge new responsibilities while getting nothing they didn't already have.

Couples entering marriage through dating and courtship experience just the opposite, especially if they maintain their sexual purity. Marriage is the culmination of their relationship and provides the full depth of a relationship they have long anticipated.

This is not to say that cohabitation guarantees marital failure nor that marriage through the conventional route guarantees marital success. There are exceptions to this rule, but a couple who live together before marriage stack the odds against themselves and their future marriage.

## **Cohabitation and Perceptions**

Although cohabitation is becoming popular in America, sociologists studying the phenomenon warned that living together before marriage, puts your future marriage in danger. That was the conclusion of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University done by sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead.[\[6\]](#)

They found that cohabiting appears to be so counterproductive

to long-lasting marriage that unmarried couples should avoid living together, especially if it involves children. They argue that living together is “a fragile family form” that poses increased risk to women and children.

Part of the reason for the danger is the difference in perception. Men often enter the relationship with less intention to marry than do women. They may regard it more as a sexual opportunity without the ties of long-term commitment. Women, however, often see the living arrangement as a step toward eventual marriage. While the women may believe they are headed for marriage, the man often has other ideas. Some men resent the women they live with and view them as easy. Such a woman is not his idea of a faithful marriage partner.

People who live together in uncommitted relationships may be unwilling to work out problems. Since there is no long-term commitment, often it is easy to leave the current living arrangement and seek less fractious relationships with a new partner.

In recent years, there has been the occasional study that suggests there are no significant problems for couples if they live together. But Scott Stanley of the Institute for Family Studies dismisses those few studies because they fail to consider long-term problems. And he points to another recent study that does show an increased risk for divorce among those living together before marriage.[\[7\]](#)

The significant increase in cohabitation in the last few decades is staggering. The reasons for the growth are many: fewer taboos against premarital sex, earlier sexual maturity, later marriage, adequate income to live apart from their families.

Whatever the reasons for cohabiting, this study documents the dangers. Couples who live together are more likely to divorce than those who don't. They are less happy and score lower on

well-being indices, including sexual satisfaction. And cohabiting couples are often poorer than married couples.

Even if millions are doing it, living together is a bad idea. As we will see below, there are clear biblical prohibitions against premarital sex. But apart from these biblical pronouncements are the ominous sociological predictions of failure when a couple considers cohabitation rather than marriage. The latest research backs up what the Bible has said for millennia. If you want a good marriage, don't do what society says. Do what the Bible teaches us to do.

## Consequences of Cohabitation

Contrary to conventional wisdom, cohabitation can be harmful to marriage as well as to the couples and their children. One study based on the National Survey of Families and Households found that marriages which had prior cohabitators were 46 percent more likely to divorce than marriages of non-cohabitators. The authors concluded from this study and from a review of previous studies that the risk of marital disruption following cohabitation "is beginning to take on the status of an empirical generalization."[\[8\]](#)

Some have tried to argue that the correlation between cohabitation and divorce is artificial since people willing to cohabit are more unconventional and less committed to marriage. In other words, cohabitation doesn't cause divorce but is merely associated with it because the same type of people are involved in both phenomena. Yet, even when this "selection effect" is carefully controlled statistically, a "cohabitation effect" remains.

Marriages are held together by a common commitment which is absent in most, if not all, cohabiting relationships. Partners who live together value autonomy over commitment and tend not to be as committed as married couples in their dedication to the continuation of the relationship.[\[9\]](#)

One study found that “living with a romantic partner prior to marriage was associated with more negative and less positive problem-solving support and behavior during marriage.” The reason is simple. Since there is less certainty of a long-term commitment, “there may be less motivation for cohabiting partners to develop their conflict resolution and support skills.”[{10}](#)

Couples living together, however, miss out on more than just the benefits of marriage. Annual rates of depression among cohabiting couples are more than three times higher than they are among married couples.[{11}](#) Those who cohabit are much more likely to be unhappy in marriage and much more likely to think about divorce.[{12}](#)

Cohabitation is especially harmful to children. First, several studies have found that children currently living with a mother and her unmarried partner have significantly more behavior problems and lower academic performance than children in intact families.[{13}](#) Second, there is the risk that the couple will break up, creating even more social and personal difficulties. Third, many of these children were not born in the present union but in a previous union of one of the adult partners (usually the mother). Living in a house with a mother and an unmarried boyfriend is tenuous at best.

These studies, along with others, suggest that cohabitation is less secure, less fulfilling, and even potentially more harmful than traditional marriage.

## **Cohabitation and the Bible**

God designed sexual intimacy to occur exclusively within the sacred commitment of marriage (Genesis 2:21-24). When we trust God’s design, we can honor marriage as we are commanded in Hebrews 13:4.

The Bible teaches that the act of sexual intercourse can have

a strong bonding effect on two people. When done within the bounds of marriage, the man and the woman become one flesh. Ephesian 5:31 says: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."

Sexual intercourse outside of marriage also has consequences. Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul said that when a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her (1 Corinthians 6:16). The context of the discussion arose from a problem within the church. A man in the church was having sexual relations with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5:1-3). Paul calls this relationship sinful. In 1 Corinthians 6:18 he says we are to flee sexual immorality.

Sexual immorality is condemned in about 25 passages in the New Testament. The Greek word is *porneia*, a word which includes all forms of illicit sexual intercourse. Jesus taught in Mark 7:21-23: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean."

Paul taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God."

Marriage is God's plan. Marriage provides intimate companionship for life (Genesis 2:18). It provides a context for the procreation and nurture of children (Ephesians 6:1-2). And finally, marriage provides a godly outlet for sexual desire (1 Corinthians 7:2).

In the New Testament, believers are warned against persistent sin, including sexual sin (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The church is to keep believers accountable for their behavior. Believers



are to judge themselves, lest they fall into God's hands (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). Sexual sin should not even be named among believers (Ephesians 5:3).

Living together outside of marriage not only violates biblical commands but it puts a couple and their future marriage at risk. In this article, I have collected several sobering statistics about the impact cohabitation can have on you and your relationship. If you want a good marriage, don't do what society says. Do what the Bible teaches us to do.

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[This article is an updated version of Kerby's 2003 transcript titled "Cohabitation."]

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# Thanksgiving Quiz

*Kerby Anderson offers a quiz concerning the origins of American Thanksgiving.*

This nation was founded by Christians, and Thanksgiving is a time when we can reflect upon this rich, Christian heritage. But many of us are often ignorant of our country's origins, so we have put together a Thanksgiving quiz to test your knowledge about this nation's biblical foundations. We hope that you will not only take this test and pass it on to others, but we also hope that you will be encouraged to study more about the Christian foundations of this country.

## 1. What group began the tradition of Thanksgiving?



A day of thanksgiving was set aside by the Pilgrims who founded Plymouth Colony. This colony was the first permanent settlement in New England. The Pilgrims were originally known as the Forefathers or Founders. The term *Pilgrim* was first used in the writings of colonist William Bradford and is now used to designate them.

## 2. Why did they celebrate Thanksgiving?

Life was hard in the New World. Out of 103 Pilgrims, 51 of these died in the first terrible winter. After the first harvest was completed, Governor William Bradford proclaimed a day of thanksgiving and prayer. By 1623, a day of fasting and prayer during a period of drought was changed to one of thanksgiving because the rain came during their prayers. The

custom prevailed in New England and eventually became a national holiday.

### **3. When did Thanksgiving become a national holiday?**

The state of New York adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom in 1817. By the time of the Civil War, many other states had done the same. In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln appointed a day of thanksgiving. Since then, each president has issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation for the fourth Thursday of November.

### **4. Why did the Pilgrims leave Europe?**

Among the early Pilgrims was a group of Separatists who were members of a religious movement that broke from the Church of England during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In 1606 William Brewster led a group of Separatists to Leiden (in the Netherlands) to escape religious persecution in England. After living in Leiden for more than ten years, some members of the group voted to emigrate to America. The voyage was financed by a group of London investors who were promised produce from America in exchange for their assistance.

### **5. How did the Pilgrims emigrate to the New World?**

On September 16, 1620, a group numbering 102 men, women, and children left Plymouth, England, for America on the Mayflower. Having been blown off course from their intended landing in Virginia by a terrible storm, the Pilgrims landed at Cape Cod on November 11. On December 21, they landed on the site of Plymouth Colony. While still on the ship, the Pilgrims signed the Mayflower Compact.

### **6. What is the Mayflower Compact?**

On November 11, 1620, Governor William Bradford and the leaders on the Mayflower signed the Mayflower Compact before setting foot on land. They wanted to acknowledge God's

sovereignty in their lives and their need to obey Him. The Mayflower Compact was America's first great constitutional document and is often called "The American Covenant."

### **7. What is the significance of the Mayflower Compact?**

After suffering years of persecution in England and spending difficult years of exile in the Netherlands, the Pilgrims wanted to establish their colony on the biblical principles they suffered for in Europe. Before they set foot on land, they drew up this covenant with God. They feared launching their colony until there was a recognition of God's sovereignty and their collective need to obey Him.

### **8. What does the Mayflower Compact say?**

"In the name of God, Amen. We whose names are underwritten, the loyal subjects of our dread sovereign Lord, King James, by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France, and Ireland king, defender of the faith, etc., Having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith, and honor of our king and country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the Northern parts of Virginia, do by these present solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends foresaid, and by virtue hereof to enact, constitute, and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, constitutions and offices, from time to time, as shall be thought most meet and convenient for the general good of the Colony, unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have hereunder subscribed our names at Cape Cod the 11th of November, in the year of the reign of our sovereign Lord, King James, of England, France, and Ireland."

### **9. Why didn't the pilgrims sail to the original destination in Virginia?**

The Pilgrims were blown off course and landed at Cape Cod in

what now appears to be God's providence. Because their patent did not include this territory, they consulted with the Captain of the Mayflower and resolved to sail southward. But the weather and geography did not allow them to do so. They encountered "dangerous shoals and roaring breakers" and were quickly forced to return to Cape Cod. From there they began scouting expeditions and finally discovered what is now Plymouth. Had they arrived just a few years earlier, they would have been attacked and destroyed by one of the fiercest tribes in the region. However, three years earlier (in 1617), the Patuxet tribe had been wiped out by a plague. The Pilgrims thus landed in one of the few places where they could survive.{1}

#### **10. What role did the lone surviving Indian play in the lives of the Pilgrims?**

There was one survivor of the Patuxet tribe: Squanto. He was kidnapped in 1605 by Captain Weymouth and taken to England where he learned English and was eventually able to return to New England.{2} When he found his tribe had been wiped out by the plague, he lived with a neighboring tribe. When Squanto learned that the Pilgrims were at Plymouth, he came to them and showed them how to plant corn and fertilize with fish. He later converted to Christianity. William Bradford said that Squanto "was a special instrument sent of God for their good beyond their expectation."{3}

#### **11. Were the colonists dedicated to Christian principles in their lives on days other than Thanksgiving?**

The Pilgrims were, and so were the other colonists. Consider this sermon by John Winthrop given while aboard the Arabella in 1630. This is what he said about the Puritans who formed the Massachusetts Bay Colony: "For the persons, we are a Company professing ourselves fellow members of Christ. . . . For the work we have in hand, it is by a mutual consent through a special overruling providence, and a more than an

ordinary approbation of the Churches of Christ to seek out a place of Cohabitation and Consortship under a due form of Government both civil and ecclesiastical.” They established a Christian Commonwealth in which every area of their lives both civil and ecclesiastical fell under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

## **12. How did the Pilgrims organize their economic activities?**

After the first year, the colony foundered because of the collective economic system forced upon them by the merchants in London. All the settlers worked only for the joint partnership and were fed out of the common stores. The land and the houses built on it were the joint property of the merchants and colonists for seven years and then divided equally.[\[4\]](#)

When Deacon Carver died, William Bradford became governor. Seeing the failure of communal farming, he instituted what today would be called free enterprise innovations. Bradford assigned plots of land to each family to work, and the colony began to flourish. Each colonist was challenged to better themselves and their land by working to their fullest capacity. Many Christian historians and economists today point to this fundamental economic change as one of the key reasons for the success of the Pilgrims at Plymouth.

## **13. What has been the significance of the Pilgrims and their legacy of Thanksgiving?**

On the bicentennial celebration of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock, Daniel Webster on December 22, 1820, declared the following: “Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their

institutions, civil, political, or literary.”

The legacy of the Pilgrims and Thanksgiving is the legacy of godly men and women who sought to bring Christian principles to this nation. These spread throughout the nation for centuries.

#### **14. How were Christian principles brought to the founding of this republic?**

Most historians will acknowledge that America was born in the midst of a revival. This occurred from approximately 1740-1770 and was known as the First Great Awakening. Two prominent preachers during that time were Jonathan Edwards (best known for his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”) and George Whitfield. They preached up and down the East Coast and saw revival break out. Churches were planted, schools were built, and lives were changed.

#### **15. How influential were Christian ideas in the Constitution?**

While the Constitution does not specifically mention God or the Bible, the influence of Christianity can plainly be seen. Professor M.E. Bradford shows in his book *A Worthy Company*, that fifty of the fifty-five men who signed the Constitution were church members who endorsed the Christian faith.

#### **16. Weren’t many of the founders non-Christians?**

Yes, some were. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin are good examples of men involved in the drafting of the Declaration of Independence who were influenced by ideas from the Enlightenment. Yet revisionists have attempted to make these men more secular than they really were. Jefferson, for example, wrote to Benjamin Rush that “I am a Christian . . . sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others.” Franklin called for prayer at the Constitutional Convention saying, “God governs the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it



probable that an empire can rise without his notice?" While they were hardly examples of biblical Christianity, they nevertheless believed in God and believed in absolute standards which should be a part of the civil order.

### **17. How important was Christianity in colonial education in America?**

Young colonists' education usually came from the Bible, the Hornbook, and the New England Primer. The Hornbook consisted of a single piece of parchment attached to a paddle of wood. Usually the alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, and religious doctrines were written on it. The New England Primer taught a number of lessons and included such things as the names of the Old and New Testament books, the Lord's Prayer, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and John Cotton's "Spiritual Milk for American Babies." Even when teaching the alphabet, biblical themes were used: "A is for Adam's fall, we sinned all. B is for Heaven to find, the Bible mind. C is for Christ crucified, for sinners died."

### **18. How important was Christianity in colonial higher education?**

Most of the major universities were established by Christian denominations. Harvard was a Puritan school. William and Mary was an Anglican school. Yale was Congregational, Princeton was Presbyterian, and Brown was Baptist. The first motto for Harvard was Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae (Truth for Christ and the Church). Students gathered for prayer and readings from the Scriptures every day. Yale was established by Increase Mather and Cotton Mather because Harvard was moving away from its original Calvinist philosophy and eventually drifted to Unitarianism. The founders of Yale said that "every student shall consider the main end of his study to wit to know God in Jesus Christ and answerably to lead a Godly, sober life."

## **19. If Christianity was so important in colonial America, why does the Constitution establish a wall of separation between church and state?**

Contrary to what many Americans may think, the phrase “separation of church and state” does not appear anywhere in the Constitution. In fact, there is no mention of the words church, state, or separation in the First Amendment or anywhere within the Constitution. The First Amendment does guarantee freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion.

The phrase is found in a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to Baptist pastors in Danbury, Connecticut in 1802 in which he gave his opinion of the establishment clause of the First Amendment and then felt that this was “building a wall of separation between church and state.” At best this was a commentary on the First Amendment, from an individual who was in France when the Constitution and Bill of Rights were drafted.

### **Notes**

1. William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, ed. Samuel Eliot Morison (New York: The Modern Library, 1967), Chapter XI.
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4. Marshall Foster, *The American Covenant* (Thousand Oaks, CA: The Mayflower Institute, 1992), 86-87.

# Heresy: Nothing New Under the Sun

*Kerby Anderson provides an overview of some ancient Christian heresies that are still being embraced today: legalism, gnosticism, mysticism, and marcionism.*

In this article we address ancient heresies that still exist in only a slightly different form today. Jesus warned us in Matthew 13:24-25 that the “kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.” But then there is a twist in the story.

“But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.”

Later Jesus explained the parable. The wheat is the “people of the kingdom.” The tares are the “people of the evil one.” The illustration would make sense to people living in the first century. There was even a Roman law against sowing tares in another person’s field. Some have called it a “primitive form of bioterrorism.”



Jesus is teaching that both true Christians and false Christians will live together. They both may even go to church and seem like Christians. But the false Christians believe and spread heresy within the church and into society.

Paul also warned about false teaching and heresy. In what might have been his last epistle, he warned Timothy that: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn

aside to myths.” (2 Timothy 4:3)

Peter also gave a warning that these false teachers will come from inside the church. “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.” (2 Peter 2:1)

Notice that these heresies and false teachers will arise from among you. They will secretly introduce these heresies. And they will use greed and sensuality to seduce Christians. Jude (1:4) also adds that these false teachers “have crept in unnoticed” and “turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

In this article we look at heresies in the past that can be found in a slightly altered form today. Just as believers in the first century were warned about false teachers and destructive heresies, so we need to warn each other today about these heresies in the 21st century.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 reminds us that there is “nothing new under the sun.” As we will see below, that is true of these ancient heresies.

## **Legalism**

Legalism is an ancient heresy going all the way back to the first century. Paul in his letter to the Colossians (2:16-17) said, “Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath-day things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” He warned them about those in their midst who were taking them captive through the

subtle lies of legalism.

You might notice that what is listed in these verses are not instructions on purity or righteousness. Rather they are specific Old Testament practices that were given to Israel before the coming of Christ. The Passover is a foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice as the Lamb of God. While the deliverance of Israel is significant, consider how much more significant is Christ's death which provides us with deliverance from the slavery of sin and separation from God. The previous feasts and festivals are no longer necessary now that we have Christ in our lives.

Jesus addressed legalism among the Pharisees and scribes. They established all sorts of rules and regulations that were binding on all Jews. Starting with the law, they set out to compile the various oral traditions and even began to develop interpretations of these laws. In the end, they even had interpretations of the interpretations that were collected in numerous volumes.

By the time of Christ, the Pharisees and the scribes were actually following the traditions of men rather than the law of God. Jesus pointedly asked them, "Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3) Jesus also condemned the Pharisees by saying, "You also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:28). Jesus therefore accused them, on numerous occasions, of being hypocrites.

Legalism is our attempt to produce righteousness apart from God. We are challenged to follow additional rules and regulations that we believe will merit favor before God. But in the end, these unbiblical rules bind us and drain the joy from our lives.

When we give people an ever expanding "to-do list" that is uncoupled from God's power, we wear people down and ultimately

drive people away from the gospel. Paul warned Timothy that in the last days there would be people “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Timothy 3:5). He counsels him to avoid such people.

## **Gnosticism**

Gnosticism is an ancient heresy that surfaced in the last century, partially because of the discovery of the Gnostic Gospels. The Gnostics were prevalent in the first few centuries after the time of Christ. The word *gnosis* means “knowledge.” The focus was on hidden knowledge that contradicted biblical revelation.

For example, the Gnostics denied the existence of sin. Instead, they proposed that the world was corrupted by the demiurge who created it and rules over it. If they believed in sin, they would say that the only sin is ignorance.

The Gnostics taught that Jesus came not to save the world but to impart special knowledge that would lead us to what they called a “divine pleroma.” If you were fortunately to find this knowledge, then you would achieve salvation.

In the first centuries, the Gnostics presented themselves as Christians and worked to popularize their ideas among the growing church of believers. They also produced their own texts (Gospel of Mary, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Judas).

Iraenaues was a church father who wrote a critique of Gnosticism in AD 180. He explained that the Gnostics used the Bible alongside their own texts to demonstrate their “perverse interpretations” and “deceitful expositions.” They also reinterpreted parables and allegories from the Old Testament in a fraudulent manner.

Nevertheless, Gnosticism appealed to many Christians in the first centuries because it had many elements that were very similar to Christianity. They believed in Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit. They quoted from the Bible. They practiced some of the sacraments.

Many of these same heretical ideas appeal to Christians today. Leaders of progressive Christianity argue that they have a more mature view of God and the Bible. These leaders believe they have special knowledge that allows them to set aside the standard interpretations of biblical passages. One evangelical pastor said: "The church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense."[\[1\]](#)

The Gnostics and modern heretics claim sources of knowledge outside the Bible. They say we know so much more now than the early Christians. C.S. Lewis refers to this as "chronological snobbery." They assume they know better than any believer in the past.

Today, we have people claiming to know what the Bible really means and invite you to join them as they impart their "special knowledge" to you. More than ever we should be alert to such leaders who will ultimately lead us away from the true Gospel.

## **Mysticism**

Mysticism is another ancient heresy that we still see today. When Paul wrote to the Colossians (2:18-19), he warned them about false teachers who would attempt to seduce them into mystical ideas: "Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God."

The word mysticism comes from the Greek word (*mystes*) for the

mystery religions that existed at the time Paul was writing to these Christians. He is describing someone who is “taking his stand on visions he has seen.” In other words, this is a person who has had some vision and is mixing that vision with the revelation of Scripture.

At the time Paul was writing to a church that was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Many were young Christians and may have brought their pagan ideas into the church. This would include the idea that you receive spiritual revelations by entering into an ecstatic state. These Christians also lived in a culture where many claimed they were receiving visions from the gods. If these young Christians did not have discernment, they might actually believe that someone who has these visions was spiritually superior to them.

Mysticism has been a major area of cultural captivity both in church history and even in our present day. We see in Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth, that believers were confused about speaking in tongues and other spiritual manifestations. Some of the believers were essentially “babes in Christ” who could not handle the solid food of God’s word. He reminded them that when they were pagans, they had been led astray (1 Corinthians 12:1-3). Because of their previous exposure to paganism, they were vulnerable to false doctrine.

Throughout church history, certain churches and denominations have brought mystical rituals and practices into their worship experience. They may take the form of chants, icons, or prescribed practices not found in Scripture but part of a tradition that borrows heavily from mystical ideas. And many of these practices are found today not only in North American churches but in churches in other parts of the world.

Mysticism is quite prevalent outside of the church and can have a strong cultural influence on Christians. Many of the books on the best-seller lists over the last few decades dealing with spirituality are not books that promote biblical



Christianity but rather books that promote an Eastern philosophy of religion or the New Age Movement.

## Marcionism

Marcionism was taught by a theologian named Marcion in the second century. Although some of his ideas parallel Gnosticism, he made a distinction between the God of the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. He taught that the benevolent God of the gospels who sent Jesus was inconsistent with the mean, vindictive, malevolent God of the Old Testament. Hence, he concluded they were two different deities.

He also considered himself a follower of Paul, who he preached was the only true apostle of Jesus Christ. In fact, he even created his own “Scriptures” that included ten of Paul’s epistles and the Gospel of Marcion (which was a shorter version and highly edited version of the Gospel of Luke). He emphasized Paul because he felt he freed Christianity from the Jewish Scriptures.

He also rejected most of the orthodox teachings of Christianity. For example, he rejected the ideas of God’s wrath and rejected the ideas of hell and judgment. Those ideas, according to him, were tied to the God of the Old Testament, whom he called the Demiurge. That God was merely a jealous tribal deity of the Jews and represented a legalistic view of justice.

A similar idea exists even today. For example, one evangelical theologian said this: “The Bible is an ancient book and we shouldn’t be surprised to see it act like one. So seeing God portrayed as a violent, tribal warrior is not how God is but how he was understood to be by the ancient Israelites community with god in their time and place.”[\[2\]](#)

We might add that an increasing number of pastors and

Christians no longer want to talk about God's wrath and refuse to teach what the Bible does say about hell and judgment. Books and articles are being written denying the existence of hell. Instead, they teach universal salvation for all.

Jesus talked more about hell than he talked about heaven. In Luke 16 he describes it as a great chasm that does not allow people to cross to the other side. In Matthew 25 he predicts a future in which people will be separated into two groups. One will enter heaven. The others will be banished to "eternal fire."

We live in a world where heresy, false teaching, and a false gospel are proliferating. That is why we need to develop biblical discernment. Paul said he was amazed that some of the early Christians adopted "a different gospel" which he said was a distorted gospel of Christ. He added, "If we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed" (Galatians 1:6-8).

These ancient heresies are being preached today. We need to return to the essential gospel and sound biblical teaching.

## Notes

1. "Rob Bell Suggests Bible Not Relevant to Today's Culture | CBN News," [www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2015/February/Rob-Bell-Suggests-Bible-Not-Relevant-to-Todays-Culture](http://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2015/February/Rob-Bell-Suggests-Bible-Not-Relevant-to-Todays-Culture) accessed 2/5/2023.
2. Peter Enns, *The Bible Tells Me So: Why Defending Scripture Has Made Us Unable to Read It* (NY: Harper One, 2014).

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# Woke Theology

We frequently hear the term “woke” in current discussions. Campuses, corporations, and even some churches are described as being woke. What does the term mean? How are these ideas influencing society? Is there any connection to ESG mandates and stakeholder capitalism? And how should Christians respond to the influence of wokeness?

## Definition of the Term

The term means that one is “awake” to the true nature of the world at a time when so many in society are asleep. In his book on *Christianity and Wokeness*, Owen Strachan explains that “wokeness occurs when one embraces the system of thought called critical race theory. CRT teaches that all societal life is structured along racial power dynamics.”



According to this view, race is a “social construct,” not biologically based, and merely exists in our imagination. This is one place where there might be some agreement between wokeness and the Bible. The Bible teaches that we are “one race.” Some translations, for example, for Acts 17:26 refer to all humans as “one blood.” Another verse would be Galatians 3:28 which says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

I have found that woke theology often surfaces in the non-Christian world as a substitute religion. Woke theology also surfaces in some churches that are legitimately concerned about injustice. They want to be relevant to the cultural dialogue and thus adopt wokeness.

These terms are sometimes misused, which is why Strachan also

devotes a section on explaining what wokeness is *not*. Here are just five statements of the fifteen he discusses:

- Wanting societal harmony across backgrounds does not make you woke.
- Seeing massive failings in American and Western history, sustained patterns of racist thought, does not make you woke.
- Doing everything you can and know to do to build bonds with people different from you in various ways does not make you woke.
- Praying for greater diversity in your church through saving of fellow sinners does not make you woke.
- Wanting greater justice in the world doesn't make you woke.

In this article we will be looking at various aspects of woke theology. What is the ideology? How does it relate to critical race theory? What about corporations that have adopted a woke ideology? And how can we as Christians respond to this current cultural trend?

## Woke Ideology

Wokeness includes the ideas of critical race theory and antiracism but is broader than just these ideas about race and racial justice. It also includes other social, legal, and even environmental concerns. These ideas were first developed and promoted on university campuses but have made their way into government, corporations, and nearly every part of society.

It is most visible through the actions of people who call themselves "social justice warriors." Critics might describe them as "virtue-signaling liberals" or merely call them "the woke." Whatever name you give to these groups, they have been successful in influencing nearly every institution in America and much of the Western world.

They use inflamed rhetoric and what one commentator calls “*ex-cathedra* incantations of pseudo-values so absurd that only a few years ago it would have seemed like they must be kidding.” That’s a fancy way of saying that you can’t believe people are completely serious when they are saying crazy things about race, gender, and science.

Much of this began on university campuses across the nation. Professors promoted ideas about cultural transformation that influenced the young minds who became the future opinion-forming elite of today. These ideas were reinforced because of a liberal media forming a feed-back loop between a leftist academy and a liberal establishment media.

This is an important principle to understand. In the past, we used to hear parents and others argue that the nutty ideas in the heads of college students would fade away as they had to earn a living and deal with the realities of the world of business. What happened was the fact that these college graduates found previous graduates in some of these corporations who were woke soul mates. The woke ideas on campus often became the foundational ideas in business and government. The media continued to reinforce those crazy woke ideas.

In her book, *Awake: Not Woke*, Noelle Mering explains how many in this emerging generation do not believe they are defined as being in the image of God but instead are called to fight evil in society. They are merely one entity in a group identity rather than someone made in the image and likeness of God. They aren’t praised or criticized by their actions and attitudes. Instead, they are elevated or condemned based on their group, their racial background, or their gender. They are not only being indoctrinated by critical theory on race but also by critical theory on sex and gender. And obedience to these ideas is achieved through thought and speech control.

# Critical Race Theory

One aspect of wokeness is critical race theory. Critical theory began at the University of Frankfurt's Institute for Social Research, which came to be known as the "Frankfurt School." The Frankfurt scholars fled to Columbia University's Teachers College in New York in 1934 to escape the Nazis.

Critical theory traces all social injustice to inequities in power that are based on class, race, gender, or sexual orientation. In classical Marxism, the focus was on class, with the assumption that the working class would rise up against the capitalist oppressors. By contrast, critical theory is a form of cultural Marxism that seeks a radical transformation of society by uprooting present social authorities. Cultural Marxism retains basic Marxist assumptions but advocated a "long march through the institutions," to quote a leading thinker, Antonio Gramsci.

You are either in power or out of power. If you are in power, you are automatically discredited. If you are underprivileged, you are immune from criticism. The underprivileged can make demands, but they need not make arguments, since the whole system, including basic rationality, is rigged against them. This also means that the claims of critical race theory are unfalsifiable.

At its core, critical race theory is impractical. James Lindsay asks you to imagine you own a small tailor shop where you must assist each customer individually. Two people enter your store: one is white, and the other is black. If you choose to serve the black person first, it shows you are racist because you don't trust a black person in the store unsupervised. If you choose to serve the white person first, it shows you are racist because you value white people over black people.

How should we respond to these claims? First, the Bible

teaches that truth exists and can be discerned (Proverbs 30:5, John 8:32, 2 Timothy 3:16). Racial bias may be a problem, but the real impediment to proper biblical interpretation is our sin (John 3:19-20). Proponents of the woke agenda reject rational arguments and censor contrary ideas about race and society.

Christians are to love God with our minds (Mark 12:30). We are to “destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God” because we are to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Second is the issue of grace. According to their view, members of an “oppressor” race will never really be forgiven because they will always be part of that race. By contrast, the Bible teaches that we are guilty because we are sinful (Romans 3:23, 6:23) not because of our racial status. We cannot earn salvation by good works because salvation is a gift of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are redeemed through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22-24).

## **Woke Corporations**

Corporations that have gone woke have been increasingly involved in politics. Here are just a few examples from the last year.

When the Georgia legislature debated and then passed voter integrity laws, the CEOs of several corporations took to the media to express their displeasure. For example, the CEO of Coca-Cola complained the voting law was oppressive, which then brought attention to the fact that the company was doing business in China with oppressive human rights violations. The CEO of Delta Airlines complained about voter IDs as other critics were reminding them that you couldn't get on a Delta flight without showing a form of ID. But if these Georgia laws were supposedly an attempt at voter suppression, they failed since the number of voters in the latest election set records.

Many of these companies seem to be reevaluating their past actions. They can see the downward financial trajectory of past woke companies. The common phrase “get woke, go broke” seems to be true.

They also have noticed how members of Congress have responded. Senator Rick Scott wrote an open letter to “Woke Corporate America,” saying that he hoped they were having fun with their virtue signaling and the attempts to one-up each other. But he reminded them they destroyed working people’s jobs and destroyed some small businesses.

Although there are some members in Congress who want to pressure corporations to be less woke, there are other significant pressures on these companies to be more woke. This comes from the enforcing of ESG standards. The “E” stands for environmental concerns. What is the company doing to address the threat of climate change by lowering carbon emissions? The “S” stands for social and looks at the company’s relationship with stakeholders (often called stakeholder capitalism). The “G” stands for governance and desires diversity on the board of directors and corporate transparency.

While many of the ESG goals are admirable, recent examples show how it has been used as a political tool against anyone who dissents. A senior HSBC banker was canceled merely because he correctly observed that some of the climate change rhetoric was shrill and unsubstantiated.

Recently Tesla was removed from the S&P 500 ESG Index, even though they are the largest producer of electric cars and a few months ago had the fourth largest weighting in the index. Could it be that this change had more to do with the words and actions of Elon Musk than anything at Tesla?

## **How Should We Respond?**

We are living in a time when we can be canceled for something



we say or even for our lack of enthusiasm for a particular policy or piece of legislation. That is why Rod Dreher warns us in his book, *Live Not by Lies*, of a coming “soft totalitarianism.” The old, hard totalitarianism came from the state (Germany, Russia) and was dedicated to the eradication of Christianity. This new totalitarianism usually comes from the Left in society but is also dedicated to the eradication of Christianity.

The soft totalitarianism of today demands allegiance to a set of progressive beliefs. Compliance is forced less by the state than by elites who form public opinion, and by private corporations that control our lives through technology. Citizens won’t be taken away in handcuffs by the state, but their lives will be devastated by Leftist elites that will do what they can to destroy their lives.

Dissenters from the woke party line find their businesses, careers, and reputations destroyed. They are pushed out of the public square, stigmatized, canceled, and demonized as racists, sexists, and homophobes.

His book is full of stories from Christians who endured hard totalitarianism and provide us with models for how to address this more insidious form of soft totalitarianism. Often this is coming from business and the media.

What is a biblical perspective on race and gender? Christians and churches are facing persecution because many of these woke ideas are contrary to Scripture. Nevertheless, many of these woke ideas are making their way into the pulpits and Sunday School classes of many churches.

Woke religion rejects the salvation of Christ and supplants it with a utopian view that true salvation can be found in environmental activism, racial activism, and stakeholder capitalism. We can applaud young people looking to make the world a better place, but they have put their allegiance into

a worldview contrary to biblical principles.

Woke faith at its core is atheistic and denies God and Christ. Much of it is rooted in a Marxist view of the world. Second, it also replaces the biblical idea of sin (Romans 3:23) with salvation through environmental activism and racial struggle. Third, it is a utopian vision that assumes we can create “heaven on Earth” without Christ.

If we want to address real social problems in our society, we need to come back to biblical principles. Many of the successful social movements in the last two centuries (abolition, suffrage, civil rights) rested on a biblical foundation. We don’t need woke theology to bring salt and light to our fallen world.

### **Additional Reading**

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Wokeness*, Point of View booklet, 2022.

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Critical Race Theory*, Point of View booklet, 2021.

Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, New York: Sentinel, 2020.

Noelle Mering, *Awake: Not Woke, A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology*, Gastonia, NC: Tan Books, 2021.

Vivek Ramaswamy, *Woke, Inc.*, New York: Center Street, 2021.

Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel and the Way to Stop It*, Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021.

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# The Liberal Mind

*Kerby Anderson tries to understand the liberal mind from a biblical perspective. What are the assumptions the liberals make? How do those assumptions square with the Bible?*

As we begin this discussion, I want to make a clear distinction between the terms “liberal” and “leftist.” We often use the terms interchangeably but there is an important difference.



Dennis Prager wrote about this and even described those differences in a PragerU video.[\[1\]](#) His argument is that traditional liberalism has far more in common with conservatism than it does with leftism. Here are some examples he uses to make his point.

Liberals and leftists have a different view of race. The traditional liberal position on race is that the color of one’s skin is insignificant. By contrast, leftists argue that the notion that race is insignificant is itself racist. Liberals were committed to racial integration and would have rejected the idea of separate black dormitories and separate black graduations on university campuses.

Nationalism is another difference. Dennis Prager says that liberals always deeply believed in the nation-state. Leftists, on the other hand, oppose nationalism and promote class solidarity.

Superman comics illustrate the point. When the writers of Superman were liberal, Superman was not only an American but also one who fought for “Truth, justice, and the American

way.” The left-wing writers of Superman comics had Superman announce a few years ago that he was going to speak before the United Nations and inform them that he was renouncing his American citizenship.

Perhaps the best example is free speech. American liberals agree with the statement: “I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend your right to say it.” Leftists today are leading a nationwide suppression of free speech everywhere from the college campuses to the Big Tech companies.

Capitalism and the free enterprise system would be yet another example. Dennis Prager says, “Liberals have always been pro capitalism,” though they often wanted government “to play a bigger role” in the economy. Leftists oppose capitalism and are eagerly promoting socialism.

Liberals have had a love of Western civilization and taught it at most universities. They were promoters of the liberal arts and fine arts. In fact, one of the most revered liberals in American history was President Franklin Roosevelt who talked about the need to protect Western Civilization and even Christian civilization.

Today Western Civilization classes are rarely if ever taught in the university. That’s because leftists don’t believe Western Civilization is superior to any other civilization. Leftists label people who attempt to defend western values as racist and accuse them of promoting white supremacy. And attempts to promote religious liberty are dismissed as thinly disguised attacks on the LGBT community.

In conclusion, liberals and leftists are very different.

## **Ethics and a Belief in Right and Wrong**

The philosophical foundation for most liberal perspectives is secularism. If you don’t believe in God and the Bible, then

you certainly don't believe in biblical absolutes or even moral absolutes. Dostoyevsky put it this way: "If God is dead, then everything is permitted."

Even atheists admit that a view of God affects human behavior. Richard Dawkins recently expressed his fear that the removal of religion would be a bad idea for society because it would give people "license to do really bad things."

He likens the idea of God to surveillance, or as he puts it, the "divine spy camera in the sky."[\[2\]](#) People generally tend to do the right thing when someone is watching them. They tend to do bad things when no one is watching. He goes on to add that the "Great Spy Camera theory" isn't a good reason for him to believe in God.

It is also worth mentioning that more and more young people aren't making decisions about right and wrong based on logic but instead based on feelings. I began to notice this decades ago. College students making a statement or challenging a conclusion used to say "I think" as they started a sentence." Then I started to see more and more of them say "I feel" at the start of a sentence. They wouldn't use reason to discuss an issue. Instead, they would use emotion and talk about how they felt about a particular issue.

The liberal mind also has a very different foundation for discussing right and wrong. Dennis Prager recently admitted that he had been wrong. All of his life, he has said that the left's moral compass is broken. But he has concluded that "in order to have a broken moral compass, you need to have a moral compass to begin with. But the left doesn't have one."[\[3\]](#)

He doesn't mean that conclusion as an attack. It is merely an observation that the left doesn't really think in terms of good and evil. We assume that other people think that way because we think that way. But that is not how most of the people on the left perceive the world.

Karl Marx is a good example. He divided the world by economic class (the worker and the owner). One group was exploiting the other group. Good and evil aren't really relevant when you are thinking in terms of class struggle. Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, operated "beyond good and evil."

To the Marxists, "there is no such thing as a universal good or universal evil." Those of us who perceive the world from a Judeo-Christian worldview see ethics as relevant to the moral standard, not the person or their social status.

A biblical view of ethics and morality begins with the reality that God exists and that He has revealed to us moral principles we are to apply to our lives and society. Those absolute moral principles are tied to God's character and thus unchanging.

## **A Naïve View of Human Nature**

In this article we are talking about the liberal mind, while often making a distinction between liberals and the left. When it comes to the proper view of human nature, both groups have a naïve and inaccurate view.

You can discover this for yourself by asking a simple question: Do you believe people are basically good? You will get an affirmative answer from most people in America because we live in a civilized society. We don't have to deal with the level of corruption or terror that is a daily life in so many other countries in the world.

But if you press the question, you will begin to see how liberals have difficulty explaining the holocaust and Muslim terrorism. Because the liberal mind starts with the assumption that people are basically good. After all, that is what so many secular philosophers and psychologists have been saying for centuries. Two world wars and other wars during the 20th century should have caused most people to reject the idea that

people are basically good.

The Bible teaches just the opposite. Romans 3:23 reminds us that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” This statement about the deceitfulness of our heart may seem extreme until we realize that Jesus also taught that “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander” (Matthew 15:19).

This naïve view of human nature should concern all of us. Young people, two generations after Auschwitz, believe people are basically good. One reason is biblical illiteracy. Another reason is historical illiteracy. A recent survey found two thirds of young people did not know six million died in the Holocaust and nearly half could not name one of the Nazi death camps.[\[4\]](#)

This naïve view of human nature may also explain another phenomenon we have discussed before. One of the untruths described in the book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, is the belief that the battle for truth is “us versus them.”[\[5\]](#) If you think that people are basically good and you have to confront someone who disagrees with you, then they must be a bad person. They aren’t just wrong. They are evil.

Tribalism has been with us for centuries. That is nothing new about people joining and defending a tribe. But that has become more intense because of the rhetoric on university campuses and the comments spreading through social media. We don’t have to live this way, but the forces in society are making the divisions in society worse by the day.

A biblical perspective starts with the teaching that all are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27) and thus have value and dignity. But all of us have a sin nature (Romans 5:12). We should interact with others who disagree with us with humility

(Ephesians 4:2) and grace (Colossians 4:6).

## Big Government

We will now look at why liberals and the left promote big government. The simple answer relates to our discussion above about human nature. If you believe that people are basically good, then it is easy to assume that political leaders and bureaucrats will want to do the best for the citizens.

Christians agree that government is necessary and that it is one of the institutions ordained by God (Romans 13:1-7). There is a role for government to set the rules of governing and to resolve internal disputes through a legal system. Government is not God. But for people who don't believe in God, then the state often becomes God.

Friedrich Hayek wrote about this drive toward big government and the bureaucratic state in his classic book, [\*The Road to Serfdom\*](#). He argued in his book that "the most important change which extensive government control produces is a psychological change, an alteration in the character of the people."[\[6\]](#)

The character of citizens is changed because they yield their will and decision-making to a more powerful government. They may have done so willingly in order to have a welfare state. Or they may have done so unwillingly because a dictator has taken control of the reins of power. Either way, Hayek argues, their character has been altered because the control over every detail of economic life is ultimately control of life itself.

Friedrich Hayek wrote *The Road to Serfdom* to warn us that sometimes the road can be paved with good intentions. Most government officials and bureaucrats write laws, rules, and regulations with every good intention. They desire to make the world a better place by preventing catastrophe and by encouraging positive actions from their citizens. But in their



desire to control and direct every aspect of life, they take us down the road to serfdom.

He argued that people who enter into government and run powerful bureaucracies are often people who enjoy running not only the bureaucracy but also the lives of its citizens. In making uniform rules from a distance, they deprive the local communities of the freedom to apply their own knowledge and wisdom to their unique situations. A government seeking to be a benevolent god, usually morphs into a malevolent tyrant.

The liberal mind is all too willing to allow political leaders and bureaucrats to make decisions for the public. But that willingness is based on two flawed assumptions. First, human beings are not God and thus government leaders will certainly make flawed decisions that negatively affect the affairs of its citizens. Second, liberals do not believe we have a sin nature (Romans 3:23), and that includes government leaders. Even the best of them will not always be wise, compassionate, and altruistic. This is why the founders of this country established checks and balances in government to limit the impact of sinful behavior.

## Tolerance?

If there is one attitude that you would think would be synonymous with the liberal mind, it would be [tolerance](#). That may have been true in the past. Liberalism championed the idea of free thought and free speech. That is no longer the case.

Liberals have been developing a zero-tolerance culture. In some ways, that has been a positive change. We no longer tolerate racism. We no longer tolerate sexism. Certain statements, certain jokes, and certain attitudes have been deemed off-limits.

The problem is that the politically correct culture of the left moved the lines quickly to begin to attack just about any

view or value contrary to the liberal mind. Stray at all from the accepted limits of leftist thinking and you will earn labels like racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic.

Quickly the zero-tolerance culture became the cancel culture. It is not enough to merely label an opponent with a smear, the left demands that an "enemy" lose their social standing and even their job and livelihood for deviating from what is acceptable thought. A mendacious social media mob will make sure that you pay a heavy penalty for contradicting the fundamental truths of the liberal mind.

One phenomenon that promotes this intolerance is the use of smears and negative labels. For example, patriotism and pride in your country is called xenophobia. Acknowledging the innate differences between males and females is labelled sexist. Promoting the idea that we are all of one race (the human race) and that all lives matter is called racist. Questioning whether we should redefine traditional marriage is deemed homophobic. Arguing that very young children should not undergo sex assignment surgery is called transphobia. Pointing out that most terrorist attacks come from Muslim terrorists is labelled Islamophobic.

Should Christians be [tolerant](#)? The answer is yes, we should be tolerant, but that word has been redefined in society to argue that we should accept every person's behavior. The Bible does not permit that. That is why I like to use the word [civility](#). Essentially, that is the Golden Rule: "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).

Civility requires humility. A civil person acknowledges that he or she does not possess all wisdom and knowledge. That means we should listen to others and consider the possibility that they might be right, and we could be wrong. Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself." We can disagree with other

without being disagreeable. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us that “A gentle answer turns away wrath.”

This is an important principle as we try to understand the liberal mind and work to build bridges to others in our society.

## Notes

1. Dennis Prager, Left or Liberal?, <https://www.prageru.com/video/left-or-liberal/>.
2. David Sanderson, “Ending religion is a bad idea, says Richard Dawkins,” *The Times*, October 5, 2019, [www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ending-religion-is-a-bad-idea-says-richard-dawkins-sqqdbmcpq](http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ending-religion-is-a-bad-idea-says-richard-dawkins-sqqdbmcpq)
3. Dennis Prager, “The Left’s Moral Compass Isn’t Broken,” September 15, 2020, [townhall.com/columnists/dennisprager/2020/09/15/the-lefts-moral-compass-isnt-broken-n2576225](http://townhall.com/columnists/dennisprager/2020/09/15/the-lefts-moral-compass-isnt-broken-n2576225).
4. Ryan Miller, “Almost two-thirds of millennials, Gen Z don’t know that 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust, survey finds,” *USA Today*, September 16, 2020, [www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/09/16/holocaust-history-millennials-gen-z-cant-name-concentration-camps/5792448002/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/09/16/holocaust-history-millennials-gen-z-cant-name-concentration-camps/5792448002/).
5. Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff, et al., *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. New York City: Penguin Press, 2018, [probe.org/coddling-of-the-american-mind/](http://probe.org/coddling-of-the-american-mind/).
6. F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents, the Definitive Edition*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 48.

# Biblical Archaeology

*Kerby Anderson provides an update on recent archaeological finds that corroborate the historicity of the Bible.*

One of the most important proofs for the historical accuracy of the Bible can be found in archaeology. Ancient history and archaeology should confirm the accuracy of this record. That is what we find when comparing these finds with the written record of Scripture.

My focus will be to summarize a few of the past archaeological finds that confirm the Bible and then provide an update on some of the newest archaeological discoveries made in just the last few years that are very significant. On the Probe website, we have an excellent summary done twenty years ago of archaeology and the Old Testament ([probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/](http://probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/)) and archaeology and the New Testament ([probe.org/archaeology-and-the-new-testament/](http://probe.org/archaeology-and-the-new-testament/)).



Archaeology not only has confirmed the historical record found in the Bible, but it also provides additional details not found in the original writings of the biblical authors. Archaeology also helps explain Bible passages by providing context of the surrounding culture as well as the social and political circumstances.

We must also admit the limitations of archaeology. Although these archaeological finds can establish the historical accuracy of the record, they cannot prove the divine inspiration of the Bible. Also, we must admit that even when we have an archaeological find, it still must be interpreted. Those interpretations are obviously affected by the worldview perspective and even bias of the historians and archaeologists.

Even granting the skeptical bias that can be found in this

field, it is still amazing that many archaeologists acknowledge the biblical confirmation that has come from significant archaeological finds.

Dr. William Albright observed, "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition."[<sup>{1}</sup>](#)

Archaeologist Nelson Glueck and president of Hebrew Union College concluded, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical description has often led to amazing discoveries."[<sup>{2}</sup>](#)

Millar Burrows, Professor of Archaeology at Yale University, remarked that "On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine."[<sup>{3}</sup>](#)

## Old Testament Archaeology

There are so many significant archaeological finds that confirm the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. Perhaps the most famous and most significant find is the Dead Sea scrolls. A young shepherd boy found the first of them in a cave in 1947. Eventually over 800 fragments were found. This includes a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah.

Many of these scrolls are from before the time of Jesus Christ. That is important because it provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament. The earliest copies of the Old Testament that we had before this discovery were a thousand years later. When we compare the

Dead Sea scrolls to these later manuscripts, we can see that there were very few variations (mostly due to changes in spelling or grammar). The transmission through the scribe was very accurate.

Another significant find was archaeological documentation of King David. Archaeologists working at one site uncovered an inscription that means "house of David" that dates to the ninth century BC.

Another important archaeological find was the Hittite nation. The Hittites are mentioned nearly 50 times in the Old Testament, but there was no solid archaeological evidence they existed until the 20th century. Some argued that the Bible must be wrong since it mentions this nation but archaeological evidence was lacking.

The Hittites were a major force against the Jews. Israel needed to conquer them in order to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 11:3-4). King David had Uriah the Hittite killed because of his adultery with his wife, Bathsheba (2 Kings 11:3-21). Fortunately, archaeologists did uncover abundant evidence of the Hittites in Turkey. They found a temple, sculptures, a storeroom with 10,000 clay tablets. Later they even uncovered the Hittite capital city of Hattusha.

Archaeologists with the Israel Antiquities Authority digging at Tel Lachish found an ancient toilet that confirms Old Testament history. To understand its significance, we need to look at the record of King Hezekiah. We read in 2 Kings that he removed the Asherah poles from the high places and smashed the sacred stones that were used in the Canaanite cultic worship.

Archaeologists discovered large rooms that appear to be a shrine where four-horned altars were destroyed. They also found a seat carved in stone with the hole in it that was used as a toilet. It was mostly likely placed there as a form of

desecration for the whole room.[\[4\]](#) This correlates with the biblical description in 2 Kings 10:27 that Jehu and his followers “demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day.”

## **New Testament Archaeology**

Jesus spent much of his time in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. It is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of the fishing industry there (anchors, fishhooks), which would have been used by many of the disciples. The houses were one-story buildings, with roofs of wooden beams or branches. This explains how men carried a man to the roof and let him down in front of Jesus (Mark 2:1-4). Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-22, Luke 4:31-36). The remains of a synagogue built in the 4th century sits atop the black basalt foundations of this synagogue that existed at the time of Jesus.

In Jerusalem are many archaeological discoveries from the time of Jesus. That includes the remains of the temple as well as the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15) and the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-7).

Archaeology (as well as history) verifies the existence of many political leaders mentioned in the New Testament. A Denarius coin shows a portrait of Tiberius Caesar. This is also significant because Jesus asked the people whose likeness was on the coin (Mark 12:17). The name Pontius Pilate was found in an inscription at Caesarea Maritima.

Sometimes archaeology can shed light on what seems like a sharp disagreement in the Bible. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he recounts what he said to Peter who stopped eating meals with gentile Christians. He argued that Peter lived like a Gentile even though he was a Jew.

The answer lies in the fact that Paul was a devout Pharisee,

who took kosher food laws and purity very seriously. Peter, though Jewish, was not a Pharisee and grew up in Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeological excavations uncovered some non-kosher evidence. Some were eating wild boar and catfish, which were considered unclean and not to be eaten by Jew following the Torah.[\[5\]](#)

Archaeological finds at Corinth include the city's *bema* seat, where Paul stood trial (Acts 18:12-17) and an inscription with the name Erastus, a city administrator who was an associate of Paul (Acts 19:22; 2 Timothy 4:20; Romans 16:23).

Critics have challenged the historical record of Luke because of alleged inaccuracies. Classical scholar Colin Hemer documents that Luke is a very accurate historian.[\[6\]](#) He identifies 84 facts in the Book of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This includes nautical details, names of gods, designation of magistrates, and proper names and titles.

These are just a few of the archaeological discoveries in the past that have confirmed the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the next section we will look at some of the most recent archaeological discoveries.

## Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Within the last few years, there have been major archaeological discoveries that further confirm biblical history. An article in *Christianity Today* provides a list of the top ten archaeological discoveries.[\[7\]](#) Here are just a few of these important discoveries.

The Israel Antiquities Authority announced the discovery of a limestone column on which the word "Jerusalem" was spelled out in Aramaic. This is the oldest inscription of this nature found so far. You might expect that there would be lots of such inscriptions, but that turn out to be very rare.



The inscription was found in an ancient potter's village that must have served pilgrims making their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. A potter's field calls to mind the one bought by the priests (Matthew 27:7) with the money Judas returned.

The Jewish tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were located for a time in Shiloh. Excavation there produced a clay pomegranate. In the Bible, the pomegranate was a common temple decoration (1 Kings 7:18; 2 Kings 25:17). Small pomegranates embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet yarns hung from the hems of the priestly robes (Exodus 28:33). This discovery affirms the sacredness of Shiloh.

Scientists and archaeologists believe they made have found the site of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. They found evidence that a "high-heat" explosive event north of the Dead Sea wiped out all civilization in the affected area. It killed all the people within a 25-kilometer circular area. The fertile soil would have been stripped of nutrients by the high heat. Waves of briny salt would have washed over the surrounding area and spread through hot winds.

The scientists suggest that a cosmic airburst event from a meteor was the reason for the disappearance from the site. It apparently took 600 years for the region to recover before it could once again be inhabited. This fits with the description in Genesis 19, which says that burning sulfur rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah and killed all the people and all the vegetation of the land.

Archaeologist Dr. Stephen Collins says that there was a violent conflagration that ended occupation at the site. There is "melted pottery, scorched foundation stones, and several feet of ash and destruction debris churned into a dark gray matrix as if in a Cuisinart." He and another author in a joint paper conclude that all of this provides "signs of a highly destructive and thermal event that one might expect from what is described in Genesis 19."[\[8\]](#)

## Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Above we looked at a few of the most recent archaeological discoveries that confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible. Most of them were found in an article in *Christianity Today*. Here are a few more significant discoveries.

An inscribed piece of limestone discovered in a tomb along the west bank of the Nile was revealed to be a Semitic abecedary (alphabet in ABC order). It dates back to the time of Moses and fits with the statement that “Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said” (Exodus 24:4). It turns out he wasn’t the only one writing in a Semitic script in Egypt at that time.

When ISIS terrorists captured Mosul, they blew up the tomb of the prophet Jonah. This uncovered the remains of a palace of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon. Previous archaeological teams stopped digging in certain sites in Iraq for fear of destroying them. That was a case of the traditional tomb of Jonah, until ISIS started digging beneath it to find artifacts to sell. As one article put it, “ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible.”[\[9\]](#) The tunnels they dug revealed a previously untouched Assyrian palace in the ancient city of Ninevah. Inscriptions found in the old city of Nineveh give an order of Assyrian kings that matches perfectly with the biblical order.

Extra careful processing of dirt from an archaeological dig in the southwest corner of the Temple Mount provided a *beka* weight. This was used (Exodus 38:6) to measure the silver in the half-shekel temple tax that was collected from each member of the Jewish community.

Another seal impression seems to be (a letter is missing) the name “Isaiah the prophet.” It was found near the Temple Mount near another seal impression that says “King Hezekiah of Judah” that was uncovered two years earlier. Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah are mentioned in the same verse 17 times. This

clay seal gives the impression that Isaiah had access to the king's palace as his adviser.

A ring with the name "Pontius Pilate" on it was excavated decades ago but only could be read recently due to advanced photographic techniques. Of course, this is not the first time that his name has surfaced in archaeology, but it is still a significant find. The ring is not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate. It was probably worn by someone authorized to act on his authority and would use it to seal official communications.

This is an exciting time for archaeological investigation. New finds provide even more evidence of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Archaeology has provided abundant confirmation of the Bible.

## Notes

1. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religions of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 176.
2. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert* (New York: Farrar, Strous and Cudahy, 1959), 136.
3. Millar Burrows, *What Mean These Stones?* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 1.
4. Richard Gray, "The wrong kind throne: Toilet discovered 2-800-year-old shrine," *Daily Mail*, 28 September 2016.
5. Craig A. Evans, "Why Archaeology Matters for Bible Study," *Bible Study Magazine*, March/April 2019, 18-19.
6. Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 1990).
7. Gordon Govier, "Biblical Archaeology's Top 10 Discoveries of 2018," *Christianity Today*, December 27, 2018.
8. Amanda Borschel-Dan, "Evidence of Sodom? Meteor blast cause of biblical destruction, say scientists," *Times of Israel*, 22 November 2018.
9. "ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible," *Facts and Trends*, March 19, 2018.

# George Washington and Religion

*Kerby Anderson presents a compelling argument for the view that George Washington was a devoted Christian rather than a deist. He points to Washington's insistence on the importance of services for his soldiers, his personal church attendance, his prayer life and his commitment to the spiritual upbringing of his godchildren.*

## Background

What was George Washington's view of religion and in particular of Christianity? The historical perspective used to be that Washington was a Christian and orthodox in most of his beliefs. But the modern view has been that he was either a lukewarm Anglican or more likely a Deist.



I want to look at some new research that argues for the traditional view and against the modern view of George Washington's religion. One book is *Washington's God: Religion, Liberty, and the Father of our Country*.[\[1\]](#) It is written by Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute and winner of the Templeton Award) and Jana Novak. Another book, written by Peter Lillback with Jerry Newcombe, is *George Washington's Sacred Fire*.[\[2\]](#)

George Washington was born into a Virginia family of moderate wealth and was exposed to various religious activities: lessons in religion, regular prayer, Sunday school attendance,

and reverence for God. His mother had a daily ritual of retiring with a book of religious readings.

By the time he was a teenager, Washington had already assumed serious responsibilities as a professional surveyor and then as a major in the Virginia militia. His adventures in the wild lands gave him invaluable lessons about the military, Indians, and the British. Years later in a speech to the Delaware chiefs, Washington said, "You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all, the religion of Jesus Christ. These will make you a greater and happier people than you are."[\[3\]](#)

He studied the Bible as well as the writings of ancient heroes. The busts and portraits at Mount Vernon demonstrate this. There are busts of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden, and Frederick II of Prussia. In the dining room are portraits of the Virgin Mary and St. John.

Washington's own stepgranddaughter "Nelly" Custis saw him as a religious man. She wrote this to one of Washington's early biographers:

It was his custom to retire to his library at nine or ten o'clock, where he remained an hour before he went to his chamber. He always rose before the sun, and remained in his library until called to breakfast. I never witnessed his private devotions. I never inquired about them. I should have thought it the greatest heresy to doubt his firm belief in Christianity. His life, his writings, prove that he was a Christian. He was not one of those who act or pray, "that they may be seen of men." He communed with his God in secret.[\[4\]](#)

In what follows we will look at the evidence for George Washington's faith as it surfaced in his letters and actions as general and president.

# Deism vs. Christianity

Pick up a book about George Washington written during the nineteenth century, and you will probably see that he is described as being a Christian. However, if you pick up a book written in the last seventy years, it will describe him as a Deist. Why the change?

The turning point seems to be a study by historian Paul F. Boller, Jr. entitled *George Washington and Religion*. His conclusion can be summarized in a single sentence: To the “unbiased observer” George Washington appears as a Deist, not a devout Christian.[\[5\]](#) Most historians since Boller accepted this idea and were less likely to assert that Washington was a Christian.

What do we mean by “Deism”? Deism is the belief that God is merely a watchmaker God who started the universe but is not involved in the affairs of humans and human history. One definition of Deism is that “There is no special providence; no miracles or other divine interventions intrude upon the lawful natural order.”[\[6\]](#)

Was George Washington a Deist? He was not. It is worth noting that even historian Paul Boller admitted that religion was important to Washington as a leader. Boller writes, “he saw to it that divine services were performed by the chaplains as regularly as possible on the Sabbath for the soldiers under his command.”[\[7\]](#) We might reasonably ask, Why would chaplains be important to a Deist?

Boller even admits there are testimonials of Washington’s church attendance. This is important since many historians even go further than Boller and assert that Washington did not even attend church as a mature adult.

Michael Novak admits that some of the names Washington often used for God *sound* Deist, but that does not mean that he was a

Deist. In fact, his prayers for God's action were just the opposite of what you might hear from a Deist. Washington believed God favored the cause of liberty and should be beseeched to "interpose" his action on behalf of the Americans. He called for public thanksgiving for the many ways in which Americans experienced God's hand in key events in our history.

Washington used more than eighty terms to refer to God, among them: Almighty God, Creator, Divine Goodness, Father of all mercies, and Lord of Hosts. The most common term he used in his writings and speeches was "Providence." When he did so, he used the masculine personal pronoun "he." Washington never refers directly to God as an "it," as he does occasionally with Providence. God is personal.[\[8\]](#)

If we look at the history of the eighteenth century, there were many with orthodox religious beliefs who sometimes used the philosophical language of the enlightenment. Washington was a Christian, even though he often used terms for God associated with Deists.

## **A Religious Nation Goes to War**

There has been some dispute about how religious America was during the Revolutionary War. There was a shortage of churches and clergy (especially along the paths of westward migration). But we should also remember that this War of Independence followed the First Great Awakening.

At the first meeting of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia (September 1774), the first motion from the floor was for prayer to seek guidance from God. But there was resistance, not because of the prayer, but because of the theological disagreements among the members (Anabaptist, Quakers, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Presbyterians). Sam Adams settled the dispute by saying he was no bigot and

could pray along with any minister as long as he was a patriot.{9} I have in my office a picture of a painting showing George Washington praying with men like Patrick Henry, John Jay, and Richard Henry Lee.

At the second meeting, they proposed that Washington be appointed commander in chief of the Continental Army. He did not think he was equal to the command but accepted it. He wrote his wife, "I shall rely, therefore, confidently on that Providence, which has heretofore preserved and been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return safe to you in the fall." {10} At the time, Washington was the only man on the continent in uniform since no Continental Army yet existed. To the British, he was the supreme traitor, in open rebellion to the King. His neck was at risk, and the American independence depended on him.

One event that George Washington believed showed God's providence was the Battle of Long Island in 1776. Washington and his men were trapped on Brooklyn Heights, Long Island. The British were poised to crush the American army the next day and that would have been the end of the rebellion. Washington planned a bold move and began evacuating his troops under the cover of darkness using everything from fishing vessels to rowboats. But there was not enough time to accomplish the task. When morning came, the fog of night remained and only lifted in time for the British to see the last American boat crossing the East River beyond the reach of their guns. You can read more about this miraculous event in Michael Novak's book, *On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding*. {11}

Washington also required chaplains for the Continental Army, and personally took time for prayer. He forbade his troops under pain of death from uttering blasphemies, even profanity. He called upon them to conduct themselves as Christian soldiers because the people demanded it. {12}



Washington's actions during the Revolutionary War demonstrate his Christian character.

## **First in War and First in Peace**

In his eulogy for George Washington, Henry Lee said he was "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." We could also say the Washington demonstrated Christian character both in war and in peace.

While fulfilling his duties as general, he came to be known as a "nursing father." This is a biblical phrase (Num. 11:12, Is. 49:23 KJV) that appears in many of the tributes to Washington after his death. He brought together very diverse groups to fight the Revolutionary War by bridging ethnic and social divisions. This ranged from the regiment from Marblehead, Massachusetts (that included men of mixed race, blacks, and Indians), to the Virginian and southern aristocrats to the yeomen in hunting shirts from western Virginia.

One of his orders stated that "All chaplains are to perform divine service tomorrow, and on every succeeding Sunday. . . . The commander in chief expects an exact compliance with this order, and that it be observed in future as an invariable rule of practice—and every neglect will be consider not only a breach of orders, but a disregard to decency, virtue and religion."[\[13\]](#)

Washington grew even more explicit as the war dragged on: "While we are zealously performing the duties of good citizens and soldiers we certainly ought not to be inattentive to the higher duties of religion. To the distinguished character of patriot, it should be our highest glory to add the more distinguished character of a Christian."[\[14\]](#)

Washington lost a great deal of money during the war by paying for things out of his own pocket and by refusing a salary. He happily returned to Mount Vernon and spent happy years with

his wife. But the constitutional convention in 1787 brought him to elective office. He was elected as president by unanimous vote in 1789.

In his inaugural address, Washington said, "No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand, which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency."

He issued a thanksgiving proclamation in 1789 in which he asserted "the duty of all nations" in regard to God. His thanksgiving proclamation of 1795 proclaims there are signs of "Divine beneficence" in the world. And in his farewell address, he reminded Americans that "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."

Washington demonstrated Christian character in war and in peace.

## **Washington as Christian: Pro and Con**

Let's summarize the arguments historians make about Washington's religious faith. Those who believe that George Washington was a Deist and not a Christian usually make the following observations.

First, Washington never took communion at Sunday services. Second, he refused to declare his specific beliefs in public. Third, he rarely used the name of Jesus Christ in private correspondence and in public utterances. Finally, while he believed in God and had an awareness of Providence in his life, it all seems more like a Greek or Roman view of fate.

Michael Novak's response to these observations is helpful. "All these objections have a grain of truth in them. Still,

they are consistent with Washington's being a serious Christian who believed that he had a public vocation that required some tact regarding his private confessional life." [\[15\]](#) Novak adds:

It is not at all unusual for public men in pluralistic American life to maintain a notable reserve about their private convictions. They do not burden the public with declarations of their deepest beliefs, whose general force they trust their actions will sufficiently reveal. In the public forum, they happily give to Caesar what is Caesar's and in the private forum, to God what is God's. [\[16\]](#)

What are some of the reasons to believe Washington was a Christian? First, he religiously observed the Sabbath as a day of rest and frequently attended church services on that day. Second, many report that Washington reserved time for private prayer. Third, Washington saved many of the dozens of sermons sent to him by clergymen, and read some of them aloud to his wife.

Fourth, Washington hung paintings of the Virgin Mary and St. John in places of honor in his dining room in Mount Vernon. Fifth, the chaplains who served under him during the long years of the Revolutionary War believed Washington was a Christian. Sixth, Washington (unlike Thomas Jefferson) was never accused by the press or his opponents of not being a Christian.

It is also worth noting that, unlike Jefferson, Washington agreed to be a godparent for at least eight children. This was far from a casual commitment since it required the godparents to agree to help insure that a child was raised in the Christian faith. Washington not only agreed to be a godparent, but presented his godsons and goddaughters with Bibles and prayer books.

George Washington was not a Deist who believed in a

“watchmaker God.” He was a Christian and demonstrated that Christian character throughout his life.

## Notes

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3. Novak, *Washington's God*, 93.
4. Ibid., 136.
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9. Novak, *Washington's God*, 123.
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12. Novak, *Washington's God*, 30-31.
13. Ibid., 90.
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# Socialism and Society

*Kerby Anderson provides an overview of the popularity of socialist ideas in America from a biblical perspective.*

Socialism is more popular today than anyone would have

predicted a few years ago. A significant number of socialist characters can be found in Congress. Universities have many professors who are promoting socialism. And more young people than ever believe socialism is superior to capitalism.



Why is socialism so appealing to so many Americans? Young people are drawn to the siren song of Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Part of the reason is that it appeals to their sense of fairness. Another reason is that it promises lots of free stuff.

Free college tuition and student loan forgiveness are examples. The millennial generation (Generation Y) and the iGen generation (Generation Z) have lots of student debt. They see the need but forget that someone would have to pay for this new massive entitlement. And they rarely stop and think about why someone who didn't go to college and took a blue-collar job should pay for their university education. These may be the most educated generations in history, but they don't seem to spend too much time reflecting on what they supposedly learned in economics.

The cost of some of these policies is enormous. Just covering the cost of tuition at public colleges and universities is estimated at \$70 billion a year. One study of the cost of government-run health care (called "Medicare for All") was estimated to cost \$32 trillion during the first ten years. Some estimate the cost of the "Green New Deal" to be \$93 trillion. We can certainly debate how accurate some of those estimates are, but we can't ignore that they would be very expensive once these programs are implemented.

There is some evidence that the popularity of socialism is

waning. A post-election survey done by the Cultural Research Center shows a significant decline in support for socialism. George Barna believes that another reason for this decline is the aggressive marketing of a government-driven culture that show young and old what socialism in America would really be like.

He found that the most precipitous decline in support for socialism was among Americans ages 30 to 49. Just a decade ago, they were the demographic I often pointed to as those who supported socialism more than capitalism. That has changed significantly.

Socialism is less popular even for Americans who are age 50 years or older. In the past, they have been the group most consistent in their support of capitalism. But even in this group, there was an eight percentage-point decline of support for socialism.

The demographic groups with the least support for socialism were Christians who had a biblical worldview and what George Barna calls SAGE Cons (Spiritually Active Governance Engaged Conservative Christians). But there are still a small percentage of them who support socialism. That is why I also address whether the Bible teaches socialism.

## **The Promise of Socialism**

In order to understand the appeal of socialism, we need to make a clear distinction between capitalism and socialism. *Capitalism* is an economic system in which there is private property and the means of production are privately owned. In capitalism, there is a limited role for government. *Socialism* is an economic system in which there is public or state ownership of the means of production, and the primary focus is on providing an equality of outcomes. In socialism, the state is all-important and involved in central planning.

Often when young people are surveyed about socialism, the pollster does not provide a definition. If you merely believe socialism means more equality in society, then you can see why so many choose socialism over capitalism. Also, young people under the age of 30 are probably the least likely to associate socialism with Soviet-style repression. Instead, they may have in their minds the current government push toward European socialism and find that more attractive.

There is also an important philosophical reason for the popularity of socialism. When Karl Marx first proposed the concepts of socialism and communism, he enjoyed an intellectual advantage. He could talk about the problems with capitalism the modern world was going through as they were adapting to the difficult process of industrialization. He could contrast the *reality* of capitalism with the *utopian* ideal of socialism.

Utopian visions will always win out over the harsh reality of the world. But we now have the terrible record of socialism. Unfortunately, socialism's death toll never quite gets factored into any equation. The late columnist Joseph Sobran said: "It makes no difference that socialism's actual record is terribly bloody; socialism is forever judged by its promises and supposed possibilities, while capitalism is judged by its worst cases."[\[1\]](#)

Dinesh D'Souza reminds us that many countries have tried socialism and all failed. The first socialist experiment was the Soviet Union, then came lots of countries in eastern Europe (Poland, Yugoslavia, Albania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and East Germany). Add to that countries in Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, North Korea, and China) and countries in South America (Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Venezuela) and Africa (Angola, Ghana, Tanzania, Benin, Mali, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). By his count, there are 25 failed experiments in socialism.[\[2\]](#)

The typical answer to these failures is that each of these wasn't done correctly. The failure of these socialist experiments was a failure of implementation. But this time, they say, we will get it right. Believing in socialism apparently mean never having to say you're sorry.

In the next section we will look at the argument that democratic socialism is the ideal we should pursue. We should ignore this list of socialist failures and focus on socialism in the Scandinavian countries.

## A Different Kind of Socialism

Proponents of socialism not only argue that it was not implemented correctly in the past but also argue that what they are proposing is "democratic socialism." They usually point to the Scandinavian countries as examples.

Anders Hagstrom in one of his videos asks, "What does socialism mean to [people such as actor and comedian Jim Carrey]?" He says that conversations about socialism often go like this: "A liberal says we should be socialist. A conservative points to Venezuela, and says socialism doesn't work. A liberal says, What about Sweden and Norway? The conservative then points out that those countries aren't actually socialist."[\[3\]](#)

He says that even if we accept the comment by liberals, there is a problem. "Nordic countries have tiny populations of less than 10 million. And copying and pasting their policies to a country of 330 million isn't going to work." These Nordic countries were successful before they adopted the redistributive policies they have now. Here's a reality check: if Sweden were to join the U.S. as a state, Sweden would be poorer than all but 12 states.

Hagstrom also explains that the policies of true socialists like Senator Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio Cortez go



far beyond what the Nordic countries have. For example, Bernie Sanders wants a planned economy. None of the Nordic states have this. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wants to abolish profit. None of the Nordic countries have done that. And both of them want a universal minimum wage. None of the Nordic states have that.

There's another problem with the argument. These countries aren't socialist. John Stossel in one of his videos interviewed a prominent Swedish historian.<sup>[4]</sup> Johan Norberg makes it clear that "Sweden is not socialist—because the government doesn't own the means of production. To see that, you have to go to Venezuela or Cuba or North Korea." He does admit that the country did have something that resembled socialism a few decades ago. The government heavily taxed the citizens and spent heavily. That was not a good period in Swedish history, especially for the economy.

Yet even with the high Swedish taxes, there was simply not enough money to fund Sweden's huge welfare state. Norberg explains that "People couldn't get the pension that they thought they depended on for the future." At this point, the Swedish people had enough and began to reduce the size and scope of the government.

John Stossel says, "They cut public spending, privatized the national rail network, abolished certain government monopolies, eliminated inheritance taxes and sold state-owned businesses like the maker of Absolut vodka." While it is true that Sweden does have a larger welfare state than the US and higher taxes than the US, there are many other areas where Sweden is actually more free market.

## **Socialism and Equality**

One of the moral arguments for socialism is that it creates a society with more social and economic equality. Proponents

want us to consider the fairness argument when applied to a free market. How fair is it that basketball star LeBron James makes more than \$37 million when a social worker starting out only makes about \$30,000? Even more extreme is the estimate that Jeff Bezos makes more than \$320 million a day while the average Amazon salary is around \$35,000 a year.

Of course, this is what happens in a free society where people with different skills, different abilities, and different motivations are allowed to participate in a free market. You will get inequality, but you also have a free society where people can use their gifts to pursue their calling and still receive a good income.

We don't have to guess what will happen in a socialist economy because we have lots of historical examples. In a desire to bring equality, socialism doesn't bring people up out of poverty. Instead, it drives them into poverty. Consider two test cases (Germany and Korea).

After World War II, Germany was divided into two countries: West Germany was capitalist, while East Germany was socialist. Throughout the time they were divided, there was a striking difference between the two countries. When the two countries were reunified, the GDP of East Germany was a third of the GDP of West Germany.

An even better example is North and South Korea, because it lasted longer and continues to this day. South Korea is now more than 20 times richer than North Korea. Of course, people in South Korea are also freer than North Korea. They are also taller and live about 12 years longer than people in North Korea.[\[5\]](#)

By contrast, capitalism provides every person a chance to influence the society. In his book, *United States of Socialism*, Dinesh D'Souza doesn't ignore the issue of justice but actually embraces it. Capitalism, he says, "far more than

socialism, reflects the will of the people and expresses democratic consent.”[\[6\]](#) A consumer is like a voter. As a citizen, we get to vote in an election every two to four years. But a consumer gets to vote every day with his or her dollar bills. That money represents the time and effort put in to get those dollar bills.

The free market provides you a level of popular participation and democratic consent that politics can never provide. You get to vote every day with your dollars and send economic signals to people and companies providing goods and services. Essentially, capitalism, like democracy, is a clear form of social justice.

## **The Bible and Socialism**

Perhaps you have heard some Christians argue that the Bible actually supports socialism. The book of Acts seems to approve of socialism. In Acts 4, we find a statement that the believers in Jerusalem “had all things in common.” It also says that those who possessed land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds to the apostles’ feet. They distributed these gifts to anyone in need. This looks like socialism to many who are already predisposed to believe it should be the economic system of choice.

First, we need to realize that this practice was only done in Jerusalem. As you read through the rest of the book of Acts and read the letters of Paul and Peter, you see that most believers in other parts of the Roman world had private property and possessions. Paul calls upon them to give voluntarily to the work of ministry.

Second, the word voluntary applies not only to Christians in other parts of the world, but it also was a voluntary act by the believers in Jerusalem to give sacrificially to each other in the midst of persecution. This one passage in the book of

Act is not a mandate for socialism.

If you keep reading in the book of Acts, you can also see that the believers in Jerusalem owned the property before they voluntarily gave the proceeds to the apostles. The next chapter (Acts 5) clearly teaches that. When Peter confronted Ananias, he clearly stated that: "While it remained, was it not your own? After it was sold, was it not in your own control?"

Owning property contradicts one of the fundamental principles of socialism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, "the abolition of property" is a major item in the plan for moving from capitalism to socialism and eventually to communism.

By contrast, the Ten Commandments assume private property. The eighth commandment forbidding stealing and the tenth commandment about coveting both assume that people have private property rights.

In fact, we can use biblical principles to evaluate economic systems like capitalism and socialism. Although the Bible does not endorse a particular system, it does have key principles about human nature, private property rights, and the role of government. These can be used to evaluate economic systems like socialism and communism.

Socialism is still a popular idea, especially among young people. Recent polls along with various books about capitalism and socialism illustrate the need for us to discuss and explain the differences between capitalism and socialism. Socialism may sound appealing until you begin to look at the devastating impact it has had on countries that travel down the road of greater governmental control.

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