Separation of Church and State

Wall of Separation

When Thomas Jefferson first used the phrase "wall of separation," it is certain that he never would have anticipated the controversy that surrounds that term two centuries later. The metaphor has become so powerful that more Americans are more familiar with Jefferson's phrase than with the actual language of the Constitution.{1}

In one sense, the idea of separation of church and state is an accurate description of what must take place between the two institutions. History is full of examples (e.g., the Inquisition) of the dangers that arise when the institutions of church and state become too intertwined.

But the contemporary concept of separation of church and state goes far beyond the recognition that the two institutions must be separate. The current version of this phrase has come to mean that there should be a complete separation between religion and public life.

At the outset, we should state the obvious: the phrase "separation of church and state" is not in the Constitution. Although that should be an obvious statement, it is amazing how many citizens (including lawyers and politicians) do not know that simple fact.

Since the phrase is not in the Constitution and not even significantly discussed by the framers (e.g., *The Federalist Papers*), it is open to wide interpretation and misinterpretation. The only clear statement about religion in the Constitution can be found in the First Amendment and we will look at its legislative history later in this article.

Thomas Jefferson used the phrase “separation of church and state” when he wrote to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802. Then the phrase slipped into obscurity. In 1947, Justice Hugo Black revived it in the case of *Everson v. Board of Education*. He wrote that the First Amendment “was intended to erect a wall of separation between church and State.” He added that this wall “must be kept high and impregnable.”{2}

The wall metaphor revived by Justice Black has been misused ever since. For example, the wall of separation has been used to argue that nearly any religious activity (prayer, Bible reading, moment of silence) and any religious symbol (cross, creche, Ten Commandments, etc.) is impermissible outside of church and home. Most of these activities and symbols have been stripped from public arenas. As we will see, it doesn’t appear that Jefferson intended anything of the sort with his metaphor.

It’s also worth noting that six of the thirteen original states had official, state-sponsored churches. Some states (Connecticut, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and South Carolina) even refused to ratify the new Constitution unless it included a prohibition of federal involvement in the state churches.

History of the Phrase (part one)

So what was the meaning of “separation of church and state” and how has it changed? Some history is in order.

The presidential campaign of 1800 was one of the most bitterly contested presidential elections in American history. Republican Thomas Jefferson defeated Federalist John Adams (who served as Vice-President under George Washington). During the campaign, the Federalists attacked Jefferson’s religious beliefs, arguing that he was an “atheist” and an “infidel.” Some were so fearful of a Jefferson presidency, they buried

their family Bibles or hid them in wells fearing that President Jefferson would confiscate them.{3}Timothy Dwight (President of Yale College) even warned a few years before that if Jefferson *were* elected, "we may see the Bible cast into a bonfire."{4} These concerns were unwarranted since Jefferson had written a great deal in the previous two decades about his support of religious liberty.

In the midst of these concerns, the loyal Republicans of the Danbury Baptist Association wrote to the president congratulating him on his election and his dedication to religious liberty. President Jefferson used the letter as an opportunity to explain why he did not declare days of public prayer and thanksgiving as Washington and Adams had done so before him.

In his letter to them on New Year's Day 1802, Jefferson agreed with their desire for religious freedom saying that religious faith was a matter between God and man. Jefferson also affirmed his belief in the First Amendment and went on to say that he believed it denied Congress (or the President) the right to dictate religious beliefs. He argued that the First Amendment denied the Federal government this power, "thus building a wall of separation between Church and State."

It appears that Jefferson's phrase actually came from the 1800 election. Federalist ministers spoke against Jefferson "often from their pulpits, excoriating his infidelity and deism."{5} Republicans therefore argued that clergymen should not preach about politics but maintain a separation between the two.

We might add that a century and a half before Jefferson wrote to the Danbury Baptists, Roger Williams erected a "hedge or wall of separation" in a tract he wrote in 1644. Williams used the metaphor to illustrate the need to protect the church from the world, otherwise the garden of the church would turn into a wilderness.{6} While it might be possible that Jefferson borrowed the metaphor from Roger Williams, it appears that

Jefferson was not familiar with Williams' use of the metaphor.{7}

Jefferson used his letter to the Danbury Baptists to make a key point about his executive power. In the letter, he argued that the president had no authority to proclaim a religious holiday. He believed that governmental authority belonged only to individual states. Essentially, Jefferson's wall of separation applied only to the national government.

History of the Phrase (part two)

Although the Danbury letter was published in newspapers, the "wall of separation" metaphor never gained much attention and essentially slipped into obscurity. In 1879 the metaphor entered the lexicon of American constitutional law in the case of *Reynolds v. United States*. The court stated that Jefferson's Danbury letter "may be accepted almost as an authoritative declaration of the scope and effects of the [First] Amendment thus secured."{8} Although it was mentioned in this opinion, there is good evidence to believe that Jefferson's metaphor "played no role" in the Supreme Court's decision.{9}

In 1947, Justice Hugo L. Black revived Jefferson's wall metaphor in the case of *Everson v. Board of Education*. He applied this phrase in a different way from Thomas Jefferson. Black said that the First Amendment "was intended to erect a wall of separation between church and State." He added that this wall "must be kept high and impregnable."{10}

Daniel Dreisbach, author of *Thomas Jefferson and the Wall of Separation Between Church and State*, shows that Black's wall differs from Jefferson's wall. "Although Justice Black credited the third president with building the 'wall of separation,' the barrier raised in *Everson* differs from Jefferson's in function and location."{11}

The wall erected by Justice Black is “high and impregnable.” On the other hand, Jefferson “occasionally lowered the ‘wall’ if there were extenuating circumstances. For example, he approved treaties with Indian tribes which underwrote the ‘propagation of the Gospel among the Heathen.'”{12}

There is also a difference in the location of the two walls. Whereas Jefferson’s “wall” explicitly separated the institutions of church and state, Black’s wall, more expansively, separates religion and all civil government. Moreover, Jefferson’s “wall” separated church and the federal government only. By incorporating the First Amendment nonestablishment provision into the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, Black’s wall separates religion and civil government at all levels—federal, state, and local.{13}

Jefferson’s metaphor was a statement about federalism (the relationship between the federal government and the states). But Black turned it into a wall between religion and government (which because of the incorporation of the Fourteenth Amendment could also be applied to state and local governments).

First Amendment

How did we get the wording of the First Amendment? Once we understand its legislative history, we can understand the perspective of those who drafted the Bill of Rights.{14}

James Madison (architect of the Constitution) is the one who first proposed the wording of what became the First Amendment. On June 8, 1789 Madison proposed the following:

> *“The civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner, or on any pretext, infringed.”*

The representatives debated this wording and then turned the task over to a committee consisting of Madison and ten other House members. They proposed a new version that read:

> *"No religion shall be established by law, nor shall the equal rights of conscience be infringed."*

This wording was debated. During the debate, Madison explained "he apprehended the meaning of the words to be, that Congress should not establish a religion, and enforce the legal observation of it by law, nor compel men to worship God in any manner contrary to their conscience."

Representative Benjamin Huntington complained that the proposed wording might "be taken in such latitude as to be extremely hurtful to the cause of religion." So Madison suggested inserting the word "national" before the word "religion." He believed that this would reduce the fears of those concerned over the establishment of a national religion. After all, some were concerned America might drift in the direction of Europe where countries have a state-sponsored religion that citizens were often compelled to accept and even fund.

Representative Gerry balked at the word "national," because, he argued, the Constitution created a federal government, not a national one. So Madison withdrew his latest proposal, but assured Congress his reference to a "national religion" had to do with a national religious establishment, not a national government.

A week later, the House again altered the wording to this:

> *"Congress shall make no law establishing religion, or to prevent the free exercise thereof, or to infringe the rights of conscience."*

Meanwhile, the Senate debated other versions of the same amendment and on Sept. 3, 1789, came up with this wording:

> *"Congress shall make no law establishing articles of faith or a mode of worship, or prohibiting the free exercise of religion."*

The House didn't like the Senate's changes and called for a conference, from which emerged the wording ultimately included in the Bill of Rights:

> *"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."*

As we can see, Congress was attempting to prevent the establishment of a national religion or a national church with their drafting of the First Amendment.

Separation, Sponsorship and Accommodation

How should the government relate to the church? Should there be a separation of church and state? Essentially there are three answers to these questions: separation, sponsorship, and accommodation.

At one end of the spectrum of opinion is strict separation of church and state. Proponents of this position advocate the complete separation of any religious activity (prayer, Bible reading) and any religious symbol (cross, Ten Commandments) from government settings. Richard John Neuhaus called this "the naked public square" because religious values are stripped from the public arena.{15}

Proponents of this view would oppose any direct or indirect benefit to religion or religious organizations from the government. This would include opposition to tuition tax credits, education vouchers, and government funding of faith-based organizations.

At the other end of the spectrum would be sponsorship of religious organizations. Proponents would support school

prayer, Bible reading in public schools, and the posting of the Ten Commandments in classrooms and public places. Proponents would also support tuition tax credits, education vouchers, and funding of faith-based organizations.

Between these two views is accommodation. Proponents argue that government should not sponsor religion but neither should it be hostile to religion. Government can accommodate religious activities. Government should provide protection for the church and provide for the free expression of religion. But government should not favor a particular group or religion over another.

Proponents would oppose direct governmental support of religious schools but would support education vouchers since the parents would be free to use the voucher at a public, private school, or Christian school. Proponents would oppose mandated school prayer but support programs that provide equal access to students. Equal access argues that if students are allowed to start a debate club or chess club on campus, they should also be allowed to start a Bible club.

We should reject the idea of a "naked public square" (where religious values have been stripped from the public arena). And we should also reject the idea of a "sacred public square" (where religious ideas are sponsored by government). We should seek an "open public square" (where government neither censors nor sponsors religion but accommodates religion).

Government should not be hostile toward religion, but neither should it sponsor religion or favor a particular faith over another. Government should maintain a benevolent neutrality toward religion and accommodate religious activities and symbols.

Notes

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4. Timothy Dwight, *The Duty of Americans, at the Present Crisis*, reprinted in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Press, 1991), 1382.
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7. Edwin Gaustad, *Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B Eerdmans, 1996), 72.
8. *Reynolds v. United States*, 98 U.S. 145, 164.
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10. *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S., 16, 18.
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12. Derek H. Davis, "Wall of Separation Metaphor," *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 45(1), Winter 2003.
13. Dreisbach, Thomas Jefferson, 125.
14. The details of the debate on the First Amendment can be found in the Annals of Congress. *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States.* "History of Congress." 42 vols. Washington, D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1834-1856.
15. Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984).

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See Also:

- "I Have Some Questions on the Separation of Church and State"

"I Have Questions about the Marriage Test"

I took the Marriage Test by Kerby Anderson. A couple questions….

1) On the age question (#7), how do you score if you are between 30 and 40 years of age?

2) If this is my 2nd marriage to the SAME PERSON, how do I score question #3?

3) Again, considering this is my second marriage to the same person, how do I add up years married (#8)? We made it 7 years the first time, 5 years this time, but were pretty involved in each other's life during the 5 years we were divorced.

4) Question # 11 asks about agreeing with each other's attitudes. I think we do mostly agree, it is just usually a long, verbal battle to figure that out.

This was a very interesting test. I am anxious to see how to score those questions listed above.

Thank you for your e-mail. The marriage test we aired is based on the work of Howard Markman at the University of Denver. I assume that it will eventually be put in a book and will then answer some of the questions you are asking.

In the mean time, let me do my best to guess what the answers to your questions might be to the marriage test.

1. On the age question (#7), I assume you would receive 0 points if you are between 30 and 40 years of age. You receive a -1 if you are under 30. You receive +1 if you are over 40, and you receive +2 if you are over 60.

2. On the previous marriage question (#3), I assume you would still give yourself a -1 because you had a previous marriage even though it was to the same person.

3. On the years of marriage question (#8), I assume you would add up the total years married to the same person. In your case, that would be 12 years. Of course, if you want to add the 5 years you were divorced then the number would be 17 years. It wouldn't make any difference in the score you would give your marriage.

4. On the conflicting attitudes question (#11), you would probably assume that you mostly agree with each other (+2 points) even if it takes awhile to reach agreement. If the conflict is too strong, then perhaps you should give your marriage 0 points.

Thank you for writing. I hope this helps.

Kerby Anderson
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"Is It OK to Accept a

Lottery-Funded Scholarship?”

I live in a state that has an education lottery. When the matter was up for a vote, I opposed it. So is it wrong for me (or at least inconsistent) to accept college scholarship money from that same lottery?

Thank you for writing. Your question would fit into the category of “Christian liberty.” I address this in more detail in my article “Making Moral Choices.”

Since the Bible does not say such things as “Thou shalt not gamble” or “Thou shalt not receive a scholarship from lottery money,” this question falls into the area of moral neutrality.

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

One of the principles he develops is that each Christian must decide what is right or wrong for him or her when dealing with an issue of moral neutrality. Paul teaches that if you believe a particular action to be wrong for you, then it is wrong. He says in Romans 14:4, I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

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

Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind (Romans 14:5). If there is doubt, then it is better to refrain from

participating rather than engaging in what has become a sinful action for the person. Doubt or uncertainty is a sufficient reason to refrain from a particular activity or behavior.

I sense from your question that you may feel it is wrong for you to accept scholarship money from this source. If so, then that is reason enough not to accept a scholarship. However, if you can receive the money with a clear conscience (Romans 14:6), I would think you are free to do so.

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Media and Discernment

We live in the midst of a media storm, and Christians need to develop discernment in their consumption of various media (TV, movies, music, videos, computer, etc).

Media Exposure

We live in the midst of a media storm. Every day we are confronted by more media messages than a previous generation could even imagine.

For example, more homes have TV sets (98 percent) than have indoor plumbing. In the average home the television set is on for more than six hours a day. Children spend more time watching television than in any other activity except sleep.{1} Nearly half of elementary school children and 60 percent of adolescents have television sets in their bedrooms.{2}

But that is just the beginning of the media exposure we encounter. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* estimates that the average teenager listens to 10,500 hours of music during their teen years.{3} Families are watching more movies than every before since they can now watch them on cable and satellite and rent or buy movies in video and DVD format.

The amount of media exposure continues to increase every year. Recent studies of media usage reveal that people spend more than double the time with media than they think they do. This amounts to nearly twelve hours a day total. And because of media multitasking, summing all media use by medium results in a staggering fifteen hours per day.{4}

Student use of the Internet has been increasing to all-time levels. A study done at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst found the following:{5}

- Nearly 90 percent of the students access the Internet every day.
- Students spent over ten hours per week using IM (instant messaging).
- Those same students spent over twenty-eight hours per week on the Internet.
- Nearly three-fourths spent more time online than they intended.

In addition to concerns about the quantity of media input are even greater concerns about the quality of media input. For example, the average child will witness over 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 16,000 murders before he or she is 18 years old. And consider that the average child views 30,000 commercials each year.

A study of adolescents (ages 12-17) showed that watching sex on TV influences teens to have sex. Youths were more likely to initiate intercourse as well as other sexual activities.{6}

Over 1000 studies (including reports from the Surgeon General's office and the National Institute of Mental Health) "point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children."{7}

To put it simply, we are awash in media exposure, and there is a critical need for Christians to exercise discernment. Never has a generation been so tempted to conform to this world (Rom. 12:1-2) because of the growing influence of the proliferating forms of media.

Biblical Discernment

Although the Bible does not provide specific instructions about media (you can't find a verse dealing with television, computers, or DVDs), it nevertheless provides broad principles concerning discernment.

For example, the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:22 instructs us to "Flee from youthful lusts." We should stay away from anything (including media) that inflames our lust. Paul also goes on to say that in addition to fleeing from these things, we should also "pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace." We should replace negative influences in our life with those things which are positive.

Paul says in Colossians 3:8, "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." Now, does that mean you could never read something that has anger or rage or slander in it? No. After all, the Bible has stories of people who manifest those traits in their lives.

What Paul is saying is that we need to rid ourselves of such things. If the input into our lives (such as through media) manifests these traits, then a wise and discerning Christian would re-evaluate what is an influence in his or her life.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” We should focus on what is positive and helpful to our Christian walk.

We are also admonished in Romans 13:13 to “behave decently as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.”

As Christians, we should develop discernment in our lives. We can do this in three ways: stop, listen, and look. Stop what you are doing long enough to evaluate the media exposure in your life. Most of us just allow media to wash over us everyday without considering the impact it is having on us.

Second, we should listen. That is, we should give attention to what is being said. Is it true or false? And what is the message various media are bringing into our lives?

Finally, we should look. We need to look at the consequences of media in our lives. We should rid ourselves of influences which are negative and think on those things which are positive.

Worldview of the News Media

Of all the forms of media, the news media have become a primary shaper of our perspective on the world. Also, the rules of journalism have changed in the last few decades. It used to be assumed that reporters or broadcasters would attempt to look at events through the eyes of the average reader or viewer. It was also assumed that they would not use their positions in the media to influence the thinking of the nation but merely to report objectively the facts of an event. Things have changed dramatically in the news business.

The fact that people in the media are out of step with the

American people should be a self-evident statement. But for anyone who does not believe it, there is abundant empirical evidence to support it.

Probably the best-known research on media bias was first published in the early 1980s by professors Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman. Their research, published in the journal *Public Opinion*{8} and later collected in the book *The Media Elite,*{9} demonstrated that reporters and broadcasters in the prestige media differ in significant ways from their audiences.

They surveyed 240 editors and reporters of the media elite—*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, ABC, NBC, and CBS. Their research confirmed what many suspected for a long time: the media elite are liberal, secular, and humanistic.

People have always complained about the liberal bias in the media. But what was so surprising is how liberal members of the media actually were. When asked to describe their own political persuasion, 54 percent of the media elite described themselves as left of center. Only 19 percent described themselves as conservative. When asked who they voted for in presidential elections, more than 80 percent of them always voted for the Democratic candidate.

Media personnel are also very secular in their outlook. The survey found that 86 percent of the media elite seldom or never attend religious services. In fact, 50 percent of them have no religious affiliation at all.

This bias is especially evident when the secular press tries to cover religious events or religious issues. Most of them do not attend church, nor do they even know people who do. Instead, they live in a secularized world and therefore tend to underestimate the significance of religious values in American lives and to paint anyone with Christian convictions as a “fundamentalist.”

Finally, they also found that the news media was humanistic in their outlook on social issues. Over 90 percent of the media elite support a woman's so-called "right to abortion" while only 24 percent agreed or strongly agreed that "homosexuality is wrong."

For a time, members of the media elite argued against these studies. They suggested that the statistical sample was too small. But when Robert Lichter began to enumerate the 240 members of the news media interviewed, that tactic was quickly set aside. Others tried to argue that, though the media might be liberal, secular, and humanistic, it did not affect the way the press covered the news. Later studies by a variety of media watchdogs began to erode the acceptance of that view.

A second significant study on media bias was a 1996 survey conducted by the Freedom Forum and the Roper Center.{10} Their survey of 139 Washington bureau chiefs and congressional correspondents showed a decided preference for liberal candidates and causes.

The journalists were asked for whom they voted in the 1992 election. The results were these: 89 percent said Bill Clinton, 7 percent George Bush, 2 percent Ross Perot. But in the election, 43 percent of Americans voted for Clinton and 37 percent voted for Bush.

Another question they were asked was, "What is your current political affiliation?" Fifty percent said they were Democrats, 4 percent Republicans. In answer to the question, "How do you characterize your political orientation?" 61 percent said they were liberal or moderately liberal, and 9 percent were conservative or moderately conservative.

The reporters were also asked about their attitudes toward their jobs. They said they see their coverage of news events as a mission. No less than 92 percent agreed with the statement, "Our role is to educate the public." And 62 percent

agreed with the statement, “Our role is sometimes to suggest potential solutions to social problems.”

A more recent survey by the Pew Research Center further confirms the liberal bias in the media. They interviewed 547 media professionals (print, TV, and radio) and asked them to identify their political perspective. They found that 34 percent were liberal and only 7 percent were conservative. This compares to 20 percent of Americans who identify themselves as liberal and 33 percent who define themselves as conservative.{11}

It is also worth questioning whether a majority of media professionals who labeled themselves as moderate in the survey really deserve that label. John Leo, writing for *U.S. News and World Report*, says that it has been his experience “that liberal journalists tend to think of themselves as representing the mainstream, so in these self-identification polls, moderate usually translates to liberal. On the few social questions asked in the survey, most of the moderates sounded fairly liberal.”{12}

Once again we see the need for Christians to exercise discernment in their consumption of media.

Dealing with the Media

Christians must address the influence of the media in society. It can be a dangerous influence that can conform us to the world (Rom. 12:2). Therefore we should do all we can to protect against its influence and to use the media for good.

Christians should strive to apply the following two passages to their lives as they seek discernment concerning the media: Philippians 4:8, which we quoted above, and Colossians 3:2–5:

> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

> When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Here are some suggestions for action.

First, control the quantity and quality of media input. Parents should set down guidelines and help select television programs at the start of the week and watch only those. Parents should also set down guidelines for movies, music, and other forms of media. Families should also evaluate the location of their television set so that it is not so easy to just sit and watch TV for long hours.

Second, watch TV with children. One way to encourage discussion with children is to watch television with them. The plots and actions of the programs provides a natural context for discussion. The discussion could focus on how cartoon characters or TV characters could solve their problems without resorting to violence. What are the consequences of violence? TV often ignores the consequences. What are the consequences of promiscuous sex in real life?

Third, set a good example. Parents should not be guilty to saying one thing and doing another. Neither adults nor children should spend long periods of time in front of a video display (television, video game, computer). Parents can teach their children by example that there are better ways to spend time.

Fourth, work to establish broadcaster guidelines. No TV or movie producer wants to unilaterally disarm all the actors on their screens for fear that viewers will watch other programs and movies. Yet many of these TV and movie producers would like to tone down the violence, even though they do not want to be the first to do so. National standards would be able to achieve what individuals would not do by themselves in a

competitive market.

Fifth, make your opinions known. Writing letters to programs, networks, and advertisers can make a difference over time. A single letter may not make a difference, but large numbers of letters can even change editorial policy. Consider joining with other like-minded people in seeking to make a difference in the media.

While the media has a tremendous potential for good, it can also have some very negative effects. Christians need wisdom and discernment to utilize the positive aspects of media and to guard against its negative effects.

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Making Moral Choices – From A Biblical Worldview Perspective

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

Love and Biblical Morality

A Christian view of morality is based upon the assumption that God exists and has revealed Himself to the human race. He

has chosen to reveal Himself in nature (Psalm 19, Romans 1) and in human conscience (Romans 2:14-15). He has also revealed Himself through the Bible (Psalm 119, 2 Timothy 3:16) and in the person of Jesus Christ (John 10:30, Hebrews 1:1-4).

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

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

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

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

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

love practiced in that day or even in our day.

The apostle Paul teaches that love is “the law of Christ” and thereby supreme and sufficient (Galatians 5:14; 6:2). He also teaches that love is the foundation of Christian obedience. Even if we manifest the gifts of the Spirit and do good works, they do not profit us unless they are done in love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

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

Knowing God’s Will

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

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

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

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

topic (1 Corinthians 6:18).

The Bible provides boundaries and barriers to our moral actions. We are to stay within those moral boundaries. Paul, writing to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:6), told them “Do not go beyond what is written.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

justification to proceed.

Christian Liberty

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

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

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

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

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

Second, each Christian must decide what is right or wrong for him or her. Paul teaches that if you believe a particular action to be wrong for you, then it is wrong. He says in Romans 14:4, “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Honesty and Biblical Morality

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

The Old Testament calls upon the people of God to deal honestly with one another. Leviticus 9:35 says “You shall do

no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity." Likewise, Proverbs 11:1 warns that "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord." Believers are to use honest weights and be honest in their dealings with others.

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Ezra 10:5), and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:25) all swore oaths or vows. The swearing of these oaths and vows underscores the seriousness of telling the truth and following up on one's commitment.

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

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Worldview and Truth

Each day Christians are confronted with a bewildering array of choices in ethics, actions, and lifestyles. The only way to make sense of this data is to have a consistent worldview. And Christians should be operating from a biblical worldview. As we will see, that is often not the case.

The Barna Research Group conducted a national survey of adults and concluded that only 4 percent of adults have a biblical worldview as the basis of their decision-making. The survey also discovered that 9 percent of born again Christians have such a perspective on life.{1}

Everyone has a worldview, but relatively few people (even religious people) have a biblical worldview. This explains a great deal about behavior. One reason so few people act like Christians is because they don't think like Christians. Behavior results from our values and beliefs. Thinking

biblically about the issues of life should ultimately result in living biblically in society. Conversely, not thinking biblically should result in not living biblically within society.

Nancy Pearcey, in her latest book *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity,* tells the story of Sarah, a practicing Christian who worked for years as a counselor for Planned Parenthood. She did not try to talk women out of an abortion, but merely was content to make sure they knew what they were doing. She said that after she graduated from college, "My Christianity was reduced to a thin veneer over the core of a secular worldview. It was almost like having a split personality."{2}

Unfortunately, there are millions of Sarahs in the world who willingly live with a split personality. The split is between the sacred and the secular. Or the split is between fact and value. In their personal lives they try to live as Christians, but in their public world they think and act just like the non-Christians around them. They do not have a Christian worldview even though they are Christians.

Now you might wonder where the pastors are in all of this. After all, shouldn't pastors and church leadership be calling people to think and behave according to Christian principles? It turns out that part of the problem is the lack of sound biblical teaching about a biblical worldview.

The Barna Research Group found in a nationwide survey of senior pastors that only half of the country's Protestant pastors have a biblical worldview. The gap among churches is reflected in the outcomes from the nation's two largest denominations. Southern Baptists had the highest percentage of pastors with a biblical worldview (71 percent), while the Methodists were lowest (27 percent).{3}

Obviously we need to do a better job within the church

thinking about the array of issues that confront us from a biblical perspective. Unfortunately, there is growing evidence that we have not been doing this effectively.

Absolute Truth

One of the foundational aspects of a Christian worldview is the matter of absolute truth. The Bible rests upon belief in it. Yet surveys by George Barna show that a minority of born again adults (44 percent) and an even smaller proportion of born again teenagers (9 percent) are certain of the existence of absolute moral truth.{4}

Even more disturbing is the growing evidence that even adults have abandoned their belief in absolute truth. By a three-to-one margin adults say truth is always relative to the person and their situation. This perspective is even more lopsided among teenagers who overwhelmingly believe moral truth depends on the circumstances.{5}

Social scientists as well as pollsters have been warning that American society is becoming more and more dominated by moral anarchy. Writing in the early 1990s, James Patterson and Peter Kim said in *The Day America Told the Truth* that there was no moral authority in America. "We choose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded more respect."{6}

Researcher George Barna, writing ten years later in his book *Boiling Point*, concludes that moral anarchy has arrived and dominates our culture today.{7} His argument hinges on a substantial amount of attitudinal and behavioral evidence, such as rapid growth of the pornography industry, highway speeding as the norm, income tax cheating, computer hacking, rampant copyright violations (movies, books, and recordings), increasing rates of cohabitation and adultery, Internet-based

plagiarism, etc{8}.

When asked the basis on which they form their moral choices, nearly half of all adults cite their desire to do whatever will bring them the most pleasing or satisfying results. Although the Bible should be the basis of our moral decision-making, the survey showed that only four out of every ten born again Christian adults relies on the Bible or church teaching as their primary source of moral guidance.{9}

The survey also found that the younger generation was even more inclined to support behaviors that conflict with traditional Christian morals. "Among the instances in which young adults were substantially more likely than their elders to adopt a nouveau moral view were in supporting homosexuality, cohabitation, the non-medicinal use of marijuana, voluntary exposure to pornography, profane language, drunkenness, speeding and sexual fantasizing."{10}

Clearly, Christians are neither thinking nor behaving as Christians. And a large part of the problem centers on this abandonment of a belief in absolute truth. If Christians believe that morality is relative and determined by the situation, then they have changed biblical moral principles. Today there is a critical need for Christians to think and act biblically in every area of life.

De-conversion

You have no doubt known of young people who go off to college and end up rejecting their faith. The story is more common than we might imagine. Nancy Pearcey, in her book *Total Truth,* tells the story of two such people.{11}

One said, "In my senior year of high school I accepted Jesus as my Savior and became a born-again Christian. I had found the One True Religion, and it was my duty—indeed it was my pleasure—to tell others about it, including my parents,

brothers and sisters, friends, and even total strangers."{12}

But his religious convictions waned when he confronted the theory of evolution. The student underwent "a de-conversion in graduate school six years later when I studied evolutionary biology." Who is this person? He is Michael Shermer, the director of the Skeptics Society and publisher of *Skeptic* magazine. He has dedicated his life to debunking Christianity and defending evolution against people who believe in intelligent design.

Another prominent atheist tells a similar story. "I was a born-again Christian. When I was fifteen, I entered the Southern Baptist Church with great fervor and interest in the fundamentalist religion." But he also found that his religious convictions were adversely affected by the theory of evolution. He says that he left the church "at seventeen when I got to the University of Alabama and heard about evolutionary theory."{13}

This person described his encounter with evolution as an "epiphany" and was enthralled with the implications of evolution. Who is this person? He is E.O. Wilson, Harvard professor and founder of sociobiology (which attempts to explain everything in life from an evolutionary process).

Sadly, these stories are repeated year after year at universities throughout this country. The students who go through this de-conversion may not grow up to become famous skeptics or atheists like the ones we just mentioned. But they will grow up without a solid, Christian faith.

Teenagers who are raised in stable Christian homes, educated in Christian schools, all too often go to college and reject their Christian faith. They fall prey to the naturalistic, evolutionary foundation of modern education. Or they adopt one of the current intellectual or cultural fads on campus.

So how are we to better prepare these young people for their

college experience? A key element is to teach a Christian worldview. As our secular culture becomes more hostile to Christian ideas, it is more difficult to live out our Christian worldview consistently. When the culture was more hospitable to Christian values, a Sunday school understanding of Christianity could survive. Now we live in a culture hostile to those values. A rudimentary understanding of Christianity in such a hostile culture will soon wilt and die.

Young people, and youth ministry to young people, must be more intentional if Christian beliefs are to survive. Teaching a Christian worldview and training young people in the basics of apologetics are absolutely crucial if their faith is to survive.

Dichotomy of Truth

A Christian worldview should encompass all of reality. But the world today (and even most Christians) has divided truth into two categories. Francis Schaeffer used the concept of a two-story building. Science and reason are found on the lower story. Religion and morality can be found in the upper story.

Nancy Pearcey says that the upper story is the realm of private truth. This is where we hear people say such things as "that may be true for you, but it isn't true for me." Or to put it another way, the lower story is modernism, while the upper story is postmodernism.

This dichotomy of truth has served to marginalize Christianity. When Christians attempt to speak to moral issues of the day, their perspective is dismissed because critics believe that it is in the realm of private truth. So when they speak on subjects ranging from bioethics to science to public policy, the world perceives these comments as merely subjective value assumptions.

Unfortunately, Christians have also accepted this dichotomy of

truth. They assume that science deals with facts and their faith deals with values. And they also assume that the two can exist simultaneously and independently of each other.

A good illustration of this can be found in a recent article in which a young writer described her first day in a theology class at a Christian high school. “My theology teacher drew a heart on one side of the blackboard and a brain on the other side. He informed us that the two are as divided as the two sides of the blackboard—the *heart* is what we use for religion, and the *brain* is what we use for science.”{14}

Even more disturbing was the fact that in a classroom of some two hundred students, she was the only one who objected to the teacher’s division of truth. Sadly, this is how more and more Christians have decided to deal with the conflicting and confusing facts of the modern world. And this is how we are supposedly “preparing” young people for college and society.

We need to give young people more than just a “heart” religion which will most certainly fail to equip them for the hostility towards Christianity found in modern society. They need a “brain” religion that includes at least training in worldview and apologetics.

Christian education and youth ministry must be more than opening the session in prayer. It must address this dichotomy of truth that places science and reason on one story of the building and leaves religion and morality on another story of the building. If we don’t address this problem, we will continue to turn out students who are Christians in their private life but essentially secular in their public life. And ultimately, their brains win out over their hearts so they end up living and thinking like non-Christians.

Christian Worldview

There are many elements to a Christian worldview, and the Probe Web site is full of articles that will help you in the development of a Christian worldview. A key verse in this endeavor is Mark 12:30: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

Jesus is telling us that we cannot live with a dichotomy of truth. We are to love God with our heart, soul, and mind. We cannot live our Christian life out on two different floors of a building where science and reason are on one story of the building and religion and morality are on another.

Jesus is also telling us that we must strive to know God intimately. He describes this as a whole-hearted, consuming desire to know God. Christianity isn’t a hobby; it’s a lifestyle. We are to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Another important verse is 2 Corinthians 10:5: “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” The apostle Paul wrote these words because he knew how important it was for Christians to have a Christian worldview in the midst of the pagan, secular culture of his day.

Notice that he describes the Christian mind in terms of warfare. We are engaged in a battle of worldviews and must be prepared for battle. We are to put all things under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, he is our commander in this battle of worldviews.

Another key verse is Colossians 2:8: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary

principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." The apostle Paul's words warn all Christians not to be "taken captive" by false philosophy. How true that is especially for young people headed off to college.

When we consider these last two verses, we notice an interesting contrast. Either we take every thought captive (2 Cor. 10:5) or we run the risk of being taken captive (Col. 2:8) by false philosophies.

A final verse is 1 Peter 3:15: "But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." The Greek word *apologia* is where we get our word apologetics. It does not mean to apologize. But it does mean to provide reasonable answers to honest questions and to do it with humility, respect, and reverence.

Christianity requires both offense and defense. While 2 Corinthians 10:5 focuses on the "offensive" nature of Christianity, 1 Peter 3:15 focuses on its "defensive" nature. We must always be ready to give an answer for our faith as we engage a world that is often hostile to the Christian worldview.

Notes

1. "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," *The Barna Update* (Ventura, Calif.), 1 Dec. 2003.

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

3. "Only Half of Protestant Pastors Have a Biblical Worldview," *The Barna Update* (Ventura, Calif.), 12 Jan. 2004.

4. "The Year's Most Intriguing Findings, From Barna Research Studies," *The Barna Update* (Ventura, Calif.), 12 Dec. 2000.

5. “Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings,” *The Barna Update* (Ventura, Calif.), 12 Feb. 2002.

6. James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991).

7. George Barna and Mark Hatch, *Boiling Point* (Ventura, Calif.: Gospel Light, 2001).

8. “Research Predicts Mounting Challenges to Christian Church,” *The Barna Update* (Ventura, Calif.), 16 Apr. 2001.

9. “Practical Outcomes Replace Biblical Principles as the Moral Standards,” *The Barna Update* (Ventura, Calif.), 10 Sept. 2001.

10. Ibid.

11. Pearcey, *Total Truth,* 223-4.

12. Michael Shermer, *How We Believe: The Search for God in an Age of Science* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 2000), 2-3.

13. E. O. Wilson, “Toward a Humanistic Biology,” *The Humanist* 42 (September/October 1982), 40.

14. Mary Passantino, “The Little Engine That Can,” *Christian Research Journal,* April 2003.

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“What Does the Bible Say

about Interracial Marriages?”

What does the Bible say about interracial marriages, and what are your thoughts on this subject?

The Bible does not prohibit interracial marriages, but that has not stopped people in the past from trying to “make” the Bible teach that it is wrong.

Here are some biblical principles that apply to race and interracial marriage:

1. We are one in Christ Jesus. The Bible teaches that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek. Galatians 3:28 – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

2. We are one in creation. Acts 17:26 – “He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation.”

We know that racial differences amount to very small changes in skin color (amount of melanin in skin), eye shape, hair color and texture. The differences that exist are often created by those with prejudices against particular groups of people.

The Bible does teach that Christians are not to be unequally yoked (2 Cor. 6:14). But that applies to the spiritual condition of your intended marriage partner.

Mixed marriages (due to cultural or social differences) may face problems. So it would be wise to seek premarital counseling to consider how these differences might affect your communication in marriage and other important issues.

I hope that answers your question.

Kerby Anderson

Probe Ministries

See Also *Probe Answers Our Email*:
"My Racist Parents Disapprove of My Boyfriend"

"What Are Some Examples of Historical Revisionism?"

Dear Kerby,

I have heard you discuss the topic of historical revisionism on radio. I told my son about this, and he doesn't believe it. Do you have some examples of how our history has been revised from the original?

Many historians have wanted to secularize our founders. Take this quote from W.E. Woodward. He wrote that "The name of Jesus Christ is not mentioned even once in the vast collection of Washington's published letters."{1}

Anyone who has read some of Washington's writing knows he mentions God and divine providence. But it isn't too difficult to also find times in which he mentions Jesus Christ. For example, when George Washington wrote to the Delaware Indian Chiefs (June 12, 1779) he 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. Congress will do every thing they can to assist you in this wise intention."{2}

Other examples are also available. For example, a well-worn, handwritten prayer book found among Washington's personal writings after his death had the name "Jesus Christ" used sixteen times. {3}

Often historical revisionism is done by selective omission. Consider this famous quote from a book on American history by Kenneth Davis.{4} In 1775, Patrick Henry asked, "Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery?" Davis then picks up the quote again with the final statement by Patrick Henry: "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death."

Technically the quote is correct, but what is missing is very important. The entire quote should read: "Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God. I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death."

Davis does the same thing when he cites the Mayflower Compact. "We whose names are under-written . . . do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine our selves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid."

Some important points are omitted. The section should read: "We whose names are under-written having undertaken, for the glory of God, and advancement of the Christian faith and honor of our king and country, a voyage to the first colonie in the Northern parts of Virginia do by these presents solemnly and mutually in the presence of God, and one another, covenant and combine our selves together into a civil body politick, for our better ordering and preservation and furtherance of the ends aforesaid."

Some of the best documented cases of historical revision were provided by the work of Paul Vitz and funded by the U.S. Department of Education. He notes that "One social studies book has thirty pages on the Pilgrims, including the first Thanksgiving. But there is not one word (or image) that referred to religion as even a part of the Pilgrims' life." {6}

Another textbook said that "Pilgrims are people who take long trips." They were described entirely without reference to religion. One reference said the Pilgrims "wanted to give thanks for all they had" but never mentioned that it was God to whom they wanted to give thanks.{7}

Historical revisionism is a sad fact of American education today. Students are not getting the whole story, and often references to religion and Christianity are left out.

Kerby Anderson

Probe Ministries

Notes

1. W.E. Woodward, *George Washington: The Image and the Man* (New York: Boni and Liverlight, 1926), 142.

2. George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1932), Vol. XV, 55.

3. *Manuscript Prayer-Book Written by George Washington* (Philadelphia, 1891).

4. Kenneth C. Davis, *Don't Know Much About History* (New York: Avon Books, 1990), 61.

5. Davis, 21.

6. Paul Vitz, *Censorship: Evidence of Bias in Our Children's*

Textbooks (Michigan: Servant Books, 1986), 3.

7. Vitz, 18-19.

Suggested Reading

David Barton, *Original Intent (*Aledo, TX: WallBuilders Press, 1996), Chapter 16.

Paul Vitz, *Censorship: Evidence of Bias in Our Children's Textbooks* (Michigan: Servant Books, 1986

Sex Education

Christians are increasingly confronted with arguments in favor of sex education in the public schools. Often the arguments sound reasonable until the scientific reports that advocate these programs are carefully analyzed. I am going to be discussing a number of these studies and will conclude by providing a biblical perspective on sex education.

I want to begin by looking at reports released by the Alan Guttmacher Institute, the research arm of Planned Parenthood. One of these reports was entitled, "Teenage Pregnancy in Developed Countries: Determinant and Policy Implications."

Alan Guttmacher was president of Planned Parenthood from 1962 until his death in 1974, so it is not surprising that the Guttmacher report supports the Planned Parenthood solution to teenage pregnancy. The Guttmacher report concludes that the adolescent pregnancy rate in the U.S. is the highest among developed nations and implies that this rate will decline if sex-education programs are instituted and contraceptive devices are made readily available.

There are a number of problems with the report, not the least of which is the close connection between the Guttmacher Institute and Planned Parenthood. But even if we ignore this policy-making symbiosis, we are still left with a number of scientific and social concerns.

First, the authors of the report selected countries that had lower adolescent pregnancy rates than the U.S. and looked at the availability of contraceptive devices. But what about countries like Japan, which has a very low teenage pregnancy rate but does not have a national sex-education program? Japan was excluded from the final "close" comparison of countries. In a footnote, Charles Westoff says that "conservative norms about early marriage and premarital sex may explain this phenomenon better than the availability of fertility control." So we are given only a selected look at developed countries; those with conservative morality (like Japan) were excluded.

Second, the researchers cite statistics that make a case for sex education but seemingly ignore other statistics of concern to society at large.For example, the Guttmacher report suggests we can learn a great deal from Sweden's experience with sex education, which became compulsory in 1954. While it has a much lower teenage pregnancy rate than the U.S., Sweden has paid a heavy price for this rate. Here are a few crucial statistics that should have been cited along with the Guttmacher report.

From 1959 to 1964, the gonorrhea rate in Sweden increased by 75 percent, with 52 percent of the reported cases occurring among young people. Between 1963 and 1974, the number of divorces tripled and the number of people bothering to get married dropped 66 percent. By 1976, one in three children born in Sweden was illegitimate, despite the fact that half of all teenage pregnancies were aborted.

So while it is true that the teenage pregnancy rate in Sweden is down, the percentages of venereal disease, illegitimate

births, and teenage disillusionment and suicide are up.

School-Based Health Clinics

With more than one million teenage girls becoming pregnant each year, family-planning groups are pushing school-based health clinics (SBCs) as a means of stemming the rising tide of teenage pregnancy.

These groups argue that studies of teen sexuality demonstrate the effectiveness of these clinics. Yet a more careful evaluation of the statistics suggests that SBCs do not lower the teen pregnancy rate.

The dramatic increase in teen pregnancies has not been due to a change in the teen pregnancy rate but rather to an increase in the proportion of teenage girls who are sexually active (28 percent in 1971, 42 percent in 1982). The approximately $500 million in federal grants invested in sex-education programs since 1973 has not reduced the number of teen pregnancies. So proponents now argue that health clinics located in the public schools can reduce the rate of teen pregnancy by providing sex information and contraception.

The most oft-cited study involves the experience of the clinic at Mechanics Arts High School in St. Paul, Minnesota. Researchers found that a drop in the number of teen births during the late 1970s coincided with an increase in female participation at the SBCs. But three issues undermine the validity of the study.

First, the Support Center for School-Based Clinics acknowledges that “most of the evidence for the success of that program is based upon the clinic’s own records and the staff’s knowledge of births among students. Thus, the data undoubtedly do not include all births.”

Second, an analysis of the data done by Michael Schwartz of the Free Congress Foundation revealed that the total female

enrollment of the two schools included in the study dropped from 1268 in 1977 to 948 in 1979. The reduction in reported births, therefore, could be attributed to an overall decline in the female population.

Finally, the study shows a drop in the teen birth rate, not the teen pregnancy rate. The reduction in the fertility rate was probably due to more teenagers obtaining an abortion.

A more recent study cited by proponents of clinics is a three-year study headed by Dr. Laurie Zabin at Johns Hopkins University. She and her colleagues evaluated the effect of sex education on teenagers. Their study of two SBCs showed a 30 percent reduction in teen pregnancies.

But even this study leaves many unanswered questions. The size of the sample was small, and over 30 percent of the female sample dropped out between the first and last measurement periods. Moreover, the word abortion is never mentioned in the brief report, leading one to conclude that only live births were counted. On the other hand, an extensive national study done by the Institute for Research and Evaluation showed that community-based clinics used by teenagers actually increase teen pregnancy. A two-year study by Joseph Olsen and Stan Weed (*Family Perspective*, July 1986) found that teenage participation in these clinics lowered teen birth rates. But when pregnancies ending in miscarriage or abortion were factored in, the total teenpregnancy rates increased by as much as 120 pregnancies per 1000 clients. Olsen and Weed's research had been challenged because of their use of weighting techniques and reliance on statewide data. But when they reworked the data to answer these objections for a second report, the conclusion remained.

School-based health clinics are not the answer. They treat symptoms rather than problems by focusing on pregnancy rather than promiscuity. And even if we ignore the morality of handing out contraceptives to adolescents, we are left with a

claim that cannot be substantiated.

Planned Parenthood

Planned Parenthood has been running ads in newspapers around the country that adopt a lesson from George Orwell and engage in a heavy dose of “newspeak.” One ad, for example, contains an impassioned plea for the continued legalization of abortion by defeating what they call “compulsory pregnancy laws.”

I take it that by “compulsory pregnancy laws,” they mean anti-abortion laws. But the ads seem to imply that the people who want to stop the killing of unborn babies are also bent on coercing women into getting pregnant. That is not what the ads really mean, but isn’t it a bit odd to label laws against abortion “compulsory pregnancy laws?”

Another ad carries the title, “Five Ways to Prevent Abortion (And One Way that Won’t).” According to the ad, outlawing abortion won’t stop abortions. But it will. While it may not stop all abortions, it certainly will curtail hundreds of thousands that are now routinely performed every year. And it will force many women who presently take abortion for granted to consider what they are doing.

But what are some of the ways Planned Parenthood suggests will stop abortion? One of their proposals is to “make contraception more easily available.” The ad states that, since the early 1970s, Title X for national family planning has been supported by all administrations except the Reagan and Bush administrations. The ad therefore encourages readers to lobby for increased funding of Title X.

By the way, Planned Parenthood has been the largest recipient of Title X grants. In other words, the solution to abortion requires we give more of our tax dollars to Planned Parenthood.

Foundational to this proposal is a flawed view of teenage

sexuality that sees cause-and-effect in reverse order. Accepting a distorted fatalism that assumes teenage promiscuity as inevitable, Planned Parenthood calls for easy access to birth control. But isn't it more likely that easy access to contraceptives encourages easy sex? Another proposal listed in the ad is to "provide young people with a better teacher than experience." As commendable as that suggestion may sound, what is really being proposed is increased funding for sex-education courses in public schools and the community. Again, notice the presupposition of this proposal. The ad writers assume promiscuity and propose further sex education in order to prevent pregnancy. The emphasis is on preventing pregnancy, not preventing sexual intercourse.

Hasn't Planned Parenthood ignored a better option? Isn't chastity still the most effective means of preventing pregnancy as well as a multitude of sexual diseases? Shouldn't we be encouraging our young people to refrain from sex before marriage? Shouldn't we teach children that premarital sex is immoral?

Arguments for sex education frequently ignore the reality of human sinfulness. We simply cannot teach sexuality in the schools and expect sexual purity unless we also teach moral principles. The greatest problem among young people today is not a lack of education, but a lack of moral instruction.

Parental Notification

Next I want to focus on state laws that require parental notification when minor children are given prescription birth-control drugs and devices.

Opponents refer to these requirements as "squeal rules" and denounce them as an invasion of privacy. This reaction illustrates how far our society has deviated from biblical morality.

High-school students must routinely obtain parental consent in order to go on field trips, participate in athletics, or take driver's education classes. Many school districts even require parental consent before a student can take a sex-education class. But opponents of parental notification believe these regulations constitute an invasion of privacy.

Critics argue that such regulations will not change the sexual mores of our teenagers. Perhaps not, but they do encourage parental involvement and instruction in the area of sexual morality. The moral burden is placed upon the parent rather than the family- planning clinic.

Without such rules, government ends up subverting the parent's role. Each year taxpayers subsidize thousands of family-planning clinics that provide medical treatment and moral counsel, yet balk at these meager attempts to inform parents of their involvement with their children.

Ultimately, who has authority over teenagers: the clinics or the parents? Opponents of these "squeal rules" would have you believe that these clinics (and ultimately the government) are sovereign over teenagers. But parents are not only morally but legally responsible for their children and should be notified of birth- control drugs and devices dispensed to teenagers.

But even more important than the question of authority is the question of morality. Premarital sex is immoral. Just because many teenagers engage in it does not make it right. Statistics are not the same as ethics, even though many people seem to have adopted a "Gallup poll" philosophy of morality.

Critics of the squeal rule believe government should be neutral. They argue that government's responsibility does not include "squealing" to teenagers' parents. But in this situation an amoral stance is nothing more than an immoral stance. By seeking to be amoral, government provides a tacit endorsement of immorality. Secretly supplying contraceptives

through government-subsidized clinics will not discourage premarital sex. It will encourage teenage sexual promiscuity.

Again, critics of the squeal rule see cause-and-effect acting in only one direction. They contend that the fact of sexually active teenagers requires birth control clinics. But isn't the reverse more accurate? The existence of birth control clinics, along with the proliferation of sex-education courses, no doubt contributes to teenage promiscuity.

Experience with these rules shows that parental notification will increase parental involvement and thus reduce teenage pregnancy and abortion. Parents should not be denied the opportunity to warn their children about the medical, social, and moral effects of premarital sex.

Make no mistake—parental notification laws will not stop teenage promiscuity; secrecy, however, will do nothing but ignite it.

A Biblical Perspective

I would like to conclude with a biblical discussion of sex education. As Christians, we need to understand the basic assumptions behind the movement to place sex-education programs and clinics in public schools.

Proponents of sex education often make naturalistic assumptions about human sexuality. They tend to argue as if young people were animals in heat who are going to have sexual relations despite what is taught at home, in church, and in school. The Bible clearly teaches that we are created in the image of God and have the capacity to make choices and exercise self-control. Sex-education advocates would have us believe that young people cannot exercise sexual control; thus we must capitulate to the teenager's sexual urges.

A second false assumption is the tendency of sex-education programs to ignore human sinfulness. Although we are created

in the image of God, we all are born with a sin nature. Frequently, sex education panders to that fallen nature.

We cannot teach sexuality and expect sexual purity without also teaching moral principles. Most sex-education programs present data in a so-called value neutral way. But, in trying to be amoral, these program become immoral. Human sexuality must be related to moral values. Young people need information about sex, but it must be placed in a moral context. The greatest problem among young people today is not a lack of education about sex, but a lack of moral instruction about sex.

I believe we are involved in a moral civil war over teenage sexuality. Here is how we lost a number of battles. First, the old morality was declared passe. The sexual revolution in the 1960s made words like virginity, celibacy, purity, and chastity seem out of date. In previous generations, peer pressure kept young people from sex; today, peer pressure pushes them into it.

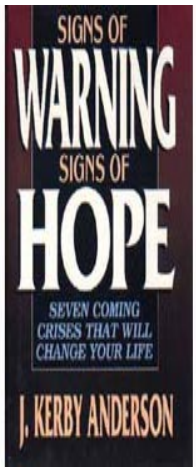
We lost a second battle when we turned sexuality over to scientists and took it away from moralists and theologians. Alfred Kinsey's studies "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male" (1948) and "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female" (1953) presented comprehensive statistics, but no moral reflection. Today, discussions about sex are supposed to be done in value-neutral settings. Inevitably, demographics determine morality.

What is the solution? Christians must reassert their parental authority and instruct their children about God's view of sex. We must teach them to flee fornication just as Joseph did in the Old Testament. We must teach them to avoid temptation by making no provision for the flesh. We must teach them to exercise self- control in every area of their lives, including the sexual. In other words, we must educate them about the dangers of premarital sex and the wisdom of obeying God's commands regarding human sexuality. Instead of capitulating to

teenager’s sexual urges, as sex-education advocates want us to do, we should provide them with biblical principles and moral leadership in the area of sexuality.

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Mid-Life Transition



Each year more than three million baby boomers turn 40. Now there is nothing magical about turning 40 per se, but turning 40 does signal the beginning of a time of introspection and re-evaluation that generally occurs during the 40-something years.

Millions of people will encounter a mid-life transition in the 1990s. Why does this occur? How does it affect people? And how can Christians marshall the emotional and spiritual resources to deal with these changes? These are just a few of the questions we will address and attempt to answer.

The leading edge of the baby boom has been the first group to hit this time of transition. Born in the late ’40s and early ’50s, they lived in new houses, built on new streets, in new neighborhoods, in the new American communities known as the suburbs.

When they headed off to school, they sat in new desks and were taught about Dick and Jane by teachers fresh out of college. They grew up with television and lived in a world brimming with promise. In the ’60s they graduated from high school and enrolled in college in record numbers. Then they landed jobs at good salaries in a still-expanding economy and bought homes before housing prices and interest rates went through the roof.

Unlike the baby boomers born after them, the leading edge achieved, in large part, the American dream. They weren’t smarter or more talented. Their success was due simply to being born earlier. But even though they have achieved a degree of financial success, many are beginning to encounter a crisis of purpose. They are like the cartoon that appeared in *The New Yorker*. The husband turns to his wife over the breakfast table and says, “The egg timer is pinging. The toaster is popping. The coffeepot is perking. Is this it, Alice? Is this the great American dream?”

Millions in this generation will no doubt repeat these questions in the next two decades. Is this it? Is this the great American dream? Add to these questions others like: Where is my life going? Is this all I am ever going to achieve?

In some ways, these are strange questions coming from the leading edge boomers who enjoy the fruits of the American economy. They have achieved a measure of success and yet they are asking questions that signal a coming crisis of purpose. So why a crisis of purpose? And why now?

The Age 40 Transition

As it enters mid-life, the baby boom generation remains an enigma. Its members rejected the values of their parents and changed the structure of their families in ways unimaginable to a previous generation. But they must now shoulder adult

responsibilities and assume positions of leadership (if they aren't already in them). Put another way: the baby boom stands at a point of transition. This is not the first time this generation has collectively faced a point of transition. When the leading-edge boomers began turning 30, they hit what psychologist Daniel Levinson calls the "Age 30 Transition." The struggle of leaving childhood and entering the adult years was worked out in a period of stagnant wages and appreciating house prices. Ultimately the collective angst of the boom generation turned Gail Sheehy's book *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* into a runaway bestseller. Among other things, the book assured the baby boomers that they were not alone in their confrontation with a major lifestage.

The leading edge of this generation is now in the midst of a more significant transition: the mid-life transition. Turning 40 is no more a predictor of change than turning 30 was. But somewhere in that time period, mid-life re-evaluation begins. It is a stage in which men and women begin to evaluate and question their priorities and deal with their dreams and aspirations.

While this transition is both somber and serious, some have attempted to inject some levity into the discussion. Lawyer Ron Katz found the YUPPIE designation an inaccurate description of his friends' lifestyle. So he coined, somewhat facetiously, yet another acronym to describe boomers at this stage. No longer rolling stones, but not yet the grateful dead, they're MOSS—middle-age, overstressed, semi-affluent suburbanites.

According to Katz, MOSS (or MOSSY, if you prefer the adjective) is what YUPPIES have become in the 1990s. As Katz says, a MOSS is "41 years old; more overstressed than overworked; affluent but doesn't feel that way." A MOSS also is beginning to understand why the world hasn't changed more over the past 25 years; [and] hopes that the world changes somewhat less over the next 30 years.

And while some social commentators want to discount the existence of a mid-life crisis, psychologists and sociologists assure us that something is indeed taking place. It is not merely media hype or self-fulfilling prophecy. During the years of mid-life, a substantial re-evaluation is taking place.

In actuality, the transition to mid-life is gradual. There are no major landmarks or signposts that signal our entry into this new and uncharted domain. Perhaps that is why there are so many jokes about turning 40 even though nothing of any significance actually happens on one's 40th birthday. Turning 40 provides a visible demarcation of a gradual process.

The Seasons of a Man's Life

In the preface of his book *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Daniel Levinson says, "Adults hope that life begins at 40—but the great anxiety is that it ends there." Fearing this may be true, many baby boomers are beginning to become "frantic at forty- something." They are making a transition from the years of their youth to a time of adulthood without any hope or optimism.

In his book, Daniel Levinson describes a number of developmental stages in adult life. He delineates an early adult era from the mid-20s to the late 30s. He also discusses a middle adult era from the mid-40s to the early 60s. What is in-between is what he calls the years of mid-life transition. He sees these years as a bridge between young adulthood and senior membership in one's occupational world.

The psychological study done by Levinson focused on men between the ages of 35 and 45. He found that about 80 percent of those studied went through a time of personal crisis and re-evaluation during this mid-life transition. Levinson argued that the 20 percent that did not encounter a struggle were in a state of denial and would go through this transition later.

This raises the first of two assumptions in these studies.

While the stages and themes documented by these studies are descriptive, they are by no means normative. As a Christian, I reject a deterministic model which predicts that everyone will go through a certain stage. While writing an earlier book on the subject of death and dying, I found that not all people go through the same psychological stages of grief. Christians, for example, who have come to terms with their own mortality and the mortality of their loved ones can face death and agree with the apostle Paul that it is better "to be absent from the body and present with the Lord." Likewise, people who have come to grips with their place in the world may not face a wrenching mid-life crisis.

A second assumption has to do with the subjects of these studies. The major studies of adult development (including Levinson's study) used male subjects born before the 1930 depression. Comparable studies for women were not done, and studies of baby boomers have not been done.

The men in the study have at least three things in common. They grew up in stable families; they had realistic goals for their lives; and they became adults in an expanding economy. Few experienced divorces in their families. Most had simple goals like "being able to provide for their families" and "being a good father." They also built their careers in a flourishing economic climate.

These assumptions are not true for the baby boom generation. They grew up in less-stable families and now are raising families in a world where divorce is very common. Baby boomers have much greater expectations and thus have personal goals that are much more difficult to fulfill. And baby boomers reached adulthood when the economy was shrinking.

Such differences make it difficult to apply these studies directly to the boom generation. While some investigators

argue that talk about a true mid-life “crisis” is overblown, most believe the current generation will be even more susceptible to a crisis than the previous one.

New Roles

In his research, Levinson discovered a number of themes that surface during the time of mid-life transition. The first is that mid-life transition involves adapting to new roles and responsibilities. By the time you are in your 30s, you are expected to think and behave like a parent. You can postpone this for awhile, and the boom generation has been fairly successful at postponing adulthood by extending the period simply called “youth.” Boomers extended adolescence into their 20s and even into their 30s. Now they are facing different and more demanding sets of roles and expectations. They are taking senior positions in their jobs and must provide care for both their children and their aging parents.

A man in his 40s is usually regarded by people in their 20s as a full generation removed. He is seen more as a parent than as a brother. In the minds of those who are younger, he is “Dad” rather than “buddy.” This message comes first as a surprise and then as an irritation to a man in mid-life.

Another way to look at this transition is to use the definitions of generations used by Spanish philosopher Jos Ortega y Gasset. He identifies five generations: childhood, youth, initiation, dominance, and old age.

The Initiation generation includes the time of mid-life transition and leads to what he calls the Dominant Generation, where individuals are expected to assume the mantle of leadership, authority, and responsibility. According to Ortega y Gasset, the Initiation and Dominant generations are the two most crucial ones. The relations between them and the successful passing of authority from one to another affect the fate of society. During the 1990s and the early part of the

21st century, this transition from the older generation to the younger generation will be taking place.

Mortality

The second stage of mid-life transition involves dealing with our own mortality. In mid-life we become increasingly aware of death. Living in a death-denying culture shields us from a sense of our own mortality. And being young further heightens our sense of indestructibility. Teenagers and young adults tend to think of themselves as “bullet-proof” and destined for immortality. But by the age of 40, we have seen many people not much older than ourselves succumb to cancer and heart attacks. Many of us have seen death in our own families. The death of a parent is a clear signal that we are now on our own. It also reminds us how short life really is.

People going through this transition not only face a crisis of mortality; they face a crisis of growing old. Baby boomers are entering what I call the “Ache Age.” Vigorous exercise is followed by hurting muscles that seem to stay sore longer. Cuts and bruises that used to heal almost overnight take much longer to heal. Such physiological reminders also focus our attention on our own mortality.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has identified five different stages of grief. Although these describe the psychological stages of a patient who is dying, they correlate remarkably well with the feelings people go through in mid-life. Whether it is the death of an individual or the death of their dreams, the emotional feelings are often the same.

Culminating Events

A mid-life transition surfaces from a culminating event. This event serves as a marker for a conclusion of young adulthood. It may be a very obvious one like a promotion or being fired from a job. But it also might be something that no one would

be able to identify, not even our spouses. It is a milestone that helps us see that one of our life's dreams is not going to be realized, and it provides an estimate for future success or fulfillment.

In *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, Daniel Levinson argues that the dreams we have are so compelling that nothing short of total success will satisfy. In other words, there is no such thing as modest success. Frequently, the culminating event is seen as evidence of flawed success and often as total failure.

To those on the outside looking in, a man may seem like he has reached the pinnacle of success. But they can't see into his irrational mind affected by sin. He may have dreams that are hopelessly unrealistic, especially in youth.

It may be that a man is the president of a very successful company, but nevertheless feels like a failure because his dream was to be President of the United States. A man who is very athletic and runs marathons feels unfulfilled because his dream was to play in the NBA. A woman who is one of the top salespeople in the company may feel inadequate because she wanted a family and cannot have kids.

Intense Introspection

Fourth, mid-life transition involves intense introspection. A consistent pattern of adult life is an early struggle in adulthood to achieve a measure of success followed by a mid-life appraisal of one's values and philosophy of life. A man around 40 begins to reassess the meaning of life and begins reconsidering the fate of his youthful dreams. He is asking major questions like: Is this all I am going to do the rest of my life? Is this all I am going to achieve?

Many people find that what they thought was going to make them happy isn't making them happy. They enjoyed law school and the first few years of law. But the thought of practicing law for

the rest of their live is not very fulfilling. They enjoyed the first few years selling life insurance, but the thought of selling insurance for another 30 years sounds more like torture than a career.

This is a time when an individual shines a light on his or her accomplishments and sets an agenda for the second half of life. There may or may not be major mid-course corrections depending on the evaluation.

Leaving a Legacy

Finally, a mid-life transition involves leaving a legacy. As we come to grips with our own mortality, we inevitably desire immortality, which is "one of the strongest and least malleable of human motives." Leaving a legacy means finding a form of immortality by leaving something behind. One is reminded of Woody Allen's quip that he didn't want to be immortal by leaving something behind; he wanted to be immortal by not dying. But since that is not possible, then an individual seeks to leave a legacy, and that quest usually forms the core of the second half of a person's life.

Successful resolution of mid-life comes from determining what legacy—possessions, memories, ministry—we will leave behind. The legacy may encompass family, work, or all of society. It may involve contributions as a parent, spouse, leader, or mentor. These elements of the legacy define the path we will take in the second half of our lives.

Application

These then are the basic themes of the mid-life transition. For the Christian, there are two points of application. First is a personal application. If you are going through mid-life, recognize that you are going to be in a daily battle over three issues.

First, you will have a daily battle with your thoughts. We need to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). We will also have a daily battle with temptation. A key verse to memorize is 1 Corinthians 10:13. And finally we will have a daily battle with sin and must confess our sins (1 John 1:8-9).

The second point of application is to our personal ministry. If we are attentive to this mid-life transition, we will be able to minister to millions of people who will go through this struggle. The 1990s might be the greatest time for harvest in this generation. Until now, most baby boomers have had few struggles. As they confront mid-life, many will be asking important questions that can lead to evangelistic opportunities.

Here are two ways you can help. First, a knowledge of the transition can ease the struggle. Daniel Levinson says knowing the transition is coming is an important antidote to its effects. So a knowledge of this transition can help you reach out.

Second, a knowledge of the Bible can help you to minister. A generation that has been impervious to the gospel may be more willing to listen as it asks the fundamental questions of life. If we reach out in love with a biblical message, we can make a difference.

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