

Utilitarianism: The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number

Utilitarianism is an ethical system that determines morality on the basis of the greatest good for the greatest number. A modern form of utilitarianism is situation ethics. Kerby Anderson examines the problems with this ethical system, and evaluates it from a biblical perspective.



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

You have probably heard a politician say he or she passed a piece of legislation because it did the greatest good for the greatest number of citizens. Perhaps you have heard someone justify their actions because it was for the greater good.

In this article, we are going to talk about the philosophy behind such actions. The philosophy is known as utilitarianism. Although it is a long word, it is in common usage every day. It is the belief that the sole standard of morality is determined by its usefulness.

Philosophers refer to it as a “teleological” system. The Greek word “telos” means end or goal. This means that this ethical system determines morality by the end result. Whereas Christian ethics are based on rules, utilitarianism is based on results.

Utilitarianism began with the philosophies of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Utilitarianism gets its name from Bentham’s test question, “What is the use of it?” He conceived of the idea when he ran across the words “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” in Joseph Priestly’s *Treatise of Government*.

Jeremy Bentham developed his ethical system around the idea of pleasure. He built it on ancient hedonism which pursued

physical pleasure and avoided physical pain. According to Bentham, the most moral acts are those which maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This has sometimes been called the “utilitarian calculus.” An act would be moral if it brings the greatest amount of pleasure and the least amount of pain.

John Stuart Mill modified this philosophy and developed it apart from Bentham’s hedonistic foundation. Mill used the same utilitarian calculus but instead focused on maximizing the general happiness by calculating the greatest good for the greatest number. While Bentham used the calculus in a quantitative sense, Mill used this calculus in a qualitative sense. He believed, for example, that some pleasures were of higher quality than others.

Utilitarianism has been embraced by so many simply because it seems to make a good deal of sense and seems relatively simple to apply. However, when it was first proposed, utilitarianism was a radical philosophy. It attempted to set forth a moral system apart from divine revelation and biblical morality. Utilitarianism focused on results rather than rules. Ultimately the focus on the results demolished the rules.

In other words, utilitarianism provided for a way for people to live moral lives apart from the Bible and its prescriptions. There was no need for an appeal to divine revelation. Reason rather than revelation was sufficient to determine morality.

Founders of Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham was a leading theorist in Anglo-American philosophy of law and one of the founders of utilitarianism. He developed this idea of a utility and a utilitarian calculus in the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1781).

In the beginning of that work Bentham wrote: “Nature has

placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it.”{1}

Bentham believed that pain and pleasure not only explain our actions but also help us define what is good and moral. He believed that this foundation could provide a basis for social, legal, and moral reform in society.

Key to his ethical system is the principle of utility. That is, what is the greatest good for the greatest number?

Bentham wrote: “By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness.” {2}

John Stuart Mill was a brilliant scholar who was subjected to a rigid system of intellectual discipline and shielded from boys his own age. When Mill was a teenager, he read Bentham. Mill said the feeling rushed upon him “that all previous moralists were superseded.” He believed that the principle of utility “gave unity to my conception of things. I now had opinions: a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one among the best senses of the word, a religion; the inculcation and diffusion of what could be made the principle outward purpose of a life.”{3}

Mill modified Bentham’s utilitarianism. Whereas Bentham established an *act* utilitarianism, Mill established a *rule* utilitarianism. According to Mill, one calculates what is

right by comparing the consequences of all relevant agents of alternative rules for a particular circumstance. This is done by comparing all relevant similar circumstances or settings at any time.

Analysis of Utilitarianism

Why did utilitarianism become popular? There are a number of reasons for its appeal.

First, it is a relatively simple ethical system to apply. To determine whether an action is moral you merely have to calculate the good and bad consequences that will result from a particular action. If the good outweighs the bad, then the action is moral.

Second, utilitarianism avoids the need to appeal to divine revelation. Many adherents to this ethical system are looking for a way to live a moral life apart from the Bible and a belief in God. The system replaces revelation with reason. Logic rather than an adherence to biblical principles guides the ethical decision-making of a utilitarian.

Third, most people already use a form of utilitarianism in their daily decisions. We make lots of non-moral decisions every day based upon consequences. At the checkout line, we try to find the shortest line so we can get out the door more quickly. We make most of our financial decisions (writing checks, buying merchandise, etc.) on a utilitarian calculus of cost and benefits. So making moral decisions using utilitarianism seems like a natural extension of our daily decision-making procedures.

There are also a number of problems with utilitarianism. One problem with utilitarianism is that it leads to an “end justifies the means” mentality. If any worthwhile end can justify the means to attain it, a true ethical foundation is lost. But we all know that the end does *not* justify the means.

If that were so, then Hitler could justify the Holocaust because the end was to purify the human race. Stalin could justify his slaughter of millions because he was trying to achieve a communist utopia.

The end never justifies the means. The means must justify themselves. A particular act cannot be judged as good simply because it may lead to a good consequence. The means must be judged by some objective and consistent standard of morality.

Second, utilitarianism cannot protect the rights of minorities if the goal is the greatest good for the greatest number. Americans in the eighteenth century could justify slavery on the basis that it provided a good consequence for a majority of Americans. Certainly the majority benefited from cheap slave labor even though the lives of black slaves were much worse.

A third problem with utilitarianism is predicting the consequences. If morality is based on results, then we would have to have omniscience in order to accurately predict the consequence of any action. But at best we can only guess at the future, and often these educated guesses are wrong.

A fourth problem with utilitarianism is that consequences themselves must be judged. When results occur, we must still ask whether they are good or bad results. Utilitarianism provides no objective and consistent foundation to judge results because results are the mechanism used to judge the action itself.

Situation Ethics

A popular form of utilitarianism is *situation ethics* first proposed by Joseph Fletcher in his book by the same name.[\[4\]](#) Fletcher acknowledges that situation ethics is essentially utilitarianism, but modifies the pleasure principle and calls it the *agape* (love) principle.

Fletcher developed his ethical system as an alternative to two extremes: legalism and antinomianism. The legalist is like the Pharisees in the time of Jesus who had all sorts of laws and regulations but no heart. They emphasized the law over love. Antinomians are like the libertines in Paul's day who promoted their lawlessness.

The foundation of situation ethics is what Fletcher calls the law of love. Love replaces the law. Fletcher says, "We follow law, if at all, for love's sake."[{5}](#)

Fletcher even quotes certain biblical passages to make his case. For example, he quotes Romans 13:8 which says, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law."

Another passage Fletcher quotes is Matthew 22:37-40. "Christ said, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Proponents of situation ethics would argue that these summary verses require only one absolute (the law of love). No other universal laws can be derived from this commandment to love. Even the Ten Commandments are subject to exceptions based upon the law of love.

Situation ethics also accepts the view that the end justifies the means. Only the ends can justify the means; the means cannot justify themselves. Fletcher believes that "no act apart from its foreseeable consequences has any ethical meaning whatsoever."[{6}](#)

Joseph Fletcher tells the story of Lenin who had become weary of being told that he had no ethics. After all, he used a very pragmatic and utilitarian philosophy to force communism on the people. So some of those around him accused him of believing

that the end justifies the means. Finally, Lenin shot back, "If the end does not justify the means, then in the name of sanity and justice, *what does?*"[\[7\]](#)

Like utilitarianism, situation ethics attempts to define morality with an "end justifies the means" philosophy. According to Fletcher, the law of love requires the greatest love for the greatest number of people in the long run. But as we will see in the next section, we do not always know how to define love, and we do not always know what will happen in the long run.

Analysis of Situation Ethics

Perhaps the biggest problem with situation ethics is that the law of love is too general. People are going to have different definitions of what love is. What some may believe is a loving act, others might feel is an unloving act.

Moreover, the context of love varies from situation to situation and certainly varies from culture to culture. So it is even difficult to derive moral principles that can be known and applied universally. In other words, it is impossible to say that to follow the law of love is to do such and such in every circumstance. Situations and circumstances change, and so the moral response may change as well.

The admonition to do the loving thing is even less specific than to do what is the greatest good for the greatest number. It has about as much moral force as to say to do the "good thing" or the "right thing." Without a specific definition, it is nothing more than a moral platitude.

Second, situation ethics suffers from the same problem of utilitarianism in predicting consequences. In order to judge the morality of an action, we have to know the results of the action we are about to take. Often we cannot know the consequences.

Joseph Fletcher acknowledges that when he says, “We can’t always guess the future, even though we are always being forced to try.”^[8] But according to his ethical system, we have to *know* the results in order to make a moral choice. In fact, we should be relatively certain of the consequences, otherwise our action would by definition be immoral.

Situation ethics also assumes that the situation will determine the meaning of love. Yet love is not determined by the particulars of our circumstance but merely conditioned by them. The situation does not determine what is right or wrong. The situation instead helps us determine which biblical command applies in that particular situation.

From the biblical perspective, the problem with utilitarianism and situation ethics is that they ultimately provide no consistent moral framework. Situation ethics also permits us to do evil to achieve good. This is totally contrary to the Bible.

For example, Proverbs 14:12 says that “There is a way *which* seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” The road to destruction is paved with good intentions. This is a fundamental flaw with an “ends justifies the means” ethical system.

In Romans 6:1 Paul asks, “Are we to continue sinning so that grace may increase?” His response is “May it never be!”

Utilitarianism attempts to provide a moral system apart from God’s revelation in the Bible, but in the end, it does not succeed.

Notes

1. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, printed in 1781 and published in 1789 (Batoche Books: Kitchener, ON Canada, 2000), 14.

2. Ibid.

3. John Stuart Mill, "Last Stage of Education and First of Self-Education," *Autobiography*, 1873 (New York: P.F. Collier & Sons, 1909-14).
4. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966).
5. Ibid., 70.
6. Ibid., 120.
7. Ibid., 121.
8. Ibid., 136.

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"How Should a Christian View Civil Disobedience?"

How should a Christian view civil disobedience? Doesn't Paul's command to submit to governmental authority in Romans 13 preclude civil disobedience?

As I have said in [my article](#) on the subject, we are to obey government (Romans 13). But that is NOT an absolute command. If there was never a time when we would disobey government, then government would be God.

So the key question is *when* do we disobey government. I believe that the Scriptures teach that we obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29) when there is a direct, specific command given by government that would force us to disobey a direct command of Scripture. The Bible provides cases of this in the Old Testament (Hebrew midwives, many instances in the book of Daniel, etc.) and the New Testament (Acts 5).

The historical cases of Corrie Ten Boom, Rosa Parks, and

Martin Luther King would all fit as examples. Erwin Lutzer (*Measuring Morality*) and Norman Geisler (*Christian Ethics*) deal with the issue of civil disobedience and obedience to Scripture in their books, if you would like to read more on the subject.

Your question about Romans 13 is more difficult. I take it that the Apostle Paul is giving a general principle rather than a universal pronouncement. Usually it is the case that “rulers hold no terror for those who do right.” But that is not always the case. There certainly are (and have been) tyrannical leaders.

It’s instructive, though, that Paul says this at a time when a corrupt leader (Nero) was in office. If nothing else it should remind us how much worse government leaders can be. Nevertheless, we are to obey those in authority (Romans 13) and pray for those in authority (1 Timothy 2). Just as there are exceptions to total obedience (civil disobedience), so there are exceptions to leaders who “hold no terror.”

I might also encourage you to revisit [my article on the Probe web site](#) and a recent Breakpoint commentary by Chuck Colson on “Caesar and Christ” (www.breakpoint.org). I hope this helped a bit. God bless you.

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Cultural Relativism

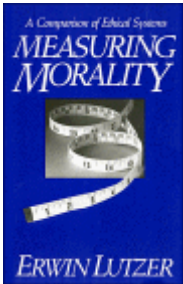
Kerby Anderson presents the basics of cultural relativism and evaluates it from a Christian worldview perspective. Comparing the tenets of cultural relativism to a biblical view

of ethics shows how these popular ideas fail the reasonableness test.

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



John Dewey



Any student in a class on anthropology cannot help but notice the differences between various cultures of the world. Differences in dress, diet, and social norms are readily apparent. Such diversity in terms of ethics and justice are also easily seen and apparently shaped by the culture in which we live.

If there is no transcendent ethical standard, then often culture becomes the ethical norm for determining whether an action is right or wrong. This ethical system is known as *cultural relativism*.^[1] Cultural relativism is the view that all ethical truth is relative to a specific culture. Whatever a cultural group approves is considered right within that culture. Conversely, whatever a cultural group condemns is wrong.

The key to cultural relativism is that right and wrong can only be judged relative to a specified society. There is no ultimate standard of right and wrong by which to judge culture.

A famous proponent of this view was John Dewey, often considered the father of American education. He taught that moral standards were like language and therefore the result of custom. Language evolved over time and eventually became organized by a set of principles known as grammar. But

language also changes over time to adapt to the changing circumstances of its culture.

Likewise, Dewey said, ethics were also the product of an evolutionary process. There are no fixed ethical norms. These are merely the result of particular cultures attempting to organize a set of moral principles. But these principles can also change over time to adapt to the changing circumstances of the culture.

This would also mean that different forms of morality evolved in different communities. Thus, there are no universal ethical principles. What may be right in one culture would be wrong in another culture, and vice versa.

Although it is hard for us in the modern world to imagine, a primitive culture might value genocide, treachery, deception, even torture. While we may not like these traits, a true follower of cultural relativism could not say these are wrong since they are merely the product of cultural adaptation.

Clifford Gertz argued that culture must be seen as “webs of meaning” within which humans must live.^{2} Gertz believed that “Humans are shaped exclusively by their culture and therefore there exists no unifying cross-cultural human characteristics.”^{3}

As we will see, cultural relativism allows us to be tolerant toward other cultures, but it provides no basis to judge or evaluate other cultures and their practices.

William Graham Sumner

A key figure who expanded on Dewey’s ideas was William Graham Sumner of Yale University. He argued that what our conscience tells us depends solely upon our social group. The moral values we hold are not part of our moral nature, according to Sumner. They are part of our training and upbringing.

Sumner argued in his book, *Folkways*: "World philosophy, life policy, right, rights, and morality are all products of the folkways."^[4] In other words, what we perceive as conscience is merely the product of culture upon our minds through childhood training and cultural influence. There are no universal ethical principles, merely different cultural conditioning.

Sumner studied all sorts of societies (primitive and advanced), and was able to document numerous examples of cultural relativism. Although many cultures promoted the idea, for example, that a man could have many wives, Sumner discovered that in Tibet a woman was encouraged to have many husbands. He also described how some Eskimo tribes allowed deformed babies to die by being exposed to the elements. In the Fiji Islands, aged parents were killed.

Sumner believed that this diversity of moral values clearly demonstrated that culture is the sole determinant of our ethical standards. In essence, culture determines what is right and wrong. And different cultures come to different ethical conclusions.

Proponents of cultural relativism believe this cultural diversity proves that culture alone is responsible for our morality. There is no soul or spirit or mind or conscience. Moral relativists say that what we perceive as moral convictions or conscience are the byproducts of culture.

The strength of cultural relativism is that it allows us to withhold moral judgments about the social practices of another culture. In fact, proponents of cultural relativism would say that to pass judgment on another culture would be ethnocentric.

This strength, however, is also a major weakness. Cultural relativism excuses us from judging the moral practices of another culture. Yet we all feel compelled to condemn such

actions as the Holocaust or ethnic cleansing. Cultural relativism as an ethical system, however, provides no foundation for doing so.

Melville Herskovits

Melville J. Herskovits wrote in *Cultural Relativism*: “Judgments are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation.”^{5} In other words, a person’s judgment about what is right and wrong is determined by their cultural experiences. This would include everything from childhood training to cultural pressures to conform to the majority views of the group. Herskovits went on to argue that even the definition of what is normal and abnormal is relative to culture.

He believed that cultures were flexible, and so ethical norms change over time. The standard of ethical conduct may change over time to meet new cultural pressures and demands. When populations are unstable and infant mortality is high, cultures value life and develop ethical systems to protect it. When a culture is facing overpopulation, a culture redefines ethical systems and even the value of life. Life is valuable and sacred in the first society. Mercy killing might become normal and acceptable in the second society.

Polygamy might be a socially acceptable standard for society. But later, that society might change its perspective and believe that it is wrong for a man to have more than one wife. Herskovits believed that whatever a society accepted or rejected became the standard of morality for the individuals in that society.

He believed that “the need for a cultural relativistic point of view has become apparent because of the realization that there is no way to play this game of making judgment across cultures except with loaded dice.”^{6} Ultimately, he believed,

culture determines our moral standards and attempting to compare or contrast cultural norms is futile.

In a sense, the idea of cultural relativism has helped encourage such concepts as multiculturalism and postmodernism. After all, if truth is created not discovered, then all truths created by a particular culture are equally true. This would mean that cultural norms and institutions should be considered equally valid if they are useful to a particular group of people within a culture.

And this is one of the major problems with a view of cultural relativism: you cannot judge the morality of another culture. If there is no objective standard, then someone in one culture does not have a right to evaluate the actions or morality of another culture. Yet in our hearts we know that certain things like racism, discrimination, and exploitation are wrong.

Evolutionary Ethics

Foundational to the view of cultural relativism is the theory of evolution. Since social groups experience cultural change with the passage of time, changing customs and morality evolve differently in different places and times.

Anthony Flew, author of *Evolutionary Ethics*, states his perspective this way: "All morals, ideas and ideals have been originated in the world; and that, having thus in the past been subject to change, they will presumably in the future too, for better or worse, continue to evolve."[\[7\]](#) He denies the existence of God and therefore an objective, absolute moral authority. But he also believes in the authority of a value system.

His theory is problematic because it does not adequately account for the origin, nature, and basis of morals. Flew suggests that morals somehow originated in this world and are constantly evolving.

Even if we concede his premise, we must still ask, Where and when did the first moral value originate? Essentially, Flew is arguing that a value came from a non-value. In rejecting the biblical idea of a Creator whose character establishes a moral standard for values, Flew is forced to attempt to derive an *ought* from an *is*.

Evolutionary ethics rests upon the assumption that values are by nature constantly changing or evolving. It claims that it is of value that values are changing. But is *this* value changing?

If the answer to this question is no, then that would mean that moral values don't have to always change. And if that is the case, then there could be unchanging values (known as absolute standards). However, if the value that values change is itself unchanging, then the view is self-contradictory.

Another form of evolutionary ethics is *sociobiology*. E. O. Wilson of Harvard University is a major advocate of sociobiology, and claims that scientific materialism will eventually replace traditional religion and other ideologies.[{8}](#)

According to sociobiology, human social systems have been shaped by an evolutionary process. Human societies exist and survive because they work and because they have worked in the past.

A key principle is the reproductive imperative.[{9}](#) The ultimate goal of any organism is to survive and reproduce. Moral systems exist because they ultimately promote human survival and reproduction.

Another principle is that all behavior is selfish at the most basic level. We love our children, according to this view, because love is an effective means of raising effective reproducers.

At the very least, sociobiology is a very cynical view of human nature and human societies. Are we really to believe that all behavior is selfish? Is there no altruism?

The Bible and human experience seem to strongly contradict this. Ray Bohlin's [article](#) on the Probe Web site provides a detailed refutation of this form of evolutionary ethics.[\[10\]](#)

Evaluating Cultural Relativism

In attempting to evaluate cultural relativism, we should acknowledge that we could indeed learn many things from other cultures. We should never fall into the belief that our culture has all the answers. No culture has a complete monopoly on the truth. Likewise, Christians must guard against the assumption that their Christian perspective on their cultural experiences should be normative for every other culture.

However, as we have already seen, the central weakness of cultural relativism is its unwillingness to evaluate another culture. This may seem satisfactory when we talk about language, customs, even forms of worship. But this non-judgmental mindset breaks down when confronted by real evils such as slavery or genocide. The Holocaust, for example, cannot be merely explained away as an appropriate cultural response for Nazi Germany.

Cultural relativism faces other philosophical problems. For example, it is insufficient to say that morals originated in the world and that they are constantly changing. Cultural relativists need to answer how value originated out of non-value. How did the first value arise?

Fundamental to cultural relativism is a belief that values change. But if the value that values change is itself unchanging, then this theory claims an unchanging value that all values change and evolve. The position is self-

contradictory.

Another important concern is conflict. If there are no absolute values that exist trans-culturally or externally to the group, how are different cultures to get along when values collide? How are we to handle these conflicts?

Moreover, is there ever a place for courageous individuals to challenge the cultural norm and fight against social evil? Cultural relativism seems to leave no place for social reformers. The abolition movement, the suffrage movement, and the civil rights movement are all examples of social movements that ran counter to the social circumstances of the culture. Abolishing slavery and providing rights to citizens are good things even if they were opposed by many people within society.

The Bible provides a true standard by which to judge attitudes and actions. Biblical standards can be used to judge individual sin as well as corporate sin institutionalized within a culture.

By contrast, culture cannot be used to judge right and wrong. A changing culture cannot provide a fixed standard for morality. Only God's character, revealed in the Bible provides a reliable measure for morality.

Notes

1. The general outline for this material can be found in chapter two of *Measuring Morality* (Richardson, Tx.: Probe Books, 1989).
2. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
3. E. M. Zechenter, "Cultural Relativism and the Abuse of the Individual, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 1997, 53:323.

4. William Graham Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), 76.
5. Melville J. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism* (New York: Random House, 1973), 15.
6. Ibid., 56.
7. Anthony Flew, *Evolutionary Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), 55.
8. E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).
9. Robert Wallace, *The Genesis Factor* (New York: Morrow and Co., 1979).
10. Dr. Ray Bohlin, "[Sociobiology: Evolution, Genes and Morality](#)"

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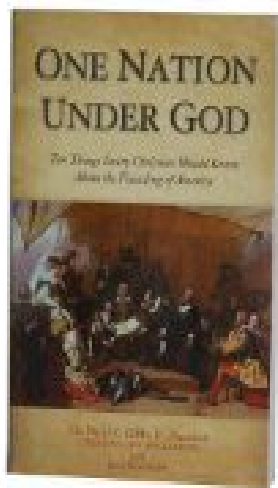
One Nation Under God

The Christian influence in American history has been lost. Kerby Anderson provides an overview of nearly 160 years of our nation's founding history by discussing Ten Things Every Christian Should Know About the Founding of America.



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

Founders of America: Part One



G.K. Chesterton once said that “America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence.”[\[1\]](#) We are going to document the origins of this country by looking at a book entitled *One Nation Under God: Ten Things Every Christian Should Know About the Founding of America*.[\[2\]](#)

The first thing every Christian should know is that “Christopher Columbus was motivated by his Christian faith to sail to the New World.” One example of this can be found in his writings after he discovered this new land. He wrote, “Therefore let the king and queen, the princes and their most fortunate kingdoms, and all other countries of Christendom give thanks to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who has bestowed upon us so great a victory and gift. Let religious processions be solemnized; let sacred festivals be given; let the churches be covered with festive garlands. Let Christ rejoice on earth, as he rejoices in heaven, when he foresees coming to salvation so many souls of people hitherto lost.”[\[3\]](#)

The second thing every Christian should know is “The Pilgrims clearly stated that they came to the New World to glorify God and to advance the Christian faith.” It could easily be said that America began with the words, “In the name of God. Amen.” Those were the first words of our nation’s first self-governing document—the Mayflower Compact.

The Pilgrims were Bible-believers who refused to conform to

the heretical state Church of England and eventually came to America. Their leader, William Bradford, said “A great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for the propagating and advancing the gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of the world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping stones unto others for the performing of so great a work.”[\[4\]](#)

Many scholars believe that the initial agreement for self-government, found in the Mayflower Compact, became the cornerstone of the U.S. Constitution. This agreement for self-government, signed on November 11, 1620, created a new government in which they agreed to “covenant and combine” themselves together into a “Body Politick.”

British historian Paul Johnson said, “It is an amazing document What was remarkable about this particular contract was that it was not between a servant and a master, or a people and a king, but between a group of like-minded individuals and each other, with God as a witness and symbolic co-signatory.”[\[5\]](#)

Founders of America: Part Two

The third thing every Christian should know is “The Puritans created Bible-based commonwealths in order to practice a representative government that was modeled on their church covenants.” Both the Pilgrims and the Puritans disagreed with many things about the Church of England in their day. But the Pilgrims felt that reforming the church was a hopeless endeavor. They were led to separate themselves from the official church and were often labeled “Separatists.” The Puritans, on the other hand, wanted to reform the Church of England from within. They argued from within for purity of the church. Hence, the name *Puritans*.

At that time, there had been no written constitution in England. The British common law was a mostly oral tradition, articulated as necessary in various written court decisions. The Puritans determined to anchor their liberties on the written page, a tradition taken from the Bible. They created the Body of Liberties which were established on the belief that Christ's rule is not only given for the church, but also for the state. It contained principles found in the Bible, specifically ninety-eight separate protections of individual rights, including due process of law, trial by a jury of peers, and prohibitions against cruel and unusual punishment.

The fourth thing every Christian should know is that "This nation was founded as a sanctuary for religious dissidents." Roger Williams questioned many of the Puritan laws in Massachusetts, especially the right of magistrates to punish Sabbath-breakers. After he left Massachusetts and founded Rhode Island, he became the first to formulate the concept of "separation of church and state" in America.

Williams said, "The civil magistrate may not intermeddle even to stop a church from apostasy and heresy."[\[6\]](#) In the 1643 charter for Rhode Island and in all its subsequent charters, Roger Williams established the idea that the state should not enforce religious opinion.

Another dissident was the Quaker William Penn. He was the main author of the founding governmental document for the land that came to be known as Pennsylvania. This document was called *The Concessions*, and dealt with not only government matters but was also concerned with social, philosophical, scientific, and political matters. By 1680, *The Concessions* had 150 signers, and in the Quaker spirit, this group effort provided for far-reaching liberties never before seen in Anglo-Saxon law.

Paul Johnson said that at the time of America's founding, Philadelphia was "the cultural capital of America." He also points out: "It can be argued, indeed, that Quaker

Pennsylvania was the key state in American history. It was the last great flowering of Puritan political innovation, around its great city of brotherly love.”{7}

Education and Religion in America

The fifth thing every Christian should know is that “The education of the settlers and founders of America was uniquely Christian and Bible-based.” Education was very important to the founders of this country. One of the laws in Puritan New England was the Old Deluder Act. It was called that because it was intended to defeat Satan, the Old Deluder, who had used illiteracy in the Old World to keep people from reading the Word of God. The New England Primer was used to teach colonial children to read and included the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostle’s Creed, and the text of many hymns and prayers.

We can also see the importance of education in the rules of many of the first colleges. The Laws and Statutes of Harvard College in 1643 said: “Let every student be plainly instructed and earnestly pressed to consider well the main end of his life and studies is *to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life* (John 17:3).”{8}

Yale College listed two requirements in its 1745 charter: “All scholars shall live religious, godly, and blameless lives according to the rules of God’s Word, diligently reading the Holy Scriptures, the fountain of light and truth; and constantly attend upon all the duties of religion, both in public and secret.”{9}

Reverend John Witherspoon was the only active minister who signed the Declaration of Independence. Constitutional scholar John Eidsmoe says, “John Witherspoon is best described as the man who shaped the men who shaped America. Although he did not attend the Constitutional Convention, his influence was multiplied many times over by those who spoke as well as by

what was said.”[{10}](#)

New Jersey elected John Witherspoon to the Continental Congress that drafted the Declaration of Independence. When Congress called for a national day of fasting and prayer on May 17, 1776, John Witherspoon was called upon to preach the sermon. His topic was “The Dominion of Providence over the Affairs of Men.”

The sixth thing every Christian should know is that “A religious revival was the key factor in uniting the separate pre- Revolutionary War colonies.”

Paul Johnson, author of *A History of the American People*, reports that the Great Awakening may have touched as many as three out of four American colonists.[{11}](#) He also points out that this Great Awakening “sounded the death-knell of British colonialism.”[{12}](#)

As John Adams was to put it afterwards, “The Revolution was effected before the War commenced. The Revolution was in the mind and hearts of the people: and change in their religious sentiments of their duties and obligations.”

Paul Johnson believes that “The Revolution could not have taken place without this religious background. The essential difference between the American Revolution and the French Revolution is that the American Revolution, in its origins, was a religious event, whereas the French Revolution was an anti-religious event.”[{13}](#)

Clergy and Biblical Christianity

The seventh thing every Christian should know is that “Many of the clergy in the American colonies, members of the Black Regiment, preached liberty.” Much of this took place in so-called “Election Sermons” of Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Often the ministers spoke on the subject of civil government in a serious and instructive

manner. The sermon was then printed so that every representative had a copy for himself, and so that every minister of the town could have a copy.

John Adams observed, "The Philadelphia ministers thunder and lighten every Sabbath' against George III's despotism."[\[14\]](#) And in speaking of his native Virginia, Thomas Jefferson observed that "pulpit oratory ran like a shock of electricity through the whole colony."[\[15\]](#)

Some of the most influential preachers include John Witherspoon, Jonathan Mayhew, Samuel West, and Reverend John Peter Muhlenberg. Reverend Mayhew, for example, preached a message entitled "Concerning Unlimited Submission to the Higher Powers, to the Council and House of Representatives in Colonial New England." He said, "It is hoped that but few will think the subject of it an improper one to be discoursed on in the pulpit, under a notion that this is preaching politics, instead of Christ. However, to remove all prejudices of this sort, I beg it may be remembered that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.' Why, then, should not those parts of Scripture which related to civil government be examined and explained from the desk, as well as others?"[\[16\]](#)

The eighth thing every Christian should know is that "Biblical Christianity was the driving force behind the key leaders of the American Revolution."

In 1772, Samuel Adams created a "Committee of Correspondence" in Boston, in order to keep in touch with his fellow Americans up and down the coast. Historian George Bancroft called Sam Adams, "the last of the Puritans."[\[17\]](#) His biographer, John C. Miller, says that Samuel Adams cannot be understood without considering the lasting impact Whitefield's preaching at Harvard during the Great Awakening had on him.[\[18\]](#) Adams had been telling his countrymen for years that America had to take her stand against tyranny. He regarded individual freedom as

“the law of the Creator” and a Christian right documented in the New Testament.[\[19\]](#) As the Declaration was being signed, Sam Adams said, “We have this day restored the Sovereign to Whom all men ought to be obedient. He reigns in heaven and from the rising to the setting of the sun, let His kingdom come.”

The Founding Documents

The ninth thing every Christian should know is that “Christianity played a significant role in the development of our nation’s birth certificate, the Declaration of Independence.” For example, the Presbyterian Elders of North Carolina drafted the Mecklenburg Declaration in May 1775 under the direction of Elder Ephraim Brevard (a graduate of Princeton). One scholar says “In correcting his first draft of the Declaration it can be seen, in at least a few places, that Jefferson has erased the original words and inserted those which are first found in the Mecklenburg Declaration. No one can doubt that Jefferson had Brevard’s resolutions before him when he was writing his immortal Declaration.”[\[20\]](#)

The relationship between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution is crucial. The Declaration is the “why” of American government, while the Constitution is the “how.”

Another influence on the Declaration was George Mason’s “Virginia Declaration of Rights.” Notice how similar it sounds to the Declaration: “That all men are by nature equally free and independent and have certain inherent rights, of which, when they enter into a state of society, they cannot, by any compact, deprive or divest their posterity; namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining happiness and safety.”

Paul Johnson says, “There is no question that the Declaration of Independence was, to those who signed it, a religious as

well as secular act, and that the Revolutionary War had the approbation of divine providence. They had won it with God's blessing and afterwards, they drew up their framework of government with God's blessing, just as in the seventeenth century the colonists had drawn up their Compacts and Charters and Orders and Instruments, with God peering over their shoulders." [\[21\]](#)

The tenth thing every Christian should know is that "The Biblical understanding of the sinfulness of man was the guiding principle behind the United States Constitution." John Eidsmoe says, "Although Witherspoon derived the concept of separation of powers from other sources, such as Montesquieu, checks and balances seem to have been his own unique contribution to the foundation of U.S. Government." [\[22\]](#) He adds, "One thing is certain: the Christian religion, particularly Rev. Witherspoon's Calvinism, which emphasized the fallen nature of man, influenced Madison's view of law and government." [\[23\]](#)

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Race and Racial Issues – A

Biblical Perspective

Christian

Kerby Anderson looks at the issue of race from a Christian worldview perspective. The Bible clearly teaches that all people are valuable and loved by God with no distinction based on race. As Christians, we are called to set an example by seeing all peoples as worthy of our love and our respect.



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

Race has divided people in our world for millennia, and the prejudice of racism is still with us today. So in this article we are going to focus on some important aspects of race and racial issues.

At the outset we should acknowledge that, although we will use the term “race” through this discussion, it is not a very precise term. First, the Bible really only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups. But the Bible doesn’t provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences.

The Bible teaches that God has made “from one blood every nation of men” (Acts 17:26). Here Paul is teaching the Athenians that they came from the same source in the creation as everyone else. We are all from one blood. In other words, there are no superior or inferior races. We are all from the same race: the human race.

Race is also an imprecise term in large part because it is not based upon scientific data. People of every race can interbreed and produce fertile offspring. It turns out that the so-called differences in the races is not very great. A

recent study of human genetic material of different races concluded that the DNA of any two people in the world would differ by just 2/10ths of one percent.[\[1\]](#) And of this variation, only six percent can be linked to racial categories. The remaining 94 percent is “within race” variation.

Let’s put it another way. All the racial differences that have been so important to people for generations are statistically insignificant from a scientific point of view. These differences are trivial when you consider the 3 trillion base pairs of human DNA.

A third reason the term “race” also lacks precision is due to interracial marriage. While it is probably true that the so-called races of the world were never completely divided, it is certainly true that the lines are becoming quite blurred today. Take golfer Tiger Woods as one example. His heritage is Thai, black, white, Chinese, and Native American.

Isn’t it ironic that at a time when racial lines are blurring more and more each generation, the government still collects data that requires individuals to check one box that represents their racial or ethnic heritage? A growing number of people are finding it hard to classify themselves by checking just one box.

The Curse on Ham

Sadly, one of the most destructive false teachings supposedly based on the Bible is the so-called “curse on Ham.” Ham was one of Noah’s three sons (along with Shem and Japheth).

In the past, certain cults and even some orthodox Christian groups have held to the belief that the skin color of black people was due to a curse on Ham and his descendants. Unfortunately, this false teaching has been used to justify racial discrimination and even slavery.

One group said, "We know the circumstances under which the posterity of Cain (and later Ham) were cursed with what we call Negroid racial characteristics."[\[2\]](#) Another group argued that "The curse which Noah pronounced upon Canaan was the origin of the black race."[\[3\]](#)

First, let's clearly state that the Bible does not teach that people with black skin color are cursed by God. This curse was not the origin of the black race or black racial characteristics.

Second, it wasn't Ham who was cursed but his son Canaan (Gen. 9:18-27; 10:6). Only one of Ham's four sons (Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan) was cursed, so how could all black people be cursed?

As it turns out, the curse on Canaan has unfolded in history. The descendants of Canaan were perhaps one of the most wicked people to live on earth. They were the inhabitants, for example, of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Third, even if a curse is given, the Bible clearly places limitations on curses to three or four generations. In Exodus 20:5-6 God says, "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Notice that this passage seems to teach that curses based upon disobedience are reversed when people repent and turn back to obedience. So not only is a curse limited, obedience to God's principles can break it.

Fourth, the Bible teaches that the fulfillment of the curse on Canaan took place with the defeat and subjugation of Canaan by Israel (Joshua 9:23; 1 Kings 9:20-21). This had nothing to do with placing black people under a permanent curse.

Although the idea of “the curse on Ham” has been dying a well-deserved death, it is still important to remember that not so long ago people were misinterpreting a biblical passage to justify their racism and discrimination. No one race or people group is inferior to any other. In fact, the Bible teaches that preferences based upon race, class, or ethnic origin are sinful and subject to God’s judgment (James 2:9-13). All of us are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27) and have value and dignity.

Racism

Racism has no doubt been the scourge of humanity. It usually surfaces from generalized assumptions made about a particular race or cultural group. While it is wrong and unfair to assign particular negative characteristics to everyone within a racial group, it is done all the time. The bitter result of these racial attitudes is intolerance and discrimination.

Often racism goes beyond just individual attitudes. These racial attitudes can become the mindset of a particular people group who may use cultural as well as legal means to suppress another race. These cultural norms and laws can be used by the majority race to exploit and discriminate against the minority race.

Although racism has existed throughout the centuries, it gained an unexpected ally in the scientific realm in the nineteenth century. In 1859, Charles Darwin published his famous work *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection of the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. It was the last part of that title that no doubt furthered some of the ideas of racial superiority that flourished during that time.

It is not at all clear that Darwin meant to apply the concept of favored races in this particular book to human beings. In

fact, he did write more on this subject later, but the provocative nature of the subtitle was enough to fuel discussions about racial superiority and inferiority. Later Darwinists took the concept far beyond what Charles Darwin intended.

So why do people hold racist attitudes? Three reasons are: feelings of pride, feelings of inferiority, and feelings of fear. Pride and arrogance fuel racism. When we are proud of who we are, we can easily look down upon those who are different from us and do not manifest the same characteristics that we do. We can start believing we are superior to another person or race.

Racism, however, can come from the opposite end of the emotional spectrum: inferiority. We may not feel good about ourselves. So in order to feel good about ourselves, we disparage another person or race.

Racism also results from fear. We fear what we don't understand. We fear what is strange and foreign. Racial and cultural differences may even seem dangerous to us. Racial attitudes can surface if we don't seek to know and understand those who are different from us.

We should stand strong against racism and racist attitudes wherever we find them: in the society, in individuals, even within the church.

Biblical Perspective

We have already noted that the Bible really only talks of one race: the human race. Superficial differences in skin color, hair color, hair texture, or eye shape may provide physiological differences between people groups, but the Bible doesn't provide any justification for treating people differently simply because of these physical differences. The

Bible teaches that God has made “of one blood all nations of men” (Acts 17:26 KJV).

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to have feelings of superiority. In Philippians 2, Paul admonishes the Christians to live in harmony with one another. They are to have a gentle spirit toward one another, and to let this gentle spirit be known to others.

Christians are also admonished to refrain from using class distinctions within the church. In James 2, believers are told not to make class distinctions between various people. They are not to show partiality within the church. Showing favoritism is called sin and the one showing favoritism is convicted by the law. Surely these commands would also apply to holding views of racial superiority and inferiority.

Likewise Paul instructs Timothy (1 Tim. 5:21) to keep his instructions without partiality and to do nothing out of favoritism. This command would also exclude making racial distinctions based on a view of racial superiority.

Finally, we see that Paul teaches the spiritual equality of all people in Christ. For example, he teaches in Colossians 3:11 that “there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.” This is a significant passage because it shows that Christ has removed four kinds of distinctions: national distinctions (Greek or Jew), religious distinctions (circumcised or uncircumcised), cultural distinctions (barbarian or Scythian), and economic distinctions (slave or free).

A similar passage would be 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.” In Christ, our human distinctions lose their significance. No one is superior to another. A believing Jew is not superior to

a believing Greek. A believing slave is of no higher rank than a believing free person.

Racism and racist attitudes are wrong. Christians should work to remove such ideas and attitudes from society.

Becoming Culturally Sensitive

Here are some suggestions on how to become more sensitive to differences in race and culture.

First, we need to take an accurate assessment of ourselves. Often our assumptions and predispositions affect the way we perceive and even treat others. A person who says he or she has no prejudices is probably in denial. All of us perceive the world differently and find it easier to accept people who are like us and harder to understand people who are different from us.

Our cultural worldview affects how we perceive others. It affects how we evaluate what others think and what others do. So an important first step in becoming more racial and culturally sensitive is to evaluate ourselves.

Second, we should try to empathize with others. We must start learning how to look at life and our circumstances from the viewpoint of others. Instead of trying to make others think like us, we should strive to begin to begin to think like them. That doesn't mean we have to agree with their viewpoint, but it does mean that becoming empathetic will be helpful in bridging racial and cultural barriers.

Third, learn to withhold judgment. Tolerance (in the biblical sense of the word) is a virtue we should cultivate. We should be willing to put aside our critical thinking and judgment until we know someone better. Taking the time to listen and understand the other person will help build bridges and dismantle barriers that often separate and isolate races and

cultures.

Fourth, do not consider yourself superior to another. One of the root causes of racism is a belief in racial superiority. Paul tell us in Romans 12:3 that a man should not “think more highly of himself than he ought to think.” Differences in race and culture should never be used to justify feelings of racial superiority which can lead to racist attitudes.

Fifth, develop cross cultural traits. A missionary who goes overseas must learn to develop personal traits that will make him or her successful in a new and different culture. Likewise, we should develop these traits so that we can reach across a racial and cultural divide. Friendliness and open communication are important. Flexibility and open-mindedness are also important. Developing these traits will enhance our ability to bridge a racial and cultural gap.

Finally, we should take a stand. We shouldn't tell (or allow others to tell) racial and ethnic jokes. These are demeaning to others and perpetuate racism and racial attitudes. Instead we should be God's instrument in bring about racial reconciliation. We should seek to build bridges and close the racial and cultural divide between people groups and reach out with the love of Jesus Christ.

Notes

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American Government and Christianity – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at how a Christian, biblical framework operated as a critical force in establishing our constitution and governmental system. The founders views on the nature of man and the role of government were derived from their biblical foundation.

America's Christian Roots

The founding of this country as well as the framing of the key political documents rests upon a Christian foundation. That doesn't necessarily mean that the United States is a Christian nation, although some framers used that term. But it does mean that the foundations of this republic presuppose a Christian view of human nature and God's providence.

In previous articles we have discussed "The Christian Roots of the Declaration and Constitution" [on the Web as ["The Declaration and the Constitution: Their Christian Roots"](#)] and provided an overview of the books [On Two Wings](#) and [One Nation Under God](#). Our focus in this article will be to pull together many of the themes of these resources and combine them with additional facts and quotes from the founders.

First, what was the perspective of the founders of America? Consider some of these famous quotes.

John Adams was the second president of the United States. He saw the need for religious values to provide the moral base line for society. He stated in a letter to the officers of the First Brigade of the Third Division of the Militia of Massachusetts:

We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.[*{1}*](#)

In fact, John Adams wasn't the only founding father to talk about the importance of religious values. Consider this statement from George Washington during his Farewell Address:

And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.[*{2}*](#)

Two hundred years after the establishment of the Plymouth colony in 1620, Americans gathered at that site to celebrate its bicentennial. Daniel Webster was the speaker at this 1820 celebration. He reminded those in attendance of this nation's origins:

Let us not forget the religious character of our origin. Our fathers were brought hither by their high veneration for the Christian religion. They journeyed by its light, and labored in its hope. They sought to incorporate its principles with the elements of their society, and to diffuse its influence through all their institutions, civil, political, or literary.[*{3}*](#)

Religion, and especially the Christian religion, was an important foundation to this republic.

Christian Character

It is clear that the framers of this new government believed that the people should elect and support leaders with character and integrity. George Washington expressed this in his Farewell Address when he said, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports."

Benjamin Rush talked about the religious foundation of the republic that demanded virtuous leadership. He said that, "the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid on the foundation of religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments." [\[4\]](#)

He went on to explain that

A Christian cannot fail of being a republican . . . for every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self- denial, and brotherly kindness which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy. . . . A Christian cannot fail of being useful to the republic, for his religion teaches him that no man "liveth to himself." And lastly a Christian cannot fail of being wholly inoffensive, for his religion teaches him in all things to do to others what he would wish, in like circumstances, they should do to him. [\[5\]](#)

Daniel Webster understood the importance of religion, and especially the Christian religion, in this form of government. In his famous Plymouth Rock speech of 1820 he said,

Lastly, our ancestors established their system of government on morality and religious sentiment. Moral habits, they believed, cannot safely be trusted on any other foundation than religious principle, nor any government be secure which is not supported by moral habits. . . .Whatever makes men

good Christians, makes them good citizens.{6}

John Jay was one of the authors of the Federalist Papers and became America's first Supreme Court Justice. He also served as the president of the American Bible Society. He understood the relationship between government and Christian values. He said, "Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty, as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers." {7}

William Penn writing the *Frame of Government* for his new colony said, "Government, like clocks, go from the motion men give them; and as governments are made and moved by men, so by them they are ruined too. Wherefore governments rather depend upon men, than men upon governments. Let men be good, and the government cannot be bad." {8}

The founders believed that good character was vital to the health of the nation.

New Man

Historian C. Gregg Singer traces the line of influence from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century in his book, *A Theological Interpretation of American History*. He says,

Whether we look at the Puritans and their fellow colonists of the seventeenth century, or their descendants of the eighteenth century, or those who framed the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, we see that their political programs were the rather clear reflection of a consciously held political philosophy, and that the various political philosophies which emerged among the American people were intimately related to the theological developments which were taking place. . . . A Christian world and life view furnished the basis for this early political thought which guided the American people for nearly two

centuries and whose crowning lay in the writing of the Constitution of 1787.{9}

Actually, the line of influence extends back even further. Historian Arnold Toynbee, for example, has written that the American Revolution was made possible by American Protestantism. Page Smith, writing in the *Religious Origins of the American Revolution*, cites the influence of the Protestant Reformation. He believes that

The Protestant Reformation produced a new kind of consciousness and a new kind of man. The English Colonies in America, in turn, produced a new unique strain of that consciousness. It thus follows that it is impossible to understand the intellectual and moral forces behind the American Revolution without understanding the role that Protestant Christianity played in shaping the ideals, principles and institutions of colonial America.{10}

Smith argues that the American Revolution “started, in a sense, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door at Wittenburg.” It received “its theological and philosophical underpinnings from John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and much of its social theory from the Puritan Revolution of 1640-1660.”{11}

Most people before the Reformation belonged to classes and social groups which set the boundaries of their worlds and established their identities. The Reformation, according to Smith, changed these perceptions. Luther and Calvin, in a sense, created a re- formed individual in a re-formed world.

Key to this is the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer where each person is “responsible directly to God for his or her own spiritual state... The individuals who formed the new congregations established their own churches, chose their own ministers, and managed their own affairs without reference to

an ecclesiastical hierarchy.”[{12}](#)

These re-formed individuals began to change their world including their view of government and authority.

Declaration of Independence

Let’s look at the Christian influence on the Declaration of Independence. Historian Page Smith points out that Thomas Jefferson was not only influenced by secular philosophers, but was also influenced by the Protestant Reformation. He says,

Jefferson and other secular-minded Americans subscribed to certain propositions about law and authority that had their roots in the Protestant Reformation. It is a scholarly common-place to point out how much Jefferson (and his fellow delegates to the Continental Congress) were influenced by Locke. Without disputing this we would simply add that an older and deeper influence – John Calvin – was of more profound importance.[{13}](#)

Another important influence was William Blackstone. Jefferson drew heavily on the writings of this highly respected jurist. In fact, Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* were among Jefferson’s most favorite books.

In his section on the “Nature of Laws in General,” Blackstone wrote, “as man depends absolutely upon his Maker for everything, it is necessary that he should, in all points, conform to his Maker’s will. This will of his Maker is called the law of nature.”[{14}](#)

In addition to the law of nature, the other source of law is from divine revelation. “The doctrines thus delivered we call the revealed or divine law, and they are to be found only in the Holy Scriptures.” According to Blackstone, all human laws depended either upon the law of nature or upon the law of revelation found in the Bible: “Upon these two foundations,

the law of nature and the law of revelation, depend all human laws.”[{15}](#)

Samuel Adams argues in “The Rights of the Colonists” that they had certain rights. “Among the natural Rights of the Colonists are these: First, a Right to Life; second, to Liberty; third, to Property; . . . and in the case of intolerable oppression, civil or religious, to leave the society they belong to, and enter into another. When men enter into society, it is by voluntary consent.”[{16}](#) This concept of natural rights also found its way into the Declaration of Independence and provided the justification for the American Revolution.

The Declaration was a bold document, but not a radical one. The colonists did not break with England for “light and transient causes.” They were mindful that they should be “in subjection to governing authorities” which “are established by God” (Rom. 13:1). Yet when they suffered from a “long train of abuses and usurpations,” they believed that “it is the right of the people to alter or abolish [the existing government] and to institute a new government.”

Constitution

The Christian influence on the Declaration is clear. What about the Constitution?

James Madison was the chief architect of the Constitution as well as one of the authors of the *Federalist Papers*. It is important to note that as a youth, he studied under a Scottish Presbyterian, Donald Robertson. Madison gave the credit to Robertson for “all that I have been in life.”[{17}](#) Later he was trained in theology at Princeton under the Reverend John Witherspoon. Scholars believe that Witherspoon’s Calvinism (which emphasized the fallen nature of man) was an important source for Madison’s political ideas.[{18}](#)

The Constitution was a contract between the people and had its

origins in American history a century earlier:

One of the obvious by-products [of the Reformation] was the notion of a contract entered into by two people or by the members of a community amongst themselves that needed no legal sanctions to make it binding. This concept of the Reformers made possible the formation of contractals or, as the Puritans called them, "covenanted" groups formed by individuals who signed a covenant or agreement to found a community. The most famous of these covenants was the Mayflower Compact. In it the Pilgrims formed a "civil body politic," and promised to obey the laws their own government might pass. In short, the individual Pilgrim invented on the spot a new community, one that would be ruled by laws of its making.[{19}](#)

Historian Page Smith believes, "The Federal Constitution was in this sense a monument to the reformed consciousness. This new sense of time as potentiality was a vital element in the new consciousness that was to make a revolution and, what was a good deal more difficult, form a new nation."[{20}](#)

Preaching and teaching within the churches provided the justification for the revolution and the establishment of a new nation. Alice Baldwin, writing in *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution*, says,

The teachings of the New England ministers provide one line of unbroken descent. For two generations and more New Englanders had . . . been taught that these rights were sacred and came from God and that to preserve them they had a legal right of resistance and, if necessary a right to . . . alter and abolish governments and by common consent establish new ones.[{21}](#)

Christian ideas were important in the founding of this republic and the framing of our American governmental

institutions. And I believe they are equally important in the maintenance of that republic.

Notes

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Homeland Security and Privacy

A Supersnoop's Dream

Every day we seem to wake up to news about another terrorist threat, so it's not surprising that Americans are placing more of their faith in the government to protect them. But there are also important questions being raised about our loss of privacy and constitutional protections. So in this article we are going to take a look at some of these issues as we focus on the subject of homeland security.

The Department of Homeland Security was created by combining twenty-two existing agencies and 170,000 federal employees with an annual budget of approximately \$35 billion. While the

implications of this megamerger of governmental agencies will be debated for some time, some columnists have already begun to question the impact it will have on our private lives.

The Washington Times called it "A Supersnoop's Dream." Columnist William Safire of the *New York Times* wrote a column entitled "You Are a Suspect" in which he warned of a dangerous intrusion into our lives. He predicted in November 2002 that if the Homeland Security Act were not amended before passage, the following would happen to you:

- *Every purchase you make with a credit card, every magazine subscription you buy and medical prescription you fill, every Web site you visit and e-mail you send or receive, every academic grade you receive, every bank deposit you make, every trip you book and every event you attend—all these transactions and communications will go into what the Defense Department describes as a virtual centralized grand database.*
- *To this computerized dossier on your private life from commercial sources, add every piece of information that government has about you—passport application, driver's license and bridge toll records, judicial and divorce records, complaints from nosy neighbors to the F.B.I., your lifetime paper trail plus the latest hidden camera surveillance—and you have the supersnoop's dream: a Total Information Awareness about every U.S. citizen.*

It is important to point out that these concerns about a potential invasion of privacy did not start with the passage of the Homeland Security Act. Over a year ago, critics pointed to the hastily passed U.S.A. Patriot Act which widened the scope of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and weakened 15 privacy laws.

On the other hand, there are many who argue that these new powers are necessary to catch terrorists. Cal Thomas, for example, writes that "Most Americans would probably favor a

more aggressive and empowered federal government if it lessens the likelihood of further terrorism. The niceties of civil liberties appear to have been lost on the 9/11 hijackers and countries from which they came. Wartime rules must be different from those in peacetime.”[\[1\]](#)

The Patriot Act

Let’s look more closely at the U.S.A. Patriot Act. When Senator Russ Feingold voted against the Act, he made these comments from the Senate floor on October 11, 2001:

“There is no doubt that if we lived in a police state, it would be easier to catch terrorists. If we lived in a country where police were allowed to search your home at any time for any reason; if we lived in a country where the government is entitled to open your mail, eavesdrop on your phone conversations, or intercept your e-mail communications; if we lived in a country where people could be held indefinitely based on what they write or think, or based on mere suspicion that they are up to no good, the government would probably discover more terrorists or would-be terrorists, just as it would find more lawbreakers generally. But that wouldn’t be a country in which we would want to live.”

Most would agree that the Patriot Act weakens grand jury secrecy. Already there is criticism that grand juries have become mere tools of the prosecution and have lost their independence. By destroying its secrecy, any federal official or bureaucrat can “share” grand jury testimony or wiretap information.

The Patriot Act also weakens Fourth Amendment protection against unreasonable searches and seizures. Under the Act, law-enforcement agencies can in “rare instances” search a person’s home without informing that homeowner for up to ninety days. This so-called “sneak and peek” provision can be

used to sneak into your home, and even implant a hidden “key logger” device on a suspect’s computer (allowing federal officials to capture passwords and monitor every keystroke).

And, the Patriot Act weakens financial privacy. The bill added additional amendments and improvements to the Bank Secrecy Act which already encourages FDIC member banks to profile account holders and report to the government (FBI, IRS, DEA) when you deviate from your usual spending or deposit habits. The Act exempts bank employees from liability for false reporting of a money laundering violation.

Michael Scardaville of the Heritage Foundation, however, isn’t concerned about conferring this new power on bureaucrats. “Even if they wanted to, the program’s employees simply won’t have time to monitor who plays football pools, who has asthma, who surfs what Web site or even who deals cocaine or steals cars. They’ll begin with intelligence reports about people already suspected of terrorism.”[\[2\]](#)

Immigration Threats

Lincoln Caplan, writing in the November-December issue of *Legal Affairs* (a magazine of the Yale Law School), said that the U.S.A. Patriot Act “authorized law enforcement agencies to inspect the most personal kinds of information – medical records, bank statements, college transcripts, even church memberships. But what is more startling than the scope of these new powers is that the government can use them on people who aren’t suspected of committing a crime.”

Although there has been some concern expressed about the intrusion of government into our lives, an even greater concern is how the Homeland Security Act fails to address the real threat to our country through lax enforcement of immigration laws. Michelle Malkin, author of *Invasion*, cites example after example of problems at the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

Foreign students getting visas to enter the U.S. constitute a major problem that is out of control. Malkin says that the bill establishing this new department doesn't do anything about it. There is also a problem with foreigners getting tourist visas to enter the U.S. and then overstaying their visas. The bill doesn't do anything about this problem either.

More than 115,000 people from Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries are here illegally. Some 6,000 Middle Eastern men who have defied deportation orders remain on the loose. Add these numbers to those who are here legally, but still intend harm to the United States, and you can begin to grasp the extent of the problem.

Consider the case of Hesham Mohamed Hedayet, who shot and killed people at the Los Angeles International Airport. He managed to stay in this country by obtaining a work permit after his wife won residency in a visa lottery program (given to 50,000 foreigners on a random basis).

Michelle Malkin broke the story about the Washington, D.C. area sniper suspect John Malvo. The INS had him in custody but released him. The U.S. State Department failed to obtain a warrant for the arrest of the other sniper suspect, John Muhammad, after he was suspected of using a forged birth certificate to obtain a U.S. passport.

Congress needs to take another look at both the Patriot Act and the Homeland Security Act. In its rush to deal with the imminent terrorist threat, it has conferred broad powers to bureaucrats that should be refined and failed to address some crucial concerns in immigration that continue to threaten our safety. It is time for Congress to pass some common sense amendments to these two pieces of legislation.

History of Governmental Power

I think all of us would strongly support the President and

Attorney General in their attempts to track down terrorists and bring them to justice. But some wonder if Congress has put too much power in the hands of the executive branch, power that could easily be abused by this administration or future administrations.

Let's consider our history. President John Adams used the Alien and Sedition Act to imprison his political enemies and curb newspaper editors critical of him. President Woodrow Wilson permitted his attorney general (Mitchell Palmer) to stop political dissent during the Palmer Raids. And President Franklin Delano Roosevelt interned thousands of Japanese-American citizens during World War II.

It is interesting that some of the greatest expansions of powers have come under Republican presidents. The first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, suspended the writ of habeas corpus. (This is a judge's demand to bring a prisoner before him, with the intent to release people from unlawful detention.) This led to the imprisonment of physicians, lawyers, journalists, soldiers, farmers, and draft resisters. Sixteen members of the Maryland legislature were arrested in order to prevent them from voting for their state to secede from the Union. By the time the Civil War was over, 13,535 arrests had been made.

Although Democrats have often been credited with expanding the size and scope of the federal government, Republican administrations are actually the ones who have expanded various police powers. RICO and nearly all the seizure laws (where police can confiscate cars, boats, even homes without due process) were passed by Republican administrations.

Dana Milbank wrote in the *Washington Post* (Nov. 20, 2001) that "The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and the war in Afghanistan have dramatically accelerated a push by the Bush administration to strengthen presidential powers, giving President Bush a dominance over American government exceeding

that of other post-Watergate presidents and rivaling even Franklin D. Roosevelt's command."

Perhaps it is time for Congress to revisit this important topic of anti-terrorism and modify some of the provisions of the Patriot Act. Some have suggested that Congress pass legislation that would sunset all aspects of the Patriot Act. The bill currently has sunset provisions that apply to selected portions of the legislation. But sunset provisions do not apply to the expanded powers given to the federal government which weaken the Fourth Amendment protections we are guaranteed under the Bill of Rights. The bill was touted as an emergency wartime measure, but some of the most dangerous aspects of the bill would continue on even after America wins the war on terrorism. It is time to revisit this bill and make some necessary changes.

Christian Perspective on Government and Privacy

Let's focus in on the matter of government and privacy.

To begin with, Christians must acknowledge that Romans 13:1-7 teaches that civil government is divinely ordained by God. Government bears the sword, and that means it is responsible to protect citizens from foreign invaders and from terrorists. So on the one hand, we should support efforts by our government to make our society safer.

On the other hand, we should also work to prevent unwarranted intrusions into our privacy and any violation of our constitutional liberties. In the past, drawing lines was easier because an unconstitutional search was conducted by a person who came to your door. Today we live in a cyber age where our privacy can be violated by a computer keystroke.

In the past, what used to be called public records weren't all that public. Now they are all too public. And what used to be

considered private records are being made public at an alarming rate. What should we do?

First, live your life above reproach. Philippians 2:14-15 says "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." 1 Timothy 3:2 says that an elder must be "above reproach" which is an attribute that should describe all of us. If you live a life of integrity, you don't have to be so concerned about what may be made public.

Second, get involved. When you feel your privacy has been violated or when you believe there has been an unwarranted governmental intrusion into your life, take the time to complain. Let the person, organization, or governmental agency know your concerns. Many people fail to apply the same rules of privacy and confidentiality on a computer that they do in real life. Your complaint might change a behavior and have a positive effect.

Third, call for your member of Congress to take another look at both the Patriot Act and the Homeland Security Act. In their rush to deal with the imminent terrorist threat, Congress may have expanded federal powers too much. Track congressional legislation and write letters. Citizens need to understand that many governmental policies pose a threat to our privacy. Bureaucrats and legislators are in the business of collecting information and will continue to do so unless we set appropriate limits.

Sadly, most Americans are unaware of the growing threats to their privacy posed by government and law enforcement. Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. We need to strike a balance between fighting terrorism and protecting constitutional rights.

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Abuse and Domestic Violence

Abuse and domestic violence affects our lives, our homes, and our society. Kerby Andersons looks at the problem of abuse and what the church can do to help victims of abuse.



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

Each year the lives of women (and men) are altered or destroyed by someone who abuses them. The resulting emotional scars, physical scars, and destruction are evident in social and crime statistics.

Although abuse is significantly under-reported, current crime statistics at least begin to tell the story. The FBI's Uniform Crime Report routinely lists domestic violence as the leading cause of injury to women ages 15 to 44 in the United States. These injuries are more than those from car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.

Abuse may be open, flagrant, and in-your-face. But abuse can also be subtle and devious. It may explode on the scene or gradually creep into a relationship. Although women are the primary victims of abuse, men may be victims, also, of abuse.

One of the first steps in dealing with abuse is to identify it. Identifying it is often difficult because it can manifest

itself in different forms. Here is a brief survey of the different types of abuse.

- *Emotional abuse* is the use of mental strategies or mind games. This would include such things as anger, aggression, humiliation, intimidation, stalking, fear, power, and control. The goal is to inflict emotional damage on the other person.
- *Physical abuse* would include the use of body parts or weapons to threaten, punish, dominate, restrain, control, or injure another person.
- *Sexual abuse* is the use of forced sexual actions which may dominate, manipulate, threaten, injure, corrupt, or control another person.
- *Social abuse* involves other forms of abuse to dominate, manipulate or control another person's social relationships.
- *Financial abuse* is the use of money or financially-related matters to dominate, threaten or control. This may be done to inflict damage on another person or take financial advantage of that person.
- *Spiritual abuse* is the controlling of another person's religious interests or practices. Spiritual damage may be inflicted by criticizing a person's religious convictions or misstating them for religious purposes.

Although abuse may take various forms, there are often common elements. For example, there often is the tendency to blame the victim of abuse. A woman may be told to "submit" or "pray harder for her marriage" by a pastor or church members. And often women go back into abusive relationships, leaving many to wonder.

In this article, we will try to provide some answers and perspective on this important issue. (And I might note that we already have articles on the Probe Web site dealing with such issues as [verbal abuse](#) and [spiritual abuse](#).)

Types of Abusers

Although abuse and domestic violence are one of the most pressing social problems of our time, most of society (including churches) still view the crisis as a private matter. Abused women are often advised by pastors and members of a congregation to “pray harder” or “try to become a better wife.”

Abuse has not only been ignored by the church but often by the medical profession. In their study of abuse, Evan Stark and Ann Flitcraft found that out of one million women who sought medical treatment for injuries sustained by husbands and boyfriends, doctors correctly identified the injuries as a result of battering only four percent of the time.[\[1\]](#)

Frequently child abuse and domestic violence go hand in hand. Men who abuse their wives will often also abuse their children. Research shows that in homes where domestic violence occurs, children are abused at a rate 1500 percent higher than the normal average.[\[2\]](#)

Often this abuse begins even before a child is born. One study of 1200 white, Latino, and African-American pregnant women, found that one in six reported physical abuse during pregnancy.[\[3\]](#)

Researchers now conclude that there are two types of abusers. Neil Jacobson and John Gottman document this in their book, *When Men Batter Women*.[\[4\]](#) Their study of more than 200 couples in dangerous relationships helped shatter myths and shed new light on abusive relationships.

They describe two types of batterers: Cobras and Pit Bulls. The Cobras are more severely violent of the two. They strike swiftly and ferociously, always remaining in control and feeling entitled to whatever they want.

Pit Bulls are violent because they are insecure. They are more

likely to lose control, letting their emotions burn slowly until they explode in anger.

Jacobson and Gottman intensively studied about 60 of the 200 couples by watching videotapes of non-violent arguments of severe batterers and their spouses. To eliminate some of the subjectivity, they also monitored the vital signs (heart rate, sweat flow) of the couples.

They found that Cobras resemble the snake for which they are named. They become still and focused just before striking their victim. They become internally calm during abuse. While the heart rates of Pit Bulls increase during abuse, the Cobras' heart rates actually decrease.

Pit Bulls are driven by deep insecurity and often have an unhealthy dependence on the mates they abuse. They are afraid of losing their wives and therefore try to control them through physical and emotional abuse. Cobras have often been physically or sexually abused themselves (frequently in childhood) and tend to see violence as an unavoidable part of life.

Boundaries

Often victims of abuse feel they deserve the abuse they receive. They have been convinced (by their partner or perhaps by society in general) that the abuse is their fault. It is not. To reinforce this claim, here are eight things that no one deserves:[{5}](#)

- No one deserves to be pushed, slapped, bruised, or kicked. No excuse makes such actions justifiable, whether drugs, alcohol, financial problems or family problems.
- No one deserves to be verbally abused. No one should be called names or yelled at for no apparent reason.
- No one deserves to have possessions damaged (dishes

thrown, clothes torn) or gifts destroyed. These things don't automatically become "his" just because he paid for them from a joint checking account.

- No one deserves to be interfered with in coming and going. You do not need to be told when you can or cannot leave the house, go shopping, or go to school.
- No one deserves to be followed, harassed, or spied upon. As an adult, you have the right to go where you want, and spend time the way you choose.
- No one deserves to be ridiculed, put down, made fun of, or belittled. This applies both at home and in public.
- No one deserves to be emotionally starved. Everyone has emotional needs: to love, to be loved, to care and be cared for, to need others and to be needed by others. This involves more than just one person who is demanding your time and attention.
- No one deserves to be isolated. You deserve to have a community of people around you rather than just a spouse who dominates your life.

Each person has rights that should be asserted to prevent abuse from taking place. Here is a short list of those rights:

- You have the right to be treated with respect. All are created in the image of God (Gen. 2:26-27) and have value and dignity. You deserve respect regardless of your economic status, race, religion, or sex.
- You have the right to be heard. You have ideas and opinions and should be free to express them.
- You have the right to have a support system. You shouldn't have to depend on one person in your life to provide all your emotional needs and who cuts you off from the rest of society.
- You have the right to come and go as you please. You should be able to make choices about what you do with your free time.

- You have the right to have privacy and space of your own. You don't give up those rights when you get married or when you begin to have children.
- You have the right to maintain a separate identity.

Each of these rights are important in establishing boundaries in a relationship. These are key components in preventing abuse.

Myths of Abuse

Let's turn now to some of the myths of abuse.[{6}](#)

One myth is that victims of abuse come from lower-income families with little education. In reality, victims of domestic violence come from all walks of life. Race, religion, socio-economic background are no predictor of abuse. Victims of abuse may be well-educated or uneducated, professionals or common laborers.

A second myth is that victims stay in abusive relationships because they like being abused. That is simply not true. Many have been conditioned to accept beatings because they are blamed by their abusers, but they do not like being beaten. Many victims actually "accept abuse as common in relationships."[{7}](#)

So, why don't victims leave? The answer to that is often quite complex. Many women believe they cannot leave because "He can't live without me." They may fear he will have a nervous breakdown, commit suicide, or lose his job.

She may believe that the children need a father, rationalizing that an abusive father is better than no father at all. And she may think she cannot make it alone in the job market.

Many women fear they will be killed if they leave an abusive relationship. And that fear may be justified. Studies show that battered women are more likely to be killed *after* leaving

an abusive relationship.{8}

Abuse victims also convince themselves that things are going to get better. Hope springs eternal, and there is always the hope that with the right changes and hard work, abuse will go away. Sadly, it does not.

A third myth is that violence happens mostly between strangers. Contrary to popular belief, a woman's greatest risk of assault is from an intimate partner. Statistics from the Department of Justice indicate that women are attacked seven times more often by offenders with whom they have an intimate relationship than are male victims of violence.{9}

A fourth myth is that abuse is not a major problem. Domestic violence is one of the most serious health problems today. As we have mentioned, it affects every socioeconomic segment of society. "Federal officials estimate that domestic violence costs U.S. firms \$4 billion a year in lower productivity, staff turnover, absenteeism, and excessive use of medical benefits." {10}

What the Church Can Do

Domestic violence is pervasive in our society and crosses all socioeconomic levels, religious belief, and cultural backgrounds. Abuse affects our lives, our homes, and our society. Is there anything the church can do to deal with this important issue? Here are a few suggestions.{11}

First, pastors and church members should be aware of the extent of the problem. I have provided some social statistics to demonstrate how pervasive abuse is within our society. It isn't a problem to be ignored or addressed through simple clichés.

Second, pastors and counselors need to help abuse victims set boundaries in their lives. Battered women often find it difficult to make choices because someone else has been making

decisions for them. Many women who live in violent homes went from their father's house straight to their abuser's house. They never have had much experience in making their own personal choices.

If you are seeking to help an abuse victim, you should encourage her to make her own decisions. Resist the temptation to rescue and take over her life. She needs to feel empowered not helpless. At the same time, you can provide suggestions about finding a family counselor or a domestic violence agency.

Third, if you are a pastor, a counselor, or just a caring friend, you can provide counsel and comfort. She needs to hear from you that she doesn't deserve to be abused. Acknowledge the seriousness of the situation, and don't let her convince herself that the abuse will go away.

Fourth, be prepared for crisis intervention. Quick action may be necessary to protect her and her children. Ask her to describe the circumstances of the last two or three beatings. What preceded his attack (drugs, alcohol, argument)? Where is her relationship right now?

A pastor or counselor who receives a crisis call only has a few moments to discern the extent of the threat and appropriate actions that should be taken. Can she find her way to a safe place immediately? Do you have a place for her to go, if necessary?

Sometimes the crisis arrives at your office or home. A pastor, counselor, or caring friend may need to arrange for medical attention and a safe place away from the abuser.

If the couple is separated, she may be stalked by her abuser. She needs to know who can protect her and how to contact legal services.

Fifth, the church should address this important issue of

domestic abuse. By speaking to this issue, we break the silence surrounding abuse and confront it with biblical principles. The church should hold batterers responsible for their actions. Intervention, confrontation, and tough love should be tools used to fight abuse in our communities.

If the batterer is a member of the church, then Matthew 18 provides a model for confronting "offenders" within the church. Galatians 5:22-25 talks about the fruit of the Spirit which includes kindness, gentleness, and self-control. These and many other verses provide a model for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Christians have an important role in dealing with abuse within our society.

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"When Was the Book of Job Written?"

When was the book of Job written? How do we know it was written then since we don't know who wrote the book and when Job lived?

Top Ten Reasons Why We Believe the Book of Job was Written During the Time of the Patriarchs

1. Job lived 140 years after his calamities (42:16). This corresponds with the lifespans of the patriarchs. For example, Abraham lived 175 years.

2. Job's wealth was reckoned in livestock (1:3; 42:12) which was also true of Abraham (Gen. 12:16) and Jacob (Gen. 30:43).

3. The Sabeans and Chaldeans (Job 1:15, 17) were nomads in Abraham's time, but in later years were not.

4. The Hebrew word (qsitah) translated "piece of silver" (42:11) is used elsewhere only twice (Gen. 33:19, Josh. 24:32). Both times are in reference to Jacob.

5. Job's daughters were heirs of his estate along with their brothers (Job. 42:15). This was not possible later under the Mosaic Law if a daughter's brothers were still living (Num. 27:8).

6. Literary works similar in some ways to the Book of Job were written in Egypt and Mesopotamia around the time of the patriarchs.

7. The Book of Job includes no references to the Mosaic institutions (priesthood, laws, tabernacle, special religious days and feasts).

8. The name (sadday) is used of God 31 times in Job (compared with 17 times elsewhere in the Old Testament) and was a name familiar to the patriarchs.

9. Several personal and place names in the book were also associated with the patriarchal period. Examples include (a) Sheba – a grandson of Abraham, (b) Tema – another grandson of Abraham, (c) Eliphaz – a son of Esau, (d) Uz – a nephew of Abraham.

10. Job was a common West Semitic name in the second millennium B.C. Job was also a name of a 19th-century-B.C. prince in the Egyptian Execration texts.

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The Declaration and

Constitution: Their Christian Roots

The Declaration of Independence

Many are unaware of the writings and documents that preceded these great works and the influence of biblical ideas in their formation. In the first two sections of this article, I would like to examine the Declaration of Independence. Following this, we'll look at the Constitution.

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee introduced a resolution to the Continental Congress calling for a formal declaration of independence. However, even at that late date, there was significant opposition to the resolution. So, Congress recessed for three weeks to allow delegates to return home and discuss the proposition with their constituents while a committee was appointed to express the Congressional sentiments. The task of composing the Declaration fell to Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson's initial draft left God out of the manuscript entirely except for a vague reference to "the laws of nature and of nature's God." Yet, even this phrase makes an implicit reference to the laws of God.

The phrase "laws of nature" had a fixed meaning in 18th century England and America. It was a direct reference to the laws of God in a created order as described in John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government* and William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*.

What Jefferson was content to leave implicit, however, was made more explicit by the other members of the committee. They changed the language to read that all men are "endowed by their Creator" with these rights. Later, the Continental

Congress added phrases which further reflected a theistic perspective. For example, they added that they were “appealing to the Supreme Judge of the World for the rectitude of our intentions” and that they were placing “firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence.”

The Declaration was not drafted in an intellectual vacuum, nor did the ideas contained in it suddenly spring from the minds of a few men. Instead, the founders built their framework upon a Reformation foundation laid by such men as Samuel Rutherford and later incorporated by John Locke.

Rutherford wrote his book *Lex Rex* in 1644 to refute the idea of the divine right of kings. *Lex Rex* established two crucial principles. First, there should be a covenant or constitution between the ruler and the people. Second, since all men are sinners, no man is superior to another. These twin principles of liberty and equality are also found in John Locke’s writings.

John Locke and the Origin of the Declaration

Although the phrasing of the Declaration certainly follows the pattern of John Locke, Jefferson also gave credit to the writer Algernon Sidney, who in turn cites most prominently Aristotle, Plato, Roman republican writers, and the Old Testament.

Legal scholar Gary Amos argues that Locke’s *Two Treatises on Government* is simply Samuel Rutherford’s *Lex Rex* in a popularized form. Amos says in his book *Defending the Declaration*,

Locke explained that the “law of nature” is God’s general revelation of law in creation, which God also supernaturally writes on the hearts of men. Locke drew the idea from the New

Testament in Romans 1 and 2. In contrast, he spoke of the “law of God” or the “positive law of God” as God’s eternal moral law specially revealed and published in Scripture.[{1}](#)

This foundation helps explain the tempered nature of the American Revolution. The Declaration of Independence was a bold document, but not a radical one. The colonists did not break with England for “light and transient causes.” They were mindful that they should be “in subjection to the governing authorities” which “are established by God” (Romans 13:1). Yet when they suffered from a “long train of abuses and usurpations,” they argued that “it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government.”

The Declaration also borrowed from state constitutions that already existed at the time. In fact, the phraseology of the Declaration greatly resembles the preamble to the Virginia Constitution, adopted in June 1776. The body of the Declaration consists of twenty-eight charges against the king justifying the break with Britain. All but four are from state constitutions.[{2}](#)

Jefferson no doubt drew from George Mason’s Declaration of Rights (published on June 6, 1776). The first paragraph states that “all men are born equally free and independent and have certain inherent natural Rights; among which are the Enjoyment of Life and Liberty, with the Means of Acquiring and possessing property, and pursuing and obtaining Happiness and Safety.” Mason also argued that when any government is found unworthy of the trust placed in it, a majority of the community “hath an indubitable, inalienable, and indefensible Right to Reform, alter, or abolish it.”

Constitution and Human Nature

The influence of the Bible on the Constitution was profound but often not appreciated by secular historians and political

theorists. Two decades ago, Constitutional scholars and political historians (including one of my professors at Georgetown University) assembled 15,000 writings from the Founding Era (1760-1805). They counted 3154 citations in these writings, and found that the book most frequently cited in that literature was the Bible. The writers from the Founding Era quoted from the Bible 34 percent of the time. Even more interesting was that about three-fourths of all references to the Bible came from reprinted sermons from that era.[\[3\]](#)

Professor M.E. Bradford shows in his book, *A Worthy Company*, that fifty of the fifty-five men who signed the Constitution were church members who endorsed the Christian faith.[\[4\]](#)

The Bible and biblical principles were important in the framing of the Constitution. In particular, the framers started with a biblical view of human nature. James Madison argued in *Federalist* #51 that government must be based upon a realistic view of human nature.

But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.[\[5\]](#)

Framing a republic requires a balance of power that liberates human dignity and rationality and controls human sin and depravity.

As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government

presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form.[{6}](#)

A Christian view of government is based upon a balanced view of human nature. It recognizes both human dignity (we are created in God's image) and human depravity (we are sinful individuals). Because both grace and sin operate in government, we should neither be too optimistic nor too pessimistic. Instead, the framers constructed a government with a deep sense of biblical realism.

Constitution and Majority Tyranny

James Madison in defending the Constitution divided the problem of tyranny into two broad categories: majority tyranny (addressed in *Federalist* #10) and governmental tyranny (addressed in *Federalist* #47-51).

Madison concluded from his study of governments that they were destroyed by factions. He believed this factionalism was due to "the propensity of mankind, to fall into mutual animosities" (*Federalist* #10) which he believed were "sown in the nature of man." Government, he concluded, must be based upon a more realistic view which also accounts for this sinful side of human nature.

A year before the Constitutional Convention, George Washington wrote to John Jay that, "We have, probably, had too good an opinion of human nature in forming our federation." From now on, he added, "We must take human nature as we find it."

Madison's solution to majority tyranny was the term *extended republic*. His term for the solution to governmental tyranny was *compound republic*. He believed that an extended republic with a greater number of citizens would prevent factions from easily taking control of government. He also believed that elections would serve to filter upward men of greater virtue.

Madison's solution to governmental tyranny can be found in *Federalist* #47-51. These include separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism.

Madison realized the futility of trying to remove passions (human sinfulness) from the population. Therefore, he proposed that human nature be set against human nature. This was done by separating various institutional power structures. First, the church was separated from the state so that ecclesiastical functions and governmental functions would not interfere with religious and political liberty. Second, the federal government was divided into three equal branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. Third, the federal government was delegated certain powers while the rest of the powers resided in the state governments.

Each branch was given separate but rival powers, thus preventing the possibility of concentrating power into the hands of a few. Each branch had certain checks over the other branches so that there was a distribution and balance of power. The effect of this system was to allow ambition and power to control itself. As each branch is given power, it provides a check on the other branch. This is what has often been referred to as the concept of "countervailing ambitions."

Constitution and Governmental Tyranny

James Madison's solution to governmental tyranny includes both federalism as well as the separation of powers. Federalism can be found at the very heart of the United States Constitution. In fact, without federalism, there was no practical reason for the framers to abandon the Articles of Confederation and draft the Constitution.

Federalism comes from *foedus*, Latin for covenant. "The tribes of Israel shared a covenant that made them a nation. American federalism originated at least in part in the dissenting

Protestants' familiarity with the Bible."[\[7\]](#)

The separation of powers allows each branch of government to provide a check on the other. According to Madison, the Constitution provides a framework of supplying "opposite and rival interests" (*Federalist* #51) through a series of checks and balances. This theory of "countervailing ambition" both prevented tyranny and provided liberty. It was a system in which bad people could do least harm and good people had the freedom to do good works.

For example, the executive branch cannot take over the government and rule at its whim because the legislative branch has been given the power of the purse. Congress must approve or disapprove budgets for governmental programs. A President cannot wage war if the Congress does not appropriate money for its execution.

Likewise, the legislative branch is also controlled by this structure of government. It can pass legislation, but it always faces the threat of presidential veto and judicial oversight. Since the executive branch is responsible for the execution of legislation, the legislature cannot exercise complete control over the government. Undergirding all of this is the authority of the ballot box.

Each of these checks was motivated by a healthy fear of human nature. The founders believed in human responsibility and human dignity, but they did not trust human nature too much. Their solution was to separate powers and invest each branch with rival powers.

Biblical ideas were crucial in both the Declaration and the Constitution. Nearly 80 percent of the political pamphlets published during the 1770s were reprinted sermons. As one political science professor put it: "When reading comprehensively in the political literature of the war years, one cannot but be struck by the extent to which biblical

sources used by ministers and traditional Whigs undergirded the justification for the break with Britain, the rationale for continuing the war, and the basic principles of Americans' writing their own constitutions." [\[8\]](#)

Notes

1. Gary Amos, *Defending the Declaration* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1989), 57.
2. Donald S. Lutz, *The Origins of American Constitutionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988, 114.
3. Ibid., 140.
4. M.E. Bradford, *A Worthy Company: Brief Lives of the Framers of the United States Constitution* (Marlborough, NH: Plymouth Rock Foundation, 1982).
5. James Madison, *Federalist*, #51 (New York: New American Library, 1961), 322.
6. Ibid., *Federalist* #55, 346.
7. Lutz, *Origins*, 43,
8. Ibid., 142.