

“What is a Christian Perspective on War?”

Is there anywhere in the Bible where God or Jesus speaks or justifies the Christian needing to go to war? I know we are to obey those who are in control of the government, unless the demands go against biblical principles. I also have read the various passages concerning loving our enemies and blessing those who persecute us. But what of war? What about the issues of defending our homes for the cause of freedom, right to worship, or when others infringe on the rights of those living in other countries?

There are essentially three Christian views concerning war:

Activism – it is always right to participate in war.

Pacifism – it is never right to participate in war.

Selectivism – it is right to participate in some wars.

Most Christians generally hold to the third position. This led to the development of what has come to be known as the just war criteria.

A just war would include the following elements:

- Just cause (defensive war)
- Just intention (just peace)
- Last resort (negotiations)
- Formal declaration
- Limited objectives
- Proportionate means
- Noncombatant immunity

There are a number of books that have been written on this

subject of war and the Christian. Here is a short list of books that you might find helpful.

- Clouse, Robert. *War: Four Christian Views*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, revised 1991.
- Holmes, Arthur, ed. *War: Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, revised 1991.
- Payne, Keith and Payne, Karl. *A Just Defense*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987.
- Schaeffer, Francis; Bukovsky, Vladimir; and Hitchcock, James. *Who Is For Peace?* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983.

Kerby Anderson

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“What About Those Who Cannot Believe?”

There were small children on the planes that were crashed in the 9-11 attacks on America. What happens to a baby or young child who dies? Do they go to heaven or hell?

When a young child dies, the bereaved parents will often ask, “Where is my baby now? Will my child go to heaven? The Bible does not give us a definitive answer to these questions; however, several statements seem to indicate that heaven is the destiny of those who can’t believe.

The critical issue is what God will do in His justice to those who were not able, because of age or mental inability, to respond to His revelation. If they are saved, how are they saved and on what basis are they saved? Wouldn’t the logic that says a child is saved say the same for an adult? In order

to answer these questions, let us look at a few basic biblical principles.

First, God is loving (1 John 4:16), good (Nah. 1:7), just (Zeph. 3:5), compassionate, and gracious (Psalm 103:8). He “wants all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4) and does not want “anyone to perish” (2 Peter 3:9). Therefore, it is inconceivable that God would damn an innocent child who is incapable of belief.

When we use the word innocent in this context we are not implying that the one who cannot believe is free from sin. The Bible clearly teaches that even infants inherit a sinful nature (Psalm 51:5; Rom. 5:12, 18-19). Their salvation comes not from being innocent from sin but rather from their ignorance of God’s revelation.

Second, Christ’s death on the cross for our sins was for all of us unless we refuse to accept it. God gives us the ability to decide. This means that we can either accept or reject God’s love for us.

But what about those who are unable to accept or reject God? We must first realize that everyone (including those who cannot believe) is lost (Luke 19:10), perishing (John 3:16), condemned (John 3:18), and under God’s wrath (John 3:36). We must also realize that Christ’s death on the cross paid the debt of sin for us. His death appeases God’s wrath (Rom. 5:9), and this provision is available to all unless they reject it. As Robert Lightner says in *Heaven for Those Who Can’t Believe*, “Since rejection of the Savior is the final reason why men go to Hell, those who do not reject Him because they are not able to make a conscious decision enter Heaven on the basis of the finished work of Christ.” [Robert P. Lightner, *Heaven for Those Who Can’t Believe* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1977), 20.]

Third, there are examples in the Bible that seem to support

the notion that children who die are bound for heaven. In 2 Samuel 12:22-23 David learned of the death of this son by Bathsheba. In this relationship with Bathsheba David broke four of the Ten Commandments: he coveted, he stole, he committed adultery, and he committed murder. As punishment, his child was to die. However, when he learned that the child had died, he took heart that his son was in heaven. He said, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

In Luke 18:16-17, Jesus used children as an object lesson for the kind of faith that leads to eternal life. He taught that the kingdom of God belongs to such as they (Luke 18:16) and that each believer must accept the kingdom of God as a little child (Luke 18:17). He further taught that God was "not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (Matt. 18:14).

Fourth, there are no biblical references that even hint that children will be in hell. While there are many references to adults in hell, there are none to children. This is admittedly an argument from silence. But in other passages in which the context might warrant such a reference, none is found. Consider, for example, the accounts of the death of mankind in the Flood (Gen. 7:21-23), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-25), the slaying of the firstborn in Egypt (Exod. 12:29-30), the destruction of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:3), and the slaying of the little boys in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16).

The character of God is such that He would not damn to hell those who cannot believe. Further, Christ's death on the cross paid the debt of man's sin and is available to all unless they reject it. We can declare with some certainty that those who cannot believe go to heaven when they die.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

Love Myths

Soul Mates

In this article we are going to focus on a few of the myths surrounding love and romance that can have a negative effect on dating and marriage. Some of these ideas have become so pervasive in our society that it may seem heretical to label them as myths. But as we will see, they can have a devastating impact if they are accepted uncritically.

The first myth is the belief that you will know when you meet “the one.” Of course, this assumes that there is only one person who is right for you—a soul mate you must find and marry. Garry Friesen in his book *Decision Making & the Will of God* (along with many other Christian writers) question whether there is *only* one right person for you to marry. But I will set aside this theological question to focus on some relevant practical issues.

First, is the problem of a false positive. We have all heard stories about couples who met and immediately one or both of them knew they were going to marry the other person. Often we call this “love at first sight.” But we don’t hear as much about the many other people who met, thought they had met “the one,” but later decided not to get married or ended up getting married and then divorced.

Certain people come into our lives and we immediately “click” with them. Why? We carry around in our minds a template of what that certain ideal person may be. It is influenced by our family background, our own expectations, books, movies, and personal experiences. When that template comes into our lives sparks fly. We may not even know much about that person’s

social, family, and religious background, but we are immediately attracted to him or her. We may feel that he or she is “the one,” but over time our relationship may surface concerns that might be detrimental to a successful marriage. Unfortunately, many people can be blinded by a belief that they have met “the one” and thus ignore important warning signs.

Second is the problem of the false negative. We also no doubt have heard stories of couples who weren’t attracted to each other when they first met. Many didn’t even like the other person. Only over time did they get to know each other and began to see admirable qualities in what became their marriage partner.

Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* (New York: Pedigree, 2000) says we are a romance-addicted society. We love movies with Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan, but life is more complicated than what is portrayed in movies with skillfully written plots, blended music, beautiful actors, and exotic locations.

Choosing a marriage partner requires more than romance and emotion. For every story someone tells of finding “the one” and experiencing “love at first sight,” there are many more where those initial emotions turned out to be wrong.

Two Peas in a Pod

The second love myth is the belief that you should be similar to your partner. This myth is quite pervasive in part because there is some truth to it. Obviously, there should be some common basis of belief within a marriage. The Bible warns Christians not to be “unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” (2 Cor. 6:14) And there should be some common areas of social and cultural similarity.

But I believe we should question the prevailing belief that

your life partner should be the same age, height, and race while having the same interests, gifts, and abilities. As some marriage counselors have said, "If your mate is exactly like you, then one of you is redundant." Strong marriages celebrate the differences and work to have each person's gifts and abilities complement the other. One partner may be good with the finances. The other partner may be good in the kitchen. One partner may be good at details. The other partner may be able to look at the bigger picture and plan for the future. Each partner's gifts complement the other partner's gifts.

In many cases, having a similar partner can actually be a source of conflict. Kevin Leman has found that two "first-borns" bring their perfectionist tendencies into a marriage. They will often "pick" at each other leading to increased marital conflict. Does that mean that two first-born children should never marry? Of course not. But they might want to reconsider whether they want to marry someone who is so similar to them.

What about differences in age? Couples should obviously consider the implications of vast differences in age in terms of energy level, hobbies, activities, and friendships. But there is also good reason to begin to rethink the prevailing assumption that compatibility must be based upon similar ages. Once again different ages and life experiences might be a significant way to bring complementarity into a marriage.

The same could be said about difference in ethnicity. Not so long ago, society frowned upon so-called mixed marriages. Today, more and more marriage partners come from different ethnic and racial backgrounds. While we still tend to marry people who come from the same social and cultural background, this trend seems to be changing.

The key point is this: you don't have to be similar to your partner to have a good marriage. In fact, your differences might actually help you to complement each other in marriage.

Annoying Habits

Now I would like to focus on the question of whether little annoying habits are unimportant in a long-term relationship.

When we are in love, little things like bad manners or chronic lateness may seem insignificant. Besides, we reason, we can always change our partner later on so that this is no longer a problem. We may even convince ourselves that these little annoying habits are kind of cute.

Well, they may seem cute in the courtship phase of a relationship, but they usually don't stay cute once you are married and have to deal with them every day. In fact, small habits often grow into bigger habits once they are indulged.

The book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* describes a study done by Professor Diane Femly at the University of California-Davis. The researcher asked people why they married and then why they divorced. The reasons for both were often quite similar. The only difference is that what was once sweet had now turned sour.

For example, a person might say: "I married him for his incredible sense of humor." When asked why they broke up, she might say: "He was always silly, he was a lightweight." Another person might cite her partner's creativity and spontaneity as a big attraction, but later said of her spouse that he was "a dreamer" who "couldn't stick with any one thing, couldn't plan anything ahead of time."

So it wasn't that these people didn't know who they married. Their spouse hadn't changed, but their tolerance of their habits had changed. What was a minor annoyance before they married, became a major reason for their breakup later on.

Frankly, I believe one of the real tests in a marriage are the minor annoyances of everyday life because they accumulate day after day. A quirky habit might be even attractive when you

first encounter it, but with daily repetition can become annoying and irksome.

A related issue is the iceberg problem. Most of the mass of an iceberg is below the surface. Likewise, most of the really difficult problems a person may have will stay below the surface during the dating and courtship phase of a relationship. Many couples, in fact, awake on their honeymoons to an entirely different person than the one they thought they married.

Here are a few issues to consider:

- *Cleanliness: what might at first seem like an admirable lack of vanity may indicate a general lack of personal hygiene.*
- *Neatness: although keeping things in order may seem like a small thing, it can develop into a major problem in marriage reminiscent of scenes from "The Odd Couple."*

The bottom line is this: consider the long-term impact these little annoying habits will have in your marriage, *before* you get married.

Living Together

Next I would like to look at the question of living together before marriage.

In our society today, cohabitation has become an extension of dating and courtship. Couples see living together as an audition for marriage, reasoning that you want to get to know someone intimately before you marry them. Although the logic seems sound, it not only goes against biblical injunctions but against sound sociological research.

A 1999 study by sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead released through the National Marriage Project at

Rutgers University confirms earlier studies about the danger of cohabiting and added additional detail. They found that cohabiting appears to be so counterproductive to long-lasting marriage that unmarried couples should avoid living together, especially if it involves children. Whitehead says that living together is "a fragile family form that poses increased risk to women and children."

Part of the reason for the danger is the difference in perception. "Women tend to see [living together] as a step toward eventual marriage, while men regard it more as a sexual opportunity without the ties of long-term commitment." And people who live together in uncommitted relationships may be unwilling to work out problems, and instead will seek less fractious relationships with a new partner.

The National Institute for Healthcare Research has found that couples who live together and then marry report less satisfaction in their marriages than other couples. Scott Stanley at the University of Denver has found that cohabiting couples who get married have a significantly higher rate of divorce than those who did not live together. (*A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*. Josey-Bass, 1998)

Couples argue that living together will provide important information about how a partner will behave and interact once married. But a cohabiting person may be quite different from a person within marriage. Marriage is a commitment for life, while cohabitation is usually a commitment for a season. That makes a big difference in a relationship. It's like the difference between being in a play and auditioning for the play. In the first example, you are in the stage production and working to make the play the best it can be. In the second example, you are trying out for the play and have much less invested.

Couples may also argue that they can live together and

eventually get married when they are ready for children. But will that day ever come? The living together arrangement actually erodes a foundation of commitment rather than strengthening it. And if the woman becomes pregnant during cohabitation rather than marriage, it is less likely that the children will have a legal (and committed) father.

Living together before marriage may sound like a good idea, until you look at the facts.

Got Problems? Have Kids

Finally I would like to conclude by focusing on the idea that children bring a couple closer.

To begin, let's acknowledge that Psalm 127:3 says that children are a gift from the Lord. Children are wonderful. A Christian family with children is delightful.

The issue here is the prevailing belief that bringing a child into a relationship that has problems will improve the situation. There is good evidence to believe that is not the case. If anything, a child can increase the tensions that are already present. Pepper Schwartz in her book *Everything You Know About Love and Sex Is Wrong* believes this may be the most damaging myth of the 25 myths she addresses in her book.

The fantasy that children will increase love and intimacy needs to be balanced by the reality that child-rearing also involves time and energy that can increase stress, fatigue, and worry. It will also decrease privacy and communication between partners. Unfortunately, many young couples may underestimate the impact of children on their marriage and be unprepared for the constant daily attention necessary to be a successful parent.

While having a child may be one of the most intimate things a man and a woman can do, the erosion of intimacy after the child arrives often surprises many couples. Even before the

child arrives, a pregnant mother often begins to feel fat and unattractive. Once the baby arrives, she must give most of her time and attention to the child. On the positive side, she is madly in love with the child but may tend to squeeze her husband out of the picture. On the negative side, she may be so exhausted from caring for a child all day that she has little energy left for her husband.

Even good marriages must work hard not to allow their marriage to be pulled into two parallel worlds. It is natural to begin to divide tasks and focus on those, but couples need to schedule “date nights” and “talk times” to make sure their two worlds intersect. Isolation is a natural drift in any marriage. Children and children’s activities can increase isolation if marriage partners don’t attempt to counter-program against the pressures that naturally will push a couple apart.

Couples should also plan ahead for a time when children are not a constant focus of the marriage. In my article on [*The Second Half of Marriage*](#), I talk about the time when children begin to leave the nest. No longer does the marriage have to be child-focused. It should return to a partner-focused marriage. Even while a couple is traveling through “the valley of the diapers,” they should keep a clear focus on the need to invest time, energy, and emotions in their partner.

Children are a gift from the Lord, but couples should understand their impact on a marriage. If a marriage has problems, having children will not bring that couple closer.

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The Clash of Civilizations

Introduction

In the summer of 1993, Samuel Huntington published an article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" in the journal *Foreign Affairs*. The article generated more controversy than any other article in the journal since the 1940s. And Huntington says it stirred up more debate than anything else he wrote during that time.

Three years later Samuel Huntington published a book using a similar title. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* came on the market in 1996 and became a bestseller, once again stirring controversy. Given the events of the last year, it seems worthy to revisit his comments and predictions, since in many ways he seems as accurate as an Old Testament prophet.

His thesis is fairly simple. In the future, world history will be marked by conflicts between three principal groups: western universalism, Muslim militancy, and Chinese assertion.

Huntington says that in the post-Cold War world, "global politics has become multipolar and multicivilizational."^[1] During most of human history, major civilizations were separated from one another and contact was intermittent or nonexistent. That pattern changed in the modern era (around 1500 A.D.). For over 400 years, the nation states of the West (Britain, France, Spain, Austria, Prussia, Germany, and the United States) constituted a multipolar international system that interacted, competed, and fought wars with each other. During that same period of time, these nations also expanded, conquered, and colonized nearly every other civilization.

During the Cold War, global politics became bipolar, and the world was divided into three parts. Western democracies led by

the United States engaged in ideological, political, economic, and even military competition with communist countries led by the Soviet Union. Much of this conflict occurred in the Third World outside these two camps and was composed mostly of nonaligned nations.

Huntington argues that in the post-Cold War world, the principal actors are still the nation states, but they are influenced by more than just power and wealth. Other factors like cultural preferences, commonalities, and differences are also influential. The most important groupings are not the three blocs of the Cold War, but rather the major world civilizations.

To put it simply, the line has moved. For 45 years, the Iron Curtain was the central dividing line in Europe. "That line has moved several hundred miles east. It is now the line separating the peoples of western Christianity, on the one hand, from Muslims and Orthodox peoples on the other."[2](#)

So in this article we are going to describe and analyze Samuel Huntington's worldview of global politics in order to understand better the profound changes taking place in the 21st century.

Worldviews of Global Politics

In essence, Huntington is proposing a new worldview in the area of foreign policy. He argues that "worldviews and causal theories are indispensable guides to international politics."[3](#)

Huntington says that the post-Cold war world is a different world with a different set of issues and conflicts. "In this new world the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between people belonging to different cultural entities."[4](#) World history,

he believes, will be marked by conflicts between three principal groups already mentioned: western universalism, Muslim militancy, and Chinese assertion.

Huntington's worldview stands in contrast to four other prominent perspectives that have been proposed to understand global politics. The view of Francis Fukuyama sees world events culminating in what he calls "the end of history." He believes that we may be witnessing the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the acceptance of western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. Although first proposed at the end of the Cold War when a harmonious globalism seemed likely, there is little evidence that the war of ideas and ideologies is coming to an end as the events of the last year clearly demonstrate.

A second view is one of *us versus them*. "People are always tempted to divide people into us and them, the in-group and the other, our civilization and those barbarians. Scholars have analyzed the world in terms of the Orient and the Occident, North and South, center and periphery. Muslims have traditionally divided the world into *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar a-Harb*, the abode of peace and the abode of war." [\[5\]](#)

A third perspective could be called "184 states, more or less." According to this view, nation states are the primary (even the sole) actors on the world stage. Each state seeks power and wealth in the midst of anarchy. And while this is a somewhat accurate view of the world, it does not provide any model for understanding global politics.

A fourth and final view is one of chaos. This perspective is illustrated by the book titles "Out of Control" by Zbigniew Brzezinski and "Pandaemonium" by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Recent history is replete with examples of the breakup of states, the loss of governmental authority, and numerous regional conflicts. But, as a model, this view provides little predictive value and also does not completely match reality.

The world stage may be full of chaos but its not totally without order and direction.

Samuel Huntington's worldview, I believe, provides a better perspective on the world of the 21st century.

Major Contemporary Civilizations

Let's dedicate our attention to what separates these civilizations. The first is the Chinese civilization which dates back to at least 1500 B.C. He describes this as a Sinic civilization in order to describe not only China and Chinese civilization, but also the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and related cultures of Vietnam and Korea.

The second is Japanese to separate it from the Chinese culture. Most scholars recognize it as a separate entity that was an offspring of China, emerging between 100 and 400 A.D.

The third civilization is Hindu, which has existed on the Subcontinent since at least 1500 B.C. This is also referred to as Indian, Indic, or Hindu. One scholar says that Hindu is "more than a religion or a social system; it is the core of Indian civilization." [\[6\]](#)

The fourth is a distinct Islamic civilization which originated in the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century A.D. Islam rapidly spread across North Africa and the Iberian peninsula and also eastward into central Asia, the Subcontinent, and Southeast Asia.

A fifth civilization is a separate Orthodox civilization, centered in Russia and separate from western Christendom as a result of its Byzantine parentage. It also has limited exposure to the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and other central western experiences.

Western civilization would be a sixth entity dated as emerging about 700-800 A.D. Scholars generally view it as having three

major components (Europe, North America, and Latin America).

A seventh civilization would be Latin America, which has a distinct identity even though it emanates from the West. It has had a corporatist, authoritarian culture and has been primarily Catholic.

Two other civilizations could be added to this list. These would be an African civilization in the south of the continent. The north and east coasts belong to Islamic civilization, but some scholars recognize a distinct African culture on the rest of the continent.

Also, a Buddhist culture could be defined. Although it did not survive in the country of its birth, it has been exported to other countries and regions in the East.

Samuel Huntington argues that in this post-Cold War world, people will identify themselves in terms of their ancestry and heritage. Ultimately they define themselves according to their civilization.

Culture and Civilizations

Samuel Huntington argues that in this new era as people identify themselves in terms of their ancestry and heritage, it will create a clash of civilizations. He says, "In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples are not ideological, political, or economic. They are cultural. Peoples and nations are attempting to answer the most basic question humans can face, who are we? And they are answering that question in the traditional way human beings have answered it, by reference to the things that mean most to them. People define themselves in terms of ancestry, religion, language, history, values, customs, and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations, and at the broadest level, civilizations." [\[7\]](#)

This is not surprising. We all tend to identify ourselves according to our culture, which includes our political, cultural, and religious heritage. In previous centuries, the major world civilizations were separated from each other. Contact was either non-existent or intermittent. Our global society has put us in contact with each other in ways never before experienced in our history. Cultural differences, therefore, should have a profound effect on how we interact.

Samuel Huntington says, "In the post-Cold War world, culture is both a divisive and unifying force. People separated by ideology but united by culture come together, as the two Germanys did and as the two Koreas and the several Chinas are beginning to. Societies united by ideology or historical circumstance but divided by civilization either come apart, as did the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Bosnia, or are subjected to intense strain, as is the case with Ukraine, Nigeria, Sudan, India, Sri Lanka, and many others."[\[8\]](#)

We should note that cultures and civilizations are not static but do change and evolve. And nations rise and fall. Most go through somewhat predictable stages and respond to challenges and opportunities.

Nation states will still remain important actors in global politics, but their interests and conflicts will become increasingly shaped by cultural forces and interactions between the major contemporary civilizations.

Samuel Huntington provides a compelling worldview for understanding the future of global politics as well as understanding the philosophical and spiritual interaction and conflict between Christianity and Islam. I believe that Christians need to begin to understand the implications of this major shift in countries and civilizations as we move into the 21st century.

Implications for Christians

The implications of this perspective on missions is profound. In the past, countries that were closed to the gospel tended to be communist countries. Even so, there was still a significant amount of Christian growth in countries behind the Iron Curtain and Bamboo Curtain. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, many of these countries are more open to the gospel than ever before. Meanwhile, persecution of Christians remains in China.

But a new phenomenon has emerged. Muslim countries are now the most resistant to the message of Christianity. Mission work is limited or even non-existent in many of these Muslim countries. This, I believe, represents the greatest challenge for missions in the 21st century: reaching the Muslim world for Christ. Already there are a billion Muslims in the world, making Islam the second largest religion in the world and one of the fastest growing.

A second implication is related to the first. Samuel Huntington predicts a growing conflict between western universalism and Muslim militancy. In other words, the conflict is between liberal western democracies and their cultures and Muslim countries.

This presents a major challenge for Christians trying to reach Muslims. When they see the West with its immorality and decadence, they reject it and Christianity. After all, they reason, these are Christian countries and this is what they produce.

As Christians, I believe it is crucial that we make a distinction between Christianity and western society. The political conflict may be between western democracies and Muslim militancy, but the spiritual battle is between Christianity and Islam. The two are not the same.

I have found it helpful to agree with Muslims about many of these criticisms of western culture. It is disarming, and also provides an opportunity to explain that many western countries (especially in Europe) are anything but Christian countries. Instead, I choose to focus the discussion on the Bible and Jesus Christ as a contrast to the Koran and Muhammed.

Whether we are missionaries overseas or missionaries in our backyard, we need to begin to understand the nature of Islam and bring the message of the gospel to the Muslims we meet. I believe Samuel Huntington is correct in his analysis, and we should begin to understand the changing world around us so that we can be more effective for Christ. I hope that this article and the other materials on the Probe Web Site will be helpful to you in that regard.

Notes

1. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 21.
2. Ibid., 28
3. Ibid., 30
4. Ibid., 28
5. Ibid., 32
6. Fernand Braudel, *On History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 226.
7. Huntington, 21.
8. Ibid., 28.

“Is It a Sin For a Christian to be a Soldier in the Military?”

Is it a sin for a Christian to be a soldier (i.e. someone training to be on the frontlines to kill) in the military?

I have been reading some arguments on both sides of this coin, and both have some weight to them. The main argument from the peaceful side of this coin is that Jesus said “those who live by the sword, will die by the sword” and that first century christians did not serve in the military, except for a few, but they weren’t in war at that time. The other side of the coin seperates personal responsibility from state responsibility and says that if you are serving in the military and kill, God holds the head of the state responsible. It also uses the Old Testament wars in many of its arguments.

It seems to me that there is power in not fighting, and that the Bible teaches that we should love our enemies, and not kill others just because a government tells you too. However, it would seem in such an evil world that if we didn’t stand up and fight for the protection of others, all Christians would be oppressed. It just keeps flipping back and forth.

Thank you for your question about Christians serving in the military. Probably the three best known books dealing with this subject are:

- *Robert Clouse, ed., War: Four Christian Views (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981).*
- *Arthur Holmes, ed., War and Christian Ethics (Grand Rapids,*

MI: Baker, 1975).

- Keith Payne and Karl Payne, *A Just Defense* (Portland: Multnomah, 1987).

I could go into the details of the various positions, but I think these books (especially the InterVarsity book) provide a good overview of the arguments on each side.

I might also mention that Tommy Nelson (the pastor of Denton Bible Church in Denton, TX) has put together a 90-minute video on the subject of Christians in the military. It is simply called "God and the Military: Is It Right to Bear Arms?" You can contact him at www.dentonbible.org. Thanks for writing.

Kerby Anderson

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"Where Did The Terms 'Right Wing' and 'Left Wing' Come From?"

I was reading Ecclesiastes 10:2 ("The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left") and what struck me right away was this fits our right and left wings.

My question is, how did the political parties get their status of being considered left and right?

It turns out that the historical explanation for the political terms left wing and right wing are based upon the seating

arrangement of the first French General Assembly. The proponents of the political ideas inspired by the Enlightenment were seated on the left. Those who supported the old regime were seated at the right hand of the president of the Assembly.

So early on, ideas that were something new and novel were associated with the left, and conservative ideas were associated with the right. Actually, the story is a bit more complicated than that, but to answer your question, the origin of left and right is found in modern politics rather than Ecclesiastes.

Thanks for writing. God bless you.

Kerby Anderson

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“How Could the Wise Men Have Found Baby Jesus in Nazareth?”

I have one question on [[the Christmas Quiz](#)] that has me completely perplexed. Question 31 asks where the Wise Men found Jesus and his family when they arrived. Your answer says that it was Nazareth. How can this be? Why would Herod have ordered the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem if they were in Nazareth? Also, why would they have travelled all the way to Egypt if they were that much further north from Bethlehem?

Thank you for writing. Dale Taliaferro wrote the Probe

Christmas Quiz, but let me try to give you a brief answer to why he answered the question the way that he did.

Many commentators merely have Jesus staying in Bethlehem, but Dale suggests a better interpretation that fits with both the Matthew account and the Luke account.

Matthew 2:11 says the Magi saw Jesus as a "young child" and found him in "the house," where "they fell down and worshiped him." At the very least, it eliminates the possibility that this was at his birth at a manger scene in Bethlehem. That would also mean that the typical nativity scene is inaccurate.

Notice that Luke's account has them leaving Bethlehem for Jerusalem to be presented in the Temple. Then Luke 2:39 says that after Jesus is presented in the Temple, the family returns to Nazareth. That is where Dale believes the Magi found Jesus and his family.

Notice that Matthew 2 gives an impression of a hurried, immediate escape to Egypt. Nothing like that is mentioned in Luke 2:39. Instead we have them returning to Nazareth.

Therefore, it is possible that the family returned to Bethlehem when Jesus was perhaps 1-2 years old. Matthew 2 then appears to be picking up the story where they escape during the night.

I think this interpretation also helps make sense of King Herod's command to kill all male children "two years old and under." Remember earlier asked "the exact time the star had appeared" in Matthew 2:7. That would mean that at the time of the king's order, Jesus was not a newborn, but a toddler, "the young child."

I hope this helps explain Dale Taliaferro's answer.

Kerby Anderson
Probe Ministries

When Nations Die

*One of the more popular Probe radio programs has been "[Decline of a Nation](#)." Kerby Anderson returns to this important theme by summarizing the significant work by Jim Nelson Black in his book *When Nations Die*. When we look at three thousand years of history, we observe that civilizations rise but eventually fall and die. The history of the world is the history of nations that are conquered by other nations or collapse into anarchy.*



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

Jim Nelson Black sees ominous parallels to our own country. He says,

As I have looked back across the ruins and landmarks of antiquity, I have been stunned by the parallels between those societies and our own. For most of us the destruction of Carthage, the rise of the Greek city-states, and the Fall of Rome are mere ghosts of the past, history lessons long forgotten. And such things as the capture of Constantinople, the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, the collapse of the kingdoms of France and Spain, and the slow withering decline of the British Empire are much less clear and less memorable. Most of us do not remember much from our history lessons about the French Enlightenment or, for that matter, the issues that led to the American Revolution. But this is the legitimate background of our own place in history, it is vital that we reconsider the nature of life in those earlier times. For within those eras and movements are the seeds of the troubles we face today.[\[1\]](#)

There are many reasons for the decline and fall of a nation,

but an important (and often overlooked) reason is its abandonment of religion. Russell Kirk has said that the roots of “culture” come from the “cult.” In other words, culture (cult-ure) is based upon some form of religious or spiritual worldview. Egypt was a religious society founded on the worship of nature gods and goddesses. Greece and Rome had their pantheon of pagan deities. And the list of nations in India, China, and other parts of the globe all demonstrate the principle that civilization arises from religion.

And the opposite is also true. When the traditional beliefs of a nation erode, the nation dies. Religion provides the set of standards that govern a nation. Historian Will Durant said, “There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion.”[\[2\]](#)

Unfortunately, this nation has embarked on a journey to maintain a society without a religious code. The Ten Commandments are pulled from the walls, and religious values are stripped from the public square.

Christian principles are no longer taught in the public schools and often ridiculed in the arenas of education and media. One has to wonder what the fate of this country will be in the future.

Social Decay

In his book *When Nations Die*, Jim Nelson Black lists three aspects of decay: social decay, cultural decay, and moral decay. Three important trends demonstrate social decay. They are “the crisis of lawlessness,” the “loss of economic discipline,” and “rising bureaucracy.”

History provides ample illustrations of the disastrous consequences of the collapse of law and order. “In ancient Greece, the first symptoms of disorder were a general loss of

respect for tradition and the degradation of the young. Among the early symptoms was the decline of art and entertainment. The philosophers and pundits distorted the medium of communication. Rhetoric became combative and intolerant; intellectuals began to deride and attack all the traditional institutions of Hellenic society.”{3}

New thinkers in the society argued for “fundamental change” and called for giving the youth a “voice in society.” Without traditional guidelines, the young men grew wild and undisciplined destroying the old order. Slowly Greece devolved into a disreputable and lawless nation. The Romans conquered Greece in 146 B.C. By placing everything under military authority, they were able to restore order and bring back the rule of law.

In a study of the French Revolution, José Ortega y Gasset noted that “Order is not pressure which is imposed on society from without, but an equilibrium which is set up from within.”{4} The Roman Empire (as well as other great civilizations) understood that discipline and custom were essential to stability.

A similar story can be found in ancient Egypt during the fourth century B.C. Lawlessness and violence crippled the economy, and the nation was in chaos. When Alexander the Great invaded the country in 333 B.C., his first task was to restore order and institute martial law (which he did in a ruthless manner). With the death of Alexander, Egypt returned to its old ways until the Roman Empire brought peace to the region through conquest and martial law.

Carthage was once called “the eternal rival of Rome” but its preeminence and impact waned as it “sank into debauchery and dissipation as a result of great wealth and luxury.” Law and order were destroyed from within. Moreover, the rich young men of Carthage no longer wanted to serve in the military so they hired mercenaries to do their fighting. But when the army came

into fierce conflict with Rome and other adversaries, the mercenaries ran and left the nation defenseless. Carthage fell to Rome in 146 B.C., and the first act of the Roman legions was to restore law and order.

In these and many other examples, social decay led to the decline and fall of a great civilization. If we are to prevent a repeat of history, then we must learn from these lessons of history.

Cultural Decay

Four important trends demonstrate cultural decay. They are the “decline of education,” the “weakening of cultural foundations,” the “loss of respect for tradition,” and the “increase in materialism.”

In his study *The Civilization of Rome*, Donald Dudley says that no single cause, by itself, would have brought the empire to its knees. Instead, the fall came through “a number of weaknesses in Roman society; their effects may be variously estimated, but in combination they must have been largely responsible for the collapse.”^{5}

The cultural decay of a nation leads inexorably to social and cultural decline. And the patterns are similar from one civilization to another. Samuel Eisenstadt wondered if the similarities were apparent or if they were historical and legitimate. After studying the work of a half dozen historians, he concluded that the similarities were actual. He concluded that “despite the great difference in cultural background most of these empires have shown similar characteristics, and that these characteristics provide the key to an understanding of the processes of their decline.”^{6}

The Roman poet Livy wrote that greed and self-indulgence led Romans to dangerous excesses. He said, “For it is true that when men had fewer possessions, they were also modest in their

desires. Lately riches have brought avarice and abundant pleasures, and the desire to carry luxury and lust to the point of ruin and universal perdition.”{7}

In describing the decadence of the Roman Republic, historian Polybius wrote that this preoccupation with luxury led to carnal indulgences. “For some young men indulged in affairs with boys, others in affairs with courtesans.” They paid a talent (roughly a thousand dollars) for a boy bought for sexual pleasure and three hundred drachmas for a jar of caviar. “Marcus Cato was outraged by this and, in a speech to the people, complained that one might be quite convinced of the decline of the republic, when pretty boys cost more than fields and jars of caviar cost more than plowman.”{8}

As we look at our society today, we too find ourselves in a world where values have been inverted and where citizens pursue hedonistic pleasures without counting the cost. Our nation would be wise to learn the lessons of the past.

Moral Decay

Three important trends demonstrate moral decay. They are the “rise in immorality,” the “decay of religious belief,” and the “devaluing of human life.”

The classic study of Roman civilization, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, written by English historian Edward Gibbon was published in that famous year of 1776. He “observed that the leaders of the empire gave into the vices of strangers, morals collapsed, laws became oppressive, and the abuse of power made the nation vulnerable to the barbarian hordes.”{9}

British historian Catherine Edwards demonstrated that our current examples of immorality are not a modern phenomenon. In her study of the “politics of immorality” in ancient Rome, she says that contraception, abortion, and exposure were common

ways to prevent childbirth in Rome. Husbands refused to recognize any child they did not believe to be their own. "Until accepted by its father, a Roman baby did not, legally speaking, exist." [{10}](#)

Life became cheap in the latter days of the Roman Empire. Burdensome regulation and taxes made manufacturing and trade unprofitable. Families were locked into hereditary trades and vocations allowing little if any vocational choice. Eventually, children were seen as a needless burden and abortion and infanticide became commonplace. In some cases, children were sold into slavery.

Manners and social life fell into debauchery. Under Justinian, entertainment grew bawdier and more bizarre. Orgies and love feasts were common. Homosexuality and bestiality were openly practiced. Under Nero, Christians were blamed for the great fire in Rome and horribly persecuted.

Similar patterns can be found in other civilizations. In Greece, the music of the young people became wild and coarse. Popular entertainment was brutal and vulgar. Promiscuity, homosexuality, and drunkenness became a daily part of life. And all moral and social restraints were lost leading to greater decadence.

In Carthage, worship turned from Baal to the earth goddess Tanit. "Sacrifices to the goddess of fertility were supposed to ensure productivity, long life, and even greater profits." [{11}](#) Ornatly carved funeral monuments depicting infant sacrifice can be seen today along with thousands of tiny stone coffins to infants sacrificed to the pagan goddess.

The parallels to our own nation are striking. No, we don't sacrifice infants to a pagan goddess, but we have aborted nearly 40 million babies on the altar of convenience. And various sexual practices are openly accepted as part of an alternative lifestyle. It's no wonder that many believe our

country is a nation in decline.

Are We A Nation in Decline?

Throughout this article we have been describing the patterns of decline in a nation. Do these patterns apply to our own nation? Many people looking at the patterns of social, cultural, and moral decay in other countries and civilizations have concluded that we are headed down the same path.

Russell Kirk put it this way:

It appears to me that our culture labors in an advanced state of decadence; that what many people mistake for the triumph of our civilization actually consists of powers that are disintegrating our culture; that the vaunted 'democratic freedom' of liberal society in reality is servitude to appetites and illusions which attack religious belief; which destroy community through excessive centralization and urbanization; which efface life-giving tradition and custom. {12}

When we understand the factors that led to the decline of great civilizations, we can easily see that this country can succumb to similar temptations and decadence. What happened in Greece, Rome, Egypt, Carthage, and many other civilizations can happen to us.

Professor Allan Bloom in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*, said, "This is the American moment in world history, the one for which we shall forever be judged. Just as in politics the responsibility for the fate of freedom in the world has devolved upon our regime, so the fate of the philosophy in the world has devolved upon our universities, and the two are related as they have never been before." {13}

We as a nation and a people must rise to the occasion or suffer a fate similar to that which has befallen civilizations

in the past. The task is not easy since the patterns of decay found in other nations strike ours as well. Nations were subverted by false and foreign ideologies. We too find hostile ideas in the public arenas of media, politics, and education. Sexual promiscuity led to the downfall of these nations. So too we find similar patterns of sexual promiscuity and debauchery.

As nations fell into decline, life became cheap. Infants were strangled, exposed to the elements, or sold into slavery. Others were sacrificed to pagan goddesses in order to ensure productivity or a long life. Today life has become cheap. At one end of the spectrum, unborn babies are aborted. At the other end, physician-assisted suicide is becoming acceptable for the aged.

In his study of history, Arnold Toynbee describes the predictable pattern of "challenge and response." We as a nation are challenged in fundamental ways, and our response will either pull us back from the brink or push us over it. Will we follow the path to renewal and reformation or will we follow the path to destruction? The choice is ours.

Notes

1. Jim Nelson Black, *When Nations Die* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1994), 3.
2. Ibid., 9.
3. Ibid., 35-36.
4. Jos Ortega y Gasset, *Mirabeau: An Essay on the Nature of Statesmanship* (Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1975).
5. Donald Dudley, *The Civilization of Rome* (New York: Meridian, 1993), 238.
6. Samuel Noah Eisenstadt, *The Decline of Empires* (Englewood

Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 2-3.

7. Livy, preface to bk. I, *The History of Rome from Its Foundation*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (Baltimore: Penguin, 1967).

8. Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. W.R. Paton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930).

9. Black, *When Nations Die*, 187.

10. Catherine Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 50.

11. Black, *When Nations Die*, 165.

12. Russell Kirk, "Can Our Civilization Survive?" address to Heritage Foundation, 24 July 1992.

13. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 382.

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Atheists and Their Fathers

*How does one become an atheist? Does a person's relationship with his earthly father affect his relationship with his heavenly Father? These are some of the questions we will explore in this article as we talk about the book *Faith of the Fatherless* by Paul Vitz.*

Vitz is a psychologist who was an atheist himself until his late thirties. He began to wonder if psychology played a role in one's belief about God. After all, secular psychologists have been saying that a belief in God is really nothing more

than infantile wish fulfillment. Dr. Vitz wondered if the shoe was on the other foot. Could it be that atheists are engaged in unconscious wish fulfillment?

After studying the lives of more than a dozen of the world's most influential atheists, Dr. Vitz discovered that they all had one thing in common: defective relationships with their fathers. The relationship was defective because the father was either dead, abusive, weak, or had abandoned the children. When he studied the lives of influential theists during those same historical time periods, he found they enjoyed a strong, loving relationship with a father (or a father substitute if the father was dead).

For example, Friedrich Nietzsche lost his father (who was a pastor) before his fifth birthday. One biographer wrote that Nietzsche was "passionately attached to his father, and the shock of losing him was profound." Dr. Vitz writes that Nietzsche had a "strong, intellectually macho reaction against a dead, very Christian father." Friedrich Nietzsche is best known as the philosopher who said, "God is dead." It certainly seems possible that his rejection of God and Christianity was a "rejection of the weakness of his father."

Contrast Nietzsche with the life of Blaise Pascal. This famous mathematician and religious writer lived at a time in Paris when there was considerable skepticism about religion. He nevertheless wrote *Les pensées* (Thoughts), a powerful and imaginative defense of Christianity, which also attacked skepticism. Pascal's father, Etienne, was a wealthy judge and also an able mathematician. He was known as a good man with religious convictions. Pascal's mother died when he was three, so his father gave up his law practice and home-schooled Blaise and his sisters.

Here we are going to look at the correlation between our relationship with our earthly father and our heavenly Father. No matter what our family background, we are still responsible

for the choices we make. Growing up in an unloving home does not excuse us from rejecting God, but it does explain why some people reject God. There may be a psychological component to their commitment to atheism.

Nietzsche and Freud

Friedrich Nietzsche is a philosopher who has influenced everyone from Adolph Hitler to the Columbine killers. His father was a Lutheran pastor who died of a brain disease before Nietzsche's fifth birthday. He often spoke positively of his father and said his death was a great loss, which he never forgot. One biographer wrote that Nietzsche was "passionately attached to his father, and the shock of losing him was profound."

It seems he associated the general weakness and sickness of his father with his father's Christianity. Nietzsche's major criticism of Christianity was that it suffers from an absence, even a rejection, of "life force." The God Nietzsche chose was Dionysius, a strong pagan expression of life force. It certainly seems possible that his rejection of God and Christianity was a "rejection of the weakness of his father."

Nietzsche's own philosophy placed an emphasis on the "superman" along with a denigration of women. Yet his own search for masculinity was undermined by the domination of his childhood by his mother and female relatives in a Christian household. Dr. Vitz says, "It is not surprising, then, that for Nietzsche Christian morality was something for women." He concludes that Nietzsche had a "strong, intellectually macho reaction against a dead, very Christian father who was loved and admired but perceived as sickly and weak."

Sigmund Freud despised his Jewish father, who was a weak man unable to support his family. Freud later wrote in two letters that his father was a sexual pervert, and that the children suffered as a result. Dr. Vitz believes that Freud's Oedipus

Complex (which placed hatred of the father at the center of his psychology) was an expression of "his strong unconscious hostility to and rejection of his own father." His father was involved in a form of reformed Judaism but was also a weak, passive man with sexual perversions. Freud's rejection of God and Judaism seems connected to his rejection of his father.

Both Nietzsche and Freud demonstrate the relationship between our attitudes toward our earthly father and our heavenly Father. In both cases, there seems to be a psychological component to their commitment to atheism.

Russell and Hume

Bertrand Russell was one of the most famous atheists of the last century. Both of Russell's parents lived on the margin of radical politics. His father died when Bertrand Russell was four years old, and his mother died two years earlier. He was subsequently cared for by his rigidly puritanical grandmother, who was known as "Deadly Nightshade." She was by birth a Scottish Presbyterian, and by temperament a puritan.

Russell's daughter Katherine noted that his grandmother's joyless faith was "the only form of Christianity my father knew well." This ascetic faith taught that "the life of this world was no more than a gloomy testing ground for future bliss." She concluded, "My father threw this morbid belief out the window."

Dr. Vitz points out that Russell's only other parent figures were a string of nannies to whom he often grew quite attached. When one of the nannies left, the eleven-year-old Bertrand was "inconsolable." He soon discovered that the way out of his sadness was to retreat into the world of books.

After his early years of lost loves and later years of solitary living at home with tutors, Russell described himself in this way: "My most profound feelings have remained always

solitary and have found in human things no companionship . . .
. The sea, the stars, the night wind in waste places, mean more to me than even the human beings I love best, and I am conscious that human affection is to me at bottom an attempt to escape from the vain search for God.”

Another famous atheist was David Hume. He was born into a prominent and affluent family. He seems to have been on good terms with his mother as well as his brother and sister. He was raised as a Scottish Presbyterian but gave up his faith and devoted most of his writing to the topic of religion.

Like the other atheists we have discussed, David Hume fits the pattern. His father died when he was two years old. Biographies of his life mention no relatives or family friends who could serve as father-figures. And David Hume is known as a man who had no religious beliefs and spent his life raising skeptical arguments against religion in any form.

Both Russell and Hume demonstrate the relationship between our attitudes toward our earthly father and our heavenly Father. In each case, there is a psychological component to their commitment to atheism.

Sartre, Voltaire, and Feuerbach

Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the most famous atheists of the last century. His father died when he was fifteen months old. He and his mother lived with his maternal grandparents as his mother cultivated a very intimate relationship with him. She concentrated her emotional energy on her son until she remarried when Sartre was twelve. This idyllic and Oedipal involvement came to an end, and Sartre strongly rejected his stepfather.

In those formative years, Sartre’s real father died, his grandfather was cool and distant, and his stepfather took his beloved mother away from him. The adolescent Sartre concluded

to himself, "You know what? God doesn't exist." Commentators note that Sartre obsessed with fatherhood all his life and never got over his fatherlessness. Dr. Vitz concludes that "his father's absence was such a painful reality that Jean-Paul spent a lifetime trying to deny the loss and build a philosophy in which the absence of a father and of God is the very starting place for the good or authentic life."

Another philosopher during the French Enlightenment disliked his father so much that he changed his name from Arouet to Voltaire. The two fought constantly. At one point Voltaire's father was so angry with his son for his interest in the world of letters rather than taking up a career in law that he "authorized having his son sent to prison or into exile in the West Indies." Voltaire was not a true atheist, but rather a deist who believed in an impersonal God. He was a strident critic of religion, especially Christianity with its understanding of a personal God.

Ludwig Feuerbach was a prominent German atheist who was born into a distinguished and gifted German family. His father was a prominent jurist who was difficult and undiplomatic with colleagues and family. The dramatic event in young Ludwig's life must have been his father's affair with the wife of one of his father's friends. They lived together openly in another town, and she bore him a son. The affair began when Feuerbach was nine and lasted for nine years. His father publicly rejected his family, and years later Feuerbach rejected Christianity. One famous critic of religion said that Feuerbach was so hostile to Christianity that he would have been called the Antichrist if the world had ended then.

Each of these men once again illustrates the relationship between atheism and their fathers.

Burke and Wilberforce

British statesman Edmund Burke is considered by many as the

founder of modern conservative political thought. He was partly raised by his grandfather and three affectionate uncles. He later wrote of his Uncle Garret, that he was "one of the very best men, I believe that ever lived, of the clearest integrity, the most genuine principles of religion and virtue."

His writings are in direct opposition to the radical principles of the French Revolution. One of his major criticisms of the French Revolution was its hostility to religion: "We are not converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helevetius has made no progress amongst us. Atheists are not our preachers." For Burke, God and religion were important pillars of a just and civil society.

William Wilberforce was an English statesman and abolitionist. His father died when he was nine years old, and he was sent to live with his aunt and uncle. He was extremely close to his uncle and to John Newton who was a frequent visitor to their home. Newton was a former slave trader who converted to Christ and wrote the famous hymn "Amazing Grace." Wilberforce first heard of the evils of slavery from Newton's stories and sermons, "even reverencing him as a parent when [he] was a child." Wilberforce was an evangelical Christian who went on to serve in parliament and was instrumental in abolishing the British slave trade.

As mentioned earlier, Blaise Pascal was a famous mathematician and religious writer. Pascal's father was a wealthy judge and also an able mathematician, known as a good man with religious convictions. Pascal's mother died when he was three, so his father gave up his law practice and home-schooled Blaise and his sisters. Pascal went on to powerfully present a Christian perspective at a time when there was considerable skepticism about religion in France.

I believe Paul Vitz provides an important look at atheists and theists in his book *Faith of the Fatherless*. The prominent

atheists of the last few centuries all had defective relationships with their fathers while the theists enjoyed a strong, loving relationship with a father or a father substitute. This might be something to compassionately consider the next time you witness to an atheist.

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The Second Half of Marriage

*When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. Kerby Anderson looks at the book *The Second Half of Marriage* by David and Claudia Arp and describes the eight challenges of second-half marriages.*

When children begin leaving the nest, marriages change and often couples are unprepared for those changes. In this article we are going to be looking at the book *The Second Half of Marriage* (Zondervan, 1998) by David and Claudia Arp. Suddenly marriages that were child-centered once again become couple-centered. Many marriages do not survive the transition. According to the National Center of Health Statistics, while divorce generally declined, divorces among couples married thirty years or more increased significantly.

In their book, the Arps describe eight themes within a second-half marriage. One is the need to transition from a child-focused marriage to a more partner-centered marriage. Without children as buffers, couples face the challenge of redefining their marriage. Either it becomes more intimate or it slowly disintegrates. A husband married for nineteen years said, "I'm

fearful that when our children leave home, we will go our separate ways, because our priorities and interests are so different.”

Couples must learn how to communicate and effectively deal with conflict and anger. Couples often lose the ability to communicate in marriage because there is such an urgent focus on the kids and their needs and problems. One wife said, “The greatest stress in my marriage is lack of communication—just being able to converse at the end of the day. I always feel as if I’m competing with the computer, the newspaper, or CNN news.”

Couples in the second half of marriage must also learn to adjust to changing roles with aging parents and adult children. Your parents may have placed certain expectations on you and your marriage that you are still feeling in midlife. A wife married thirty-one years said, “Whatever I do for my parents, I can never meet all of their expectations. Yet I keep trying. I’d have to say unmet expectations are the hardest to deal with. I need to add that my expectations are the hardest to deal with.”

Reconnecting with your adult children is also a challenge. As children leave the nest, they leave behind certain requirements and expectations. Our relationship with them changes, and couples in the second half of marriage must reconnect with children who are now adults on a different level. Often we must learn to resist giving advice unless it is requested. And even when we give advice, we should mentally prepare ourselves for the possibility that our grown children may not act on it.

Here we will be looking at these eight themes of second half marriages and discuss the challenges of each of them. We will view them from the kaleidoscope of over five hundred survey responses used by the Arps in writing their book. We pray that this look at second half marriages will help strengthen your

marriage no matter how long you have been married.

Expectations and Companionship

The first challenge is to learn to let go of past marital disappointment, forgive each other, and commit to making the rest of your marriage the best. All of us go into marriage with certain dreams and expectations. Some of these will never be realized. Are you willing to let go of unmet expectations and unrealistic dreams? You may never build your dream house or go on that exotic vacation. Are you willing to let it go? Can you accept those extra pounds or that gray hair or even no hair at all? Giving up lost dreams and dealing with each other's imperfections is a positive step toward forgiving past hurts and moving on in your marriage.

A wife married for twenty-five years said, "After twenty years of marriage, I finally realized my husband will never be home at 5 p.m. While this is disappointing to me, I simply had to let that expectation go." Another wife said, "During times of testing and disappointment, we kept working on our relationship. We learned how to forgive each other and how to work things out. We are committed to our marriage and we never give up. That's our secret."

The second challenge is to create a marriage that is partner-focused rather than child-focused. When children leave the nest, couples often move from a child-focused marriage to an activity-focused marriage. Community or church activities may now take up the time and energy formerly devoted to children. As valuable as these activities might be, they still serve as buffers to a mutual, partnership marriage. In the second half of marriage, couples need to redefine their roles and functions. What previously worked may no longer be relevant. Marriage can be more personal and more fulfilling as you focus on the couple's relationship rather than the children.

A wife married for thirty-three years said, "It's important to

build a good relationship with your spouse so that when the children leave, you have the underlying joy of focusing on each other and not on your adult children.”

Key to this is to develop what is called a “companionship marriage.” This has been defined as a socially registered commitment between a man and a woman where they seek to know themselves and each other as far as they are capable of being known. It also involves mutual affection and affirmation where they help each other grow and change in order to become the loving and creative persons they are capable of becoming.

These then are the first two of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Next we will look at two more challenges.

Communication and Conflict

The third challenge is to maintain an effective communication system that allows you to express your deepest feelings, joys, and concerns. Communication is the lifeblood of a good marriage. But what do you do when the communication patterns that seemed to work in the first half of marriage seem inadequate for the second half? When children are gone, there are more spaces of silence, and there is often less to say to each other. Couples may wonder how they made it this far only to end up as quiet strangers in front of each other. Couples in the second half of marriage need to develop intimate and honest communication that focuses on their needs, wants, and dreams at midlife.

A wife married for eighteen years said, “My greatest fear is that when the kids are gone, we won’t communicate or have anything in common. I’m afraid of being left alone with someone who never speaks, pays attention, or ever touches me.” Another wife said, “The greatest frustration for me in my marriage is simply not being understood.”

The fourth challenge is to use anger and conflict in a

creative way to build your relationship. Anger and conflict are part of any marriage. Mature couples need to learn how to process anger. Marriage must become a safe place to express your concerns in the context of a loving relationship. This challenge is critical because often the real problem isn't the facts but the strong negative feelings we harbor. Once those feelings are dealt with, it's easier to move on and resolve the conflict.

A wife of eighteen years said, "We had the divorce papers ready to sign a couple of times a number of years ago, but both times we looked at each other and said, 'But I haven't stopped loving you.' Even when we couldn't agree on virtually anything else, we have always agreed on that. Nothing we've been through was bad enough to kill the love we have for each other."

Often the key to dealing with anger is to objectively state the problem and then begin to set forward the solutions. In the process, the couple can also identify what is at stake and what each partner has invested. Finding a solution to the problem is easier when both partners are committed to each other and committed to a mutually satisfying solution. Sometimes this will involve compromise and in other cases, it will involve showing love to your partner by accepting his or her perspective.

These then are the first four of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. In the next section we will look at two more challenges.

Friendship and Romance

The fifth challenge is to build a deeper friendship and enjoy your spouse. In the second half of marriage, we can deepen our friendship and become close companions. When we are in a long-term marriage, we become more familiar and comfortable with each other. When we acknowledge that we aren't perfect, we can

relax and enjoy each other. What are you doing to build your friendship with your spouse? Are you working to expand your boundaries and prevent boredom? Are you trying to put more fun back into your marriage? Fun and friendship are two key ingredients in the second half of marriage.

One wife married for twenty years said, "This year has been a time of growth for us as a couple. It started with lots of stress—overcommitment and relationship problems—but God helped us through it. We just celebrated our twentieth anniversary with a romantic getaway. We've become best friends again. Hope can be restored!"

In their book, the Arps provide some concrete tips for making the second half more enjoyable. First, take care of yourself. Sometimes our back muscles can give us a midlife wake-up call, so exercise and physical therapy should become a way of life. Second, pace yourself. Third, build relationships and maintain them. This is the time of life to beef up your friendships and develop a support system. Fourth, stretch your boundaries. Fifth, stay involved with life. Sixth, hang in there. When you are discouraged, don't throw your life away.

The sixth challenge is to renew romance and restore a pleasurable, sexual relationship. Contrary to popular belief, interest in sex does not have to diminish as we grow older. Actually the research done by the Arps tends to indicate that sexual satisfaction increases rather than decreases with the number of years married. Couples in the second half of marriage need to do three things: protect privacy, cherish the love relationship, and renew romance. These are important priorities.

The Arps list six secrets to rekindle romance. These are: be affectionate, be a listener, be adventuresome, be playful, be in shape, and be a little wacky. As we grow older, the pace of life changes and there is a greater need to stay in shape by eating well, working out, and watching our weight. This is not

only good for your marriage. It is good for your health.

These then are the first six of eight challenges in the second half of marriage. Let's look at the last two challenges.

Adapted Relationships and Spiritual Growth

The seventh challenge is to adjust to changing roles with aging parents and adult children. As children leave the nest, we release them into adulthood. But it is also important to reconnect with them on an adult level. At the same time, you need to balance relationships with your own parents. This will be difficult, especially if your parents did not successfully meet this challenge in their marriage. Whatever your situation, your relationship with your adult children and your elderly parents will affect your marriage. Accepting the circumstances can be key in building a strong second half of marriage. You can't go back and change your family history, but you can make wise choices for the future based upon past circumstances.

The drain of family commitments can take its toll on a second half marriage. One wife of twenty-eight years said, "For me, the emotional drain of trying to be everything to everybody is affecting my relationship with my husband. There is no energy left at the end of the day for me to invest in our marriage."

The challenge of rearing children and sending them into a world also affects one of the other challenges we have discussed: the challenge of communication. One husband of thirty years said, "We don't have an empty nest yet, although two out of three are gone. We've tried to push our children out of the nest but leave the lines of communication open to advise and assist when needed."

The final challenge is to evaluate where you are on your spiritual pilgrimage, grow closer to each other and to God,

and together serve others. Our faith in God should make a difference in our marriage. The relationship of a husband and wife to God provides the foundation for a good marriage that will be tested by the changing circumstances of the second half of marriage. Couples should evaluate their spiritual pilgrimage and seek to grow closer spiritually to each other and to God.

A husband married for thirty-two years said, "The best aspects of our marriage are companionship, our faith in God, and our love for each other. We try to add to the other's happiness by surprising each other with little gifts, a hug, a kiss, or giving a compliment—or just being thoughtful."

We trust that this has been helpful to you as you seek to strengthen your marriage and grow closer to God. We believe you will grow closer to each other as you grow closer to God. May God bless you.

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