

The Importance of Voting

Kerby Anderson provides reasons why it's so important for people of faith to exercise our stewardship of voting in what is probably the most consequential election in our lifetime.

This election season is like no other in recent memory. This was the first time in more than a century that two presidential candidates, who have served in that office, were running against each other. Now we have a previous president and vice-president running. This is similar to 1984 when President Reagan ran against the previous Vice-President in Jimmy Carter's administration (Walter Mondale).

Voters can compare four years of a Trump administration with three-and-half years of a Biden/ Harris administration. Of course, they can also compare a Republican-controlled Senate with a Democratic-controlled Senate. And they can do the same for the House of Representatives.

You can also compare the National Democratic Platform with the National Republican Platform. Here are links to both:

[Democratic](#)

[Republican](#)

The differences are stark and illustrate why so many people say this is the most consequential election in our lifetimes. Who we elect to office will determine our laws and our taxes. Judges that are appointed and confirmed will affect life, liberty, and property.

As Christians we need to consider what role we will play in the next election. We have a civic responsibility because we are both citizens of heaven and citizens of earth. To assess our involvement, let's look at a few issues.

Close Elections

We have had many close elections for federal office. For example, we have had close presidential elections in 1960, 1976, 2000, 2004, 2016, and 2020. The last two presidential elections illustrate this when we examine the vote totals in the six swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin).

In 2016, Donald Trump won three of those swing states (Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) by a mere 77,744 votes. In 2020, Joe Biden won three swing states (Arizona, Georgia, and Michigan) by 42,844 votes.

While we can have a debate about whether Joe Biden really won those states fairly, my point is to illustrate how close even the presidential elections have been. Change 42,844 votes in three states and we would have had a 269-269 electoral college tie.

We can also point to very close elections for federal, state, and local offices. The key point is we have close elections, and that's why all Christians should be registered to vote and then go out and cast their ballot.

Importance of the Christian Vote

Various polls suggest that religious voters could sway the race between Vice President Harris and former President Donald Trump. One CBN report documented that "President Biden is trailing Donald Trump among voters who regularly attend religious services, a phenomenon extending beyond the traditional support base of evangelical Christians." Senator Josh Hawley put it this way: "There's no majority for the Republican party without voters of faith. And they're going to decide this election. So we need to them to turn out."

Former member of Congress and former presidential candidate,

Tulsi Gabbard explains that the Democratic Party “is trying to erase God from every facet of our public life.” She also added that “Now more than ever, people of faith, people of spirituality, need to stand up, to defend this fundamental, God-given right and stop those who are trying to take it away from us.”

Stewardship of the Vote

Have Christians been a good steward of the vote? Over the years, I have provided statistics about how born-again Christians have done in previous elections. The percentages are relatively consistent. Approximately 85 percent of Christians of voting age are registered to vote. That means about 15 percent are not even registered to vote. Of those Christians registered to vote, about 65 percent actually vote.

In the New Testament, Jesus says that believers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). We have a stewardship responsibility when it comes to using our gifts, talents, and opportunities. Jesus also described the importance of this stewardship in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). He was critical of the one servant who buried his talent (Matthew 25:26). We as voters should not “bury our talent” but use the opportunity God has given us to vote responsibly.

Educating Voters

Having accurate information is vital and can change an election. Unfortunately, [media bias](#) often prevents voters from knowing important information. A month after the 2020 election, the Media Research Center asked The Polling Company to survey 1,750 Biden voters in seven swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin). They tested the voters’ knowledge of eight news stories that liberal news media failed to report properly.

They concluded that this lack of information proved crucial. They discovered that one in every six Biden voters surveyed (17%) said they would have abandoned the Democratic candidate if they had known the facts in one or more of these news stories.

The eight news stories surveyed included three stories that reflected poorly on Joe Biden or Kamala Harris and five stories about Trump administration successes. For example, they found that more than a third (35.4%) didn't know of the Biden sex assault allegations. Nearly half (45.1%) did not know about the scandals involving Hunter Biden. And a quarter (25.3%) of them did not know that Senator Kamala Harris had the most left-wing record of any Senator in 2019.

When they surveyed the Trump successes, they found that anywhere from four in ten to five in ten did not know about economic growth, the creation of 11 million jobs, the Middle East peace deals, energy independence, and Operation Warp Speed.

A total of 17 percent said they would have changed their vote if they had been aware of these issues. This would have moved every one of the swing states into Trump's column and given him 311 electoral votes. This study is illustrative of the impact the mainstream media had on the 2020 election.

Churches and Pastors

Another place where voters can be educated is in church. But pastors often want to know how IRS regulations affect what churches might want to do to educate the congregation. Fortunately, Kelly Shackelford and First Liberty Institute have put together a legal summary of what pastors can and cannot do during an election.

Because the church is a 501(c) (3) organization, there are two actions pastors cannot take during an election. First, a

pastor or a church may not use the organization to endorse one candidate over another. Second, a pastor or a church may not give its money to one candidate over another.

On the other side, pastors are free to do many things during an election. First, pastors can speak about political issues. “It is a misconception that pastors cannot address political issues—even ‘hot button’ issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and gun control—from the pulpit.”

Second, pastors can educate their congregation about politics. “Pastors are fully protected when it comes to issues like educating members of their church about the political process, handing out non-partisan voter guides and flyers so members can read about each candidate’s platform, and even providing the opportunity for members to register to vote.”

Third, pastors can invite political candidates to speak at their church. “Contrary to popular belief, pastors and churches can invite political candidates to address their congregation from the pulpit, as long as all the candidates in a race are included in the invitation.”

This is a crucial election. It is time for Christians to get involved.

©2024 Probe Ministries

Worldviews Through History – Compared to a Christian View

Kerby Anderson provides a summary of how mankind has viewed the world from the Romans until today. This summary provides us a perspective against which to compare and contrast a

Christian, biblical worldview based on New Testament principles.

Roman Worldview

On the Probe Web site we often talk about [worldviews](#). I want to explain how the worldviews we talk about developed through history. We will be using as our foundation an excellent book written by Professor Glenn Sunshine whom I have met and also had the privilege of interviewing. His book is *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home*. {1}

Glenn Sunshine is a member of the church that Jonathan Edwards attended when he was at Yale. Professor Sunshine gave a lecture about Jonathan Edwards's worldview at a conference they held, and Chuck Colson invited him to teach with the Centurions program. He gave a talk about "How We Got Here" and then later turned it into *Why You Think the Way You Do*.



Since we will be talking about worldview, it would be good to begin with Glenn Sunshine's definition. "A worldview is the framework you use to interpret the world and your place in it." {2} You do not need to be a philosopher to have a worldview. All of us have a worldview.

Although Glenn Sunshine begins with the worldview of the Roman world, he quickly takes us back to neo-Platonism. It was the religion and philosophy based upon Plato's ideas. Neo-Platonism was the belief that the fundamental ground of reality is non-physical. Instead it is found in the world of ideas (and is known as *idealism*). These ideas cast shadows that cast other shadows until they arrive at the physical world.

According to this worldview, the whole universe exists as a hierarchy. The spiritual is superior to the physical. This

provides a scale of values for the world, but also provides a scale for humanity. In other words, those who are superior should rule over those who are inferior because they have demonstrated their ability to rule or conquer.

This view of hierarchy led to the idea of the father having superiority over all members of the family. It led to the idea that men are superior to women. It led to the idea that the emperor should rule and be worshipped. And it led to the idea that slaves are inferior to free people and nothing more than "living tools."[\[3\]](#)

This explains not only the success of Rome but also its ugly underside. Essentially there are two pictures of Rome: "the glittering empire and the rotten core."[\[4\]](#)

In Rome, human life did not have much value. While it is true that Romans abandoned human sacrifice, they engaged in other practices equally abhorrent. "They picked up the Etruscan practice of having people fight to the death in games in honor of the dead."[\[5\]](#)

Slavery provided the economic foundation for the empire. Abortion and infanticide were regularly practiced. "Roman families would usually keep as many healthy sons as they had and only one daughter; the rest were simply discarded."[\[6\]](#) And Roman law required that a father kill any visibly deformed child.

Transformation of the Pagan World

How did Christianity transform the pagan world? In AD 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian began a severe persecution of Christians. But because Christians were faithful and even willing to go to their deaths for their beliefs, their credibility increased. Eventually they were accepted and allowed to exercise their faith. Constantine even legalized the Christian faith by AD 313.

Once that took place, Christian ideas were allowed to percolate through society. One of the most important ideas was that human beings are created in the image of God. This idea has a profound impact. First, it meant that people are fundamentally equal to each other. No longer were there grounds for saying that some people are superior to others. In fact, "Christians were the first people in history to oppose slavery systematically."[\[7\]](#)

Christians (who believed that all are created in the image of God) treated the sick differently. They believed that even those who were deathly ill still deserved care. Dionysius of Alexandria reported that Christians (often at great risk to their own lives) "visited the sick fearlessly and ministered to them continually."[\[8\]](#) They would rescue babies abandoned in an act of infanticide. They would oppose abortion.

In economics, we can also see the influence of Christianity. The idea that God created the universe and then rested showed that God worked. That would mean that human beings (made in the image of God) are expected to work as well. God gave Adam and Eve intellectual work (in naming the animals) and physical work (in tending the Garden). Contrast this with the Roman world where physical work was seen as something that only slaves would do. Christians saw labor as something that was intrinsically valuable.

Labor is good; drudgery is bad. Drudgery is a result of the Fall (Genesis 3). So Christians were the first to develop technology to remove drudgery from work. Other civilizations had technology, but the West uniquely applied such things as water power to make work more valuable and worthwhile by eliminating the drudgery and repetitive nature of certain tasks.

Property rights were also well-developed during this period. "The medieval world under the influence of Christianity has a much stronger emphasis on property rights than other cultures

had.”[{9}](#)

These ideas come from a biblical worldview and began to be developed during the Middle Ages. This led to a complete transformation of western society and set it on a trajectory to our modern world.

Christianity and Politics

Glenn Sunshine points out that in the West, the dynamic between church and state is unique. Christianity was originally a persecuted minority religion. Even when Christianity was declared a legal religion, the church did not depend upon the state. So the question of the relationship between church and state has been an open question.

During the Middle Ages, two men helped shape political thinking. The first was Augustine, who described two realms: the City of God and the City of Man. He argued that human government is the result of sin. He believed that it is based upon selfishness. Government itself is corruption. In the absence of government, anarchy reigns. So government is a necessary evil.

The City of God is different in that it is not based upon force or coercion. It is based upon love, charity, and repentance. That doesn't mean that the City of Man and the City of God cannot work together. But overall, Augustine had a more pessimistic view of government.

Aristotle had a different view of government. As people in the Middle Ages began to rediscover Aristotle, they began to develop a different view of government. They saw government as a necessary institution that God has placed in the world. It had positive and legitimate functions.

Aristotle believed that government had a more positive role in society. But the Christian theologians had to also deal with

the problem of original sin. They wanted to find a way to prevent original sin from corrupting the government. The tension between these two views is what drives the discussion of western political theory.

Sunshine notes that “another check on civil government involved the idea of rights.”^{10} We normally associate the idea of rights, especially inalienable rights, with eighteenth century political theorists. However, John Locke’s idea that we have inalienable right to life, liberty, and property is already found in the writings of medieval theologians. The basis for this is a belief that all are created in the image of God. Therefore, all of us have a number of natural rights that the state cannot remove. Natural law was the idea that God wove moral laws into the fabric of the universe.

There also was the belief that there should be limitations on the jurisdiction of civil government and church government. One example is the Magna Carta, that stated that the English church was to be free and its liberties unimpaired by the crown.

The Renaissance and Enlightenment

What about the transformation into the modern world? In the early modern period, starting with the Renaissance in the fifteenth century to the seventeenth century, there are a whole series of events that shook the worldview consensus that developed in the Middle Ages.

Previously there were certain beliefs about truth: (1) that truth was absolute, (2) that truth is knowable to the human mind, and (3) that truth is necessary for society (a society could not be based upon a lie). The best good guide for truth would be the great civilizations of the past that lasted for so long and thus must have been based upon truth.

The idea was to go to the past to find truth. During the

Renaissance scholars were very successful in collecting manuscripts and finding ancient sources. Unfortunately, they found so many sources that they discovered there was not a coherent perspective. The ancient writers disagreed with each other. In a sense, the Renaissance was a victim of its own success. There was too much information. The more ancient sources they found, the less likely they would find agreement in the perspectives. Once it became obvious that this grand synthesis was not possible, the entire purpose of intellectual activity was thrown into question.

Then there were the wars of the Reformation in which various factions fought over who was the true follower of the prince of peace. The devastation of the religious wars left many people wondering if there really was religious certainty. No longer was the question "is Christianity true" but rather "which Christianity is true?" Now you had a multiplicity of options that left people confused. This also generated questions about the role of religion in society.

Then you also had the discovery of the New World and whole people groups that had never heard the gospel. Some began to ask questions like: Is it fair of God to send them all to hell because they had never heard of Christianity? Or, in light of biblical history, where did they come from? How do these people fit with the story of Noah? These discoveries called into question biblical morality and biblical history.

Also, people started using a new way of looking at knowledge. They began to use the scientific method to evaluate everything. This begins a significant shift in how we understand the world. There is a movement away from certainty toward probability. There is also a movement away from studying ancient authors toward scientific experimentation.

In the modern world, therefore, truth is not found in the past but in the present and future. With this is also questioning of biblical authority.

The Modern World and Christianity

Let me conclude by talking about our modern world and how Christians should respond. Sunshine concludes his book with chapters on “Modernity and Its Discontents” and “The Decay of Modernity.” Essentially the modern world has left humans with a loss of truth, certainty, and meaning in life. “Materialism provides a ready answer to the question of the meaning and purpose of life: there is none.”[\[11\]](#) From a Darwinian perspective, our only purpose is to pass our genes on to the next generation.

This rejection of spirituality and meaning has ushered in various other worldviews as alternatives. These would be such worldviews as postmodernism, neo-paganism, and the New Age Movement. Sunshine argues that in many ways we have been catapulted back to Rome.

Like Rome we value toleration as the supreme virtue. Rome believed that toleration was important because it kept the empire together. If you go beyond the lines of toleration, you are persecuted. This is similar to the mindset today. The highest value in a postmodern world is toleration. Toleration so defined means that we will embrace any and all lifestyles people may choose.

The Romans lived in an oversexed society.[\[12\]](#) So do we. Rome practiced abortion. So does our society. Rome was antinatal and made a deliberate attempt to prevent pregnancy. They focused on sexual enjoyment and did not want to bother with kids. In our modern world, birthrates in most of the western democracies are plummeting.

Western civilization is a product of ancient Roman civilization plus Christianity. Sunshine argues that once you removed Christianity, modern society reverted back to Roman society and a recovery of the ancient pagan worldview.

So how should Christians live in this world? Of course, we should live out a biblical worldview. Every generation is called to live faithfully to the gospel, and our generation is no exception.

This is especially important today since we are facing a society that is not willing to accept biblical ideas. In many ways, we face a challenge similar to the early church, though not as daunting. From history we can see that the early church did live faithfully and transformed the Roman world. Christians produced a totally new civilization: western culture. By living faithfully before the watching world, we will increase our credibility and earn the respect from those who are around us by living in accordance with biblical principles.

Notes

1. Glenn Sunshine, *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).
2. Ibid., 13.
3. Ibid., 31
4. Ibid., 20
5. Ibid., 30
6. Ibid., 33-34
7. Ibid., 43
8. Ibid., 44
9. Ibid., 76
10. Ibid., 91
11. Ibid., 177
12. Ibid., 33

Cohabitation and Living Together – A Biblical, Christian Worldview Perspective

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



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

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

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



That may explain why living together has gone from rare to routine in the secular world, but also explains why so many

Christian couples also see living together as acceptable. In the 1960s and 1970s, only about a half million were living together. One study from a few years ago, estimated that over 18 million Americans were cohabiting, and nearly a quarter of them were people over the age of 50 years old.[{2}](#)

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

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

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

Cohabitation is without a doubt changing the cultural landscape of our society. That is why we look at the social, psychological, and biblical aspects of cohabitation in this article.

Test-drive Relationships and Other Myths

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cohabitation and Perceptions

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

They found that cohabiting appears to be so counterproductive to long-lasting marriage that unmarried couples should avoid living together, especially if it involves children. They

argue that living together is “a fragile family form” that poses increased risk to women and children.

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

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

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

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

Whatever the reasons for cohabiting, this study documents the dangers. Couples who live together are more likely to divorce than those who don't. They are less happy and score lower on well-being indices, including sexual satisfaction. And cohabiting couples are often poorer than married couples.

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

Consequences of Cohabitation

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

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

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

One study found that "living with a romantic partner prior to marriage was associated with more negative and less positive

problem-solving support and behavior during marriage.” The reason is simple. Since there is less certainty of a long-term commitment, “there may be less motivation for cohabiting partners to develop their conflict resolution and support skills.”[{10}](#)

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

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

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

Cohabitation and the Bible

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

The Bible teaches that the act of sexual intercourse can have a strong bonding effect on two people. When done within the bounds of marriage, the man and the woman become one flesh.

Ephesian 5:31 says: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."

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

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

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

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

In the New Testament, believers are warned against persistent sin, including sexual sin (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The church is to keep believers accountable for their behavior. Believers are to judge themselves, lest they fall into God's hands (1 Corinthians 11:31-32). Sexual sin should not even be named

among believers (Ephesians 5:3).

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

Notes

1. David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know about Cohabitation before Marriage," *The National Marriage Project*, the Next Generation Series, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, January 1999.
2. Patricia Reaney, "More Americans 50 Years and Over are Cohabiting, Research Shows," Reuters, April 6, 2017, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-cohabitation/more-americans-50-years-and-over-are-cohabiting-research-shows-idUSKBN1782RI
3. Scott Stanley, "Premarital Cohabitation Is Still Associated with Greater Odds of Divorce, Institute for Family Studies, October 17, 2018, ifstudies.org/blog/premarital-cohabitation-is-still-associated-with-greater-odds-of-divorce
4. money.usnews.com/money/personal-finance/family-finance/articles/what-is-a-cohabitation-agreement
5. Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially* (New York: Random House, 2000).
6. David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The National Marriage Project*, January 1999.
7. Scott Stanley, "Premarital Cohabitation," *Institute for Family Studies*, October 17, 2018
8. Alfred DeMaris and K. Vaninadha Rao, "Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability in the United States: A Reassessment," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 54(1992), 178-190.

9. Stephen Nock, "A Comparison of Marriages and Cohabiting Relationships," *Journal of Family Issues* 16(1995), 53-76.
10. Catherine L. Cohan and Stacey Kleinbaum, "Toward A Greater Understanding of the Cohabitation Effect: Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Communication," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64(2002), 180-192.
11. Lee Robins and Darrel Reiger, *Psychiatric Disorders in America* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 72.
12. Andrew Greeley, *Faithful Attraction* (New York: Tom Doherty, 1991), 206.
13. Elizabeth Thompson, T. L. Hanson, and S.S. McLanahan, "Family Structure and Child Well-Being: Economic Resources versus Parental Behaviors," *Social Forces* 71(1994), 221-242.

Additional Resources

Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005, chapter thirteen.

Jeff Van Goethem, *Living Together: A Guide to Counseling Unmarried Couples*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004.

Glenn Stanton, *The Ring Makes All the Difference: The Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage*, Chicago: Moody Press, 2011.

Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially* (New York: Random House, 2000).

©2023 Probe Ministries

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

Heresy: Nothing New Under the Sun

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

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

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

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



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

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

aside to myths.” (2 Timothy 4:3)

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

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

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

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

Legalism

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

subtle lies of legalism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gnosticism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mysticism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Marcionism

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

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

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

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

We might add that an increasing number of pastors and

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

©2023 Probe Ministries

Woke Theology

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

Definition of the Term

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



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

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

These terms are sometimes misused, which is why Strachan also

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

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

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

Woke Ideology

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

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

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

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

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

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

Critical Race Theory

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Woke Corporations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How Should We Respond?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a worldview contrary to biblical principles.

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

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

Additional Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

©2023 Probe Ministries

Nuclear War

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of nuclear war from Annie Jacobsen's book Nuclear War: A Scenario with a biblical response.

Hell on Earth

Annie Jacobsen begins her book with a scenario: [{1}](#) a one-megaton thermonuclear bomb strikes the Pentagon and vaporizes the building and the 27,000 employees within it. A mile away the marble columns of the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials burst apart and disintegrate. Two and a half miles west at National Park, the clothes of a majority of the 35,000 people watching the ballgame catch on fire.

Her book, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, takes you through, in a minute-by-minute description, what would happen if a “bolt out of the blue” nuclear attack took place on U.S. soil. This 370-page book isn't for the faint-hearted, but it is an in-depth investigation in how we got to this place in world history and what would happen if the unthinkable became reality. And the book provides a sequel to the 2023 biographical film, *Oppenheimer*.



Why are we discussing this difficult topic of nuclear war now? First, there is a need to educate a new generation. Although Americans talked about the danger of nuclear war during the Cold War years, much less has been said in recent years. Second, the threat of nuclear war is even greater today because of countries like North Korea that have nuclear weapons and other countries like Iran that are attempting to develop nuclear weapons. Third, this discussion is relevant because so many documents about nuclear war have been declassified. We know so much more about nuclear war than we knew just a few years ago.

It is impossible for our minds to comprehend what happens in a nuclear blast. The air heats to one hundred and eighty million degrees Fahrenheit. This is nearly five times hotter than the temperature in the center of the sun. The blast levels any structure within miles, but also creates winds travelling at several hundred miles per hour.

The nuclear fireball then rises like a hot-air balloon forming the iconic mushroom cloud with cap and stem. Then the inferno begins. Gas lines explode and look like giant blowtorches. Washington, D.C. has now become a mega-inferno. Asphalt streets turn to liquid from the intense heat. More than a million people are dead or dying within two minutes after the detonation.

Outside of the blast area, the electromagnetic pulse obliterates all radio, television, and the Internet. Cars with electric ignition systems cannot start. Water stations cannot pump water. And deadly radiation spreads to those who survived the initial blast.

Nuclear war may be unthinkable, but that is why we are thinking and talking about it.

Happens Too Fast

Nuclear war could develop unthinkably fast and devastate our world.

An intercontinental ballistic missile is a long-range missile that delivers nuclear weapons to political and military targets on the other side of the world. These ICBMs exist to do one thing: kill millions of people in another country.

Back when the ICBM was invented, Herb York, the Pentagon's chief scientist, wanted to calculate how many minutes it would take for it to reach the Soviet Union.[\[2\]](#) A group of defense scientists estimated that it would take 26 minutes and 40

seconds. From launch to annihilation takes just 1,600 seconds. Nuclear war happens too fast.

Today that estimate varies because we have nine countries that possess nuclear weapons: Russia, France, China, Pakistan, India, Israel, North Korea, the UK, and the US. Given North Korea's geographical location, the launch-to-target time frame from the Korean peninsula to the East Coast of the US would be about 33 minutes.

But a nuclear blast can come even sooner from nuclear-armed, nuclear-powered submarines. These submarines are called "boomers" or even have been called the "handmaidens of the apocalypse." They are undetectable under the sea and can sneak up very close to a nation's coast and launch a first-strike attack. This is why the president actually has only a six-minute window to decide on a nuclear counterattack.

Launch on Warning

America has a policy known as "launch on warning."^[3] What that means is that America will launch its nuclear weapons once its early-warning electronic sensor system warns of an impending nuclear attack. Put another way, the US won't wait to check if a warning is accurate, it will not wait and physically absorb a nuclear blow before launching its own nuclear weapons at whoever sent a missile to them.

This policy has been in place since the height of the cold war and represented an incredibly high risk. As one advisor explains, launch on warning during at time of intense crisis is a recipe for catastrophe.

Presidential candidates have promised to change this policy, but nothing has happened so far. George W. Bush in 2000 vowed to address this policy: "Keeping so many weapons on high alert may create an unacceptable risk for accidental or unauthorized launch." Barack Obama argued that "keeping nuclear weapons ready to launch on a moment's notice is a dangerous relic of

the Cold War.” President Biden has also encouraged to eliminate this perilous policy. No change has been made.

President’s Football

The decision to launch a nuclear strike comes from the president. How did the government decide to give the president the nuclear football? The story begins with Harold Agnew back in 1959.^{4} He visited a NATO base and noticed there were four F-84F aircraft at the end of the runway; each was carrying two nuclear gravity bombs. This meant that these nuclear bombs were in the custody of one U.S. Army private armed with a M1 rifle with eight rounds of ammunition. The only safeguard against unauthorized use of an atomic bomb was this single GI surrounded by numbers of foreign troops on foreign territory with thousands of Soviet troops just miles away.

When he got back to the U.S., Agnew contacted a project engineer at Sandia Laboratories and asked if they could put an electronic “lock” on the bomb’s firing circuits that would prevent others from arming the nuclear bomb. They produced a lock and coded switch that would be activated with a three-digit code.

They presented the idea and the device to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and then to President Kennedy who ordered it to be done. But the military objected. A general asked how a pilot somewhere in the world could get a code from the President of the United States to arm a nuclear weapon before being overrun by a massively superior number of Soviet troops? And why not have other nuclear bombs also coded?

The answer came in the creation of the President’s Football, which is an emergency satchel. This gave the president, not the military, control of America’s nuclear arsenal. The Football must always be near the president.

There is a story of how important it is for the president to have access to the Football.[{5}](#) When President Clinton was visiting Syria, President Hafez al-Assad's handlers tried to prevent Clinton's military aide from riding in an elevator with him. The Secret Service would not let that happen, and they did not let that happen.

Inside is a set of documents known as the Black Book. Robert "Buzz" Patterson served as a military aide to President Clinton, and I was able to interview him one time on [my radio program](#). He likened the Black Book to a "Denny's breakfast menu" because of how it looked. The president must choose retaliatory targets from a predetermined nuclear strike list on the menu.

Let me end with this question: Do you believe the current president has a mental capacity to make a rational decision of about launching nuclear weapons?

War Games

One question that was asked more than forty years ago was whether anyone could win a nuclear war. Spoiler alert: no one can. President Reagan ordered a simulated war game with the name Proud Prophet to explore the outcome and long-term effects of a nuclear war.[{6}](#)

The research used mathematical models to predict outcomes and was conducted at the National War College. Participants were cloistered away inside a secure location to prevent leaks. The results were only declassified in 2012, but much of the material was blacked out. Fortunately, this declassification allowed participants to discuss it without violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

Over the two weeks, every simulated scenario ended the same way. Sometimes they began with a tactical nuclear strike and a so-called limited nuclear war. Other times they simulated

exercises with NATO and then with other exercises without NATO. There were scenarios where the U.S. launched nuclear war preemptively. Sometimes that was when the Pentagon was supposedly in focused calm and other when in a crisis mode.

Sadly, the result was the same. Once a nuclear war starts, there is no way to win it or even end it. No matter how a nuclear war begins, it ends with complete Armageddon-like destruction. As one participant put it, this destruction "made all the wars of the past five hundred years pale in comparison." At least a half billion (and probably more like a billion) people die in the war's opening salvo. Then billions more die of radiation poisoning and starvation.

Nuclear Winter

When the bombs cease striking targets, the world turns cold and dark. Everything is on fire. Smoke produces noxious smog of pyrotoxins. Fires in the cities ignite other fires. Even in the less-populated areas, forest fires rage.

The density of soot reduces global temperatures by 20-40 degrees depending on the location. Earth plunges into the horror known as a "nuclear winter." This might be a familiar term for those of us who lived in the 1980s. Astronomer Carl Sagan wrote about it and warned us of the dangers of nuclear war.

A nuclear war would change the troposphere and thus the amount of sunlight reaching the earth. Once the radioactive fog and haze diminish, the ozone layer disappears, and the sun's warming rays are now killer UV rays.

Earth is no longer as hospitable for humans as it once was. After millennia of planting and harvesting, the few humans to survive return to a hunter-gatherer existence.

Biblical Perspective

We will conclude this discussion of nuclear war with a biblical perspective. Let's begin with the realization that God is sovereign and in control. But that doesn't mean that He would never allow a nuclear war to take place. Throughout history, we have had tyrants and armies destroy people groups and civilizations. God used pagan nations to judge the nation of Israel.

How should we respond? Since the first atomic bombings at the end of World War II, there has been a condition known as "nuclear anxiety." Jesus instructs us not to "be anxious about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34), and Paul also tells us not to "be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6). Jesus even says that "if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved" (Matthew 24:22).

In the book of Daniel, we have another reminder of God's sovereignty that came in the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar. It reminded him of the fact that God "rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men" (Daniel 4:17). Nebuchadnezzar knew more about human sovereignty than anyone and proclaimed God's sovereignty over the earth at the end of his days (4:34).

Some Christians have suggested that the Bible may be describing a nuclear war. In the book of Revelation, there is a description of the poisoning of the waters (8:11), death of the earth's vegetation (8:17), the end of ocean life (16:3), and the inability to block the sun's rays resulting in severe burns (16:8).

There is a description of stars of heaven falling to earth (6:13) that some have suggested might be describing nuclear missiles raining down on earth during a nuclear war. These would be visible as they enter the atmosphere and begin striking the cities on earth.

Even passages in the Old Testament might point to the effects of a nuclear war. For example, in Zechariah 14:12 we read that “the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.”

One prophecy yet to be fulfilled can be found in Ezekiel 38 that describes nations that will come against Israel. But critics point to the fact that it says they are riding horses, wearing helmets and armor, and wielding swords (38:4-5). That doesn't look like a modern army. But I remember a famous quote from Albert Einstein: “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.” The world might look very different after a nuclear war.

In this article we have been discussing the unthinkable: a nuclear war. We should remember the words of Jesus: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Notes

1. Annie Jacobsen, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, NY: Dutton, 2024, xvii.
2. Ibid., 53-55.
3. Ibid., 59-60.
4. Ibid., 86-87.
5. Ibid., 84-85.
6. Ibid., 173-178.

Worldview Deficiency

Kerby Anderson addresses the very sad and dire lack of a biblical worldview in the majority of people claiming to be Christians.

Over the last few months, I have been doing some interviews on books that document (in one way or another) a lack of moral behavior among evangelicals. If you read articles in *Christianity Today*, *Ministry Watch*, or *World* magazine, you see other examples.

As the authors document what is happening in the evangelical world, I always like to bring us back to why. The “why” question is probably more important than the “what” question. Why aren’t Christians acting like Christians? Of course, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Christians are supposed to be different than the world, but there is abundant evidence that they are very much like the world around them.

Each year, George Barna posts [The American Worldview Inventory](#). His most recent report shows that very few Americans (including evangelicals) have a biblical worldview. About four percent have a biblical worldview with four percent more with a variety of different worldviews. The dominant worldview (encompassing 92 percent) is the worldview of syncretism.

The classic definition of syncretism is that it is an amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. In the Christian context, it is an acceptance and even affirmation of a diverse set of beliefs that aren’t biblical. That is best illustrated by the fact that a majority (58%) of American adults don’t believe in absolute truth and instead believe that moral truth is up to the individual to decide.

You would hope pastors might be able to correct some of this

theological confusion. But George Barna found that less than a majority (41%) of senior pastors have a biblical worldview. And the problem is worse with youth pastors. Only 12 percent of them have a biblical worldview.

We shouldn't be surprised at what is happening in the evangelical world when we understand the why behind it.

“Is Race a Social Construct?”

How do you respond to the assertion that race is a social construct?

Thank you for your question. It may surprise you, but this is one area where I think Christians can agree with some of the statements being made by woke progressives. Although they might want to say that many other issues (class, gender, etc.). are examples of social constructs, we could agree that race is an example.

In [my booklet on “A Biblical Point of View on Racism,”](#) I give many examples of why the term “race” is imprecise. First, the Bible 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 does not 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 taught the Athenians that they came from the same source in the creation as everyone else. If you have ever watched people at an international airport, you can conclude that human beings come

in so many shapes, sizes, and colors. Yet all these differences go back to the parents of the human race (Genesis 1-3, 1 Corinthians 15).

Science has also shown us that “race” is not a precise term. Research on the human genome project shows us that such racial characteristics (such as skin color) are insignificant genetically. People of every race can interbreed and produce fertile offspring.

One 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. And of this variation, only six percent can be linked to racial categories. These “racial differences” are trivial when you consider there are 3 billion base pairs of human DNA.

Another reason the term “race” also lacks precision is because of interracial marriage, which is blurring distinctions even more. Consider one well-known athlete: Tiger Woods. His heritage is Thai, black, white, Chinese, and Native American.

As you can see, the term “race” is not very precise and thus I think qualifies as a social construct.

Kerby Anderson

Posted June 2024

© 2024 Probe Ministries

Biblical Reliability

Kerby Anderson provides classic reasons the bible can be believed and trusted as a divine book from God.

Is the Bible historically reliable? That is an important question that deserves an answer since so many people today believe that the Bible is not accurate or reliable. We will look at various tests we can use to evaluate any book and will discover that the Bible is reliable and trustworthy. But before we look at the Bible's reliability, it is worth mentioning its uniqueness.

No doubt you have heard people say they don't read the Bible because it is merely another book. That is not true. Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell spend pages in their book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, listing all the many ways the Bible is unique.



First, it is unique in character. This includes the fact that it is unique in time span, geographical production, authorship, literary genres, and languages. Professor F.F. Bruce, in *The Books and the Parchments*, summarized it this way: "The Bible, at first sight, appears to be a collection of literature—mainly Jewish. If we enquire into the circumstances under which the various Biblical documents were written, we find that they were written at intervals over a space of nearly 1400 years the writers wrote in various lands, from Italy in the west to Mesopotamia and possible Persia in the east."

He goes on to remind us that "The writers themselves were a heterogeneous number of people, not only separated from each other by hundreds of years and hundreds of miles but belonging to the most diverse walks of life . . . The writings themselves belong to a great variety of literary types. They include history, law, religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyric poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively Biblical types of prophecy and apocalyptic."

The Bible is also unique in its theology. There are teachings in the Bible that are not found in any other religious book.

And the Bible is certainly unique in its impact (art, literature, history) and circulation (best-selling book of all time).

The Bible is unique, but it is reliable? The Bible makes significant claims about itself, and events recorded in the Bible. These are historical events and can be tested by the same criteria used to evaluate other historical documents.

There are three specific tests scholars, researchers, and archaeologists use to determine the authenticity of historical material. There are three basic principles of historiography: the internal test, the external test, and the bibliographic test. We will apply these three tests to the Bible to determine its reliability as an accurate historical source.

Internal Test

The internal test looks at a document to first see what the document claims for itself, and then to see if there are internal contradictions. What does the Bible claim for itself?

The Bible makes some very significant claims. It claims to be the Word of God. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Just because the Bible claims to be inspired is not enough to accept that claim, but it does serve to remind us about the unique nature of the Bible. Jesus made an even more significant claim: "But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (Luke 16:17).

The Bible is unique in another significant way: its unity. Consider that the Bible was written over a 1400-year period, by over 40 authors, from many walks of life. It was written in three languages, on different continents, under different circumstances. And it addresses numerous controversial topics, and yet we have unity and consistency

throughout the Bible. Imagine if you had three people living at the same time, same place, speaking the same language writing on one controversial topic. Would they agree? They would not. The unity of the Bible suggests its inspiration.

But this raises another question. Skeptics often like to point to contradictions in the Bible. My quick answer often is to merely to point to the number of books written over the last few centuries that provide reasonable answers to apparent contradictions. These many books illustrate that these difficult biblical texts can be resolved.

Professor Gleason Archer has written about Bible difficulties and concludes, "As I have dealt with one apparent discrepancy after another and have studied alleged contradictions between the biblical record and evidence of linguistics, archaeology, or science, my confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture has been repeatedly certified and strengthened."

The reliability of the gospels is also supported by what is called undesigned coincidences. Professor Tim McGrew has been on my radio program to talk about these, and his wife Lydia has written a book on the subject. The writer in one gospel provides part of a testimony, while the- writer of another gospel provides another key fact. These are not planned but give a fuller picture of the event. They are like pieces of a puzzle and provide yet another important piece of evidence for the internal test.

External Test

The external test looks at how the document aligns itself with facts, dates, and persons from its world. The facts from archaeology and history validate the historical accuracy of the Bible. In previous articles, we have provided many examples of archaeological verification of the historical accuracy of the Bible.[\[1\]](#)

Dr. William Albright concluded, "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of the Bible." Yale professor and expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls, Millar Burrows explained, "Archeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine."

One of the most famous and most significant archeological finds was the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#). Over 800 fragments were found including a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah. It has provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament.

Another archaeological find occurred in 1993 when a stone monument fragment was discovered near the border of Israel and Syria. It mentions the "House of David" and implies a victory by Ben-Hadad, king of Damascus (1 Kings 15:20).

More recently, archaeologists uncovered a Curse Tablet found in Joshua's altar on Mount Ebal (Joshua 8:30). This ancient Hebrew inscription is centuries older than any known Hebrew inscription from ancient Israel. This is the earliest recorded Divine name in Israel and supports the biblical date of the Exodus.

There are also archaeological finds that validate the New Testament. In 1961, archeological work at Caesarea Maritima discovered a stone with the name "Pontius Pilate." He was a prefect of the Roman province of Judea and was responsible for ordering the crucifixion of Jesus. More recently, a ring was found at the Herodium (a desert palace outside of Bethlehem) with the inscription "Pontius Pilate." The ring was not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate and was likely used for official communications.

Classical scholar and historian Colin Hemer chronicles Luke's

accuracy in the book of Acts. With painstaking detail, he identifies 84 facts in the last 16 chapters of the Book of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This includes nautical details, names of gods, designation of magistrates, and proper names and titles.

Bibliographic Test

Now we will look at the bibliographic test. Since we do not have the original documents of any ancient literature, this test is used to evaluate the transmission from the original document to the manuscripts we possess today. The Bible is far superior to any ancient historical book in its- manuscript evidence with respect to time and the number of manuscripts.

Sir Frederic Kenyon observed, "In no other case is the interval of time between the composition of the book and the date of the earliest manuscripts so short as in that of the New Testament."

Many of the books on apologetics or biblical reliability provide a chart of the gap between the original manuscript and the earliest copy that we have: Plato (1200 years), Thucydides, *History* (1300 years), and Tacitus, *Annals* (1000 years). That smallest gap is Homer's *Iliad* (500 years). By contrast, the gap for the New Testament is just a few decades.

Above, we mentioned the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Until their discovery, there was a significant gap between the original and the earliest copy (around AD 900). The discovery allowed us to now see there was an accurate transmission over a 1000-year period.

The number of manuscripts is also important. When we have more manuscripts, we can compare them and have a better understanding of what was written in the original document. We have seven copies of Plato, eight copies of Thucydides, and twenty copies of Tacitus. There are over six hundred copies of

Homer's *Illiad*.

By contrast, the number of manuscripts for the Bible is significant. The total number of Greek and non-Greek New Testament manuscripts is nearly 24,000. The number of Old Testament scrolls is more than 42,000. F.F. Bruce concludes, "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament."

The early church fathers also quoted from the New Testament as they wrote to each other. We have more the 36,000 of scripture citations from them as well.

John Warwick Montgomery concluded, "To be skeptical of the resultant text of the New Testament books is to allow all of classical antiquity to slip into obscurity; for no documents of the ancient period are as well attested bibliographically as the New Testament."

One Last Test: Prophecy

We have discussed three tests that show the reliability of the Bible, especially when compared to other literature of antiquity. The Bible passed the internal test because of its unity and cohesion. The Bible passed the external test because of the history and archaeology that confirms its accuracy. And the Bible passes the bibliographic test because of the number of manuscripts and the short time gap between the original and its copies.

But there is an additional test that only the Bible can meet. More than one-fourth of the Bible's content was prophetic at the time that it was originally written. More than half of these 1000+ prophecies have been fulfilled down to the minutest detail. No other book (religious or secular) can make this claim.

Fifty years ago, J. Barton Payne compiled the *Encyclopedia of*

Biblical Prophecy. It lists 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 prophecies in the New Testament, for a total of 1,817. These encompass 8,352 verses.

In previous articles we have discussed the [prophecies of the Messiah](#). Hundreds of prophecies written down in the Old Testament are literally fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. For example, Zechariah records prophecies about the Messiah that were fulfilled by Jesus during the week He entered Jerusalem and was crucified. He predicted that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem riding a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). That was fulfilled during what we often call “Palm Sunday” (Matthew 21:5; Luke 19:32-37).

The price of his betrayal would be thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12-13) and the money would be cast onto the floor of the Temple. That was fulfilled by Judas and the chief priests (Matthew 27:3-10). Also, he predicted that the betrayal money would be used to buy a potter’s field- (Zechariah 11:13). We read about its fulfillment in Matthew 27:6-10.

Prophecy is history written before it happens and is another indication of the inspiration of the Bible. It also can give us confidence that prophecies that have not been fulfilled will be fulfilled in the future.

The Bible is historically accurate, and it also shows in many ways that it is also the inspired word of God.

Additional Resources

F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1984.

F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1964.

Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic*

History, Eisenbrauns reprint edition 1990.

Josh McDowell and Sean McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017.

Lydia McGrew, *Hidden in Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts*, Deward Publishing, 2017.

J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1973.

Chauncey Saunders, *Introduction to Research in English Literary History*, New York: Macmillan, 1952.

Notes

1. probe.org/biblical-archaeology/, probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/,
probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/

©2024 Probe Ministries

Spiritual Abuse

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

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



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

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

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

Jesus addressed the issue of spiritual abuse many times when he confronted the Pharisees. In Matthew 23, he proclaims seven woes to the Scribes and Pharisees. He concludes with: "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" He describes them this way in John 8:44, "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires."

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

Spiritual abuse can occur when someone is in a position of spiritual authority misuses that authority to control or

manipulate another Christian. It may take the form of using religious works to control. It may involve misusing Scripture or twisting biblical concepts. Churches or Christian organizations may be guilty of teaching false doctrine. Even churches that teach sound doctrine may be guilty allowing worship leaders to bring music into the church with bad theology.

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

Characteristics of Abusive Churches

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

1. Abusive churches have a control-oriented style of leadership. The leader may be arrogant and dogmatic. The leader often is portrayed as more in tune spiritually with God. Thus, these leaders often are not accountable to anyone.
2. Second, the leader of an abusive church often uses manipulation to gain complete submission from their members. These tactics may involve guilt, peer pressure, and intimidation. The leader may even suggest that divine judgment from God will result if you question them.
3. There is a rigid, legalistic lifestyle involving numerous requirements and minute details for daily life. Members are pressured to give a certain amount of time and money to the church. Often members drop out of school, quit working, or neglect their families to meet a church-designated quota.
4. Abusive churches tend to change their names, especially

once they are exposed by the media. Often this is done because the church received bad publicity or was involved in a significant scandal.

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

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

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

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

Leaving an Abusive Church

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

The emotional damage is significant. One author suggested that victims of church abuse or other forms of spiritual abuse

suffer PTSD(post-traumatic stress disorder). They find it difficult to trust others, whether leaders in a church or other leaders in their life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enabling Behavior and a Biblical Response – Part 1

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

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

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

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

Paul reminds Timothy (1 Timothy 3:2-3) that a leader in the church should be “must be above reproach . . . sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a

drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.”

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

Christians today also enable spiritual abuse when they value the institution over individuals. We have seen this in our numerous radio

programs involving church sexual abuse. Churches and denominations have been too quick to cover up sexual abuse scandals and intimidate victims. Time and again we hear them worrying about their reputations or the reputation of the church or denomination.

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

Enabling Behavior and a Biblical Response – Part 2

Christians today enable spiritual abuse when they value performance over character. Churches are often quicker to remove a pastor teaching heresy than to remove a pastor with character deficits. We should address heresy. Peter warns (2

Peter 2:1) that there will be “false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them, bringing swift destruction on themselves.”

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

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

Christians today enable spiritual abuse when they value anger and outrage over grace and meekness. Too often we reward candidates who raise their voice and point their fingers by electing them to office. We may enjoy a pastor who pounds the pulpit and condemns society, but is that what is required of a church leader?

Christians should not be enabling this behavior, they should be confronting this behavior and even condemning this behavior. This first step should be to follow the instructions of Jesus (Matthew 18:15-17) to go directly to a person engaging in spiritual abuse (after prayer and reflection). If he listens to you, “you have won your brother over. But if he

will not listen, take one or two others along.” If this is happening in society, we should speak out against spiritual abuse and abusive churches.

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

Additional Resources

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

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

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

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

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

©2024 Probe Ministries