

# Integrity – A Christian Virtue

*Kerby Anderson helps us understand the true meaning and importance of the Christian virtue of integrity. From a biblical worldview perspective, integrity is a critical element of a Christ centered life. Understanding integrity will help us incorporate it in our daily walk with Jesus Christ.*



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

## Integrity and the Bible

The subject of this article is the concept of integrity—a character quality that we often talk about but don't see quite as regularly in the lives of public officials or even in the lives of the people we live and work with.

The word *integrity* comes from the same Latin root as *integer* and implies a wholeness of person. Just as we would talk about a whole number, so also we can talk about a whole person who is undivided. A person of integrity is living rightly, not divided, nor being a different person in different circumstances. A person of integrity is the same person in private that he or she is in public.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about those who were “pure in heart” (Matt. 5:8), implying an undividedness in following God's commands. Integrity, therefore, not only implies an undividedness, but a moral purity as well.

The Bible is full of references to integrity, character, and moral purity. Consider just a few Old Testament references to integrity. In 1 Kings 9:4, God instructs Solomon to walk with “integrity of heart and uprightness” as his father did. David

says in 1 Chronicles 29:17, "I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity." And in Psalm 78:70-72 we read that "David shepherded them with integrity of heart, with skillful hands."

The book of Proverbs provides an abundance of verses on integrity. Proverbs 10:9 says that, "He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out." A person of integrity will have a good reputation and not have to fear that he or she will be exposed or found out. Integrity provides a safe path through life.

Proverbs 11:3 says, "The integrity of the upright will guide them, But the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them." Proverbs is a book of wisdom. The wise man or woman will live a life of integrity, which is a part of wisdom. Those who follow corruption or falsehood will be destroyed by the decisions and actions of their lives.

Proverbs 20:7 says, "A righteous man who walks in his integrity; How blessed are his sons after him." Integrity leaves a legacy. A righteous man or woman walks in integrity and provides a path for his or her children to follow.

All of these verses imply a sense of duty and a recognition that we must have a level of discernment of God's will in our lives. That would certainly require that people of integrity be students of the Word, and then diligently seek to apply God's Word to their lives. The book of James admonishes us to be "doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (James 1:22). That is my goal in this article as we talk about integrity.

## **Corruption**

As we examine integrity, I would like to talk about its opposite: corruption. We claim to be a nation that demands integrity, but do we really? We say we want politicians to be

honest, but really don't expect them to be; perhaps because often we aren't as honest as we should be. We say that we are a nation of laws, but often we break some of those same laws—like speed limits and jaywalking— and try to justify our actions.

A powerful illustration can be found in the book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, by James Patterson and Peter Kim.<sup>[1]</sup> Using a survey technique that guaranteed the privacy and anonymity of the respondents, they were able to document what Americans really believe and do. The results were startling.

First, they found there was no moral authority in America. "Americans are making up their own moral codes. Only 13 percent of us believe in all the Ten Commandments. Forty percent of us believe in five of the Ten Commandments. We choose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded more respect."

Second, they found Americans are not honest. "Lying has become an integral part of American culture, a trait of the American character. We lie and don't even think about it. We lie for no reason." The authors estimate that 91 percent of us lie regularly.

Third, marriage and family are no longer sacred institutions. "While we still marry, we have lost faith in the institution of marriage. A third of married men and women confessed to us that they've had at least one affair. Thirty percent aren't really sure that they still love their spouse."

Fourth, they found that the "Protestant [work] ethic is long gone from today's American workplace. Workers around America frankly admit that they spend more than 20 percent (7 hours a week) of their time at work totally goofing off. That amounts to a four-day work week across the nation."

The authors conclude by suggesting that we have a new set of

commandments for America:

- I don't see the point in observing the Sabbath (77 percent).
- I will steal from those who won't really miss it (74 percent).
- I will lie when it suits me, so long as it doesn't cause any real damage (64 percent).
- I will cheat on my spouse; after all, given the chance, he or she will do the same (53 percent).
- I will procrastinate at work and do absolutely nothing about one full day in every five (50 percent).

We may say that we are a nation that wants integrity, but apparently a majority of us lack it in our own personal lives.

## **The Traits of Integrity**

### *Honesty*

I would now like to turn our focus toward four key traits found in a person of integrity. One of those traits is honesty.

We talked about some of the findings from the book *The Day America Told the Truth*. The authors found that nearly everyone in America lies and does so on a fairly regular basis. Truth telling apparently is no longer a virtue people try to adopt for their lives. We may say we want people to tell the truth, but we don't do it ourselves.

That is the problem with corruption; it is corrosive. We believe we can be dishonest just a little bit. We say we want people to be honest, but then we cheat on our taxes. We say we want people to obey the laws, but then we go "just a little" over the speed limit. We want to be honest just enough to ease our conscience.

It's a little like the story of the man who sent a letter to

the Internal Revenue Service. He said, "I cheated on my income taxes, and felt so bad that I couldn't sleep. Enclosed find a check for \$150. And if I still can't sleep I'll send the rest of what I owe."

Many of us can relate to that man. We want to be honest, but sometimes we find it easier to be dishonest. So we try to find a way to compromise our values so that a little bit of lying doesn't bother our conscience.

### *Trustworthiness*

Another characteristic of a person of integrity is trustworthiness. A person of integrity is unimpeachable. He or she stands by principles no matter what the consequences. A person of integrity realizes there are moral absolutes even in a world of relative values.

In Tom Clancy's novel, *Clear and Present Danger*, Jack Ryan is about the only noble character in the book. As he begins to uncover this clandestine government plot, he is confronted by the antagonist who makes fun of Jack Ryan's principles. He says, "You're a boy scout, Jack. Don't you get it? It's all grey. It's all grey."

I wonder how often people of integrity hear a similar statement in corporate board rooms or the halls of government. It's all grey. There are no absolute right and wrong values. It's all relative.

A person of integrity knows that it isn't all grey. There are principles worth standing by and promoting. There are values that should govern our lives. We have a responsibility to follow God's law rather than the crowd.

When the book of Proverbs talks of the "integrity of the upright" it implies that we adhere to God's will and God's laws. We have a duty to obey God's absolute commands in our lives and become men and women of integrity.

## *"Private" Life*

There is a popular book on the market entitled, *Who You Are When Nobody's Looking*. Who are you when nobody's looking? Will I see the same person that I see when you are in a group of people? Do you do the right thing no matter what the circumstances?

There was a newspaper story years ago about a man in Long Beach who went into a KFC to get some chicken for himself and the young lady with him. She waited in the car while he went in to pick up the chicken. Inadvertently the manager of the store handed the guy the box in which he had placed the financial proceeds of the day instead of the box of chicken. You see, he was going to make a deposit and had camouflaged it by putting the money in a fried chicken box.

The fellow took his box, went back to the car, and the two of them drove away. When they got to the park and opened the box, they discovered they had a box full of money. Now that was a very vulnerable moment for the average individual. However, realizing the mistake, he got back into the car and returned to the place and gave the money back to the manager. Well, the manager was elated! He was so pleased that he told the young man, "Stick around, I want to call the newspaper and have them take your picture. You're the most honest guy in town.

"Oh, no, don't do that!" said the fellow.

"Why not?" asked the manager.

"Well," he said, "you see, I'm married, and the woman I'm with is not my wife." [\[2\]](#)

Apparently he had not considered the consequences of his actions. Even when he was doing something right, it turned out he was also doing something wrong. A person of integrity is integrated and authentic. There is no duplicity of attitudes and actions.

When the apostle Paul lists the qualifications for an elder in the church, he says “he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (1 Tim. 3:7). This is not only a desirable quality for church elders, it is a quality we should all aspire to. Christians should be “above reproach” in their public testimony before the watching world.

In the next section we will talk more about the importance of a public testimony of integrity and conclude our study.

## **Public Testimony**

I would like to conclude our discussion by addressing the importance of integrity in our daily lives.

It’s been said that we may be the only Bible some people ever read. In other words, people around us often judge the truthfulness of Christianity by its affect in our lives. If they see us as hypocrites, they may not go any further in their investigation of the gospel.

Every day we rub shoulders with people who are watching us. Your life will demonstrate to them whether Christianity is true or false. They make value judgements about you by your attitudes and actions. Have we made the right choice?

After his Sunday messages, the pastor of a church in London got on the trolley Monday morning to return to his study downtown. He paid his fare, and the trolley driver gave him too much change. The pastor sat down and fumbled the change and looked it over, counted it eight or ten times. And, you know the rationalization, “It’s wonderful how God provides.” He realized he was tight that week and this was just about what he would need to break even, at least enough for his lunch. He wrestled with himself all the way down that old trolley trail that led to his office. Finally, he came to the stop and got up, and he couldn’t live with himself. He walked

up to the trolley driver, and said, "Here. You gave me too much change. You made a mistake." The driver said, "No, it was no mistake. You see, I was in your church last night when you spoke on honesty, and I thought I would put you to the test." {3}

Fortunately the pastor passed the test. Do you pass the test when unbelievers look at you and your life and wonder if the gospel is true? It's a convicting question. When we live lives of integrity, opportunities for evangelism and ministry surface. When we don't, those opportunities dry up.

I have been encouraging you to develop a life of integrity. In some respects, it's a life-long process. But we have to begin somewhere. Our lives are the collection of choices we have made in the past<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> both good choices and bad choices. Perhaps you have seen the poem:

Sow a thought, reap an act.  
Sow an act, reap a habit.  
Sow a habit, reap a character.  
Sow a character, reap a destiny.

I would encourage you to begin to focus on the verses and biblical principles delineated here. If you want to be a person of integrity, it won't happen overnight. But if you don't make a deliberate plan to be a person of integrity, it will never happen at all.

## Notes

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

*Dallas Times Herald*, 23 Sept. 1966.

Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations* (Assurance Publishers, 1990).



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# Partial Birth Abortion – From a Biblical Perspective

## A Commitment to Gruesomeness

This year is the twenty-seventh year of legal abortion, and the only thing that appears to have changed in the debate is the addition of newer and more gruesome abortion procedures. At the top of the list is partial birth abortion.

The first legislative debate on partial birth abortion took place back in 1995 when Representative Charles Canady introduced a bill to ban this unknown procedure. Congressional testimony revealed that a fetus was delivered feet first, up to the head, so that the skull could be pierced and the brain suctioned out.

Canady's bill was a response to a paper delivered by Martin Haskell, a doctor from Dayton, Ohio, at the National Abortion Federation. At the time, reaction to Haskell's practice ran high in Ohio and eventually nationwide. The state of Ohio became the first state to prohibit the procedure and Canady's bill began to focus the issue on a national level.

Who would have predicted that such a long and protracted battle would take place over the last five years? And perhaps that shows how extreme the abortion lobby has become by its willingness to defend any abortion procedure no matter how far advanced the pregnancy might be. It also demonstrates the judiciary's willingness to defend abortion at every turn.

Although Charles Canady's bill was passed by both the House (288 to 139) and Senate (54 to 44), it was vetoed by President

Clinton in April of 1996. Meanwhile, pro-life advocates were turning their energies to state legislatures. Partial birth abortion bans spread like wildfire through the legislatures. Today nearly three out of every five state legislatures have passed a ban, and some of these bans have been passed over gubernatorial vetoes. Unfortunately, liberal judges in various judicial jurisdictions have overturned many of these bans, alleging that they are vague or could threaten the life of the mother.

Congress has also reconsidered the issue again. Senator Rick Santorum reintroduced the ban in January 1997. A month later the newspaper *American Medical News* published an interview with Ron Fitzsimmons, executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers. He admitted that he lied on national television regarding the number of partial birth abortions performed and the reasons for them. This was a stunning revelation that thousands of such abortions had been performed and usually for no medical indications. The momentum for a ban on partial birth abortions seemed to be growing. And the bill again passed both houses of Congress with a larger margin. But the Senate vote (64 to 36) was still not quite large enough to ensure an override of the expected veto by President Clinton.

Currently Congress is considering the issue again. And there are many political commentators who wonder if the margin may grow again since this is an election year. Also, as we will discuss in more detail, the Supreme Court seemed poised to act on the issue as well. While that does not insure that a federal ban on partial birth abortion will pass this year, it does raise the stakes over this controversial and gruesome procedure. Will Congress or the courts eventually ban this procedure? That seems more likely now than at any time in the past. Certainly the next few months will tell. But how will that take place?

## The Current Climate

Publicity over the partial birth abortion procedure has helped build momentum. During the debate in October of 1999, Senator Rick Santorum and Senator Barbara Boxer engaged in the following exchange.

*Santorum:* But, again, what you are suggesting is if the baby's toe is inside the mother, you can, in fact, kill that baby.

*Boxer:* Absolutely not.

*Santorum:* Okay. So if the baby's toe is in, you can't kill the baby. How about if the baby's foot is in?

*Boxer:* You are the one who is making these statements.

*Santorum:* We are trying to draw a line here.

*Boxer:* I am not answering these questions.

*Santorum:* If the head is inside the mother, you can kill the baby.

Discussion and dialogue like this has helped solidify and bolster public opposition to partial birth abortion. Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has called this procedure "near-infanticide." Opinion polls show that he is not alone in his assessment. Even citizens and politicians who are sympathetic to abortion rights are repulsed by partial birth abortion.

Throughout this year the battle against partial birth abortion will be fought on two fronts: Congress and the courts. Pro-life advocates point out that vote counts in the Senate show they are getting very close to a veto-proof margin. Key senators forced to vote on this measure during an election year might make the difference.

Meanwhile, federal courts have forced the Supreme Court to deliberate on the issue. This fall federal judges in Wisconsin and Illinois found the partial birth abortion bans in their states to be constitutional. Before the laws could be implemented, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens issued a stay that holds the two state laws in limbo until the high court disposes of the appeals.

Legal experts say that the order is written in such a way as to force the court to directly consider the constitutionality of partial birth abortions, or else the court must leave these state laws in place. In either case, this appears to be a pro-life victory.

Last summer in Arizona, an abortionist was performing a partial birth abortion on what he thought was a twenty-three week old. Suddenly he realized the baby was actually thirty-seven weeks old. He stopped the abortion and delivered the baby. The police said that, "At this point it doesn't appear that anybody will be charged with anything." The reason? Nothing illegal was done.

President Clinton continues to veto congressional bans on this procedure, and judges continue to overturn state bans on this procedure. But it appears that in the year 2000 that is about to change.

## **The Biblical Perspective**

Before we continue this discussion I wanted to focus on the biblical perspective of abortion. A key passage in this discussion is Psalm 139, where David reflected on God's sovereignty in his life.

The psalm opens with the acknowledgment that God is omniscient; He knows what the psalmist, David, is doing. God is aware of David's thoughts before he expresses them. Wherever David might go, he could not escape from God, whether

he traveled to heaven or ventured into Sheol. God is in the remotest part of the sea and even in the darkness. David then contemplated the origin of his life and confessed that God was there forming him in the womb.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

Here David wrote of God's relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. The Bible does not speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. This is not a piece of protoplasm that became David. This was David already being cared for by God while in the womb.

Verse 13 speaks of God as the Master Craftsman, weaving and fashioning David into a living person. In verses 14-15 David reflected on the fact that he was a product of God's creative work within his mother's womb, and he praised God for how wonderfully God had woven him together.

David drew a parallel between his development in the womb and Adam's creation from the earth. Using figurative language in verse 15, he referred to his life before birth when "I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth." This poetic allusion hearkens back to Genesis 2:7, which says that Adam was made from the dust of the earth.

David also noted that "thine eyes have seen my unformed substance." This shows that God knew David even before he was known to others. The term translated "unformed substance" derives from the verb "to roll up." When David was forming as a fetus, God's care and compassion were already extended to

him. The reference to “God’s eyes” is an Old Testament term connoting divine oversight of God in the life of an individual or a group of people.

While there are certainly other passages in the Old and New Testament that speak to the sanctity of human life, I believe that Psalm 139 is sufficient to show why Christians must oppose abortion, especially partial birth abortion. The unborn baby is a human being that God cares for. It should not be sacrificed in the womb for convenience or even for fetal parts that might improve the medical condition of another person. The unborn must be protected at every stage of development.

Partial birth abortion is a controversial and gruesome procedure. It is also against the will of God. Christians must speak out against the horror of this procedure and do whatever they can to make the procedure illegal.

## **Fetal Tissue Trafficking**

I would like to turn our focus to a related issue: the traffic of fetal tissue parts. In the fall of 1999, a pro-life group by the name of Life Dynamics published their two-year investigation of the traffic of fetal body parts. They produced copies of brochures, protocols, and price lists that document the interstate commerce of fetal body parts. One brochure touts “the freshest tissue available.” A price list provides a grim picture of the trafficking in cannibalized body parts: eyes are \$50 to \$75 depending on the age of the fetus, skin is \$100, a spinal cord is \$325.

The investigation provided new insight into why the fight against partial birth abortion has been so tough. Partial birth abortion, after all, is a difficult procedure that involves turning the fetus in the womb and removing it feet first. This complicates the abortion and therefore poses more risk to the mother. So why do abortionists do it? Fetal tissue parts. Quite simply, if you want an intact brain, spinal cord,

or limbs, partial birth abortion will provide that in ways that other abortion techniques will not.

Essentially scientists who need human body parts for research have found a loophole in the federal law that prohibits the sale of body parts. Abortion clinics provide these companies with whole or dismembered aborted fetuses for a service fee. This is listed as a "site fee" which is "rental on the space" that a body parts company employee occupies within the clinic. The company can, therefore, argue that they are donating the parts, but charging reasonable costs for retrieval which the federal law does allow. As long as the retrieval fees are higher than the site fee, they can make a profit.

Just one look at the "Fees for Services Schedule" can be chilling. Prices for every conceivable body part are listed. But it's important to notice that an intact embryonic cadaver costs \$600. Why should there be a retrieval fee for that? Why not just list the cost of shipping? This discrepancy illustrates how the body parts companies are trying to circumvent the law.

Gene Rudd, an obstetrician and member of the Christian Medical and Dental Society's Bioethics Commission, said: "It's the inevitable logical progression of a society that, like Darwin, believes we came from nothing. . . . This is the inevitable slide down the slippery slope." He is appalled by this "death for profit" scheme that takes the weakest of the species to satisfy our desires.

Apparently women who come into an abortion clinic are asked to sign a document allowing the clinic to donate their aborted baby to research. No fetus may be used without permission. Then the clinic receives orders (usually from their fax machine) for parts that will be retrieved and shipped. Many of the protocols require that the specimens be obtained within minutes after the abortion and frozen or preserved.

Life Dynamics' two year investigation clearly documents what many of us suspected all along. The fight against partial birth abortion was so tough because a lot of money and fetal tissue was a stake. This procedure has little to do with providing women with choice and everything to do with the interstate trafficking of fetal body parts.

A technician identified as "Kelly" came to Life Dynamics with this story of the traffic of fetal body parts.

The doctor walked into the lab and set a steel pan on the table. "Got you some good specimens," he said. "Twins." The technician looked down at a pair of perfectly formed 24-week-old fetuses moving and gasping for air. Except for a few nicks from the surgical tongs that had pulled them out, they seemed uninjured. "There's something wrong here," the technician stammered. "They are moving. I don't do this."

She watched the doctor take a bottle of sterile water and fill the pan until the water ran over the babies' mouths and noses. Then she left the room. "I would not watch those fetuses moving," she recalls. "That's when I decided it was wrong."

Back in the fall of 1999, Life Dynamics published its two-year investigation of the traffic of fetal body parts. They produced copies of brochures, protocols, and price lists that document the interstate commerce of fetal body parts.

I believe their investigation provided new insight into why the fight against partial birth abortion has been so tough. This procedure provides fetal tissue parts that are intact and thus available to research labs for a profit. And these are respected, tax-funded laboratories pursuing laudable goals like treating diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

"Kelly" says that it was her job to go to abortion clinics to procure tissue "donations." She would get a generated list each day of what tissue researchers needed and then look at the particular patient charts to determine where the specimens



would be obtained. She would look for the most perfect specimens to give the researchers "the best value that we could sell for."

Fetuses ranged in age from seven weeks to 30 weeks and beyond. Typically, "Kelly" harvested tissue from 30 to 40 "late" fetuses each week. These are delivered using the partial birth abortion procedure.

"Kelly" and others like her would harvest eyes, livers, brains, thymuses, and especially cardiac blood. Then they would pack and freeze the tissue and send them out by standard couriers (UPS, FedEx) to the research laboratories requesting the material. Life Dynamics has produced copies of forms for fetal parts from researchers. They contain the names of researchers, universities, pharmaceutical companies, and more.

Proponents of the research argue that the goal justifies the means. After all, these babies would have been aborted anyway. Why not use the discarded parts to further science and improve the quality of living of others? Christopher Hook, a fellow with the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity calls this exploitation of the unborn "too high a price regardless of the supposed benefit. We can never feel comfortable with identifying a group of our brothers and sisters who can be exploited for the good of the whole." He believes that, "Once we have crossed that line, we have betrayed our covenant with one another as a society and certainly the covenant of medicine."

This is the sad legacy of partial birth abortion and the international traffic of fetal body parts. Christians must stand up against this gruesome practice and reassert the sanctity of human life and work for the banning of these procedures.

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# Online Affairs – A Christian Look at a Major Problem

*Kerby Anderson highlights online affairs, the sin of adultery with an “electronic” relationship on the Internet.*



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

## The Allure of Cyber-Relationships

The Internet is becoming a breeding ground for adultery, so say many experts who track the pattern of extramarital affairs. So we will discuss the phenomenon of online affairs.

Peggy Vaughn is the author of *The Monogamy Myth* and also serves as an expert for America Online on problems caused by infidelity. She predicts that one “role of the Internet in the future will be as a source of affairs.” She is writing a second book on the subject of adultery and says she could base half of it just on the letters she receives from people who started an affair online.[\[1\]](#)

An online affair (or cyberaffair) is an intimate or sexually explicit communication between a married person and someone other than their spouse that takes place on the Internet. Usually this communication takes place through an online service such as America Online or CompuServe. Participants usually visit a chat room to begin a group conversation and then often move into a one-to-one mode of communication. Chat room categories range from “single and liking it” to “married and flirting” to “naked on the keyboard.”

Women in a chat room are often surprised at what develops in a fairly short period of time. At first the conversation is

stimulating, though flirtatious. Quickly, however, women are often confronted with increasingly sexual questions and comments. Even if the comments don't turn personal, women find themselves quickly sharing intimate information about themselves and their relationships that they would never share with someone in person. Peggy Vaughn says, "Stay-at-home moms in chat rooms are sharing all this personal stuff they are hiding from their partners." She finds that the intensity of women's online relationships can "quickly escalate into thinking they have found a soulmate."

Online affairs differ from physical world affairs in some ways, but are similar in others. Cyberaffairs are based upon written communication where a person may feel more free to express herself anonymously than in person. Frequently the communication becomes sexually graphic and kinky in ways that probably would not occur if a real person were hearing these comments and could act on them. Participants in an online affair will often tell their life stories and their innermost secrets. They will also create a new persona, become sexually adventurous, and pretend to be different than they really are.

Pretending is a major theme in cyberaffairs. Men claim to be professionals (doctors, lawyers) who work out every day in the gym. And they universally claim that if their wives met their needs, they wouldn't be sex shopping on the Internet. Women claim to be slim, sexy, and adventurous. The anonymity of the Internet allows them to divulge (or even create) their wildest fantasies. In fact, their frank talk and flirtation pays great dividends in the number of men in a chat room who want to talk to them and get together with them.

Just as the Internet has become a new source of pornography for many, so it seems that it has also become a new source for affairs. Relationships online frequently go over the line leaving pain, heartbreak, and even divorce in their wake. Even though these online affairs don't involve sex, they can be very intense and threaten a marriage just the same.

## Current Statistics on Adultery

In a [previous article](#), I talked about some of the statistics concerning adultery. Before we continue, let me update some of those numbers with a multitude of studies all coming to similar conclusions.

One conclusion is that adultery is becoming more common, and researchers are finding that women are as likely as men to have an affair. A 1983 study found that 29 percent of married people under 25 had had an affair with no statistical difference between the number of men and women who chose to be unfaithful to their spouses early in life.<sup>{2}</sup> By comparison, only 9 percent of spouses in the 1950s under the age of 25 had been involved in extramarital sex. Another study concluded that by age 40 about 50 to 65 percent of husbands and 45 to 55 percent of wives become involved in an extramarital affair.<sup>{3}</sup>

Affairs are usually more than a one-time event. A 1987 study surveyed 200 men and women and found that their affairs lasted an average of two years.<sup>{4}</sup> In fact, affairs go through transitions over time. They may begin as romantic, sexual, or emotional relationships and may become intimate friendships. Affairs that become friendships can last decades or a lifetime.

Online affairs differ from other affairs in that they may not involve a physical component, but the emotional attachment is still there. Online affairs develop because of the dual attraction of attention and anonymity. Someone who has been ignored by a spouse (or at least perceives that he or she is ignored) suddenly becomes the center of attention in a chat room or a one-on-one e-mail exchange. A woman finds it exciting, even intoxicating, that all these men want to talk to her. And they are eager to hear what she says and needs.

Anonymity feeds this intoxication because the person on the other end of this cyberaffair is unknown. He or she can be as

beautiful and intelligent as your dreams can imagine. The fantasy is fueled by the lack of information and the anonymity. No one in cyberland has bad breath, a bald head, love handles, or a bad temper. The sex is the best you can imagine. Men are warm, sensitive, caring, and communicative. Women are daring, sensual, and erotic.

Is it all too good to be true? Of course it is. Cyberaffairs are only make-believe. Usually when cyberlovers meet, there is a major letdown. No real person can compete with a dream lover. No marriage can compete with a cyberaffair. But then an online affair can't really compete with a real relationship that provides true friendship and marital intimacy.

Nevertheless, online affairs are seductive. An Internet addict calls out to a spouse "one more minute" just as an alcoholic justifies "one more drink." Cyberaffairs provide an opportunity to become another person and chat with distant and invisible neighbors in the high-tech limbo of cyberspace. Social and emotional needs are met, flirting is allowed and even encouraged, and an illusion of intimacy feeds the addiction that has caught so many unsuspecting Internet surfers.

## **Motivations for Affairs**

Affairs usually develop because the relationship meets various social and psychological needs. Self-esteem needs are often at the top of the list. Self-esteem needs are met through knowing, understanding, and acceptance. Psychologists say that those needs are enhanced through talking intimately about feelings, thoughts, and needs. This can take place in person or take place through the Internet.

Even though online affairs may not involve a physical component, the emotional attachment can be just as strong and even overwhelming. And when they end, this strong attachment usually leaves participants in emotional pain.

Women report feeling thrilled by their lover's interest in them physically, emotionally, and intellectually. They are also excited about the chance to know a different man (how he thinks and feels). They also feel intimate with their lovers because they can talk about their feelings openly. However, when the affair ends, they feel a great deal of guilt with regard to their husband and children. They also regret the deceit that accompanied the affair.

Men report feeling excited about the sexual experience of the affair. They try to control their feelings in the affair and do not compete with their feelings for their wife. Often they limit the emotional involvement with their lover. Men also feel guilt and regret over deceit when an affair ends, but less so than most women.

Men and women have affairs for different reasons. Research has shown that women seek affairs in order to be loved, have a friend, and feel needed. Men seek affairs for sexual fulfillment, friendship, and fun.[{5}](#)

It appears that the percentage of women who have extramarital sex has increased the last few decades. In 1953 Alfred Kinsey found that 29 percent of married women admitted to at least one affair.[{6}](#) A *Psychology Today* survey in 1970 reported that 36 percent of their female readers had extramarital sex.[{7}](#) One study in 1987 found that 70 percent of women surveyed had been involved in an affair.[{8}](#)

It also appears that women who are employed full-time outside of the home are more likely to have an affair than full-time homemakers. Several studies come to this same conclusion. One study found that 47 percent of wives who were employed full-time and 27 percent of full-time homemakers had been involved in an affair before they were 40 years old.[{9}](#) And *New Woman* magazine found that 57 percent of employed wives who had an affair met their lover at work.[{10}](#)

Contrary to conventional wisdom, an affair will not help your marriage. In 1975, Linda Wolfe published *Playing Around* after she studied twenty-one women who were having affairs to keep their marriages intact.[\[11\]](#) The reasoning for many of these women was that if they could meet their own needs, their marriages would be more successful. Many said they were desperately lonely. Others were afraid, believing their husbands did not love them or were not committed to their marriage. Five years after the initial study, only three of the twenty-one women were still married.

Adultery can destroy a marriage, whether a physical affair or an online affair.

## Preventing an Affair

The general outline for some of these ideas comes from family therapist Frank Pittman, author of *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*, although I have added additional material. He has counseled 10,000 couples over the last forty years, and about 7,000 have experienced infidelity. He has nineteen specific suggestions for couples on how to avoid affairs.[\[12\]](#) Let's look at a few of them.

First, accept the possibility of being sexually attracted to another and of having sexual fantasies. Frank Pittman believes we should acknowledge that such thoughts can develop so that you don't scare them into hiding. But he also says you shouldn't act on them.

Second, we should hang out with monogamous people. He says, "They make a good support system." To state it negatively, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33).

Third, work on your marriage. He says to keep your marriage sexy and work to be intimate with your spouse. He also says to make marriage an important part of your identity. "Carry your

marriage with you wherever you go.”

Fourth, be realistic about your marriage. Pittman says, “Don’t expect your marriage to make you happy. See your partner as a source of comfort rather than a cause of unhappiness.” Accept the reality of marriage; it isn’t always beautiful. Also accept that you are both imperfect.

Fifth, keep the marriage equal. Share parenting duties. “If not, one partner will become the full-time parent, and the other will become a full-time child” without responsibilities, who seeks to be taken care of. And keep the relationships equal. Pittman says, “The more equal it is, the more both partners will respect and value it.”

Sixth, if you aren’t already married, be careful in your choice of a marriage partner. For example, marry someone who believes in, and has a family history of, monogamy. Frank Pittman says, “It is a bad idea to become the fifth husband of a woman who has been unfaithful to her previous four.” Also, marry someone who respects and likes your gender. “They will get over the specialness of you yourself and eventually consider you as part of a gender they dislike.”

Seventh, call home every day you travel. “Otherwise, you begin to have a separate life.” And stay faithful. “If you want your partner to (stay faithful), it is a good idea to stay faithful yourself.” And make sure you are open, honest, and authentic. Lies and deception create a secret life that can allow an affair to occur.

Finally, don’t overreact or exaggerate the consequences of an affair if it occurs. Pittman says, “It doesn’t mean there will be a divorce, murder or suicide. Catch yourself and work your way back into the marriage.”

Affairs can destroy a marriage. Take the time to affair-proof your marriage so you avoid the pain, guilt and regret that inevitably results. And if you have fallen into an affair,



work your way back and rebuild your marriage.

## Consequences of Affairs

When God commands, "You shall not commit adultery" (Ex. 20:14), He did so for our own good. There are significant social, psychological, and spiritual consequences to adultery.

A major social cost is divorce. An affair that is discovered does not have to lead to divorce, but often it does. About one-third of couples remain together after the discovery of an adulterous affair, while the other two-thirds usually divorce.

Not surprisingly, the divorce rate is higher among people who have affairs. Annette Lawson (author of *Adultery: An Analysis of Love and Betrayal*) found that spouses who did not have affairs had the lowest rate of divorce. Women who had multiple affairs (especially if they started early in the marriage) had the highest rate of divorce.

A lesser known fact is that those who divorce rarely marry the person with whom they are having the affair. For example, Dr. Jan Halper's study of successful men (executives, entrepreneurs, professionals) found that very few men who have affairs divorce their wife and marry their lovers. Only 3 percent of the 4,100 successful men surveyed eventually married their lovers.<sup>{13}</sup>

Frank Pittman has found that the divorce rate among those who married their lovers was 75 percent.<sup>{14}</sup> The reasons for the high divorce rate include: intervention of reality, guilt, expectations, a general distrust of marriage, and a distrust of the affairer.

The psychological consequences are also significant, even if they are sometimes more difficult to discern. People who pursue an affair often do so for self-esteem needs, but often further erode those feelings by violating trust, intimacy, and

stability in a marriage relationship. Affairs do not stabilize a marriage, they upset it.

Affairs destroy trust. It's not surprising that marriages formed after an affair and a divorce have such a high divorce rate. If your new spouse cheated before, what guarantee do you have that this person won't begin to cheat on you? Distrust of marriage and distrust of the affairer are significant issues.

Finally, there are spiritual consequences to affairs. We grieve the Lord by our actions. We disgrace the Lord as we become one more statistic of moral failure within the body of Christ. We threaten the sacred marriage bond between us and our spouse. We bring guilt into our lives and shame into our marriage and family. Affairs extract a tremendous price in our lives and the lives of those we love and hold dear.

And let's not forget the long-term consequences. Affairs, for example, can lead to unwanted pregnancies. According to one report, "Studies of blood typing show that as many as 1 out of every 10 babies born in North America is not the offspring of the mother's husband."<sup>[15]</sup> Affairs can also result in sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis, chlamydia, herpes, or even AIDS. Many of these diseases are not curable and will last for a lifetime.

Adultery is dangerous, and so are online affairs. The popularity of the recent movie *You've Got Mail* has helped feed the fantasy that you are writing to Tom Hanks or Meg Ryan. In nearly every case, nothing could be further from the truth. An online affair could happen to you, and the plot might be more like *Fatal Attraction*.

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# Privacy Issues

## The Need to Discuss Privacy Issues

Privacy is something I believe we all take for granted until we lose it. Then we begin to think about how someone invaded

our privacy, often by incremental steps. In this article we are going to talk about ways in which we have lost our privacy. Most of the intrusion into our lives comes from government, but not all. Businesses also buy and sell information about us every day. Most of us would be shocked to find out how much personal information is in databases around the country.

As I address this important issue, I will focus on several specific threats to our privacy. I want to begin, though, by discussing how quickly our privacy is being lost and how often it takes place without any debate.

Let's look at the last session in Congress. It's amazing to me that there never was an extended debate on the issue of privacy. Granted there wasn't much debate on a number of issues, but the lack of debate on this fundamental issue shows how far down the road we have gone.

For example, we saw absolutely no debate on issues such as the national ID card, the medical ID number, the Clinton administration encryption policy, the expansion of the FBI's wiretap capability, along with the Clinton administration's Executive Order authority and federal databases.

Some of the proposals were defeated, at least for now. The national ID card was defeated, for example, not because Congress debated the issue, but because thousands of Americans wrote letters and made phone calls. Meanwhile, plans by the Clinton administration to develop a medical ID number are on hold, but could surface at any time.

Most other issues, however, are moving ahead. Congress gave the FBI permission to use "roving wiretap surveillance." That means that the next time you use a pay phone at your local grocery store, it may be tapped merely because there's a criminal suspect within the area. And if you think I am overreacting, look at what has already happened in California.

One wiretap order there authorized surveillance on 350 phones for over two years. In another case, five pay phones were tapped, intercepting 131,000 conversations.

Recently, the Federal Communications Commission mandated that cell phones and other wireless telephone companies track the location of the customers from the time the call was initiated until the time it was terminated. By locating the cell site the person was using, the government can pinpoint the location of every citizen who uses a cell phone since the telephone companies must track and log the locations.

Those are just a few of the examples we will discuss on the subject of privacy. Unfortunately, whenever someone cries for privacy, another is sure to ask, "What do you have to hide?" The question confuses privacy and secrecy. I don't really have anything I want to keep secret, but I'm not terribly excited about the government listening to every one of my phone conversations. You may not want your future boss to know that you have a genetic predisposition to breast cancer. You may not want a telemarketer to know what you just recently purchased so that he can call your home number and try to sell you more.

The point is that each day we are losing a bit of our privacy. And we will continue to do so unless we work to establish some limits to these invasions of our privacy.

## **National ID Card**

Issuing internal passports has been one of the methods used by communist leaders to control their people. Citizens had to carry these passports at all times and had to present them to authorities if they wanted to travel within the country, live in another part of the country, or apply for a job.

The Department of Transportation has recently called for the establishment of a national ID system by the first of October,

in the year 2000. Although presented as merely a move toward standardization, this seemed to many as a move toward a national passport to allow the government to “check up” on its citizens.

A little history is in order. Back in 1996, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. This charged the federal Department of Transportation with establishing national requirements for birth certificates and drivers’ licenses. Add to this the 1996 Kennedy-Kassebaum health care law that implies that Americans may be required in the future to produce a state-issued ID that conforms to federal specifications.

If all of this sounds to you like Big Brother or even the mark of the beast, then you have company. Congressman Ron Paul believes that the Department of Transportation regulations would adversely affect Americans. He says, “Under the current state of the law, the citizens of states which have drivers’ licenses that do not conform to the federal standards by October 1, 2000, will find themselves essentially stripped of their ability to participate in life as we know it.”

Congressman Paul adds that, “On that date, Americans will not be able to get a job, open a bank account, apply for Social Security or Medicare, exercise their Second Amendment rights, or even take an airplane flight, unless they can produce a state-issued ID that conforms to the federal specifications.”

The law orders the Attorney General to conduct pilot programs where the state driver’s license includes a “machine-readable” Social Security number. It also orders the development of a Social Security card that uses magnetic strips, holograms, and integrated circuits. The law also requires that states collect Social Security numbers from all applicants for various licenses. It requires states to transmit the name, address, and Social Security number of every new worker to a Directory of New Hires.

The good news is that the work by Congressmen Ron Paul and Bob Barr paid off and the attempt to create a national ID card was stopped, for now. But it is likely to surface again.

After all, there has been a push to establish a federal database for Americans and having each person carry an ID card would allow that information to be linked to a federal database. And while it would help the government catch illegal aliens, it could also be used to track law-abiding American citizens.

Tracking down illegal aliens and standardizing licenses are worthy goals. But the ends do not justify the means. That is why so many people wrote Congress to stop this push for a national ID card. Sometimes in the midst of this political debate, citizens must determine how much they value their freedom and privacy.

Congressman Bob Barr says, "Novelists Aldous Huxley and George Orwell have given us countless reasons why we shouldn't trade our privacy for any benefit, no matter how worthwhile it sounds." In the end, we must ask, At what cost? Is it worth trading our privacy for the benefits government promises?

## **Medical ID Number**

While the Department of Transportation is moving ahead with plans for a national ID card, the Department of Health and Human Services is working to assign everyone a lifetime medical ID number.

The purpose of the ID number is to make it easier to keep accurate records of patients as they change doctors and health plans. The identification was required in a 1996 law that guarantees workers continued access to health coverage even if they change jobs.

One solution proposed is to merely use Social Security numbers. But doing that could give credit card companies and

other organizations access to medical records. This would raise a greater concern over privacy of medical records. And that's the point. Even a secure number still could pose a privacy nightmare by potentially giving everyone from insurance companies to computer hackers access to medical histories.

One doctor expressed his concern that a "unique patient identifier could lead to a central database." He fears that "someone without permission could break into those records." But even if the record is secure, doctors fear that patients will withhold embarrassing information if there is a chance someone else might get access to the records.

Robert Gellman, an information policy consultant said at a recent hearing, "Once everyone's required to use a government-issued health identification card, it may become impossible for any American citizen to walk down the street without being forced to produce that card on demand by a policeman."

Why are so many people concerned? Perhaps past history is an indication. One of the features of Hillary Clinton's national health care plan was a federal database of every American's medical records. During one of his State of the Union addresses, President Clinton waved a card with a "unique identifier number" that would give government bureaucrats and health care providers easy computer access to everyone's medical history.

Although the American people rejected that plan back in 1993 and 1994, the government is still moving ahead with a plan to give every American an "unique identifier number" and to compile medical records into a federal database. Five years ago the argument for a medical card and number linked to a federal database was to aid in health care planning and to eliminate fraud by health care providers. The American people, however, feared it would end medical privacy and increase federal control over health care.



The fear is justified. Just listen to what has already happened in a system without a medical ID number. For example, there is the banker on a county health care board who called due the mortgages of people suffering with cancer. There was a congresswoman whose medical records, revealing a bout of depression, were leaked before primary day. And there are a number of drug store chains that sell the name, address, and ailments of their customers to marketing firms.

The Hippocratic Oath says, "That whatsoever I shall see or hear of the lives of men, which is not fitting to be spoken . . . I shall keep inviolably secret." Current attempts by the federal bureaucracy to standardize and centralize medical information are presented as a way to make health care delivery more effective and efficient, but they also have the potential to invade our privacy and threaten doctor-patient confidentiality. Frankly, I think the administration needs to rethink their current proposal. Or, to put it in medical terms, I think they need a second opinion.

## **Encryption**

As we have been looking at the issue of privacy, we've considered attempts to establish a national ID card and a medical ID number. I want to turn to computers and talk about another important issue: encryption. Now I know that's probably an unfamiliar word. But stay with me. Encryption is big word for a big issue that I think you need to know about.

Encryption is a relatively new technology that enables you to have private phone conversations and send e-mail messages that are secure. Encryption codes your words so that they cannot be deciphered by people listening in on your conversation or reading your mail.

As you may know, nosy people already can listen in on your wireless phone calls (cellular or cordless phones). And they can intercept and read your e-mail. Sending e-mail without

encryption is like mailing a postcard – everyone can read it along the way. And we all know that people will do exactly that. If you have ever had a phone on a party line, you know that people listen in.

What you may not know is that various members of the Clinton administration (like Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh) are demanding the authority to read encrypted messages. Now remember that the Fourth Amendment guarantees citizens be free of unreasonable searches and seizures. Nevertheless, these and other law enforcement officers believe they have the right to open your mail.

What they are asking for is the key to the code. When you send a message in code, you need a key to enable you to send the code and the recipients need the same key to read the code. The Clinton administration is demanding access to all encryption keys. This is like giving the government the power to steam open all the letters we send in the mail. Frankly, you only see this level of surveillance in totalitarian countries. If the government has the key, then it could call up information on you, your family, your medical records, your bank records, your credit card purchases, and your e-mail messages to all of your friends and relatives.

What is even more disturbing is the current attempt by the government to limit an American citizen's access to strong and powerful encryption software. A new study from the Cato Institute says that "People living outside the United States find it amusing and perplexing that U.S. law regulates the distribution of strong encryption." Critics of the administration's policy point out that true criminals (terrorists, drug dealers, the mafia) are unlikely to use anything less than the strongest encryption for their communication and data storage. The government will unlikely have a key to that level of encryption. Meanwhile, the average citizen must use weak encryption to protect private data and run the risk that the government will have a key to access it.

Everyone wants encryption in the computer age. Citizens want private communication. Businesses want to prevent billing records and personnel records from falling into the wrong hands. Consumers don't want their credit card numbers widely distributed. That is why we need strong encryption software, and that is why government should not be given a key to the messages we send. Most Americans would not like to turn over so much of their privacy to the government, but unfortunately most Americans don't realize that they already have.

## Privacy and Your Life

Dave Ballert thought he was being a savvy consumer when he attempted to download a copy of his credit report from a web site. He hadn't checked it recently and thought it was worth paying the eight bucks. But when the report arrived a few minutes later, it wasn't his. It was a report for someone in California. The next thing he knew he received a call from the *Washington Post*, who said they received his report. The web site halted access later, but the damage was already done. How would you like a major newspaper to have a copy of your credit report?

Consider the case of the Social Security Administration. They provided earnings information to individuals via the Internet. After more than a month of virtually unfettered access for disgruntled employees, ex-spouses, and their attorneys, the Social Security Administration pulled the plug.

Such is life in the cyberage. More and more people are seeing their privacy violated and wonder what to do in a time of financial and personal indecent exposure. What used to be called public records weren't all that public. Now they are all too public. And what used to be considered private records are being made public at an alarming rate. What should we do?

First, don't give out personal information. You should assume that any information that you do give out will end up on a

database somewhere. Phone solicitors, application forms, warranty cards all ask for information you may not want to give out. Be careful how much information you disclose.

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

Third, exercise discretion, especially when you use e-mail. Too many people assume they have a one-on-one relationship with someone through the Internet. The message you send might be forwarded on to other people, and the message may even be read by other nosy people. One web site provider advises, "A good rule of thumb: Don't send any e-mail that you wouldn't want your mother to read."

Finally, get involved. When you feel your privacy has been violated, take the time to complain. Let the person or organization know your concerns. Many people fail to apply the same rules of privacy and confidentiality on a computer that they do in real life. Your complaint might have a positive effect.

Track congressional legislation and write letters. Many of the threats to privacy I've talked about started in Congress. Citizens need to understand that many governmental policies pose a threat to our privacy. Bureaucrats and legislators are in the business of collecting information and will continue to do so unless we set appropriate limits.

Sadly, most Americans are unaware of the growing threats to their privacy posed by government and private industry.

Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. We must continue to monitor the threats to our privacy both in the public and private sector.

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## **Kids Killing Kids**

Not so long ago the biggest problem kids faced was getting a flat tire on their bikes or having a mean teacher assign homework over the weekend. How times have changed. Who would have guessed that one of the perennial stories would be kids killing kids?

In this essay we're going to talk about the issue of school shootings and the broader issue of kids killing kids. Why is this happening? What can be done to stem the tide of violence on campus and society? We'll look at such topics as video games, teenage rebellion, and tolerance. And we'll also look at the spiritual aspects as well.

Each time we hear about gunshots on a high school campus we are once again reminded that we are living in a different world. The body count of students and teachers causes us to shake our heads and wonder what is going on. In some cases the shooters are teenagers with elaborate plans and evil desires. But sometimes the hail of bullets comes from impulsive kids as young as eleven years old.

In the past, when we did talk about kids killing kids, it was in an urban setting. Gangland battles between the Bloods and the Crips reminded us that life in the inner city was hard and ruthless. But the latest battlegrounds have not been Watts,

the Bronx, or Cabrini-Green. These violent confrontations have taken place in rural, idyllic towns with names like Pearl, Mississippi and Paducah, Kentucky and Jonesboro, Arkansas and Littleton, Colorado.

We are shocked and surprised. We open our newspapers to see the faces of kids caught up in the occult and we wonder how they were attracted to such evil. We open those newspapers again and we see the faces of Opie and Beaver look-alikes charged with five counts of murder and we wonder if they even understood what they were doing.

The answers from pundits have been many. Young people are desensitized to violence, and they learn to kill by using point- and-shoot video games. Teenagers are rebellious, and they are looking for a way to defy authority. In the past, that was easier to accomplish by merely violating the dress code. Today, in a society that values tolerance, trying to come up with a behavior that is shocking is getting harder and harder to do. And the social and spiritual climate that our kids live in is hardly conducive to moral living.

Kids killing kids, I believe, is the best evidence yet of a culture in chaos that has turned its back on God's moral law. Do we really believe that children can see thousands of TV murders or play violent computer games and not be tempted to act out that violence in real life? Do we think we can lower societal standards and not have kids act out in very bizarre ways? Do we think we can pull God from the schools and prayer from the classroom and see no difference in the behavior of children? We shouldn't be surprised. Kids killing kids is evidence of a nation in moral free fall.

## **The Media and Video Games**

I would like to begin with a look at the influence of the media and video games. In the past, we have talked about the impact of violent media on our society. We shouldn't be

surprised that it is having an effect on our kids.

One of the people who knows this only so well is Lt. Col. Dave Grossman. He is a retired West Point psychology professor, Army Ranger, and an expert in the study of violence in war and killing. He is also an instructor at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, and was one of the first on the scene of the Jonesboro, Arkansas shootings. He has a lot to say.

He saw the devastation wrought by the shootings—not just the five dead and ten wounded. He saw what happens when violence intrudes into everyday life. And, where he's been, he sees where the violence comes from. He says, "Anywhere television appears, fifteen years later, the murder rate doubles."[\[1\]](#)

He says, "In the video games, in the movies, on the television, the one behavior that is consistently depicted in glamorous terms and consistently rewarded is killing." He believes that media violence was a significant factor in the killings in Pearl, Mississippi, in West Paducah, Kentucky, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in Springfield, Oregon, and in Littleton, Colorado.

He also says that the combination of a sense of inferiority and the exposure to violence can provoke violence in young boys who are "wannabes." Sometimes they see violence as a route to fame, and one has to wonder whether all the media exposure of these school shootings will spawn even more.

Consider the 1995 movie, *The Basketball Diaries*. In the film, Leonardo DiCaprio (also of *Titanic* fame) goes into a schoolroom and shoots numerous children and teachers. In doing so, he became a role model for young boys who are "wannabes."

The parents of three students killed in Paducah, Kentucky have brought a lawsuit against the company that distributed the film *The Basketball Diaries*. The parents' lawyer points out that Michael Carneal, who opened fire on a group of students in Kentucky, viewed the film and honed his shooting skills by

playing computer games such as *Doom* and *Redneck Rampage*.

Dave Grossman goes into some detail in showing how violence in films, videos, and television can affect us. The parallels in his book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*<sup>{2}</sup> and what is happening in the media today are chilling. Two factors are desensitization and operant conditioning. Show soldiers (or children) enough visual images of violence and they will become desensitized to it. Practice shooting targets of people and conditioning will eventually take over. In some ways it doesn't matter whether it's soldiers doing target practice at a range or kids using point-and-shoot video games. The chilling result is the same: the creation of a killing machine.

But you don't need to read Grossman's book to see the parallels. Young people today are exposed to violent images that desensitize them and make it possible for some to act out these violent images in real life. And video games help them hone their shooting skills and overcome their hesitation to kill. Dave Grossman has seen it in war, and now he is seeing it in everyday life.

## **Violence and Teenage Rebellion**

So many words have been spoken in the last few months about school shootings that it's often difficult to hear sound commentary in the midst of the cacophony. But one voice that deserves a hearing is Jonathan Cohen who wrote a commentary in the *New York Post* entitled "Defining Rebellion Up."<sup>{3}</sup>

Years ago Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a seminal piece in an academic journal entitled "Defining Deviancy Down."<sup>{4}</sup> It was his contention that in the midst of cultural chaos we tend to redefine what is normal. When the crime rate goes through the roof, we say that crime is inevitable in a free society. When the illegitimate birth rate quadruples, we say that maybe two parents in a home aren't really necessary



after all. In essence, what society has done is follow the pattern in Isaiah 5:20 of calling evil good and good evil.

Jonathan Cohen picks up on that theme and extends it to our current crisis. He says that when America became willing to define deviancy down, it simultaneously defined rebellion up. He says, "Anti-social teens are nothing new, but as deviancy has been made normal, we have made it increasingly difficult for teenagers to rebel."

Adults are no longer offended or outraged by behavior that would have sent our parents through the roof. Unfortunately, we have learned the lessons of tolerance well. We tolerate just about everything from tattoos to black nail polish to metal pierced eyebrows.

Jonathan Cohen says, "We have raised the threshold of rebellion so high that it is practically beyond reach. To be recognized, to get attention, to stir anyone in authority to lift a finger, whether it is a parent, a teacher, a principal, or a sheriff, a rebel has to go to very great lengths these days. One must send letter bombs, blow up office buildings or gun down children."

If a young person is trying to defy authority, it does take quite a bit to be recognized. Just a few decades ago, when dress codes were still in effect a student could be somewhat rebellious without getting into too much trouble or hurting other people. Today, it apparently takes quite a bit to run afoul of those in authority.

Jonathan Cohen asks, "And what of the teachers at Columbine High? It seemed they were not disturbed at all by the boys' odd conduct. In fact, one instructor actually helped them make a video dramatizing their death-and-destruction fantasy. For all we know, he may well have commended himself for being so nonjudgmental."

This surfaces an important issue. The highest value in our

society today has become tolerance. We are not to judge others. When you put this trend of rising rebellion with increased tolerance together, you end up with a lethal mixture.

Jonathan Cohen concludes by wondering if all of this might have been different. He says, "If teachers had forbidden their students from coming to class wearing black trenchcoats, fingernail polish and makeup, Littleton likely would not be a name on everyone's lips. If the principal had had the common sense to ban a group of boys from coming to school sporting Nazi regalia, marching through the corridors in military fashion and calling themselves the Trench Coat Mafia, Columbine High School might not be behind a police line."

## Tolerance

Tolerance has become the highest value in our society today, and I believe that it may explain why we miss the signals that something is wrong with our kids.

After the school shooting in Colorado, an editorial appeared in the *New York Post*.<sup>{5}</sup> The editorial writers said, "The Littleton massacre could prove a turning point in American society—one of those moments when the entire culture changes course." Who knows if that will be the case. Only time will tell. The editorial writers believe that one of the things that must change is our contemporary view of tolerance.

The editorial was entitled "Too Much Tolerance?" While other pundits focused on guns, video games, and other cultural phenomena, these editorial writers said the real cause was "inattention."

After all, the killers in Colorado were sending out signals of an impending calamity. It's just that no one was paying attention. For example, one Littleton parent went to the police twice about threats made on his son's life by Eric

Harris. His pleas were to no avail. The cops didn't pay attention.

These kids in the Trench Coat Mafia gave each other Hitler salutes at a local bowling alley. But the community didn't pay attention.

These same kids marched down the hallways and got into fights with jocks and other kids after school. But the school didn't pay attention.

One kid's mother works with disabled kids, but seemed unaware that her own son had a fascination with Adolf Hitler and spent a year planning the destruction of the high school. Again parents didn't pay attention.

Throughout the article the editorial writers recount all the things these kids did. They conclude that while they "were doing everything they could to offend the community they lived in, the community chose to pay them no heed."

Why? I believe that this tragic lack of attention is the sorry harvest of tolerance and diversity preached in the nation's classrooms every day. We are not to judge others. The only sin in society is the sin of judgmentalism. We cannot judge hairstyles or lifestyles, manners or morals. We may think another person's dress, actions, or lifestyles are a bit different, but we are told not to judge. Everything must be tolerated. And so we decide to ignore in the name of tolerance. In essence, inattention is the fruit of a message of tolerance and diversity.

In decades past, boundaries existed, school dress codes were enforced, and certain behavior was not allowed. As the boundaries were dropped and the lines blurred, teachers and parents learned to cope by paying less attention.

The editorial writers therefore conclude (and please excuse the bluntness of their statement) that, "The only way

Americans can live like this is to tune out, to ignore, to refuse to pay attention. In the name of broad-mindedness, Littleton allowed Harris and Klebold to fall through the cracks straight to Hell.”

So why do we have kids killing kids? There are lots of reasons: the moral breakdown of society, video games, rebellion. But another reason is tolerance. We have been taught for decades not to judge, and this has given adults a license to be inattentive.

## **Spiritual Issues**

I would like to conclude this essay by looking at some spiritual issues associated with so many of these school shootings.

Perhaps the best way to begin is to quote former Education Secretary Bill Bennett. He was on one of the talking-head shows discussing the tragedy in Littleton, Colorado. All of a sudden he turned directly to the television camera and said, “Hello?”

That was the attention-getter. But what he said afterward should also get our attention. He pointed out that these kids were walking the halls in trench coats, and apparently that didn't really get the attention of the teachers and administrators. But, he said, if a kid walked the halls with a Bible, that would probably get their attention. Something is very wrong with a society and a school system that would admonish a school kid for carrying a Bible and spreading the good news while ignoring a group of kids wearing trench coats and spreading hate.

In her *Wall Street Journal* column<sup>{6}</sup>, former presidential speech writer Peggy Noonan talked about “The Culture of Death” our children live in. She quoted headlines from news stories and frankly I can't even repeat what she quoted. Our kids are

up to their necks in really awful stuff, and it comes to them day after day on television, in the movies, and in the newspapers.

She then asked, Who counters this culture of death? Well, parents do and churches do. But they aren't really given much of a place in our society today. In fact, Peggy Noonan told a story to illustrate her point.

She said, "A man called into Christian radio this morning and said a true thing. He said, and I am paraphrasing: Those kids were sick and sad, and if a teacher had talked to one of them and said, 'Listen, there's a way out, there really is love out there that will never stop loving you, there's a real God and I want to be able to talk to you about him'—if that teacher had intervened that way, he would have been hauled into court."

You know that man who called that radio station is right. A few years ago, a very famous case made its way through the Colorado courts. A high school teacher in Colorado was taken to court merely because he had a Bible on his desk. If you haven't heard the story, I guess the conclusion wouldn't surprise you. The teacher lost the case and lost it again on appeal.

As we've talked about the disturbing phenomenon of kids killing kids, we have discussed the breakdown of society, video games, rebellion, and tolerance. But we shouldn't forget the spiritual dimension. We are reaping the harvest of a secular society.

Kids kill other kids and so we wonder why. We throw God out of the classroom, we throw the Bible out of the classroom, we throw prayer out of the classroom, and we even throw the Ten Commandments out of the classroom.

Maybe we shouldn't wonder why any longer. Maybe we should be surprised the society isn't more barbaric given the fact that

so many positive, spiritual influences have been thrown out. The ultimate solution to the problem of kids killing kids is for the nation to return to God.

## Notes

1. Andrea Billups and Jerry Seper, "Experts Hit Permissiveness in Schools, Violence on TV," *The Washington Times*, 22 April, 1999.
2. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little, Brown, 1996).
3. Jonathan Cohen, "Defining Rebellion Up," *New York Post*, 27 April 1999.
4. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Defining Deviancy Down," *The American Spectator*, Winter 1993.
5. "Too Much Tolerance?" *New York Post*, 27 April 1999.
6. Peggy Noonan, "The Culture of Death," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 April 1999.

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# Christian View of Government and Law

*Kerby Anderson helps us develop a biblically based, Christian view of both government and the laws it enforces. Understanding that the New Testament does not direct a*

*particular type of government, Kerby leads us to understand how the principles of the New Testament will help us select governmental models that are conducive to Christian life and witness.*

## **Christian View of Government**

Government affects our lives daily. It tells us how fast to drive. It regulates our commerce. It protects us from foreign and domestic strife. Yet we rarely take time to consider its basic function. What is a biblical view of government? Why do we have government? What kind of government does the Bible allow?

Developing a Christian view of government is difficult since the Bible does not provide an exhaustive treatment of government. This itself is perhaps instructive and provides some latitude for these institutions to reflect the needs and demands of particular cultural situations. Because the Bible does not speak directly to every area of political discussion, Christians often hold different views on particular political issues. However, Christians are not free to believe whatever they want. Christians should not abandon the Bible when they begin to think about these issues because there is a great deal of biblical material that can be used to judge particular political options.

The Old Testament teaches that God established government after the flood (Gen. 9:6). And the Old Testament provides clear guidelines for the development of a theocracy in which God was the head of government. These guidelines, however, were written for particular circumstances involving a covenant people chosen by God. These guidelines do not apply today because our modern governments are not the direct inheritors of the promises God made to the nation of Israel.

Apart from that unique situation, the Bible does not propose nor endorse any specific political system. The Bible, however,

does provide a basis for evaluating various political philosophies because it clearly delineates a view of human nature. And every political theory rests on a particular view of human nature.

The Bible describes two elements of human nature. This viewpoint is helpful in judging government systems. Because humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27), they are able to exercise judgment and rationality. However, humans are also fallen creatures (Gen. 3). This human sinfulness (Rom. 3:23) has therefore created a need to control evil and sinful human behavior through civil government.

Many theologians have suggested that the only reason we have government today is to control sinful behavior because of the Fall. But there is every indication that government would have existed even if we lived in a sinless world. For example, there seems to be some structuring of authority in the Garden (Gen. 1–2). The Bible also speaks of the angelic host as being organized into levels of authority and function.

In the creation, God ordained government as the means by which human beings and angelic hosts are ruled. The rest of the created order is governed by instinct (Prov. 30:24–28) and God's providence. Insect colonies, for example, may show a level of order, but this is due merely to genetically controlled instinct.

Human beings, on the other hand, are created in the image of God and thus are responsible to the commands of God. We are created by a God of order (1 Cor. 14:33); therefore we also seek order through governmental structures.

A Christian view of government differs significantly from views proposed by many political theorists. The basis for civil government is rooted in our created nature. We are rational and volitional beings. We are not determined by fate, as the Greeks would have said, nor are we determined by our



environment as modern behaviorists say. We have the power of choice. Therefore we can exercise delegated power over the created order. Thus a biblical view of human nature requires a governmental system that acknowledges human responsibility.

While the source of civil government is rooted in human responsibility, the need for government derives from the necessity of controlling human sinfulness. God ordained civil government to restrain evil (cf. Gen. 9). Anarchy, for example, is not a viable option because all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and are in need of external control.

Notice how a Christian view of human nature provides a basis to judge various political philosophies. For example, Christians must reject political philosophies which ignore human sinfulness. Many utopian political theories are based upon this flawed assumption. In *The Republic*, Plato proposed an ideal government where the enlightened philosopher-kings would lead the country. The Bible, however, teaches that all are sinful (Rom. 3:23). Plato's proposed leaders would also be affected by the sinful effects of the Fall (Gen. 3). They would not always have the benevolent and enlightened disposition necessary to lead the republic.

Christians should also reject a marxist view of government. Karl Marx believed that human nature was conditioned by society, and in particular, the capitalist economy. His solution was to change the economy so that you would change human nature. Why do we have greed? Because we live in a greedy capitalist society. Marx taught that if society changed the economy from capitalism to socialism and then communism, greed would cease.

Christians should reject the utopian vision of marxism because it is based upon an inaccurate view of human nature. The Bible teaches that believers can become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17) through spiritual conversion, but that does not mean that the effects of sin are completely overcome in this life. The Bible

also teaches that we will continue to live in a world tainted by sin. The view of Karl Marx contradicts biblical teaching by proposing a new man in a new society perfected by man's own efforts.

Since civil government is necessary and divinely ordained by God (Rom. 13:1–7), it is ultimately under God's control. It has been given three political responsibilities: the sword of justice (to punish criminals), the sword of order (to thwart rebellion), and the sword of war (to defend the state).

As citizens, Christians have been given a number of responsibilities. They are called to render service and obedience to the government (Matt. 22:21). Because it is a God-ordained institution, they are to submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13–17) as they would to other institutions of God. As will be discussed later, Christians are not to give total and final allegiance to the secular state. Other God-ordained institutions exist in society alongside the state. Christians' final allegiance must be to God. They are to obey civil authorities (Rom. 13:5) in order to avoid anarchy and chaos, but there may be times when they may be forced to disobey (Acts 5:29).

Because government is a divinely ordained institution, Christians have a responsibility to work within governmental structures to bring about change. Government is part of the order of creation and a minister of God (Rom. 13:4). Christians are to obey governmental authorities (Rom. 13:1–4, 1 Peter 2:13–14). Christians are also to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13–16) in the midst of the political context.

Although governments may be guilty of injustice, Christians should not stop working for justice or cease to be concerned about human rights. We do not give up on marriage as an institution simply because there are so many divorces, and we do not give up on the church because of many internal

problems. Each God-ordained institution manifests human sinfulness and disobedience. Our responsibility as Christians is to call political leaders back to this God-ordained task. Government is a legitimate sphere of Christian service, and so we should not look to government only when our rights are being abused. We are to be concerned with social justice and should see governmental action as a legitimate instrument to achieve just ends.

A Christian view of government should also be concerned with human rights. Human rights in a Christian system are based on a biblical view of human dignity. A bill of rights, therefore, does not grant rights to individuals, but instead acknowledges these rights as already existing. The writings of John Locke along with the Declaration of Independence capture this idea by stating that government is based on the inalienable rights of individuals. Government based on humanism, however, would not see rights as inalienable, and thus opens the possibility for the state to redefine what rights its citizens may enjoy. The rights of citizens in a republic, for example, are articulated in terms of what the government is forbidden to do. But in totalitarian governments, while the rights of citizens may also be spelled out, power ultimately resides in the government not the people.

A Christian view of government also recognizes the need to limit the influence of sin in society. This is best achieved by placing certain checks on governmental authority. This protects citizens from the abuse or misuse of governmental power which results when sinful individuals are given too much governmental control.

The greatest threat to liberty comes from the exercise of power. History has shown that power is a corrupting force when placed in human hands. In the Old Testament theocracy there was less danger of abuse because the head of state was God. The Bible amply documents the dangers that ensued when power was transferred to a single king. Even David, a man after

God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22), abused his power and Israel experienced great calamity (2 Sam. 11–21).

## **Governmental Authority**

A key question in political theory is how to determine the limits of governmental authority. With the remarkable growth in the size and scope of government in the 20th century, it is necessary to define clearly the lines of governmental authority. The Bible provides some guidelines.

However, it is often difficult to set limits or draw lines on governmental authority. As already noted, the Old Testament theocracy differed from our modern democratic government. Although human nature is the same, drawing biblical principles from an agrarian, monolithic culture and applying them to a technological, pluralistic culture requires discernment.

Part of this difficulty can be eased by separating two issues. First, should government legislate morality? We will discuss this in the section on social action. Second, what are the limits of governmental sovereignty? The following are a few general principles helpful in determining the limits of governmental authority.

As Christians, we recognize that God has ordained other institutions besides civil government which exercise authority in their particular sphere of influence. This is in contrast to other political systems that see the state as the sovereign agent over human affairs, exercising sovereignty over every other human institution. A Christian view is different.

The first institution is the church (Heb. 12:18–24; 1 Pet. 2:9–10). Jesus taught that the government should work in harmony with the church and should recognize its sovereignty in spiritual matters (Matt. 22:21).

The second institution is the family (Eph. 5:22–32, 1 Pet. 3:1–7). The family is an institution under God and His

authority (Gen.1:26–28, 2:20–25). When the family breaks down, the government often has to step in to protect the rights of the wife (in cases of wife abuse) or children (in cases of child abuse or adoption). The biblical emphasis, however, is not so much on rights as it is on responsibilities and mutual submission (Eph. 5:21).

A third institution is education. Children are not the wards of the state, but belong to God (Ps. 127:3) and are given to parents as a gift from God. Parents are to teach their children (Deut. 4:9) and may also entrust them to tutors (Gal. 4:2).

In a humanistic system of government, the institutions of church and family are usually subordinated to the state. In an atheistic system, ultimately the state becomes a substitute god and is given additional power to adjudicate disputes and bring order to a society. Since institutions exist by permission of the state, there is always the possibility that a new social contract will allow government to intervene in the areas of church and family.

A Christian view of government recognizes the sovereignty of these spheres. Governmental intervention into the spheres of church and family is necessary in certain cases where there is threat to life, liberty, or property. Otherwise civil government should recognize the sovereignty of other God-ordained institutions.

## **Moral Basis of Law**

Law should be the foundation of any government. Whether law is based upon moral absolutes, changing consensus, or totalitarian whim is of crucial importance. Until fairly recently, Western culture held to a notion that common law was founded upon God's revealed moral absolutes.

In a Christian view of government, law is based upon God's

revealed commandments. Law is not based upon human opinion or sociological convention. Law is rooted in God's unchangeable character and derived from biblical principles of morality.

In humanism, humanity is the source of law. Law is merely the expression of human will or mind. Since ethics and morality are man-made, so also is law. Humanists' law is rooted in human opinion, and thus is relative and arbitrary.

Two important figures in the history of law are Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661) and William Blackstone (1723-1780). Rutherford's *Lex Rex* (written in 1644) had profound effect on British and American law. His treatise challenged the foundations of 17th century politics by proclaiming that law must be based upon the Bible, rather than upon the word of any man.

Up until that time, the king had been the law. The book created a great controversy because it attacked the idea of the divine right of kings. This doctrine had held that the king or the state ruled as God's appointed regent. Thus, the king's word had been law. Rutherford properly argued from passages such as Romans 13 that the king, as well as anyone else, was under God's law and not above it.

Sir William Blackstone was an English jurist in the 18th century and is famous for his *Commentaries on the Law of England* which embodied the tenets of Judeo-Christian theism. Published in 1765, the *Commentaries* became the definitive treatise on the common law in England and in America. According to Blackstone, the two foundations for law are nature and revelation through the Scriptures. Blackstone believed that the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom, and thus taught that God was the source of all laws. It is interesting that even the humanist Rousseau noted in his *Social Contract* that one needs someone outside the world system to provide a moral basis for law. He said, "It would take gods to give men laws."

Unfortunately, our modern legal structure has been influenced by relativism and utilitarianism, instead of moral absolutes revealed in Scripture. Relativism provides no secure basis for moral judgments. There are no firm moral absolutes upon which to build a secure legal foundation.

Utilitarianism looks merely at consequences and ignores moral principles. This legal foundation has been further eroded by the relatively recent phenomenon of sociological law. In this view, law should be based upon relative sociological standards. No discipline is more helpless without a moral foundation than law. Law is a tool, and it needs a jurisprudential foundation. Just as contractors and builders need the architect's blueprint in order to build, so also lawyers need theologians and moral philosophers to make good laws. Yet, most lawyers today are extensively trained in technique, but little in moral and legal philosophy.

Legal justice in the Western world has been based upon a proper, biblical understanding of human nature and human choice. We hold criminals accountable for their crimes, rather than excuse their behavior as part of environmental conditioning. We also acknowledge differences between willful, premeditated acts (such as murder) and so-called crimes of passion (i.e., manslaughter) or accidents.

One of the problems in our society today is that we do not operate from assumptions of human choice. The influence of the behaviorist, the evolutionist, and the sociobiologist are quite profound. The evolutionist and sociobiologist say that human behavior is genetically determined. The behaviorist says that human behavior is environmentally determined. Where do we find free choice in a system that argues that actions are a result of heredity and environment? Free choice and personal responsibility have been diminished in the criminal justice system, due to the influence of these secular perspectives.

It is, therefore, not by accident that we have seen a dramatic

change in our view of criminal justice. The emphasis has moved from a view of punishment and restitution to one of rehabilitation. If our actions are governed by something external, and human choice is denied, then we cannot punish someone for something they cannot control. However, we must rehabilitate them if the influences are merely heredity and environmental. But such a view of human actions diminishes human dignity. If a person cannot choose, then he is merely a victim of circumstances and must become a ward of the state.

As Christians, we must take the criminal act seriously and punish human choices. While we recognize the value of rehabilitation (especially through spiritual conversion, John 3:3), we also recognize the need for punishing wrong-doing. The Old Testament provisions for punishment and restitution make more sense in light of the biblical view of human nature. Yet today, we have a justice system which promotes no-fault divorce, no-fault insurance, and continues to erode away the notion of human responsibility.

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## **Euthanasia: A Christian Perspective**

*Kerby Anderson looks at euthanasia from a distinctly Christian perspective. Applying a biblical view gives us clear understanding that we are not lord of our own life or anyone else's.*



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

Debate over euthanasia is not a modern phenomenon. The Greeks



carried on a robust debate on the subject. The Pythagoreans opposed euthanasia, while the Stoics favored it in the case of incurable disease. Plato approved of it in cases of terminal illness.(1) But these influences lost out to Christian principles as well as the spread of acceptance of the Hippocratic Oath: "I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to that effect."

In 1935 the Euthanasia Society of England was formed to promote the notion of a painless death for patients with incurable diseases. A few years later the Euthanasia Society of America was formed with essentially the same goals. In the last few years debate about euthanasia has been advanced by two individuals: Derek Humphry and Dr. Jack Kevorkian.

Derek Humphry has used his prominence as head of the Hemlock Society to promote euthanasia in this country. His book *Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance and Assisted Suicide for the Dying* became a bestseller and further influenced public opinion.

Another influential figure is Jack Kevorkian, who has been instrumental in helping people commit suicide. His book *Prescription Medicide: The Goodness of Planned Death* promotes his views of euthanasia and describes his patented suicide machine which he calls "the Mercitron." He first gained national attention by enabling Janet Adkins of Portland, Oregon, to kill herself in 1990. They met for dinner and then drove to a Volkswagen van where the machine waited. He placed an intravenous tube into her arm and dripped a saline solution until she pushed a button which delivered first a drug causing unconsciousness, and then a lethal drug that killed her. Since then he has helped dozens of other people do the same.

Over the years, public opinion has also been influenced by the tragic cases of a number of women described as being in a "persistent vegetative state." The first was Karen Ann

Quinlan. Her parents, wanting to turn the respirator off, won approval in court. However, when it was turned off in 1976, Karen continued breathing and lived for another ten years. Another case was Nancy Cruzan, who was hurt in an automobile accident in 1983. Her parents went to court in 1987 to receive approval to remove her feeding tube. Various court cases ensued in Missouri, including her parents' appeal that was heard by the Supreme Court in 1990. Eventually they won the right to pull the feeding tube, and Nancy Cruzan died shortly thereafter.

Seven years after the Cruzan case, the Supreme Court had occasion to rule again on the issue of euthanasia. On June 26, 1997 the Supreme Court rejected euthanasia by stating that state laws banning physician-assisted suicide were constitutional. Some feared that these cases (*Glucksburg v. Washington* and *Vacco v. Quill*) would become for euthanasia what *Roe v. Wade* became for abortion. Instead, the justices rejected the concept of finding a constitutional "right to die" and chose not to interrupt the political debate (as *Roe v. Wade* did), and instead urged that the debate on euthanasia continue "as it should in a democratic society."

## **Voluntary, Active Euthanasia**

It is helpful to distinguish between mercy-killing and what could be called mercy-dying. Taking a human life is not the same as allowing nature to take its course by allowing a terminal patient to die. The former is immoral (and perhaps even criminal), while the latter is not.

However, drawing a sharp line between these two categories is not as easy as it used to be. Modern medical technology has significantly blurred the line between hastening death and allowing nature to take its course.

Certain analgesics, for example, ease pain, but they can also shorten a patient's life by affecting respiration. An

artificial heart will continue to beat even after the patient has died and therefore must be turned off by the doctor. So the distinction between actively promoting death and passively allowing nature to take its course is sometimes difficult to determine in practice. But this fundamental distinction between life-taking and death-permitting is still an important philosophical distinction.

Another concern with active euthanasia is that it eliminates the possibility for recovery. While this should be obvious, somehow this problem is frequently ignored in the euthanasia debate. Terminating a human life eliminates all possibility of recovery, while passively ceasing extraordinary means may not. Miraculous recovery from a bleak prognosis sometimes occurs. A doctor who prescribes active euthanasia for a patient may unwittingly prevent a possible recovery he did not anticipate.

A further concern with this so-called voluntary, active euthanasia is that these decisions might not always be freely made. The possibility for coercion is always present. Richard D. Lamm, former governor of Colorado, said that elderly, terminally ill patients have "a duty to die and get out of the way." Though those words were reported somewhat out of context, they nonetheless illustrate the pressure many elderly feel from hospital personnel.

The Dutch experience is instructive. A survey of Dutch physicians was done in 1990 by the Rummelink Committee. They found that 1,030 patients were killed without their consent. Of these, 140 were fully mentally competent and 110 were only slightly mentally impaired. The report also found that another 14,175 patients (1,701 of whom were mentally competent) were denied medical treatment without their consent and died.(2)

A more recent survey of the Dutch experience is even less encouraging. Doctors in the United States and the Netherlands have found that though euthanasia was originally intended for exceptional cases, it has become an accepted way of dealing

with serious or terminal illness. The original guidelines (that patients with a terminal illness make a voluntary, persistent request that their lives be ended) have been expanded to include chronic ailments and psychological distress. They also found that 60 percent of Dutch physicians do not report their cases of assisted suicide (even though reporting is required by law) and about 25 percent of the physicians admit to ending patients' lives without their consent.(3)

## **Involuntary, Active Euthanasia**

Involuntary euthanasia requires a second party who makes decisions about whether active measures should be taken to end a life. Foundational to this discussion is an erosion of the doctrine of the sanctity of life. But ever since the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that the life of unborn babies could be terminated for reasons of convenience, the slide down society's slippery slope has continued even though the Supreme Court has been reluctant to legalize euthanasia.

The progression was inevitable. Once society begins to devalue the life of an unborn child, it is but a small step to begin to do the same with a child who has been born. Abortion slides naturally into infanticide and eventually into euthanasia. In the past few years doctors have allowed a number of so-called "Baby Does" to die—either by failing to perform lifesaving operations or else by not feeding the infants.

The progression toward euthanasia is inevitable. Once society becomes conformed to a "quality of life" standard for infants, it will more willingly accept the same standard for the elderly. As former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop has said, "Nothing surprises me anymore. My great concern is that there will be 10,000 Grandma Does for every Baby Doe."(4)

Again the Dutch experience is instructive. In the Netherlands, physicians have performed involuntary euthanasia because they

thought the family had suffered too much or were tired of taking care of patients. American surgeon Robin Bernhoft relates an incident in which a Dutch doctor euthanized a twenty-six-year-old ballerina with arthritis in her toes. Since she could no longer pursue her career as a dancer, she was depressed and requested to be put to death. The doctor complied with her request and merely noted that "one doesn't enjoy such things, but it was her choice."(5)

## **Physician-Assisted Suicide**

In recent years media and political attention has been given to the idea of physician-assisted suicide. Some states have even attempted to pass legislation that would allow physicians in this country the legal right to put terminally ill patients to death. While the Dutch experience should be enough to demonstrate the danger of granting such rights, there are other good reasons to reject this idea.

First, physician-assisted suicide would change the nature of the medical profession itself. Physicians would be cast in the role of killers rather than healers. The Hippocratic Oath was written to place the medical profession on the foundation of healing, not killing. For 2,400 years patients have had the assurance that doctors follow an oath to heal them, not kill them. This would change with legalized euthanasia.

Second, medical care would be affected. Physicians would begin to ration health care so that elderly and severely disabled patients would not be receiving the same quality of care as everyone else. Legalizing euthanasia would result in less care, rather than better care, for the dying.

Third, legalizing euthanasia through physician-assisted suicide would effectively establish a right to die. The Constitution affirms that fundamental rights cannot be limited to one group (e.g., the terminally ill). They must apply to all. Legalizing physician-assisted suicide would open the door

to anyone wanting the “right” to kill themselves. Soon this would apply not only to voluntary euthanasia but also to involuntary euthanasia as various court precedents begin to broaden the application of the right to die to other groups in society like the disabled or the clinically depressed.

## **Biblical Analysis**

Foundational to a biblical perspective on euthanasia is a proper understanding of the sanctity of human life. For centuries Western culture in general and Christians in particular have believed in the sanctity of human life. Unfortunately, this view is beginning to erode into a “quality of life” standard. The disabled, retarded, and infirm were seen as having a special place in God’s world, but today medical personnel judge a person’s fitness for life on the basis of a perceived quality of life or lack of such quality.

No longer is life seen as sacred and worthy of being saved. Now patients are evaluated and life-saving treatment is frequently denied, based on a subjective and arbitrary standard for the supposed quality of life. If a life is judged not worthy to be lived any longer, people feel obliged to end that life.

The Bible teaches that human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26) and therefore have dignity and value. Human life is sacred and should not be terminated merely because life is difficult or inconvenient. Psalm 139 teaches that humans are fearfully and wonderfully made. Society must not place an arbitrary standard of quality above God’s absolute standard of human value and worth. This does not mean that people will no longer need to make difficult decisions about treatment and care, but it does mean that these decisions will be guided by an objective, absolute standard of human worth.

The Bible also teaches that God is sovereign over life and death. Christians can agree with Job when he said, “The Lord

gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21). The Lord said, "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand" (Deut. 32:39). God has ordained our days (Ps. 139:16) and is in control of our lives.

Another foundational principle involves a biblical view of life-taking. The Bible specifically condemns murder (Exod. 20:13), and this would include active forms of euthanasia in which another person (doctor, nurse, or friend) hastens death in a patient. While there are situations described in Scripture in which life-taking may be permitted (e.g., self-defense or a just war), euthanasia should not be included with any of these established biblical categories. Active euthanasia, like murder, involves premeditated intent and therefore should be condemned as immoral and even criminal.

Although the Bible does not specifically speak to the issue of euthanasia, the story of the death of King Saul (2 Sam. 1:9-16) is instructive. Saul asked that a soldier put him to death as he lay dying on the battlefield. When David heard of this act, he ordered the soldier put to death for "destroying the Lord's anointed." Though the context is not euthanasia per se, it does show the respect we must show for a human life even in such tragic circumstances.

Christians should also reject the attempt by the modern euthanasia movement to promote a so-called "right to die." Secular society's attempt to establish this "right" is wrong for two reasons. First, giving a person a right to die is tantamount to promoting suicide, and suicide is condemned in the Bible. Man is forbidden to murder and that includes murder of oneself. Moreover, Christians are commanded to love others as they love themselves (Matt. 22:39; Eph. 5:29). Implicit in the command is an assumption of self-love as well as love for others.

Suicide, however, is hardly an example of self-love. It is perhaps the clearest example of self-hate. Suicide is also usually a selfish act. People kill themselves to get away from pain and problems, often leaving those problems to friends and family members who must pick up the pieces when the one who committed suicide is gone.

Second, this so-called "right to die" denies God the opportunity to work sovereignly within a shattered life and bring glory to Himself. When Joni Eareckson Tada realized that she would be spending the rest of her life as a quadriplegic, she asked in despair, "Why can't they just let me die?" When her friend Diana, trying to provide comfort, said to her, "The past is dead, Joni; you're alive," Joni responded, "Am I? This isn't living." (6) But through God's grace Joni's despair gave way to her firm conviction that even her accident was within God's plan for her life. Now she shares with the world her firm conviction that "suffering gets us ready for heaven." (7)

The Bible teaches that God's purposes are beyond our understanding. Job's reply to the Lord shows his acknowledgment of God's purposes: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know" (Job 42:2-3). Isaiah 55:8-9 teaches, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Another foundational principle is a biblical view of death. Death is both unnatural and inevitable. It is an unnatural intrusion into our lives as a consequence of the fall (Gen. 2:17). It is the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26, 56). Therefore Christians can reject humanistic ideas that assume death as nothing more than a natural transition. But the Bible also teaches that death (under the present



conditions) is inevitable. There is “a time to be born and a time to die” (Eccles. 3:2). Death is a part of life and the doorway to another, better life.

When does death occur? Modern medicine defines death primarily as a biological event; yet Scripture defines death as a spiritual event that has biological consequences. Death, according to the Bible, occurs when the spirit leaves the body (Eccles. 12:7; James 2:26).

Unfortunately this does not offer much by way of clinical diagnosis for medical personnel. But it does suggest that a rigorous medical definition for death be used. A comatose patient may not be conscious, but from both a medical and biblical perspective he is very much alive, and treatment should be continued unless crucial vital signs and brain activity have ceased.

On the other hand, Christians must also reject the notion that everything must be done to save life at all costs. Believers, knowing that to be at home in the body is to be away from the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6), long for the time when they will be absent from the body and at home with the Lord (5:8). Death is gain for Christians (Phil. 1:21). Therefore they need not be so tied to this earth that they perform futile operations just to extend life a few more hours or days.

In a patient's last days, everything possible should be done to alleviate physical and emotional pain. Giving drugs to a patient to relieve pain is morally justifiable. Proverbs 31:6 says, “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter.” As previously mentioned, some analgesics have the secondary effect of shortening life. But these should be permitted since the primary purpose is to relieve pain, even though they may secondarily shorten life.

Moreover, believers should provide counsel and spiritual care to dying patients (Gal. 6:2). Frequently emotional needs can

be met both in the patient and in the family. Such times of grief also provide opportunities for witnessing. Those suffering loss are often more open to the gospel than at any other time.

Difficult philosophical and biblical questions are certain to continue swirling around the issue of euthanasia. But in the midst of these confusing issues should be the objective, absolute standards of Scripture, which provide guidance for the

## Notes

1. Plato, *Republic* 3. 405.
2. R. Finigsen, "The Report of the Dutch Committee on Euthanasia," *Issues in Law and Medicine*, July 1991, 339-44.
3. Herbert Hendlin, Chris Rutenfrans, and Zbigniew Zylicz, "Physician-Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia in the Netherlands: Lessons from the Dutch," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 277 (4 June 1997): 1720-2.
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# Genetic Engineering

*Kerby Anderson provides a biblical look at genetic engineering. Christians would be wise to distinguish between two types of research: genetic repair (acceptable) and the creation of new forms of life (unacceptable).*

## Genetic Diseases

The age of genetics has arrived. Society is in the midst of a genetic revolution that some futurists predict will have a greater impact on the culture than the industrial revolution. So, in this essay we are going to look at the area of genetic engineering.

The future of genetics, like that of any other technology, offers great promise but also great peril. Nuclear technology has provided nuclear medicine, nuclear energy, and nuclear weapons. Genetic technology offers the promise of a diverse array of good, questionable, and bad technological applications. Christians, therefore, must help shape the ethical foundations of this technology and its future applications.

How powerful a technology is genetic engineering? For the first time in human history, it is possible to completely redesign existing organisms, including man, and to direct the genetic and reproductive constitution of every living thing. Scientists are no longer limited to breeding and cross-pollination. Powerful genetic tools allow us to change genetic structure at the microscopic level and bypass the normal processes of reproduction.

For the first time in human history, it is also possible to make multiple copies of any existing organism or of certain sections of its genetic structure. This ability to clone

existing organisms or their genes gives scientists a powerful tool to reproduce helpful and useful genetic material within a population.

Scientists are also developing techniques to treat and cure genetic diseases through genetic surgery and genetic therapy. They can already identify genetic sequences that are defective, and soon scientists will be able to replace these defects with properly functioning genes.

At this point, let's take a look at the nature of genetic diseases. Genetic diseases arise from a number of causes. The first are single-gene defects. Some of these single-gene diseases are dominant and therefore cannot be masked by a second normal gene on the homologous chromosome (the other strand of a chromosome pair). An example is Huntington's chorea (a fatal disease that strikes in the middle of life and leads to progressive physical and mental deterioration). Many other single-gene diseases are recessive and are expressed only when both chromosomes have a defect. Examples of these diseases are sickle-cell anemia, which leads to the production of malformed red blood cells, and cystic fibrosis, which leads to a malfunction of the respiratory and digestive systems.

Another group of single-gene diseases includes the sex-linked diseases. Because the Y chromosome in men is much shorter than the X chromosome it pairs with, many genes on the X chromosome are absent on the homologous Y chromosome. Men, therefore, will show a higher incidence of genetic diseases such as hemophilia or color blindness. Even though these are recessive, males do not have a homologous gene on their Y chromosome that could contain a normal gene to mask it.

Another major cause of genetic disease is chromosomal abnormalities. Some diseases result from an additional chromosome. Down's syndrome is caused by trisomy-21 (three chromosomes at chromosome twenty-one). Klinefelter's syndrome results from the addition of an extra X chromosome (these men

have a chromosome pattern that is XXY). Other genetic defects result from the duplication, deletion, or rearrangement (called translocation) of a gene sequence.

Genetic engineering offers the promise of eventually treating and curing these genetic defects. Although this is a promise in the future, we are already involved in genetic counseling and the significant ethical concerns it presents. Let's turn now to look at the topic of genetic counseling.

## **Genetic Counseling**

As scientists have learned more about the genetic structure of human beings, they have been able to predict with greater certainty the likelihood of a couple bearing a child with a genetic disease. Each human being carries approximately three to eight genetic defects that might be passed on to their children. By checking family medical histories and taking blood samples (for chromosome counts and tests for recessive traits), a genetic counselor can make a fairly accurate prediction about the possibility of a couple having a child with a genetic disease.

Most couples, however, do not seek genetic counsel in order to decide if they should have a child, but instead seek counsel to decide if they should abort a child that is already conceived. In cases in which the mother is already pregnant, the focus is not whether to prevent a pregnancy but whether to abort the unborn child. These circumstances raise some of the same ethical concerns as abortion.

Major deformities can be discovered through many advanced new techniques. One is ultrasound, which uses a type of sonar to determine the size, shape, and sex of the fetus. An ultrasound transducer is placed on the mother's abdomen and sound waves are sent through the amniotic sac. The sonar waves are then picked up and transmitted to a video screen that provides important information about the characteristics of the fetus.

Another important tool is laparoscopy. A flexible fiber optic scope is inserted by the doctor through a small incision in the mother's abdomen. This tool allows the doctor to probe into the abdominal cavity.

Genetic defects can be detected in the womb through various prenatal tests. These tests can detect approximately two hundred genetic disorders. In the mid-1960s physicians began to use amniocentesis. A doctor inserts a four-inch needle into a pregnant woman's anesthetized abdomen in order to withdraw up to an ounce of amniotic fluid. As the fetus grows, cells are shed from the skin of the fetus, and these can be collected from the fluid and used to discover the sex and genetic make-up of the fetus.

For years, doctors used this procedure to identify congenital defects by the twentieth week of pregnancy. Now more doctors use another technique called chorionic villus sampling (CVS), which can produce the same information at ten weeks. Doctors also use a blood test known as maternal serum alfa-fetoprotein (MSAFP). This test, usually done between the fifteenth and twentieth week, can detect a neural tube defect of the spinal cord or brain, such as spina bifida or Down's syndrome.

The newest procedure is called BABI (blastomere analysis before implantation). Using reproductive technologies, a couple can conceive several embryos in test tubes and discard those exhibiting known defects. A doctor gives a woman a drug to stimulate ovulation, then extracts eggs from her ovaries and mixes them with her husband's sperm. So far, the procedure has been used to test embryos for such hereditary diseases as Tay-Sachs and Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

Using these techniques to give genetic information to couples is not wrong in itself. But, since most of these genetic diseases cannot be cured, the tacit assumption is that abortion will be used if any defects are found. Many doctors and clinics will not do genetic tests unless a couple gives

prior consent to abortion. Thus genetic counseling can often raise ethical questions, and this is especially true when abortion is involved.

Next, we'll look at the future promise of genetic engineering found in gene splicing.

## **Gene Splicing: Scientific Benefits and Concerns**

For the remainder of this essay, I would like to focus on the issue of gene splicing, also known as recombinant DNA research. This new technology began in the 1970s with new genetic techniques that allowed scientists to cut small pieces of DNA (known as plasmids) into small segments that could be inserted in host DNA. The new creatures that were designed have been called DNA chimeras because they are conceptually similar to the mythological Chimera (a creature with the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a serpent).

Gene splicing is fundamentally different from other forms of genetic breeding used in the past. Breeding programs work on existing arrays of genetic variability in a species, isolating specific genetic traits through selective breeding. Scientists using gene splicing can essentially "stack" the deck or even produce an entirely new deck of genetic "cards."

But this powerful ability to change the genetic deck of cards also raises substantial scientific concerns that some "sleight-of-hand" would produce dangerous consequences. Ethan Singer said, "Those who are powerful in society will do the shuffling; their genes will be shuffled in one direction, while the genes of the rest of us will get shuffled in another." Also there is the concern that a reshuffled deck of genes might create an Andromeda strain similar to the one envisioned by Michael Crichton in his book by the same title. A microorganism might inadvertently be given the genetic structure for some pathogen for which there is no antidote or

vaccine.

In the early days of this research, scientists called for a moratorium until the risks of this new technology could be assessed. Even after the National Institute of Health issued guidelines, public fear was considerable. When Harvard University planned to construct a genetic facility for gene splicing, the mayor of Cambridge, Massachusetts, expressed his concern that "something could crawl out of the laboratory, such as a Frankenstein."

The potential benefits of gene splicing are significant. First, the technology can be used to produce medically important substances. The list of these substances is quite large and would include insulin, interferon, and human growth hormone. Gene splicing also has great application in the field of immunology. In order to protect organisms from viral disease, doctors must inject a killed or attenuated virus. Scientists can use the technology to disable a toxin gene, thus yielding a viral substance that triggers the generation of antibodies without the possibility of producing the disease.

A second benefit is in the field of agriculture. This technology can improve the genetic fitness of various plant species. Basic research using this technology could increase the efficiency of photosynthesis, increase plant resistance (to salinity, drought, or viruses), and reduce a plant's demand for nitrogen fertilizer.

Third, gene splicing can aid industrial and environmental processes. Industries that manufacture drugs, plastics, industrial chemicals, vitamins, and cheese will benefit from this technology. Scientists have already begun to develop organisms that can clean up oil spills or toxic wastes.

This last benefit, however, also raises one of the greatest scientific concerns over genetic technology. The escape (or



even intentional release) of a genetically engineered organism might wreak havoc on the environment. Scientists have created microorganisms that dissolve oil spills or reduce frost on plants. Critics of gene splicing fear that radically altered organisms could occupy new ecological niches, destroy existing ecosystems, or drive certain species to extinction.

## **Gene Splicing: Legal and Ethical Concerns**

Now, we want to focus on the legal and ethical concerns of gene splicing.

Legal concerns also surround genetic technology. The Supreme Court ruled that genetically engineered organisms as well as the genetic processes that created them can be patented. The original case involved a microorganism designed to eat up oil-slicks; it was patented by General Electric. Since 1981 the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office has approved nearly 12,000 patents for genetic products and processes. Scientists have been concerned that the prospects of profit have decreased the relatively free flow of scientific information. Often scientists-turned-entrepreneurs refuse to share their findings for fear of commercial loss.

Even more significant is the question of whether life should even be patented at all. Most religious leaders say no. A 1995 gathering of 187 religious leaders representing virtually every major religious tradition spoke out against the patenting of genetically engineered substances. They argued that life is the creation of God, not humans, and should not be patented as human inventions.

The broader theological question is *whether* genetic engineering should be used and, if permitted, *how* it should be used. The natural reaction for many in society is to reject new forms of technology because they are dangerous. Christians, however, should take into account God's command to humankind in the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28). Christians

should avoid the reflex reaction that scientists should not tinker with life; instead Christians should consider how this technology should be used responsibly.

One key issue is the worldview behind most scientific research. Modern science rests on an evolutionary assumption. Many scientists assume that life on this planet is the result of millions of years of a chance evolutionary process. They conclude, therefore, that intelligent scientists can do a better job of directing the evolutionary process than nature can do by chance. Even so, many evolutionary scientists warn of this potential danger. Ethan Singer believes that scientists will “verify a few predictions, and then gradually forget that knowing something isn’t the same as knowing everything. . . . At each stage we will get a little cockier, a little surer we know all the possibilities.”

Some evolutionary scientists have always believed they could control evolution. In essence, gene splicing gives them the tools they have wanted. Julian Huxley looked forward to the day in which scientists could fill the “position of business manager for the cosmic process of evolution.” Certainly this technology enables scientists to create new forms of life and alter existing forms in ways that have been impossible until now.

How should Christians respond? They should humbly acknowledge that God is the sovereign Creator and that man has finite knowledge. Genetic engineering gives scientists the god-like technological ability, but without the wisdom, knowledge, and moral capacity to behave like God.

Even evolutionary scientists who deny the existence of God and believe that all life is the result of an impersonal evolutionary process express concern about the potential dangers of this technology. Erwin Chargaff asked, “Have we the right to counteract, irreversibly, the evolutionary wisdom of millions of years, in order to satisfy the ambition and

curiosity of a few scientists?" His answer is no. The Christian's answer should also be the same when we realize that God is the Creator of life. We do not have the right to "rewrite the sixth day of creation."

But can gene splicing be used responsibly? We'll address that question next as we attempt to put forward a biblical framework for genetic engineering.

### A Biblical Framework for Genetic Engineering

When faced with the complexities of modern life, and especially with modern technology, many tend to exert the mental reflex of condemning all forms of genetic engineering. So the obvious first question is whether genetic engineering should be used at all. Then, if it is permissible, we should ask how it should be used.

Christians must resist the tendency to reject technology merely because it is foreign or merely because it is technology. God's command to humankind in the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28) instructs us to develop and use technology wisely. Christians should avoid the reflex reaction that scientists should not tinker with life; instead Christians should develop a biblical framework to guide responsible use of this technology.

In developing this framework, I believe we must distinguish between two types of research. The first could be called genetic repair. This research attempts to remove genetic defects and develop techniques that will provide treatments for existing diseases. Applications would include various forms of genetic therapy and genetic surgery as well as modifications of existing microorganisms in order to produce beneficial results.

The Human Genome Project is helping scientists to pinpoint the location and sequence of the approximately 100,000 human genes. Further advances in gene splicing will allow scientists

to repair defective sequences and eventually remove these genetic diseases from our population.

Genetic disease is not part of God's plan for the world. It is the result of the Fall (Gen. 3). Christians can apply technology to fight these evils without being accused of fighting against God's will. Genetic engineering can and should be used to treat and cure genetic diseases.

A second type of research is the creation of new forms of life. While minor modifications of existing organisms may be permissible, Christians should be concerned about the large-scale production of novel life forms. Their potential impact on the environment and on mankind could be considerable. Science is replete with examples of what can happen when an existing organism is introduced into a new environment (e.g., the rabbit into Australia, the rat to Hawaii, or the gypsy moth in the United States). One can only imagine the potential devastation that could occur when a newly created organism is introduced into a new environment.

God created plants and animals as "kinds" (Gen. 1:24). While there is minor variability within these created kinds, there are built-in barriers between these created kinds. Redesigning creatures of any kind cannot be predicted the same way new elements on the periodic chart can be predicted for properties even before they are discovered. Recombinant DNA technology offers great promise in treating genetic disease, but Christians should also be vigilant. While this technology should be used to repair genetic defects, it should not be used to confer the role of creator on scientists.

I believe Christians involved in the scientific disciplines of biology, genetics, medicine, and molecular biology need to stand up and point the way to the wise and proper use of genetic engineering. The benefits are great, but so are the perils. As with any form of technology, Christians should thoughtfully and carefully promote the beneficial aspects of

this technology while resisting and constraining its detrimental aspects.

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# **School-Based Health Clinics and Sex Education**

*Kerby provides an in-depth critique of how our public schools are addressing sex education and providing sex aids through health clinics. Speaking from a Christian worldview perspective, he looks at the data and concludes that public schools are doing more harm than good in the addressing dangerous sexual activity among teenagers.*

## **School-based Health Clinics**

As comprehensive sex education curricula have been promoted in the schools, clinics have been established to provide teens greater access to birth control information and devices. Proponents cite studies that supposedly demonstrate the effectiveness of these clinics on teen sexual behavior. Yet a more careful evaluation of the statistics involved suggests that school-based health clinics do not lower the teen pregnancy rate.

The first major study to receive nationwide attention was DuSable

High School. School administrators were rightly alarmed that before the establishment of a school-based health clinic, three hundred of their one thousand female students became

pregnant. After the clinic was opened, the media widely reported that the number of pregnant students dropped to 35.

As more facts came to light, the claims seemed to be embellished. School officials admitted that they kept no records of the number of pregnancies before the operation of the clinic and that three hundred was merely an estimate. Moreover, school officials could not produce statistics for the number of abortions the girls received as a result of the clinic.

The most often-cited study involved the experience of the clinic at Mechanics Arts High School in St. Paul, Minnesota. Researchers found that a drop in the number of teen births during the late 1970s coincided with an increase in female participation at the school-based clinics. But at least three important issues undermine the validity of this study.

First, some of the statistics are anecdotal rather than statistical. School officials admitted that the schools could not document the decrease in pregnancies. The Support Center for School-Based Clinics acknowledged that "most of the evidence for the success of that program is based upon the clinic's own records and the staff's knowledge of births among students. Thus, the data undoubtedly do not include all births."

Second, an analysis of the data done by Michael Schwartz of the Free Congress Foundation found that the total female enrollment of the two schools included in the study dropped from 1268 in 1977 to 948 in 1979. Therefore the reduction in reported births could have been merely attributable to an overall decline in the female population at the school.

Finally, the study actually shows a drop in the teen birth rate rather than the teen pregnancy rate. The reduction in the fertility rate listed in the study was likely due to more teenagers obtaining an abortion.

Today, more and more advocates of school-based health clinics are citing a three-year study headed by Laurie Zabin at Johns Hopkins University, which evaluated the effect of sex education on teenagers. The study of two school-based clinics in Baltimore, Maryland showed there was a 30 percent reduction in teen pregnancies.

But even this study leaves many unanswered questions. The size of the sample was small and over 30 percent of the female sample dropped out between the first and last measurement periods. Since the study did not control for student mobility, critics point out that some of girls who dropped out of the study may have dropped out of school because they were pregnant. And others were not accounted for with follow-up questionnaires. Other researchers point out that the word abortion is never mentioned in the brief report, leading them to conclude that only live births were counted.

The conclusion is simple. Even the best studies used to promote school-based health clinics prove they do not reduce the teen pregnancy rate. School-based clinics do not work.

## **Sex Education**

For more than thirty years proponents of comprehensive sex education have argued that giving sexual information to young children and adolescents will reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. In that effort nearly \$3 billion have been spent on federal Title X family planning services; yet teenage pregnancies and abortions rise.

Perhaps one of the most devastating popular critiques of comprehensive sex education came from Barbara Dafoe Whitehead. The journalist who said that Dan Quayle was right also was willing to say that sex education was wrong. Her article, "The Failure of Sex Education" in the October 1994 issue of *Atlantic Monthly*, demonstrated that sex education neither reduced pregnancy nor slowed the spread of STDs.

Comprehensive sex education is mandated in at least seventeen states, so Whitehead chose one of those states and focused her analysis on the sex education experiment in New Jersey. Like other curricula, the New Jersey sex education program rests on certain questionable assumptions.

The first tenet is that *children are sexual from birth*. Sex educators reject the classic notion of a latency period until approximately age twelve. They argue that you are “being sexual when you throw your arms around your grandpa and give him a hug.”

Second, *children are sexually miseducated*. Parents, to put it simply, have not done their job, so we need “professionals” to do it right. Parents try to protect their children, fail to affirm their sexuality, and even discuss sexuality in a context of moralizing. The media, they say, is also guilty of providing sexual misinformation.

Third, *if mis-education is the problem, then sex education in the schools is the solution*. Parents are failing miserably at the task, so “it is time to turn the job over to the schools. Schools occupy a safe middle ground between Mom and MTV.”

*Learning about Family Life* is the curriculum used in New Jersey. While it discusses such things as sexual desire, AIDS, divorce, condoms, and masturbation, it nearly ignores such issues as abstinence, marriage, self-control, and virginity. One technique promoted to prevent pregnancy and STDs is noncoital sex, or what some sex educators call “outercourse.” Yet there is good evidence to suggest that teaching teenagers to explore their sexuality through noncoital techniques will lead to coitus. Ultimately, outercourse will lead to intercourse.

Whitehead concludes that comprehensive sex education has been a failure. For example, the percent of teenage births to unwed mothers was 67 percent in 1980 and rose to 84 percent in 1991.



In the place of this failed curriculum, Whitehead describes a better program. She found that "sex education works best when it combines clear messages about behavior with strong moral and logistical support for the behavior sought." One example she cites is the "Postponing Sexual Involvement" program at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia, which offers more than a "Just say no" message. It reinforces the message by having adolescents practice the desired behavior and enlists the aid of older teenagers to teach younger teenagers how to resist sexual advances. Whitehead also found that "religiously observant teens" are less likely to experiment sexually, thus providing an opportunity for church-related programs to help stem the tide of teenage pregnancy.

Contrast this, however, with what has been derisively called "the condom gospel." Sex educators today promote the dissemination of sex education information and the distribution of condoms to deal with the problems of teen pregnancy and STDs.

## **The Case Against Condoms**

At the 1987 World Congress of Sexologists, Theresa Crenshaw asked the audience, "If you had the available partner of your dreams and knew that person carried HIV, how many of you would have sex, depending on a condom for your protection?" None of the 800 members of the audience raised their hand. If condoms do not eliminate the fear of HIV infection for sexologists and sex educators, why encourage the children of America to play STD Russian roulette?

Are condoms a safe and effective way to reduce pregnancy and STDs? Sex educators seem to think so. Every day sex education classes throughout this country promote condoms as a means of safe sex or at least safer sex. But the research on condoms provides no such guarantee.

For example, Texas researcher Susan Weller, writing in the

1993 issue of *Social Science Medicine*, evaluated all research published prior to July 1990 on condom effectiveness. She reported that condoms are only 87 percent effective in preventing pregnancy and 69 percent effective in reducing the risk of HIV infection. This 69 percent effectiveness rate is also the same as a 31 percent failure rate in preventing AIDS transmission. And according to a study in the *1992 Family Planning Perspectives*, 15 percent of married couples who use condoms for birth control end up with an unplanned pregnancy within the first year.

So why has condom distribution become the centerpiece of the U.S. AIDS policy and the most frequently promoted aspect of comprehensive sex education? For many years the answer to that question was an a priori commitment to condoms and a safe sex message over an abstinence message. But in recent years, sex educators and public health officials have been pointing to one study that seemed to vindicate the condom policy.

The study was presented at the Ninth International Conference on AIDS held in Berlin on June 9, 1993. The study involved 304 couples with one partner who was HIV positive. Of the 123 couples who used condoms with each act of sexual intercourse, not a single negative HIV partner became positive. So proponents of condom distribution thought they had scientific vindication for their views.

Unfortunately, that is not the whole story. Condoms do appear to be effective in stopping the spread of AIDS when used "correctly and consistently." Most individuals, however, do not use them "correctly and consistently." What happens to them? Well, it turns out that part of the study received much less attention. Of 122 couples who could not be taught to use condoms properly, 12 became HIV positive in both partners. Undoubtedly over time, even more partners would contract AIDS.

How well does this study apply to the general population? Not very well. This study group was quite dissimilar from the

general population. For example, they knew the HIV status of their spouse and therefore had a vested interest in protecting themselves. They were responsible partners in a committed monogamous relationship. In essence, their actions and attitudes differed dramatically from teenagers and single adults who do not know the HIV status of their partners, are often reckless, and have multiple sexual partners.

And even if condoms are used correctly, do not break, and do not leak, they are still far from 100 percent effective. The Medical Institute for Sexual Health reported that “medical studies confirm that condoms do not offer much, if any, protection in the transmission of chlamydia and human papilloma virus, two serious STDs with prevalence as high as 40 percent among sexually active teenagers.”

## **Abstinence Is the Answer**

Less than a decade ago an abstinence-only program was rare in the public schools. Today, directive abstinence programs can be found in many school districts while battles are fought in other school districts for their inclusion or removal. While proponents of abstinence programs run for school board or influence existing school board members, groups like Planned Parenthood bring lawsuits against districts that use abstinence-based curricula, arguing that they are inaccurate or incomplete.

The emergence of abstinence-only programs as an alternative to comprehensive sex education programs was due to both popularity and politics. Parents concerned about the ineffectiveness of the safe-sex message eagerly embraced the message of abstinence. And political funding helped spread the message and legitimize its educational value. The Adolescent Family Life Act, enacted in 1981 by the Reagan Administration, created Title XX and set aside \$2 million a year for the development and implementation of abstinence-based programs. Although the Clinton Administration later cut funding for

abstinence programs, the earlier funding in the 1980s helped groups like Sex Respect and Teen-Aid launch abstinence programs in the schools.

Parents and children have embraced the abstinence message in significant numbers. One national poll by the University of Chicago found that 68 percent of adults surveyed said premarital sex among teenagers is "always wrong." A 1994 poll for USA Weekend asked more than 1200 teens and adults what they thought of "several high profile athletes [who] are saying in public that they have abstained from sex before marriage and are telling teens to do the same." Seventy-two percent of the teens and 78 percent of the adults said they agree with the pro-abstinence message.

Their enthusiasm for abstinence-only education is well founded. Even though the abstinence message has been criticized by some as naive or inadequate, there are good reasons to promote abstinence in schools and society.

First, teenagers want to learn about abstinence. Contrary to the often repeated teenage claim, not "everyone's doing it." A 1992 study by the Centers for Disease Control found that 43 percent of teenagers from ages fourteen to seventeen had engaged in sexual intercourse at least once. Put another way, the latest surveys suggest that a majority of teenagers are not doing it.

A majority of teenagers are abstaining from sex; also more want help in staying sexually pure in a sex-saturated society. Emory University surveyed one thousand sexually experienced teen girls by asking them what they would like to learn to reduce teen pregnancy. Nearly 85 percent said, "How to say no without hurting the other person's feelings."

Second, abstinence prevents pregnancy. After the San Marcos (California) Junior High adopted the Teen-Aid abstinence-only program, the school's pregnancy rate dropped from 147 to 20 in

a two-year period.

An abstinence-only program for girls in Washington, D.C. has seen only one of four hundred girls become pregnant. Elayne Bennett, director of "Best Friends," says that between twenty and seventy pregnancies are common for this age-group in the District of Columbia.

Nathan Hale Middle School near Chicago adopted the abstinence-only program "Project Taking Charge" to combat its pregnancy rate among eighth-graders. Although adults were skeptical, the school graduated three pregnancy-free classes in a row.

Abstinence works. That is the message that needs to be spread to parents, teachers, and school boards. Teenagers will respond to this message, and we need to teach this message in the classroom.

Third, abstinence prevents sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). After more than three decades, the sexual revolution has taken lots of prisoners. Before 1960, doctors were concerned about only two STDs: syphilis and gonorrhea. Today there are more than twenty significant STDs, ranging from the relatively harmless to the fatal. Twelve million Americans are newly infected each year, and 63 percent of these new infections are in people under twenty-five years of age. Eighty percent of those infected with an STD have absolutely no symptoms.

Doctors warn that if a person has sexual intercourse with another individual, he or she is not only having sexual intercourse with that individual but with every person with whom that individual might have had intercourse for the last ten years and all the people with whom they had intercourse. If that is true, then consider the case of one sixteen-year-old girl who was responsible for 218 cases of gonorrhea and more than 300 cases of syphilis. According to the reporter, this illustrates the rampant transmission of STDs through

multiple sex partners. "The girl has sex with sixteen men. Those men had sex with other people who had sex with other people. The number of contacts finally added up to 1,660." As one person interviewed in the story asked, "What if the girl had had AIDS instead of gonorrhea or syphilis? You probably would have had 1,000 dead people by now."

Abstinence prevents the spread of STDs while safe sex programs do not. Condoms are not always effective even when they are used correctly and consistently, and most sexually active people do not even use them correctly and consistently. Sex education programs have begun to promote "outercourse" instead of intercourse, but many STDs can be spread even through this method, and, as stated, outercourse almost always leads to intercourse. Abstinence is the only way to prevent the spread of a sexually transmitted disease.

Fourth, abstinence prevents emotional scars. Abstinence speakers relate dozens and dozens of stories of young people who wish they had postponed sex until marriage. Sex is the most intimate form of bonding known to the human race, and it is a special gift to be given to one's spouse. Unfortunately, too many throw it away and are later filled with feelings of regret.

Surveys of young adults show that those who engaged in sexual activity regret their earlier promiscuity and wish they had been virgins on their wedding night. Even secular agencies that promote a safe-sex approach acknowledge that sex brings regrets. A Roper poll conducted in association with SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) of high schoolers found that 62 percent of the sexually experienced girls said they "should have waited."

Society is ready for the abstinence message, and it needs to be promoted widely. Anyone walking on the Washington Mall in July 1993 could not miss the acres of "True Love Waits" pledge cards signed by over 200,000 teenagers. The campaign, begun by

the Southern Baptist Convention, provided a brief but vivid display of the desire by teenagers to stand for purity and promote abstinence. For every teenager who signed a card pledging abstinence, there are no doubt dozens of others who plan to do the same.

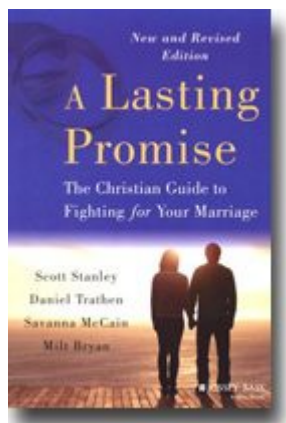
Teenagers want and need to hear the message of abstinence. They want to promote the message of abstinence. Their health, and even their lives, are at stake.

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## Why Marriages Fail

Why do marriages fail? While the answers to that question are many, there is a growing body of empirical research to suggest there are four negative risk factors that create barriers to oneness in marriage and increase a couple's chances for marital failure.



I am going to look at these risk factors and see how they can be corrosive elements to oneness in marriage. Most of the material I will cover comes from PREP, which stands for the "Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program" developed at the University of Denver. The material was originally published in a book entitled *Fighting for Your Marriage*, and has been featured on numerous TV newsmagazine programs like "20/20." There is a Christian version of this material found in a book written by Scott Stanley entitled *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your*

*Marriage*. Perhaps you have heard marriage speakers like Gary Smalley or Dave and Claudia Arp recommend this book (which should be available in your local Christian bookstore and is also available online at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)).

The significance of this research is two-fold. First, it provides a strong body of university research on what makes marriages fail. Other Christian books, though very helpful, are often based upon the opinions and spiritual insights of the authors. The material we will be talking about in this article is based on clinical studies which validate biblical principles others have discussed.

Second, the research provides an extremely accurate predictor of subsequent behavior and marital failure. In one of the key studies, researchers followed a sample of 135 couples for twelve years, starting before they were married. The researchers found that using only data from before the couple married, they were able to differentiate those couples who do well from those who do not, with up to 91% accuracy. In other words, the seeds of distress and possible divorce were already sown before the couples went to the altar.

Now please do not be discouraged by those numbers. At the outset it seems to be telling us that certain marriages are doomed to failure, and there is nothing a couple can do. But we need to reconsider that conclusion. This research, while showing us marriages which might fall apart, does not suggest that there is nothing we can do about it. This research simply shows us what behaviors can be changed and warns us what will probably happen if we are unwilling or unable to change. As the book of James reminds us, it is not enough to just believe something, we must act upon it (James 1:25, 2:15-18, 3:13).

Since knowing precedes acting, it is necessary to discuss these four negative risk factors that can be barriers to oneness, for oneness is God's design for marriage. Genesis 2:24 says, "For this reason a man will leave his father and



mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” When Jesus was confronted by the scribes and Pharisees about the issue of divorce, He brought them back to this foundational truth and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt. 19:5-6).

## **Escalation**

According to the research done over the last two decades, negative patterns can destroy a relationship. Couples who want to save their marriage need to focus on changing these negative behavior patterns. There are four such patterns I will discuss here, the first of which is escalation.

According to the researchers, “escalation occurs when partners respond back and forth negatively to each other, continually upping the ante so the conversation gets more and more hostile.”<sup>{1}</sup> 1 Peter 3:9 says, “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.” But this is exactly what happens with escalation. Each negative comment increases the level of anger and frustration, and soon a small disagreement blows up into a major fight.

Research shows that couples who have a good marriage are less prone to escalation. And if the argument starts to escalate, they are able to stop the negative process before it erupts into a full-blown fight. Marriages that will have problems, and even fail, find that arguments escalate so that such damaging things are said that they may even threaten the lifeblood of the marriage.

Escalation can develop in two different ways. The first is a major shouting fight that may erupt over a conflict as small as putting the cap back on the toothpaste. As the battle heats up the partners get more and more angry, saying mean things

about each other. Frequently there are threats to end the relationship. Over time those angry words damage oneness, and angry threats to leave begin to seem like prophecy. Once negative comments are made, they are hard to take back and drive a knife into the partner's heart. Proverbs 12:18 says, "Reckless words pierce like a sword."

These reckless words can do great damage to a marriage because when an argument escalates, every comment and vulnerability becomes fair game. Concerns, failings, and past mistakes can now be used by the attacking partner. Oneness and intimacy can be shattered quickly by a few reckless words.

You may be thinking, "we don't fight like cats and dogs." And while that may be true, your marriage may still have this risk factor. Damaging escalation is not always dramatic. Voices do not have to be raised for couples to get into a cycle of returning negative for negative. Conflict over paying the rent, taking out the garbage, running errands that result in muttering to oneself, rolling your eyes, or throwing up your hands can also be examples of escalation.

Couples who escalate arguments must control their emotions and control their tongues. James writes, "If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (James 1:26). Couples who want a strong marriage must learn to counteract the tendency to escalate as a couple. The key to a strong and stable marriage is learning to control your emotions and learning how to keep a rein on your tongue.

## **Invalidation**

Having covered escalation, I will now turn to the second of the four negative risk factors to oneness. This risk factor is called invalidation. "Invalidation is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other." [\[2\]](#)

Invalidation can take many forms. Sometimes it can be caustic, in which one partner (or both) attacks the other person verbally. You can hear, and even feel, the contempt one partner has for another.

Sarcastic phrases like “Well, I’m sorry I’m not perfect like you” or “I forgot how lucky I am to be married to you” can cut like a knife. These are attacks on the person’s character and personality that easily destroy a marriage. Research has found that invalidation is one of the best predictors of future problems and divorce.

Jesus taught that attacks on the character of another person are sinful and harmful. “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell” (Matt. 5:22). Calling a person worthless or empty-headed (which is what the Aramaic term *raca* means) is not what a Christian should do.

Invalidation can also be much more subtle. It may involve an argument where contempt for the other partner is not so obvious. One partner may merely be putting the other partner down for his or her feelings. The message conveyed is that your feelings do not matter. A husband may put his wife down because she is more emotional or because she is more easily hurt by comments. A husband may invalidate a wife’s fears about the children’s safety. A wife may invalidate a husband’s desire to succeed in the company, saying that it really doesn’t matter if he becomes district manager. Ultimately the partner receiving these comments begins to share less and less so that the intimate level of sharing evaporates. When this happens, oneness is lost.

Sometimes invalidation may be nothing more than trite cliches like “It’s not so bad” or “Just trust in the Lord.” While the sayings may be true, they invalidate the pain or concern of

the other partner. They make the other partner feel like their fears or frustration are inappropriate. This kind of invalidation is what Solomon called “singing songs to a heavy heart” (Prov. 25:20). When one partner is hurting, the other partner should find words of encouragement that do not invalidate his or her pain or concerns.

The antidote to invalidation is validation. Couples must work at validating and accepting the feelings of their spouse. That does not mean you have to agree with your spouse on the issue at hand, but it does mean that you listen to and respect the other person’s perspective. Providing care, concern, and comfort will build intimacy. Invalidating fears and feelings will build barriers in a marriage. Discipline yourself to encourage your spouse without invalidating his or her feelings.

## **Negative Interpretations**

So far we have looked at the negative risk factors of escalation and invalidation. The third risk factor is negative interpretations. “Negative interpretations occur when one partner consistently believes that the motives of the other are more negative than is really the case.”<sup>{3}</sup>

Such behavior can be a very destructive pattern in a relationship, and quickly erode intimacy and oneness in a marriage. A wife may believe that her husband does not like her parents. As a result, she may attack him anytime he is not overly enthusiastic about visiting them. He may be concerned with the financial cost of going home for Christmas or about whether he has enough vacation time. She, in turn, considers his behavior as disliking her parents.

When a relationship becomes more distressed, the negative interpretations mount and help create an environment of hopelessness. The attacked partner gives up trying to make himself or herself clear and becomes demoralized.

Another kind of negative interpretation is mind reading. "Mind reading occurs when you assume you know what your partner is thinking or why he or she did something." Nearly everyone is guilty of mind reading at some time or other. And when you mind read positively, it does not tend to do much harm. But when you mind read on the negative side, it can spell trouble for a marriage.

Paul warned against attempting to judge the thoughts and motives of others (1 Cor. 4:5). And Jesus asked, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" (Luke 6:41).

Negative interpretations are hard to detect and counteract. Research shows that in distressed marriages there is a tendency for partners to discount the positive things they see, attributing them to causes such as chance rather than to positive characteristics of the partner. That is why negative interpretations do not change easily.

The key to battling negative interpretations is to reconsider what you think about your partner's motives. Perhaps your partner is more positive than you think. This is not some unrealistic "positive thinking" program, but a realistic assessment of negative assumptions you may be bringing to the marriage.

Did your spouse really forget to do what you asked? Was it intentional or accidental? Does he or she try to annoy you or are you being more critical than is warranted? Most of the time, people think they are doing the best they can. It hurts to be accused of something you never intended to be hurtful. For couples to have a good marriage this pattern of negative interpretation must be eliminated.

Often this is easier said than done. First, you have to ask yourself if your thinking might be overly negative. Do you give your spouse the benefit of the doubt? Second, you have to

push yourself to look for evidence that is contrary to your negative interpretation. Often it is easier to see his or her speck than your own plank. Give your mate the benefit of the doubt rather than let inaccurate interpretations sabotage your marriage.

## **Withdrawal and Avoidance**

Escalation, invalidation, and negative interpretations are three of the four negative risk factors identified by researchers at the University of Denver. The last of these has two descriptors: withdrawal and avoidance. These are two different manifestations of the problem wherein a partner is unwilling to get in or stay in a discussion that is too threatening.

“Withdrawal can be as obvious as getting up and leaving the room or as subtle as ‘turning off’ or ‘shutting down’ during an argument. The withdrawer often tends to get quiet during an argument, look away, or agree quickly to a partner’s suggestion just to end the conversation, with no real intention of following through.”[{4}](#)

“Avoidance reflects the same reluctance to get into certain discussions, with more emphasis on the attempt to not let the conversation happen in the first place. A person prone to avoidance would prefer that the topic not come up and, if it does, may manifest the signs of withdrawal just described.”[{5}](#)

In a typical marriage, one partner is the pursuer and the other is the withdrawer. Studies show that it is usually the man who wants to avoid these discussions and is more likely in the withdrawing role. However, sometimes the roles reverse. But, for the sake of this discussion, we will assume that the husband is the one who withdraws.

Why does he withdraw? Because he does not feel emotionally safe to stay in the argument. Sometimes he may even be afraid

that if he stays in the discussion or argument that he might turn violent, so he retreats.

When the husband withdraws, the wife feels shut out and believes that he does not care about the marriage. In other words, lack of talking equals lack of caring. But that is often a negative interpretation about the withdrawer.

He, on the other hand, may believe that his wife gets upset too much of the time, nagging and picking fights. This is also a negative interpretation because most pursuers really want to stay connected and resolve the issue he does not want to talk about.

Couples who want to have a good marriage must learn to stay engaged. Paul said, writing to the church in Ephesus, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold" (Eph. 4:25-27).

Although the immediate context in this passage is anger, the broader principle is the importance of not allowing avoidance to become a corrosive pattern in your marriage. Couples should build oneness and intimacy by speaking openly and honestly about important issues in their marriage.

## **Conclusion**

Each of these four risk factors (escalation, invalidation, negative interpretations, and withdrawal and avoidance) can build barriers in a marriage leading ultimately to loneliness and isolation. The research shows that couples that want a good marriage need to eliminate these risk factors from their marriage, or else the negative factors will overwhelm the positive aspects of the marriage. It is never too late to put your marriage back on track.

For further study on this topic, I would once again recommend that you purchase the book *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage*. This book is widely available and is a good source for help in establishing and maintaining the oneness that God desires for every marriage.

## **Notes**

1. Scott Stanley, et al. *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 1998), p. 29.
2. Stanley, p. 32.
3. Stanley, p. 35-36.
4. Stanley, p. 40.
5. Stanley, p. 40-41.

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