

# Time and Busyness

It has, perhaps, always been true that "time is money." But for the current generation, this maxim has a new twist. In the frenetic 90s, time has become even more scarce than money and therefore more valuable. As with any commodity, the law of supply and demand determines value. In the last two decades, free time has grown scarce and hence has become a valuable possession.

The 1990s is the decade of the time famine. Leisure time, once plentiful and elastic, is now scarce and elusive. People seeking the good life are finding it increasingly difficult to enjoy it, even if they can afford it. What money was in the 1980s, time has become in the 1990s.

According to a Lou Harris survey, the amount of leisure time enjoyed by the average American has shrunk 37 percent since 1973. A major reason is an expanding workweek. Over this same period, the average workweek (including commuting) has increased from fewer than 41 hours to nearly 47 hours. And in many professions, such as medicine, law, and accounting, an 80-hour week is not uncommon. Harris therefore concludes that "time may have become the most precious commodity in the land."

## The Technology of Time

Our current time crunch has caught most people off-guard. Optimistic futurists in the 1950s and 60s, with visions of utopia dancing in their heads, predicted Americans would enjoy ample hours of leisure by the turn of the century. Computers, satellites, and robotics would remove the menial aspects of labor and deliver abundant opportunities for rest and recreation.

The optimists were partly right: computers crunch data at

unimaginable speeds, orbiting satellites cover the globe with a dizzying array of messages, and robots zap together everything from cars to computer chips at speeds far exceeding their human counterparts. Yet these and other technological feats have not freed Americans from their labors. Most people are busier than ever.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Testimony before a Senate subcommittee in 1967 predicted that "by 1985, people could be working just 22 hours a week or 27 weeks a year or could retire at 38." The major challenge facing people in the 1990s should have been what to do with all the leisure time provided by our technological wizardry.

Instead, technology has been more of an enemy than an ally. "Technology is increasing the heartbeat," says Manhattan architect James Trunzo, who designs automated environments. "We are inundated with information. The mind can't handle it all. The pace is so fast now, I sometimes feel like a gunfighter dodging bullets."

Actually, the problem isn't so much technology as it is the heightened expectations engendered by it. The increased speed and efficiency of appliances, computers, and other machines have enabled us to accomplish much more than was possible in previous decades. But this efficiency has also fostered a desire to take on additional responsibilities and thereby squeeze even more activities into already crammed calendars.

As the pace of our lives has increased, over-commitment and busyness have been elevated to socially desirable standards. Being busy is chic and trendy. Pity the poor person who has an organized life and a livable schedule. Everyone, it seems, is running out of time.

## **Time-Controlling Devices**

It is little wonder that most of the products now being

developed are not so much time-savers as they are time-controllers. Most of the appliances developed in the 1950s—vacuum cleaners, dishwashers, mixers—were designed to save time and remove drudgery from housework. By comparison, most of the products developed in the 1980s—VCRs, answering machines, automatic tellers—were time-controllers. These devices do not save much time, but they do allow harried consumers to use their time more effectively.

Technological efficiency has also increased competition. Labor-saving devices that are supposed to make life easier frequently force people to work harder. Baby boomers who are intensely competing with one another for jobs and prestigious promotions avidly employ the latest equipment to give them an edge. Faxes, LANs, car phones, and laptop computers are viewed as necessities if one is to remain competitive.

But technology isn't enough. So most professionals, especially those in service industries such as law, accounting, and advertising, work long hours in an effort to meet their clients' seemingly endless needs and demands. Other baby boomers feel trapped in the same rat race because economic pressures make it nearly impossible to support a family on one income.

The work ethic seems out of control. In the frenetic dash for success or just plain survival, leisure time becomes a scarce commodity. "My wife and I were sitting on the beach in Anguilla on one of our rare vacations," recalls architect James Trunzo, "and even there my staff was able to reach me. There are times when our lives are clearly leading us."

## **No Time to Talk**

Everywhere, it seems, people are over-scheduled and over-committed. Workers are weary. Parents are preoccupied. And children and family relationships are often neglected.

A recent survey by Cynthia Langham at the University of Detroit found that parents and children spend only 14.5 minutes per day talking to each other. That is less time than a football quarter and certainly much less time than most people spend commuting to work.

She says that many people are shocked to hear the 14.5-minutes statistic. But once they take a stopwatch to their conversations, they realize she is right.

But that 14.5 minute statistic is misleading, since most of that time is squandered on chitchat like "What's for supper?" and "Have you finished your homework?" Truly meaningful communication between parent and child unfortunately occupies only about two minutes each day. Langham concludes, "Nothing indicates that parent-child communications are improving. If things are changing, it's for the worse."

She points to two major reasons for this communication breakdown. First is a change in the workforce. A few decades ago the dinner table was a forum for family business and communication. But now, when dinner-time rolls around, Dad is still at work, Mom is headed for a business meeting, and sister has to eat and run to make it to her part-time job. Even when everyone is home, there are constant interruptions to meaningful communication.

The second reason for poor parent-child communication is the greatest interruption of all: television. Urie Bronfenbrenner of Cornell has reported a forty-year decline in the amount of time children spend with their parents, and much of the recent loss is due to television. TV sabotages much of the already-limited time families spend together. Meals are frequently eaten in front of the "electronic fireplace." After dinner, talk-starved families gather to watch congenial television families with good communication skills, like the Huxtables on the Cosby show.

While some television shows deal with issues families might discuss (drugs, pregnancy, honesty), few families take advantage of these opportunities to talk about the dilemmas portrayed on the programs and provide moral instruction.

The greeting card business has developed a whole new product line for busy parents and children. More and more children are finding cards in their backpacks or under their pillows that proclaim, "Have a good day at school," or lament, "I wish I were there to tuck you in."

The effect of time pressures on the family has been devastating. Yale psychology professor Edward Ziglar somberly warns that "as a society, we're at the breaking point as far as family is concerned."

Homemaking and child-rearing are full-time activities. When both husband and wife work, maintaining a home and raising a family becomes difficult. In the increasing numbers of single-parent households, the task becomes next to impossible.

Someone has to drive car pools, make lunches, do laundry, cope with sick kids and broken appliances, and pay the bills. In progressive homes, household tasks are shared as the traditional husband/wife division of labor breaks down. In others, super-Mom is expected to step into the gap and perform flawlessly.

Inevitably, children are forced to grow up quickly and take on responsibilities they should never have to shoulder. Some children are effectively abandoned—if not physically, at least emotionally—and must grow up on their own. Others are latch-key kids who are forced to mature emotionally beyond their years. These demands take their toll and create what sociologist David Elkind has called the "hurried child" syndrome.

Time, or rather our lack of it, is severely hurting families. Nurturing suffers when families do not have time to

communicate and parents do not have time to instruct their children. In the end, the lack of time takes its toll on the stability of our families.

## Never Enough Time

A 1989 survey done by *Family Circle* documented the loss of time in families, especially for working mothers. The article, entitled "Never Enough Time?" began: "Remember 'quality time'? In the 1980's that was what you sandwiched in for the children between the office and the housework. We all learned how valuable time was in the school of hard knocks. Life was what happened while we were busy making other plans, to paraphrase ex-Beatle John Lennon." That was then.

A resounding 71 percent of those surveyed said their lives had gotten busier in the previous year. Nearly a third attributed this increase in busyness to expanding work loads at the office, the demands of a new job, or the pressures of starting a business or returning to work. Not only were the women working longer hours, but many were also working on weekends, and nearly a third often took work home.

Dual-income couples reported major difficulties finding time for each other. Negotiating schedules and calendar-juggling were daily activities. Three out of four women in the survey reported that finding enough time to be alone with their husbands was "often" or "sometimes" a major stress in their relationships. When asked, "In a time crunch, who gets put on the back burner?" half said friends, then husbands, and then other family members.

Those hit hardest by time pressures were single parents. One single mother with two teenagers in Illinois wrote: "I am responsible for a house and yard, work 40 hours a week, take college classes, run a local support group for divorced and widowed women and am involved with a retreat group through church. I have time because I *make* time."

Often the first thing women will let slide is housekeeping. A full 82 percent said they had changed their standards of cleaning and organizing a house. When asked why, 49 percent said other things are more important, 42 percent said they were more relaxed about letting chores wait, 35 percent said they had one or more young children, and 23 percent said they had taken a paying job.

Organization expert Stephanie Winston says that the young generation of working women has reframed expectations about household responsibilities. She says, "Their sense of what is expected of them is really very different from what was expected 10 years ago, when women joining the work force had been raised on the old model—rearing the family, cooking, cleaning and the proverbial white-glove test." But whether they were in the work force or full-time homemakers, more than half of the women surveyed were either "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied with the amount of time they have alone. Only 30 percent try to set aside four or more hours a week just for themselves. Another 30 percent carve out two to three hours. But 19 percent say they give themselves an hour or less a week, and 20 percent do not allot themselves any leisure time at all.

The time pressure on women and families is significant. The time crunch is squeezing out meaningful communication and important time to think and reflect. The additional time will not come without changes in our lifestyles.

## **Redeeming the Time**

Time, or the lack of it, will continue to dominate our thinking through the 1990s. All of us are in the midst of a time crunch—the solution is to recognize our priorities and apply them rigorously to our lives.

First, we must establish biblical priorities in our lives. Often our busyness is merely a symptom of a deeper problem,

such as materialism. In Luke 12, Jesus illustrated this danger with the parable of the rich fool. He says, "The land of a certain rich man was very productive. And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods, laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.'" But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?'"

There are a number of applications we can derive from this passage. First, we should make sure that we are not so involved in the affairs of the world that we neglect the affairs of the spirit. To turn the familiar adage around, we can be so earthly-minded we are no heavenly good.

Second, we should ask ourselves if we are tearing down productive resources for a more luxurious lifestyle. If a three-bedroom house is sufficient, are we selling it merely to move up to a four- bedroom house? If the car we are currently driving is fine, are we nevertheless eager to trade it in on a newer or more expensive model? Often our indulgences constrain our time and financial resources.

This observation leads to our second biblical principle: fight materialism in our lives. Proverbs 28:20 says "He who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished." Materialism brings with it a haste to get rich. Materialistic people are not patient people. They want what they want, when they want it, and they want it now.

Often our lack of time is tied to our haste to get rich, to feed our greed. We need to ask ourselves the fundamental question, How much do we really need? If we fight materialism in our lives and cut back on the lavishness of our lifestyle, we might be surprised how much time we will free up.



A third biblical principle is to redeem the time. Ephesians 5:15-16 says "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil." Colossians 4:5 says, "Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, redeeming the time."

Unlike many of the other resources God has given us, time is not renewable. We may lose money, but we can always earn more. We may lose our possessions, but we can always acquire new ones. But time is a non-renewable commodity. If we squander our time, it is lost forever.

All of us, but especially Christians, must carefully manage the time that God has given us. It is a valuable resource, and we can either spend it on ourselves or redeem it as a spiritual investment. We can spend it only once, and how we spend it can have eternal consequences. Let us not waste the resources God has given us. Instead, let us redeem the time and use it for God's glory.

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## **Disillusionment in the 1990's**

The changing social and economic conditions of the 1990s are turning this into the decade of disillusionment. Millions of baby boomers who grew up in a world that fed and nurtured their expectations are facing a world much different than the one in which they were raised. This crisis of disillusionment could also be called a crisis of "broken promises," since the boomers came to expect that they would in adulthood be privileged to enjoy the fruits of the American dream. Instead, they are tasting the bitter fruit of despair and disillusionment.

The seeds of these circumstances were sown in earlier decades. During the 1980s, they took root and grew, creating a different set of circumstances for this generation in the 1990s.

## **Leading-Edge Versus Trailing-Edge Boomers**

Although these circumstances have affected all baby boomers, they have hit one segment of the boom much harder than the others: the trailing edge. The members of this generation, born during the boom's later years (1955-1964), have not fared as well as their older brothers and sisters. The reason is simple; they were born later.

Psychologist Kevin Leman has written about the effects of birth-order in a single family. The oldest child tends to be serious, responsible, even driven. The youngest child tends to be more carefree—sometimes even the family comic. The order of birth in a single family can often be a great predictor of personality traits.

Paul Light, in his book *Baby Boomers*, observes that “generations may be subject to the same kinds of birth-order effects that social psychologists find in families.” Just as the first-born in a family receives a disproportionate amount of parental attention and nurturance, so first-born boomers received a disproportionate amount of societal attention and privilege.

The leading edge boomers were the first to college, the first to the jobs, and the first to the houses. In the American “first come- first serve” economy, the leading edge found better jobs, better opportunities for career advancement, and better house prices. The trailing edge found just the opposite.

For example, take house prices. A couple that bought a house before inflation and interest rates increased would be better

off financially than a couple that bought a house with an inflated price. The leading edge bought houses before the prices went through the roof. They invested in an appreciating asset. By contrast, the trailing edge bought (or tried to buy) houses that were already inflated. Often just coming up with the down payment was difficult if not impossible.

In general, the earlier someone was born, the better are his or her chances of succeeding in the economy. Anyone who doubts the trend need only watch the devastating impact these economic forces are having on the generation following the baby boom. Many “baby busters” cannot find a job that pays them enough to enable them to leave their parents’ home. Buying homes of their own seems like the impossible dream.

Actually the seeds of this current disillusionment were sown in the 1960s and 1970s. These later-born boomers were not reared in the optimism of the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. Camelot was an historical footnote. During their “Wonder Years” they experienced the assassinations of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert Kennedy. They grew up during the Vietnam War. They saw anti-war protests on nightly television. Leading-edge boomers saw their idyllic visions unravel in the late 60s, but they still retained their childhood memories of a world of affluence and optimism. By contrast, trailing-edge boomers growing up in the 1960s saw a different world—a world of shattered dreams and discordant images.

While older boomers grew up in relatively stable families, younger boomers saw the divorce rate climb to unprecedented levels. Television shows about traditional families like the Andersons and the Cleavers were replaced by sitcoms about single parents like Julia and blended families like The Brady Bunch.

By the time boomers hit the job market, wages had stagnated. National attention on a potential energy crisis, an Arab oil

embargo, and governmental attempts to control inflation made a bad economy worse. Prime entry-level jobs were hard to find and chances for career advancement seemed slim. Inflation peaked at 18 percent in 1979, and unemployment reached 11 percent in 1982—the highest level since before World War II. These certainly were **not** the “Wonder Years.”

Yet through the 1980s, boomer optimism buoyed spirits that perhaps tomorrow would be better, like it had been for their parents. Mom and Dad struggled through the Great Depression and survived World War II to build a better life. Boomers hoped that the same would be true for them. But, for many, better never came, and they are facing an impending crisis of disillusionment in the 1990s.

## **Yuppies and Yuffies**

Social commentators, always looking for new acronyms to describe portions of the population, dubbed these boomers “Yuffies”: young, urban failures. Just as the name “yuppie” lacked demographic precision, so also the term “yuffie” is imprecise. Nevertheless, the term reinforces a point made in previous programs. Not all baby boomers are yuppies. Just the opposite. Most baby boomers are coming face-to-face with disillusionment and downward mobility. Definitions used in 1985 to describe yuppies and yuffies illustrate the point. Yuppies were defined as 25- to 39-year-olds who live in metropolitan areas, work in professional or managerial occupations, and earn at least \$30,000 if living alone and \$40,000 if married or living with someone else. Using that definition, there were only four million yuppies in 1985—constituting just 5 percent of all baby boomers.

Yuffies were defined as baby boomers making less than \$10,000 a year. Although that definition seemed much too restrictive in terms of income, it still defined a full 40 percent of the baby boom generation. In 1985, yuffies were roughly eight times as numerous as yuppies.

In the 1990s the trend is continuing. A generation reared with great expectations must now come to grips with the reality of downward mobility.

## **Home Bittersweet Home**

While the American dream has meant different things to different people, certainly one of the most universal, deeply-held parts of the dream has been owning a home. A Roper Organization survey in 1989 reported that nearly nine out of ten adults listed “a home that you own” as part of the life they would like to have. This was nine percentage points ahead of a happy marriage and fourteen points ahead of a car or children.

Not only is home ownership part of the American dream; it is part of the American fantasy. A nationwide survey by Spiegel Inc. found that one out of ten Americans fantasizes about the “house of their dreams” every single day. The dream house has four bedrooms, three bathrooms, two fireplaces, seven closets, three televisions, four telephones, and is a short stroll from the beach. Other amenities include a media/entertainment center, an exercise facility, a library, a spa/whirlpool, a home office, and an indoor/outdoor pool.

If this characterization of American home fantasies is even close to accurate, no wonder more and more boomers are facing a crisis of broken promises. The American economy simply did not deliver. The dream of owning your own home is a relatively recent one. In 1946— the year the baby boom began—the majority of Americans were renters. Yet within one generation, more than two-thirds of Americans became home owners. The boom generation, growing up in the midst of this significant transition, came to see home ownership as a right rather than a privilege.

But the housing crunch in the 1970s began to change that perception. When the baby boom generation headed out into the

world upon graduation, they found stagnant wages and increasing house prices. Both phenomena were due to the size of the baby boom generation. American couples could create millions of babies every year during the baby boom, but the American economy could not create millions of new jobs and millions of new homes in the 1970s. The sheer size of the generation was only one reason for rising home prices. The living patterns of this generation exacerbated the problem. Three lifestyle patterns are especially relevant. First, baby boomers left the nest earlier than any other generation. Many left for college and never returned home but instead began looking for homes of their own. Second, boomers stayed single longer. Unlike their parents, who married early and then purchased houses, boomers in the 1970s often bought houses as singles, thereby creating an even greater demand on the housing market. Finally, boomers had higher divorce rates. This trend also created more demand for housing than would have occurred if they had assumed the lifestyle of their parents.

These three patterns converged to increase demand on housing. From 1960 to 1980, the total number of households grew by at least 10 million each decade. To put this dramatic increase in perspective, the rate of increase for households was three times faster than that of the population as a whole.

Another reason for the increased cost of home ownership involved the changing perception of a home as an investment. The tax advantage of owning a home in the 1970s and early 1980s was compelling. When the federal income tax was first enacted in 1913, "interest on indebtedness" was exempt. Therefore, a home owner receives a mortgage-interest deduction—effectively a tax subsidy for owning a house rather than renting an apartment. On the other hand, a renter must pay for his apartment with after-tax dollars, and any return from his savings is subject to taxation.

Suddenly, people who would not have normally considered owning

a house (singles, couples who preferred apartment living, etc.) were buying homes in record numbers simply because they were good investments. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, net increases in home owner equity were more than three times larger than total personal savings out of income.

Soon the frenzy became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rising home prices seemed like a good way to beat inflation. The increased demand drove prices even higher, spurring even more demand. According to one writer,

*They bought and sold homes like traders in the pork-belly pit. It was the 1980s, and hundreds of thousands of baby boomers, two-income-couples with ready access to credit, were buying New York real estate.*

Taken together, all of these factors worked to price many couples out of the housing market. To illustrate the impact, compare the difference between buying a new home in 1949 and buying a house in the 1980s. In 1949, a 30-year-old man purchasing a median-priced house only needed to commit 14 percent of his income. A new "Cape Cod" house in Levittown, New York, went for just \$7,990.

By 1983, the convergence of the various factors already mentioned radically altered the equation. Now a 30-year-old man needed to commit 44 percent of his income to meet the carrying charges on a median-priced house. That same year, 65 percent of all first-time home buyers needed two paychecks to meet their monthly payments. The demographics of first time home buyers in 1989 further illustrate this point. The median home price for first-time buyers went over the \$100,000 mark (actually \$105,200) in that year. The average first-time buyer was nearly thirty-something (29.6), and most first-time buyers (87%) needed dual-incomes to qualify. The prospects for a typical renter to become a homeowner are discouraging. Apartment rents stabilized during the late 1980s, but at

record high levels. Only four out of ten young renters had sufficient income to qualify for the mortgage on a median “starter house.” Coming up with a down payment was no easier. According to Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies, even with a 10 percent down payment mortgage, only 20 percent of white renters and 4 percent of black renters can afford a typical starter house.

## **Careers in Crisis**

Although boomers saw their parent’s salaries and job opportunities increase, this has not been the case for them. Wages stagnated in 1973, thus reducing boomer earning potential. By the end of the 1970s, *Fortune* magazine estimated that baby boomers had effectively lost ten years’ income when compared with the earnings of the generation just preceding them.

In the 1970s and 1980s, many couples were able to cope with declining wages by living off two incomes. Many middle-class couples compensated primarily due to the strength of the wife’s increased income since men’s earnings remained relatively flat during this period. But even the wife’s additional income could not forestall the economic impact on families. Young families with two paychecks today earn about the same as a couple that lived only on the husband’s salary in the 1970s.

The problem intensified in the 1990s. The size of the boom generation caused part of the problem. The resulting discrepancy between job supply and job demand first affected the number of entry-level positions that baby boomers could find.

Now boomers find themselves competing for increasingly scarce management-level positions. As one rises in the corporation, the number of management positions decreases as the corporate pyramid narrows. In the early 1980s, economists were writing



about the presence of too many people vying for too few management-level positions, causing a bottleneck at the middle management level. Changes in the corporate world throughout the 1980s exacerbated the problem. "Downsizing," "streamlining," and "merging" are just a few of the terms used to describe the twisting of the corporate pyramid into an almost unrecognizable polygon. Driven by the twin goals of improving productivity and enhancing a company's ability to compete, major corporations have eliminated whole levels of middle and upper management.

This generation often finds itself facing two dismal prospects: career plateauing and the potential of a mid-life layoff.

Belt-tightening measures in the 1980s forced employees to be content with lower wages and smaller wage increases. One research economist predicts that "Salaries will probably barely keep up with the cost of living and taxes...I think we're looking at very modest wage increases in the 1990s." For a generation raised on high expectations, the reality of lower wages and fewer and smaller increases can lead to disillusionment.

Although the conclusion may seem like bad news for society as a whole, I believe that it is good news for the church of Jesus Christ. This generation has effectively turned its back on the gospel, in part because it has had it so good. Boomers didn't feel like they needed anyone or anything. Now that they are coming to grips with discouragement and disillusionment, they may be more open to the gospel. If that is so, then churches and individual Christians can use the trends in our society to maximize their influence for Jesus Christ.

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# The Decline of a Nation – History and Christian Values

*Kerby Anderson considers factors which may lead to the decline of this nation's position as the only world super-power. He points out the relationship between moral and spiritual decline and the decline of society in general. We need to return to godly principles if we are to avoid a descent into irrelevance and depravity.*

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



Doomsayers for many years have been predicting the decline and fall of this country. And while many of these short-term predictions have proved inaccurate, there is some truth to the prevailing belief that this nation will fall like every great nation before it. Apart from revival and reformation, this nation is destined to decline.

The problem with many of these doomsayers is that while their prognosis is right, their diagnosis is wrong. Yes, the future is bleak. But our problem is not ultimately political, economic, or social, as these doomsayers would have us believe. The decline of this nation (just as the decline of every other nation) is due to spiritual factors. The political, economic, and social problems we encounter are the symptoms of the spiritual deterioration of a nation.

Just as there are spiritual principles that influence the life of an individual, so there are political-spiritual principles that govern the life of a nation. And though we may feel that these are obscure and difficult to discern, in reality they are visible to anyone willing to look at the record of history.

Our problem is that we don't really learn from history. George Santayana said that "those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it." The philosopher Hegel said, "What experience and history teach us is this: that people and government never have learned anything from history or acted on principles deduced from it." Or as Winston Churchill said, "The one thing we have learned from history is that we don't learn from history."

The refrains that are often heard are: "It can't happen here," or "Our country is different." But the reality is that nations are born and die just like individuals. Their longevity may exceed the average person's lifespan. But the reality is that nations also die.

History has shown that the average age of the great civilizations is around two hundred years. Countries like Great Britain exceed the average while other countries like the United States are just now reaching the average age.

Each of the great civilizations in the world passed through a series of stages from their birth to their decline to their death. Historians have listed these in ten stages.

The first stage moves from bondage to spiritual faith. The second from spiritual faith to great courage. The third stage moves from great courage to liberty. The fourth stage moves from liberty to abundance. The fifth stage moves from abundance to selfishness. The sixth stage moves from selfishness to complacency. The seventh stage moves from complacency to apathy. The eighth stage moves from apathy to moral decay. The ninth stage moves from moral decay to dependence. And the tenth and last stage moves from dependence to bondage.

These are the ten stages through which the great civilizations have gone. Notice the progression from bondage to liberty back to bondage. The first generation throws off the shackles of

bondage only to have a later generation through apathy and indifference allow itself to once again be enslaved.

This is the direction this and every other country is headed. The book of Judges shows that the nation of Israel passed through these same stages. And this country will do the same unless revival and reformation break out and reverse the inexorable decline of this nation.

## **The Cycle of Nations**

In his book *The End of Christendom*, Malcolm Muggeridge makes this powerful observation. He says:

I conclude that civilizations, like every other human creation, wax and wane. By the nature of the case there can never be a lasting civilization anymore than there can be a lasting spring or lasting happiness in an individual life or a lasting stability in a society. It's in the nature of man and of all that he constructs to perish, and it must ever be so. The world is full of the debris of past civilizations and others are known to have existed which have not left any debris behind them but have just disappeared.

He goes on to say that

...whatever their ideology may be, from the Garden of Eden onwards such dreams of lasting felicity have cropped up and no doubt always will. But the realization is impossible for the simple reason that a fallen creature like man though capable of conceiving perfection and aspiring after it, is in himself and in his works forever imperfect. Thus he is fated to exist in the no man's land between the perfection he can conceive and the imperfection that characterizes his own nature and everything he does.

Nations rise and nations fall. Every nation has followed this progression from bondage to bondage. The nations of this century will be no different. But let us not accept the

Marxist notion that these are fixed and intractable laws of history. Christians can point to unusual times when revival has redirected the inexorable decline of a civilization. In the Old Testament, Jonah saw revival postpone God's judgment of Nineveh. In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther and John Calvin saw a Protestant Reformation transform Europe. And even in the history of the United States the First and Second Great Awakenings changed individuals and our society.

But apart from God's intervention, nations will decline and eventually pass off the scene. Much of the Old Testament records the history of the nation of Israel. It passed through these same stages and so will every country in the world.

As Christians we must recognize that nations will rise and fall just as individuals will be born and die. Our civilization will not last indefinitely, but will eventually pass off the scene. Only God's Word endures forever. We should not put our trust in the things of this world for they are destined for destruction. Instead, we should put our faith in God and His word.

## **The Decline of the Family**

Nations most often fall from within, and this fall is usually due to a decline in the moral and spiritual values in the family. As families go, so goes a nation.

This has been the main premise of thinkers from British historian J. D. Unwin to Russian sociologist Pitirim Sorokin who have studied civilizations that have collapsed. In his book *Our Dance Has Turned to Death*, Carl Wilson identifies the common pattern of family decline in ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. Notice how these seven stages parallel what is happening in our nation today. In the first stage, men ceased to lead their families in worship. Spiritual and moral development became secondary. Their view of God became naturalistic, mathematical, and mechanical.

In the second stage, men selfishly neglected care of their wives and children to pursue material wealth, political and military power, and cultural development. Material values began to dominate thought, and the man began to exalt his own role as an individual. The third stage involved a change in men's sexual values. Men who were preoccupied with business or war either neglected their wives sexually or became involved with lower-class women or with homosexuality. Ultimately, a double standard of morality developed. The fourth stage affected women. The role of women at home and with children lost value and status. Women were neglected and their roles devalued. Soon they revolted to gain access to material wealth and also freedom for sex outside marriage. Women also began to minimize having sex relations to conceive children, and the emphasis became sex for pleasure. Marriage laws were changed to make divorce easy.

In the fifth stage, husbands and wives competed against each other for money, home leadership, and the affection of their children. This resulted in hostility and frustration and possible homosexuality in the children. Many marriages ended in separation and divorce.

Many children were unwanted, aborted, abandoned, molested, and undisciplined. The more undisciplined children became, the more social pressure there was not to have children. The breakdown of the home produced anarchy.

In the sixth stage, selfish individualism grew and carried over into society, fragmenting it into smaller and smaller group loyalties. The nation was thus weakened by internal conflict. The decrease in the birthrate produced an older population that had less ability to defend itself and less will to do so, making the nation more vulnerable to its enemies.

Finally, unbelief in God became more complete, parental authority diminished, and ethical and moral principles

disappeared, affecting the economy and government. Thus, by internal weakness and fragmentation the societies came apart. There was no way to save them except by a dictator who arose from within or by barbarians who invaded from without.

Although this is an ancient pattern of decline found in Greece and Rome, it is relevant today. Families are the foundation of a nation. When the family crumbles, the nation falls because nations are built upon family units. They are the true driving social force. A nation will not be strong unless the family is strong. That was true in the ancient world and it is true today.

Social commentator Michael Novak, writing on the importance of the family, said:

One unforgettable law has been learned through all the disasters and injustices of the last thousand years: If things go well with the family, life is worth living; when the family falters, life falls apart.

## **The Decline of Values**

There are many factors in the decline of a nation. Certainly a major one is the breakdown of the family. But another potent but less perceptible force is the power of ideas.

False ideas are bringing about the decline of western culture. Carl F. H. Henry, in his book *Twilight of a Great Civilization*, says:

There is a new barbarism. This barbarism has embraced a new pagan mentality . . . not simply rejecting the legacy of the West, but embracing a new pagan mentality where there is no fixed truth.

Today we live in a world where biblical absolutes are ignored, and unless we return to these biblical truths, our nation will continue to decline.

To understand how we have arrived at this appalling situation, we need to go back a century and look at the influence of five intellectual leaders who still profoundly affect the modern world. The first person is Charles Darwin (1809-1882). In 1859 he published *The Origin of Species* and later published *The Descent of Man*. His writings blurred the distinction between humans and animals since he taught that we are merely part of an evolutionary progression from lower forms of life. Darwinism, as it came to be called, not only affected the field of biology, but became the foundation for the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology.

The second person is Karl Marx (1818-1883). He and Friedrich Engels published the *Communist Manifesto* around 1850, and Marx devoted his life to writing about the demise of capitalism and coming of communism. He understood the importance of ideas. Marx once wrote: "Give me twenty-six lead soldiers and I will conquer the world." (So did Benjamin Franklin.) The twenty-six lead soldiers are the keys on a typewriter. The pervasive influence of communism in the world today is testimony to the truthfulness of his statement.

The third person is Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). Although he may not be as well known as the other two men mentioned, his influence was just as profound. He was a German Bible scholar whose theory on the dating of the Pentateuch completely transformed Old Testament studies.

Wellhausen argued that the early books of the Bible were not put together by Moses but were gathered together many centuries later by several different men called redactors who wove various strands together. He and his disciples established an anti-supernatural approach to the scriptures which is influential in most denominational seminaries today.

The fourth person is Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). He merely took the logical implications of what Darwin was doing in biology and applied them to what today is known as psychology and



psychiatry. Freud argued that humans are basically autonomous and therefore do not need to know God. Instead, we need to know and understand ourselves since our problems stem from those secret things that have evolved in our lives from our past.

A fifth person is John Dewey (1859-1952). He is the founder of modern education and published his first work, *The School and Society*, in 1899. John Dewey was also one of the co-signers of the *Humanist Manifesto* in 1933.

Dewey, like Darwin and Freud, believed that humans are autonomous. They don't need to have an authority above them but can evolve their own system of education. Thus the very foundation of modern education is anti-supernatural.

Ideas have consequences, and false ideas can bring down a nation. The theories of these five men are having devastating consequences in our nation and world. Unless we return to biblical absolutes, our nation will continue its decline.

## **Spiritual Decline**

The decline and fall of nations is usually due to internal factors rather than external threats. Even though some may have fallen to barbarians, their demise ultimately came because of moral and spiritual weakness which manifested itself as military weakness. Historians have listed the stages in the decline of a nation. These should not be too surprising to any student of the Old Testament. The stages of decline parallel the stages through which the nation of Israel passed.

But neither should they surprise a student of the New Testament. In the opening chapter of the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he traces a similar progression. In fact, Romans 1 shows the decline of a civilization from a societal perspective. Looking at the Hellenistic world of his time, he reflects on the progression of sin in a nation.

The first stage is when people turn from God to idolatry. Although God has revealed Himself in nature to all men so that they are without excuse, they nevertheless worship the creation instead of the Creator. This is idolatry. In the past, this took the form of actual idol worship. In our day, it takes the form of the worship of money or the worship of self. In either case, it is idolatry. A further example of this is a general lack of thankfulness. Although they have been prospered by God, they are ungrateful. And when they are no longer looking to God for wisdom and guidance, they become vain and futile and empty in their imaginations. They no longer honor God, so their foolish hearts become darkened. In professing to be wise, they have become fools.

The second stage is when men and women exchange their natural use of sex for unnatural uses. Here the Apostle Paul says those four sobering words, "God gave them over." In a society where lust-driven sensuality and sexual perversion dominate, God gives them over to their degrading passions and unnatural desires. The third stage is anarchy. Once a society has rejected God's revelation, it is on its own. Moral and social anarchy is the natural result. At this point God has given the sinners over to a depraved mind and so they do things which are not proper. This results in a society which is without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.

The final stage is judgment. God's judgment rightly falls upon those who practice idolatry and immorality. Certainly an eternal judgment awaits those who are guilty, but a social judgment occurs when God gives a nation over to its sinful practices.

Notice that this progression is not unique to the Hellenistic world the Apostle Paul was living in. The progression from idolatry to sexual perversion to anarchy to judgment is found throughout history.

In the times of Noah and Lot, there was the idolatry of greed,

there was sexual perversion and promiscuity, there was anarchy and violence, and finally there was judgment. Throughout the history of the nation of Israel there was idolatry, sexual perversion, anarchy (in which each person did what was right in his own eyes), and finally judgment.

This progression happened throughout the Bible and to Greece, to Persia, to Babylon, and to Rome. And if it happened to these nations, then it can happen today. Unless we return to God's principles, decline and destruction are inevitable.

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## **Politics and Religion**

Nearly everywhere you go, it seems, you hear statements like, "You can't legislate morality," or "Christians shouldn't try to legislate their morality." Like dandelions, they pop up out of nowhere and sow seeds of deception in the fertile, secular soil of our society.

Unfortunately, I have also heard these cliches repeated in many churches. Even Christians seem confused about how they are to communicate a biblical view of issues to a secular world.

Part of the confusion stems from blurring the distinctions between law and human behavior. When a person says, "You can't legislate morality," he or she might mean simply that you can't make people good through legislation. In that instance, Christians can agree.

The law (whether biblical law or civil law) does not by itself transform human behavior. The apostle Paul makes that clear in his epistle to the Romans. English jurists for the last few

centuries have also agreed that the function of the law is not to make humans good but to control criminal behavior.

But if you understand the question in its normal formulation, then Christians can and should legislate morality. At the more basic level, law and public policy is an attempt to legislate morality. The more relevant question is not whether we should legislate morality but what kind of morality we should legislate.

Much of the confusion stems from our country's misunderstanding of democratic pluralism. Our founders wisely established a country that protected individual personal beliefs with constitutional guarantees of speech, assembly, and religion. But undergirding this pluralism was a legal foundation that presupposed a Judeo-Christian system of ethics.

Thus, in the area of personal ethics, people are free to think and believe anything they want. Moreover, they are free to practice a high degree of ethical pluralism in their personal life. To use a common phrase, they are free "to do their own thing." But that doesn't imply total ethical anarchy. Not everyone can "do his own thing" in every arena of life, so government must set some limits to human behavior.

This is the domain of social ethics. To use an oft-repeated phrase, "a person's right to freely swing his or her arms, stops at the end of your nose." When one person's actions begin to affect another person, we have moved from personal ethics to social ethics and often have to place some limits on human behavior.

Government is to bear the sword (Rom. 13:4) and thus must legislate some minimum level of morality when there is a threat to life, liberty, or property. An arsonist is not free "to do his own thing" nor is a rapist or a murderer. At that point, government must step in to protect the rights of

citizens.

Perhaps the most visible clash between different perceptions of ethics can be seen in the abortion controversy. Pro-choice groups generally see the abortion issue as an area of personal morality. On the other hand, pro-life advocates respond that the fetus is human life, so something else is involved besides just personal choice. Thus, government should protect the life of the unborn child.

## **Promoting Christian Values**

Christians must consider how to communicate biblical morality effectively to a secular culture. Here are a few principles.

First, we must interpret Scripture properly. Too often, Christians have passed off their sociological preferences (on issues like abortion or homosexual behavior) instead of doing proper biblical exegesis. The result has often been *a priori* conclusions buttressed with improper proof-texting.

In areas where the Bible clearly speaks, we should exercise our prophetic voice as we seek to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16). In other areas, concessions should be allowed.

The apostle Paul recognized that the first priority of Christians is to preach the gospel. He refused to allow various distinctions to hamper his effectiveness and tried to “become all things to all men” that he might save some (1 Cor. 9:22). Christians must stand firm for biblical truth, yet also recognize the greater need for the unsaved person to hear a loving presentation of the gospel.

Second, Christians should carefully develop biblical principles which can be applied to contemporary social and medical issues. Christians often jump immediately from biblical passages into political and social programs. They wrongly neglect the important intermediate step of applying biblical principles within a particular social and cultural

situation.

In recent years, there has been a dangerous tendency for certain Christians to identify their message with a particular political party or philosophy of government. Christians must be more careful to articulate the connection between biblical principles and specific programs. While Christians may agree about the goal, they may reasonably disagree about which program might best achieve that goal. In these non-moral areas, a spirit of freedom may be necessary.

Third, Christians should articulate the moral teachings of Scripture in ways that are meaningful in a pluralistic society. Philosophical principles like the "right to life" or "the dangers of promiscuity" can be appealed to as part of common grace. Scientific, social, legal, and ethical considerations can be useful in arguing for biblical principles in a secular culture.

Christians can argue in a public arena against abortion on the basis of scientific and legal evidence. Medical advances in embryology and fetology show that human life exists in the womb. A legal analysis of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision shows the justices violated a standard principle of jurisprudence. The burden of proof is placed on the life-taker and the benefit of the doubt is given to the life-saver. Since the Court never determined when life begins, they erroneously ruled that states could not prohibit first trimester abortions.

Likewise, Christians can argue against the depravity of homosexuality on the basis of the dangers of sexual promiscuity in an age of AIDS. Epidemiological and sociological data can provide a convincing case for public health measures that will prevent the spread of AIDS.

This does not mean we should sublimate the biblical message. But our effectiveness in the public arena will be improved if

we elaborate the scientific, social, legal, and ethical aspects of a particular issue instead of trying to articulate our case on Scripture alone.

In conclusion, Christians should develop effective ways to communicate biblical morality to our secular culture. Law and public policy should be based upon biblical morality which results from an accurate interpretation of Scripture and a careful application to society.

## **Role of Religion in Politics**

What should be the role of religion in politics? A number of years ago I participated in a panel representing a Baskin-Robbins variety of religious opinion that considered this controversial question. The scenario we were to consider was that of “a candidate running for office who comes from the far religious right and uses his religious beliefs as a major part of his political credentials.”

I was intrigued by the addition of the adjective “far,” especially since the moderator, Hodding Carter, served in the administration of an evangelical president. Jimmy Carter—hardly considered a member of the “far” religious right—became the only Democrat to win a presidential election in the last twenty years because he successfully used his “born-again” beliefs to influence voters.

Moreover, how plausible is the scenario? Pat Robertson withdrew from the 1988 presidential primaries with few delegates. Jerry Falwell has withdrawn from his previous active role in the Moral Majority. And many surveys suggest that American voters still have some misgivings about mixing politics and evangelical Christianity.

The Williamsburg Charter Survey on Religion and Public Life (taken a number of years ago) showed that while only 8 percent of Americans would refuse to vote for a Roman Catholic on the

basis of religion, 13 percent would refuse to vote for a "born-again Baptist" and 21 percent wouldn't vote for a candidate who has been a minister of a church.

Nevertheless, two ministerial candidates did campaign for the presidency in 1988, perhaps hoping that voters who shared their convictions would overlook their lack of experience in public office. Although they both achieved some minor success, the delegate counts confirmed American voters' wariness of ministers in public office.

Is it possible too much is being made of the religious factor in elections? While it may make great copy for ACLU or PAW fund raising letters warning of "religious ayatollahs" taking over the government, the reality is that the American electorate may be looking more for competence than convictions.

Two notable evangelicals in Congress in the last few years have been Senator Bill Armstrong and Senator Mark Hatfield. Both come from states geographically removed from the Bible Belt, suggesting that they are elected for more than just their religious convictions.

Certainly the evangelical vote has played a factor in past presidential elections. Jimmy Carter won one of the closest elections in American history because of the "born-again" vote and lost it four years later when many of those voters abandoned him for Ronald Reagan. American voters, perhaps because of the Carter experience, seem less inclined to use religious conviction as the litmus test for public office.

If anything, the Williamsburg Charter Survey seems to show that Americans are applying an inverse religious test. The Constitution prohibits a religious test for public office, but the voters may be reversing that idea and really wanting someone who doesn't take his faith too seriously.

This is indeed unfortunate because religious ideals should



undergird this republic. Yet voters seem willing to settle for a president with nothing more than a lukewarm Christian faith.

Thirty years ago, President Eisenhower declared a national day of prayer and then used the day to go golfing. Later revelations from the Reagan White House suggest the president spent more time consulting the stars than praying to the Creator of those stars. Perhaps nothing has changed. If so, then the hypothetical scenario we were asked to consider on the panel will remain hypothetical.

## **Pluralism in this Country**

This country was founded on the idea of a tempered pluralism that allowed for a civil debate among the citizens. Although we take this pluralism for granted, it is instructive to remember how radical this concept was in the history of political philosophy. In the past, secular political philosophers argued that a legitimate state could not tolerate much freedom and diversity. After all, how would the dictator or monarch rule effectively if that much dissent were allowed?

Foundational to this idea is the belief that government should not be the final arbiter of truth. It should not be an institution that settles by force the truthfulness of an issue. This is why the framers of the Constitution specifically provided freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. Government should not have power to impose its version of truth by force.

Christians should be strong supporters of this idea. We believe that God governs this world by His grace. His final judgment awaits, and we should not take His judgment into our hands. Overly anxious Christians often want to pull up the tares in the field instead of allowing the wheat and the tares to grow together.

Tyranny results when an authoritarian leader comes along who

wants to impose his brand of truth on others. It is wrong for secularists to try to remove religion from the public sphere, and it is equally wrong for religious leaders to impose religion on others by force. In either case the political arena becomes a religious battleground.

What we should develop is a civil debate where Christians are allowed to promote biblical morality without imposing it. This has been made more difficult by the current anti-religious climate in our society.

Richard John Neuhaus talks of the "naked public square," where religious values have been stripped from the public arenas of discourse. In this case, the tempered pluralism of the framers has been replaced by a radical pluralism which assumes that all values are relative. Public moral judgments, therefore, seem out of place. In recent years, we have seen a great deal of prejudice against such pronouncements simply because they are rooted in biblical morality.

So, the "naked public square," where religious values are excluded, is wrong. Likewise, the "sacred public square," which seeks to impose religious values, is also wrong. What Christians should be arguing for is a "civil public square" that allows an open, civil debate to take place. In such an arena, controversial ideas can be discussed and debated in a civil manner.

This form of pluralism must be more than just window dressing. Christians and non-Christians alike must be dedicated to maintaining a pluralism that allows vigorous interchange and debate. Unfortunately, there is some indication that many in our society see pluralism as merely a means to an end. English historian E. R. Norman believed that "pluralism is a name society gives itself when it is in the process of changing from one orthodoxy to another."

If this is what secularists really want, then pluralism is in

trouble. When religion is excluded in the name of pluralism, then pluralism no longer exists.

## **Biblical Principles**

Christians should first develop a comprehensive program of social involvement. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is not a temporary, issue-oriented crusade. Christians are not merely to march against injustice and then cease their involvement. They have an on-going responsibility to build positive alternatives to existing evil.

Second, social and political involvement based upon biblical absolutes must be realistic. We should not fall prey to utopian political philosophies but squarely face the sinful nature of man and the important place government has in God's creation. Because of a general cynicism about the role of government, Christians are often guilty of neglecting their role in society.

As Christians we must remember that although the times are evil, God's common grace restrains sin. Even though perfect justice cannot be achieved until Christ returns, we are nevertheless responsible for doing what we can. If we co-labor with God, we can have a measure of success in achieving a better society.

Third, Christians should focus attention not only on individual change but on societal change. Changing lives is fundamental but not completely sufficient to change society. Revival must lead to reformation. Christians should not merely be content with Christians thinking biblically about the issues of life. They must also be acting biblically and building institutions with a Christian framework. A Christian world view implies a Christian world order.

Christian obedience goes beyond calling for spiritual renewal. We have often failed to ask the question, What do we do if

hearts are not changed? Because government is ordained of God, we need to consider ways to legitimately use governmental power. Christians have a high stake in making sure government acts justly and makes decisions that provide maximum freedom for the furtherance of the gospel.

In situations in which governmental redress is not available, civil disobedience becomes an option. When such conditions exist, Christians might have to suffer the consequences as did their first-century counterparts in a hostile Roman culture.

We are to obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29) when civil government and civil law violate God's commands and law. Christians therefore were correct when they hid Jews from the Nazis during World War II. Hitler's Germany did not have the right to take innocent life or persecute the Jews.

Finally, the major focus of social involvement should be through the local church. Social action in the church is best called *social service*, since it attempts to move from the theoretical area of social ethics to the practical level of serving others in need. While evangelicals are to be commended for giving to the poor and others faced with adversity, our duty does not stop there. A much neglected area is personal involvement with people who need help.

The local church is the best place to begin to meet many social needs of a society. In the New Testament, the local church was the training ground for social involvement and provided a context by which the needy were shown compassion. Christians, therefore, should begin their outreach to society from the church and work together to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

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# Economic Issues

## Minimum Wage

Although the minimum wage law is more than 50 years old, it is still a very controversial measure. In fact, a battle over the minimum wage occurs every time Congress tries to increase it. Minimum wage seems like one of those political issues that compassionate people should support. But the opposite is true. The minimum wage leads to maximum unemployment for people with few job skills trying to enter the work force.

My own experience is illustrative. I started job hunting as a teenager during a rather depressed economy. The minimum wage requirement nearly kept me from getting a job because, as an unskilled laborer entering the job market for the first time, I had nothing more to offer than a strong back and conscientious work habits. Whether I was worth the minimum wage in my first job is questionable. But after working in a machine shop and as a ditch digger, I developed skills that made me more valuable to my employer.

Back in 1938, establishing a minimum wage of 35 cents an hour seemed admirable. But today it effectively shuts less-skilled people out of the work force. In essence, the minimum wage law requires employers to discriminate against young people with few job skills. A teenager whose services are worth, say, only \$3 an hour is not going to be hired at \$4.25 an hour (plus benefits like Social Security, which raise the cost to the employer to over \$5 an hour). The choice is not between working for \$3 an hour and working for \$4.25 an hour. The real choice is between working for \$3 an hour and not working at all.

The effect of minimum wage on young people is devastating. When the lowest rung on the ladder is higher than your head, that necessary first step into a job will never be taken. The high rate of unemployment among teenagers is due in large part to the minimum wage laws that place the rungs on the ladder too high. Eliminating the minimum wage would allow more young people to get on-the-job training.

Minimum wage's effect on the poor is also troubling. Research indicates that for every 10 percent rise in the minimum wage, there is a 3 percent drop in employment among workers covered by the Fair Labor and Standards Act. In other words, if seven workers get their wages increased, three workers either get fired or can't find work. Notice how the minimum wage law has changed the nature of employment in America. More and more restaurants are switching from waiter service to self-service. Gas stations have followed suit. It explains why you see fewer ushers at movie theaters and fewer "bag boys" at supermarkets. In the past, these jobs allowed young people to develop job skills. Today, many don't exist, and young people are the losers.

Raising the minimum wage may seem compassionate. But in the end, those with limited job skills in need of work experience are the ones hurt by good intentions.

## **Comparable Worth**

Although the idea of comparable worth has been roundly criticized, it is still gaining proponents. Like the minimum wage, it seems at first glance like an issue we should back. But it has not exactly generated a groundswell of support.

Clarence Pendleton (former chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights) called comparable worth "the looniest idea since Looney Tunes came on the screen." But even so, its proponents are resolved to make it the law of the land.

The seeds of comparable worth first found fertile ground in the judicial system. A number of years ago, Federal Judge Jack Tanner, citing a consulting firm's comparable-worth study, ruled that the state of Washington was guilty of sex discrimination. His judgment of nearly \$1 billion against the state provided impetus for a similar suit in California.

Proponents of comparable worth argue that the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are not enough and urge the adoption of comparable worth legislation. But underlying this movement are some questionable assumptions.

First is the dubious assumption that differences between male and female wages are due to discrimination. But sexism has less to do with the wage differences than with the way women participate in the economy. Many work part-time, and most leave the job market to raise children. Economist Walter Williams estimates that women on the average spend about one-third of their potential working years in the labor market and therefore have less job-related experience than men. When relevant criteria such as education, experience, and seniority are factored in, many wage disparities vanish.

A study released by the Rand Corporation demonstrates that the gap between male and female wages is decreasing steadily, and the rate of decrease has begun to accelerate in the last few years. Economists James Smith and Michael Ward show that this rise in wages is commensurate with improvements in women's education and job experience, "rather than legislation, government commissions, or political movements."

Second, the approach assumes that personnel studies can adequately compare different kinds of jobs. Yet there is no such thing as an objective scale of economic values. Economists from Marx to Ricardo have tried to devise non-market criteria for the value of labor, and there is still no consensus after 100 years of work on the project.

What will happen when the studies disagree, as they inevitably will? The potential for disputes is endless. Should nurses earn as much as doctors or paramedics? How about a secretary who can drive a car? Should she make more than a truck driver who cannot type? There simply are not enough courts to handle the many kinds of questions that will surely follow.

Third, comparable worth assumes that governmental bureaucrats should decide pay levels. Even in situations of obvious discrimination, we should question whether a bureaucracy is the best way to rectify the problem. In fact, in light of the last 25 years of research into the nature of governmental bureaucracies, one might wonder whether bureaucracies are the best way to deal with any social problem.

Wage inequity deserves attention, but the solution is not to force employers to pay wages established by bureaucrats rather than by the free market. We need better implementation of existing laws and prosecution when discrimination occurs.

Comparable worth plays a game of "worthier than thou" by trying to compare vastly dissimilar occupations without utilizing the market system and depending solely upon subjective judgments. We would do better without it.

## **Budget Deficits**

A theme in recent campaigns has been the budget deficit. And for good reason. We are drowning in tides of red ink, and something must be done. Some candidates suggest that the way to balance the budget is to increase taxes. But that won't solve the problem and most likely will make it worse.

The problem is not that we are undertaxed but that we are overspent. Consider these budget statistics. First, taxes have continued to increase throughout this century. That's not so surprising since the cost of living has increased as well. But tax receipts as a percentage of the GNP have also steadily



increased over time.

A second way to look at the problem is to plot the increase of the federal government's budget. In 1938 the budget was \$7 billion. Today the budget exceeds \$1 trillion. That's an increase of over 14,000 percent. In comparison, in 1938 a Hershey bar cost 5 cents, a first-class stamp 3 cents, a new Ford \$600, a good suit \$40, and gold \$35 per ounce. However, if these costs increased by the same proportion as the cost of government, the prices would be astronomical. A Hershey bar would be \$7, a first-class stamp would be \$4.20, a car would sell for \$84,000, a suit for \$5,600, and an ounce of gold would be \$4,900.

Moreover, a tax increase is not a solution; it is part of the problem. Economist Walter Williams has shown that the facts simply do not square with the oft-repeated assumption that more taxes will reduce the deficit.

Williams has studied the federal budget figures for the last 25 years and found the following. The budget has been in the red 24 of the last 25 years. And in 19 of those years there have been tax increases. His studies show that for each \$1 in tax increase during that period, there was a \$1.58 spending increase. In other words, when taxes rose, deficits skyrocketed.

In 1982, when Congress passed the largest peacetime tax increase in U.S. history, the new revenues were not used to decrease the deficit. Instead, they were used to increase spending in a number of budget categories.

The solution is to cut the federal budget. Bloated bureaucracies drain America's economic competitiveness and often dole out grants to things ranging from obscure scientific projects to obscene art. Certainly it is time to begin cutting the federal budget in significant ways.

A major budget category is federal pensions. There is nothing

wrong with providing pensions to civil service employees and military retirees. But some of these pensions have grown much more lucrative than anything found in the private sector.

For example, retired Senator Al Gore was making more than his son, Al Gore, Jr., until the younger man was given a Congressional pay increase in the mid-1980s. When Gore senior retired from Congress in 1970, his salary was \$42,000. But, thanks to federal cost-of-living increases, his pension was over \$78,000, while his son's salary was only \$77,000. When a current member of Congress makes less than a retired one, something is wrong with pensions. The Grace Commission found that if federal pensions were trimmed to resemble the "best" private sector pension programs, \$58 billion in taxes could be saved over a three-year period.

The federal budget is a problem, but many are looking in the wrong places for solutions. Americans are not undertaxed. The American government is overspent. We need to cut expenses, not raise taxes.

## **Housing**

In recent years, Congress has made significant changes in the way it funds public housing. As the next budget considerations loom in the future, we can learn a great deal from the successes of the past.

One of the most important successes was the adoption of the housing voucher concept. The argument for housing vouchers is simple. Many current federal housing policies focus on bricks and mortar. These programs provide incentives to private developers and thus place an emphasis on buildings. Direct rent assistance in the form of housing vouchers is used to replace construction subsidy programs, which often benefit contractors more than the poor. These voucher programs, therefore, direct government resources at people, not projects.

Housing vouchers given to renters utilize the free market system to bring about desired changes. When rent subsidies are allocated for construction of housing projects, we create a seller's market. When we give housing vouchers to renters, we create a buyer's market. A housing voucher system encourages landlords to improve run-down apartments.

Government housing policies make families dependent upon governmental subsidies and lock them into inadequate housing situations. In our effort to win the war on poverty, we have lost the war on independence.

To be poor is to be caught in a culture of poverty, frustrated and without choices. The voucher system provides not only a roof and walls, but choice and dignity. Although government pays only the amount of rent that exceeds 30 percent of a family's income, the family can choose to pay more than that and is free to move to a different housing situation.

A second program success has been the privatization of public housing. A few years ago a bill encouraging privatization was sponsored by conservative Jack Kemp and liberal Walter Fauntroy. Kemp, invoking memories of the Homestead Act of 1862, referred to this legislation as the "urban homesteading bill."

The bill offered tenants of the nation's 1.25 million public housing units the chance to buy their own homes and apartments at 75 percent below market value with no money down and at greatly reduced interest rates. Only units that were "modernized" were offered for sale.

The bill also empowered public housing tenants to run their own projects. Legislators recognized that tenant management would provide better management of public housing.

Inspiration for resident management came from the example of the Kenilworth-Parkside project in Washington, D.C. In 1982, Mayor Marion Barry granted self-management to the residents.

An analysis by an international accounting firm indicated that the tenants cut operating costs significantly, boosted rent collections by 77 percent, reduced the vacancy rate by two-thirds, and halved the rate of welfare dependency, thanks to jobs in the project created by the management team. These savings and new revenues, say the accountants, added close to \$10 million to Washington's tax collections.

These have been constructive changes in public housing policy. Housing vouchers provide choices and dignity and arm the poor with a mechanism to improve housing. Resident control of public housing provides for initiative and independence. We need more housing programs like this in the future.

## **Churches and Taxes**

One of the oft-cited criticisms of Christians is that they attend churches that should be forced to pay their fair share of taxes. But once you understand the history of this issue, it is easy to see why critics of tax-exempt institutions miss the point.

When the United States was founded, the framers of the constitution wanted to protect churches from governmental influence. The first amendment to the Constitution specifically states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This protected the churches from the intrusive hand of the state.

But when Congress began to tax its citizens, a question arose. Could it tax churches? The answer then was very simple.

The first two modern income-tax statutes were the Revenue Act of 1894 and the Revenue Act of 1913. In both the laws, only "net income" was to be taxed. Churches and all other non-profit organizations had no "net income," so they were not taxed. The author of the 1913 Act, Cordell Hull, even resisted

the call for establishing explicit categories of exemptions. He argued that the law was designed to impose explicit categories of taxation, therefore, all organizations not listed would be exempt.

But that was not sufficient for many in the bureaucracy, and so, over time, the Internal Revenue Service began to define what a tax- exempt organization might be. In the IRS code, it is defined as a 501(c)(3) organization.

From the IRS's point of view, it made sense to define a church, because they began to see the rise of bogus churches with names like the "Church of the Marijuana" or the "Hot Tub Church." But from the Christian point of view it seems most unwise to have IRS agents define in legal language what the Bible provides in explicit detail. Sometimes there was a significant confrontation.

Fortunately, Congress has passed a bill which more clearly specifies the role the IRS can have in securing church records and determining whether a church qualifies under the IRS code.

Many critics of churches argue that they can unfairly compete in the marketplace because of their tax exemption. But most of that objection was answered years ago.

The Tax Reform Act of 1969 ended churches' tax exemption for income from profit-making enterprises. Before 1969, churches exempt under the IRS code did not have to pay corporate income tax on unrelated business income, but Congress closed that loophole.

Critics also argue that exemptions are given as a legislative grace in return for specified public services which government would have to provide. But the U.S. Supreme Court held in a 1970 case that traditional property-tax exemptions for churches are constitutional and rejected the notion that exemption is a legislative grace. The argument may have its merits in reference to colleges, hospitals, libraries, or

parks. But it is not applicable to churches, since government could not constitutionally set up or operate a church to provide the religious services churches provide. Despite allegations to the contrary, churches are not “getting away with something.” They do not pay taxes because they do not have net income. When they do make a profit in a business enterprise, they pay taxes on it. The rest of the time, they should be tax exempt.

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# Civil Disobedience

## Biblical Examples

In Romans 13:1-7 we read that every person should be in subjection to governing authorities because there is no authority except from God. Those who resist authority have opposed the ordinance of God and will receive condemnation upon themselves. The Apostle Paul then concludes this section by saying that believers are to render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

The Apostle Peter likewise says, Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right (1 Pet. 2:13-14). So it is against this backdrop of biblical obedience to civil authorities that we discuss the issue of civil disobedience.

Francis Schaeffer said in the *Christian Manifesto* that if

there is never a case in which a Christian would practice civil disobedience, then the state has become Lord. He said, One either confesses that God is the final authority, or one confesses that Caesar is Lord. The Bible clearly teaches that there are times when a believer must disobey civil law so that he or she can obey God's higher law.

In the Old Testament there are a number of prominent examples of civil disobedience. In Exodus 1 and 2, when Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill all male Hebrew babies, they lied to Pharaoh and did not carry out his command.

The book of Daniel has a number of instructive examples. In Daniel 3, for example, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow down to the golden image and were cast into the fiery furnace. In Daniel 6 the commissioners and satraps had King Darius make a decree that no one could make a petition to any god or man for thirty days. Daniel nevertheless continued to pray to God three times a day and was cast into the lion's den.

The most dramatic example of civil disobedience in the New Testament can be found in Acts 4 and 5. When Peter and John were commanded not to preach the gospel, their response was, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

Notice that in each of these examples there are at least two common elements. First, there was a direct, specific conflict between God's law and man's law. Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill male Hebrew babies. Nebuchadnezzar commanded his subjects to bow before the golden image. King Darius ruled that no one could pray. And, in the New Testament, the High Priest and the Council forbade the apostles from proclaiming the gospel.

Second, in choosing to obey God's higher law, believers paid the normal consequence for disobedience. Although most of those previously cited escaped the consequence through

supernatural intervention, we know from biblical and secular history that others paid for their disobedience with their lives.

## Operation Rescue

Operation Rescue describes itself as a group of God-fearing people peacefully but physically placing themselves between the killer [the abortionist] and his intended victims [the baby and the mother]. Members of Operation Rescue explain that

*to rescue someone is to physically intervene on their behalf when they are in danger. We have an obligation before God to try to rescue these children and these women. We do this in a spirit of repentance for our many years of apathy and lack of action.*

The foundational scripture for Operation Rescue is found in Proverbs 24:11-12. These verses read:

*Rescue those being led away to death. Hold back those staggering toward slaughter. If you say, But we knew nothing about this, does not He who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not He who guards your life know it?*

One brochure produced by Operation Rescue explains these verses by saying,

*It is evil to know that children are about to be murdered and just let them die (Matthew 24:45). The abortionist is committing murder. He will not be able to appeal to Romans 13 on the day of judgment, and neither will we if we remain silent and allow this holocaust to continue.*

Another very important verse for Operation Rescue is James 4:17. It is frequently cited with any commentary on the previous verses in Proverbs. And it is also used to answer the



question of whether it is sin if a person does not engage in a rescue. James 4:17 reads, Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do, and does not do it, to him it is sin. Evidently, anyone who does not participate in Operation Rescue is committing sin.

When asked how going to jail can save a baby, members of Operation Rescue respond that it doesn't. But, they say, preventing the mother and baby from entering the killing center saves the baby and the mother.

When asked why they have to get arrested, members of Operation Rescue respond as follows.

*There is an immovable moral ground upon which we stand. The murder of innocent people is wrong—absolutely wrong (Proverbs 6:16-17). Therefore, the appropriate response (based on Jesus' example) is to firmly and non-violently resist the evil by placing our bodies between the abortionist and his victims, which we do until we are carried away. This is called intervention. Intervention is a reasonable and proper response to murder. We are not there to get arrested. This is not a protest or a media stunt. We are there to follow God's command to rescue those being led away to death (Proverbs 24:11). We are to obey God's law even when it conflicts with the laws of men (Acts 5:29).*

Finally, members of Operation Rescue are often asked why they don't rescue every day. They respond,

*We would if we could. We are committing all we can to this task. If more in the Christian community would respond and be willing to be broken and spilled out we could close every abortuary in this city everyday (Mark 14:8).*

## Critique by Dr. Charles Stanley

As pastor of the First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Dr. Charles Stanley was confronted with the activities of Operation Rescue in his city and thus provided one of the first critiques of the movement. While he is pro-life and agrees that the Supreme Court precedent of Roe v. Wade must be changed, he disagrees with the tactics and methodology of Operation Rescue.

In his analysis of the relevant scriptural passages, Dr. Stanley identifies a general biblical principle and the biblical exception. In developing the general biblical principle, he lists three major passages: Romans 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:11-17, and Titus 3:1. He then concludes that these passages clearly teach that a believer has a biblical responsibility to submit to and obey the governing authorities.

The underlying premise on which this general principle is founded is that government is a divinely ordained institution for the maintenance of order, the punishment of evil, and the promotion of good in the world. This premise, according to Dr. Stanley, is supported by the following ideas. First, all authority is from God. Second, governing authorities are God's ministers. Third, observing the law is a positive, public testimony for Christ. Fourth, observing the law is the right thing to do. And finally, observing the law is ordered by God.

Having stated the general principle, Dr. Stanley then articulates the biblical exception. He says, It is right to break the laws when there is a direct, specific conflict between God's law and man's law because God's law is higher. He lists three major examples: Exodus 1 with the Hebrew midwives, Daniel 6 with Daniel and King Darius, and Acts 4 and 5 where Peter and John are commanded not to preach the gospel.

As I noted earlier, each of these examples has two elements in common with the other. First, there was a direct, specific

conflict between God's law and man's law. Second, in choosing to obey God's higher law, the law-breakers paid the normal, natural consequences of their disobedience.

Dr. Stanley therefore concludes that a believer has a biblical responsibility to obey God's higher law when there is a direct, specific conflict with man's law. He then goes on to say that the civil disobedience advocated by Operation Rescue does not fit the biblical exception for three reasons.

First, the law being broken has nothing to do with abortion. Those arrested are not being arrested because they are protesting abortion but because they are trespassing. Dr. Stanley says that if anti-God protesters blocked the entrance to First Baptist Church, he would use the same ordinance to have them arrested.

Second, Roe v. Wade neither requires abortions nor prohibits them, but makes them permissible with certain restrictions. Third, the women who choose to have abortions are free moral agents responsible before God for their actions, including the exercise of the rights of their innocent, unborn children.

Dr. Stanley adds that if the law required abortions or prohibited the preaching of the gospel, his response would be different. The biblical exception would be met and the battle lines would be drawn.

## **Additional Critique**

In our survey of biblical instances of civil disobedience, we have found that in each situation there was a direct conflict between God's law and man's law. In every situation a command from someone in authority directly conflicted with a biblical command.

In these cases, breaking civil statutes is biblically permitted. But what about instances where there is no direct command that conflicts with Scripture? This is where

proponents and opponents of Operation Rescue generally differ.

Proponents argue that because abortion is immoral and unbiblical, we must exercise civil disobedience. Opponents instead say that breaking civil statutes is biblically permissible only when we are forced to choose between God and Caesar.

Ken Myers, editor of the newsletter *Genesis* and former editor of *Eternity* magazine, summarizes the argument this way. He says Christians are permitted before God to disobey those laws that, if obeyed, would involve sin. But laws that can be obeyed without sin should be obeyed.

The fundamental principle is this: Christians are never permitted to disobey a just law in order to minimize the effects of unjust laws. In the case of Operation Rescue, the law being broken is a just law that prohibits trespassing. Rescuers are not being arrested because they are protesting abortion; they are being arrested for trespassing.

When there is a clear contradiction between God and Caesar, we have to obey God. But in other cases, we are to render obedience to civil authority. If we do not, then a state of anarchy would quickly develop in which each person did what was right in his own eyes. Christians must resist our culture's tendency to rebel at the first provocation, especially in light of the numerous scriptural admonitions to obey those in authority. These verses place the burden of proof on those advocating civil disobedience. Ken Myers suggests that rather than being argued out of breaking the law, we should be argued into breaking the law. Those advocating civil disobedience should successfully argue their case for disobeying the law. If they do not or cannot, then we should obey civil authority.

This principle is especially important in light of our sin nature. All of us have some rebellion in us because of our sin

nature, and we want to break the law. So a good check on our carnal desires is to ask if breaking a civil law is biblically required. If not, we should give obedience to the law the benefit of the doubt.

Finally, opponents of Operation Rescue have objected to its use of physical force. Proponents believe that physical force (blocking entrances to abortion clinics) should be used to restrain the evil of abortion. But this raises two questions.

First, what are the limits to the use of physical force? If blocking clinics is justified, what about burning them down or blowing them up? Once any form of physical force is justified, how do we define the limits of its use?

Second, if physical force can be justified in fighting abortion what about its use in restraining other evils like idolatry or adultery? Should Christians block the entrances to New Age bookstores or porno shops?

These are important questions that need to be resolved. Although the Bible does permit civil disobedience, proponents of Operation Rescue leave many unanswered questions at a time when their actions should bear the burden of proof.

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