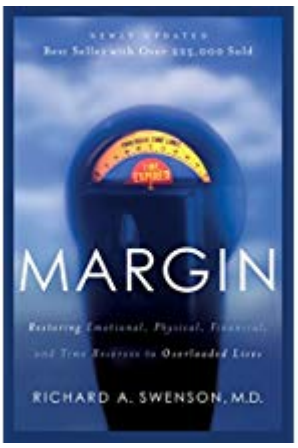
Margin: Space Between Ourselves and Our Limits

Margin is "The space that once existed between ourselves and our limits." When we reach the limits of our resources and abilities, we are out of margin. Former Probe staffer Lou Whitworth reviews a very important book by Dr. Richard Swenson, Margin: How to Create the Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves You Need.

The Problem with Progress



Until very recently most Americans had a blind faith in progress; we acknowledged that modern life brought problems but considered that such were inevitable and could be dealt with and eventually overcome. Over the past few years, however, discerning people have begun to ask, "What went wrong? With all the advancements we have made, life should be better. Instead, many aspects of our lives are worse than they were just a few years ago. What happened?"



In this article we are looking at a very important book by Richard A. Swenson, a medical doctor. The book is *Margin: How to Create the Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves You Need*. Dr. Swenson's thesis is that though scientific progress benefits us in numerous ways, it also brings with it inevitable pains that must be ruthlessly resisted if one is to live a balanced life, and especially a life that reflects Christian values/virtues.

Margin is "the space that once existed between ourselves and

our limits.” When we reach the limits of our resources and abilities, we are out of margin. Progress, contrary to our expectations, is like Pacman; it incessantly eats up margin. Progress and margin are often opposing forces.

The author recognizes the pains of the past and acknowledges that life for previous generations was no picnic. Nevertheless, he amply illustrates the staggering number of challenges facing contemporary mankind, challenges that have no precedent in human history. The pace of modern life has been steamrolled by progress.

Many have resisted the notion that life in the waning years of the 20th century was unusually painful and stressful. After all, didn’t our history teach us of those intrepid men and women who crossed oceans and braved the harsh winters of the new world to have personal and religious freedom? Shouldn’t we be ashamed to complain about the stress in our lives when brave pioneer men, and their even braver wives, piled their children and all their belongings into covered wagons and headed west across unknown and unforgiving lands surrounded by potentially hostile Indians? Did not our fathers win World War II? After 50 years of strife and struggle and staring eyeball to eyeball with Russia, didn’t America finally face down the threat of world dominion by implacable, godless communism? Where then do we get off saying that life today is hard and stressful?

As Swenson clearly points out, without minimizing the horrors of the past, modern progress brings problems never before faced by mankind. Some of our problems are very different from those of the past perhaps, but they are real, formidable problems just the same. For example, a partial list of problems would include the speed of travel, the power of computers, levels of litigation, pervasiveness of the media, specialization, business layoffs, indebtedness, vulnerability to terrorism, spiraling medical costs, AIDS, numbers of teen mothers and illegitimate births, aging population, overcrowded

prisons, environmental pollution, overcrowding, traffic congestion, prevalence of divorce, disintegration of the family, drugs, prevalence of sexual diseases, complexity at all levels, and on and on the list could go. Never before have we had to face problems of this – and certainly we have never before had to face them all at the same time.

As Swenson writes, "Each item has played a significant role in making our era different from all those that preceded it. And when we factor in the interrelatedness of issues, the dimensions involved, and the speed of change, then unprecedented become too mild a word."

The Pain of Life Without Boundaries

In his book *Margin*, Dr. Swenson says that our problems have no precedent because of the rate of change. In the past we faced a slightly upward pattern of linear change; now we are looking at a skyrocketing pattern of exponential change in practically every area of life. Yet most of us still think and live with a linear mind-set. Suddenly we are encountering limits in our time, energy, health, finances, ability to concentrate, to care, to even feel. Minds, bodies, systems, plans that were adequate on a linear timescale may self-destruct at warp speed. We are perilously close to burnout. We hope beyond hope that things will level out and slow down, but even if that happens, much that makes life worthwhile and manageable will be destroyed in the meantime.

Examples abound of life without natural boundaries. Once it was a given that the night was for sleeping, and the day was for work. Now a hundred years after the electric light bulb, whole cities never sleep. Sunday was once a day of rest; nearly everyone had one day off from work. Now the boundaries between work and play and home and the office are so confused some people can never relax or let down. A few years back we might have known someone who had borne a child out of wedlock,

been divorced, had emotional problems, or gone bankrupt, but today we are in an epidemic of such problems.

Swenson asks, “Is there a critical mass of problems beyond which a society—or, for that matter, an individual—will be destroyed no matter how wonderful the benefits it enjoys? If so, what is that critical mass? Are we approaching it? Have we reached it?” He answers, Yes, there is a point of critical mass; what that point is we don’t know, but clearly we are approaching it. He says it remains to be seem whether we have already reached it. As George Gallup wrote, “I’ve come to feel a deep sense of urgency about the Future Forces at work today. . . . If swift, forceful steps aren’t taken to defuse the political and social time bombs facing us, we may well find ourselves on a track that could lead to the destruction of civilization as we know it.”

It is critical to note here that progress has brought man much power— power that can be used for good or for evil. The sobering truth, then, is that the power to do evil advances exponentially, and modern secular man is not known for restraint nor does he recognize his fallenness and the danger it holds for himself and all humanity.

We have benefited from progress in two main areas. First, we have seen positive gains in medicine, technology, and in our standard of living and material well being. Second, our intellectual and educational opportunities have expanded enormously, and knowledge and information are increasing with unimagined speed.

The pain that progress has brought us is evident in three areas. First, we have lost ground in the social sphere as pressures have increased on all relationships: family, friendships, neighborhoods, community spirit, and church life. Second, we are often emotionally drained, stressed, angry, isolated, and frequently unfulfilled and don’t know what to do about these problems. Third, we are spiritually weakened by

the pace of life, the lack of community, lack of time and energy to cultivate our relationship with God and with our fellow man. This, Dr. Swenson says, is the price we have paid for progress.

The Problem of Stress

Because of the unprecedented level of problems today people live with very high levels of stress. Stress is “the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it.” Note that stress is not the circumstance but the response to the circumstance.

We normally think of such a crisis as the “fight or flight” reaction which pumps adrenaline into our system, makes us stronger and more alert, etc. If these responses are occasional there is little harm done, but if triggered too often or if “stuck” in a constant state of anger, rage, anxiety, fear, or frustration, we begin to overdose on our own adrenaline. This can bring about irreversible damage to the body and set it up for heart attack, stroke, cancer, etc.

Our stress levels are unprecedented. One reason is that most of us today experience constant mental strain without the offsetting benefits of strenuous physical work. When, for example, the commercial property deal we’ve worked on for months falls through, or the accounts don’t balance, or the computer just won’t cooperate, there is no place to run and no one to hit. We just have to try again. The physical laborer, even if he has some mental strain, still has the labor to drain off his adrenaline, and he usually has the ability to think about other things occasionally as he works.

Closely related to stress is overload; in fact, overload is a primary cause of stress. Our culture adds detail on top of detail; one more choice, one more option, one more change, and the details never end. “We must now deal with more ‘things per person’ than at any other time in history. Yet one can

comfortably handle only so many details in his or her life. Exceeding this threshold will result in disorganization or frustration. . . . The problem is not in the 'details.' The problem is in the 'exceeding.' This is called overloading."

The facts are that there are physical limits and man has performance limits, emotional limits, and mental limits. The work load a twenty-five year old athletic, single man can carry may differ greatly from the load a fifty-five year old man can carry if the latter has two teenage children and two children in college, dependent parents, and a wife in menopause. When such overload occurs, the person may experience anxiety, have a physical or nervous breakdown, exhibit hostility, slip into depression, or become bitter and resentful.

We are overloaded with activities, change, choices, commitments, competition, debt, decisions, education, expectations, fatigue, hurry, information, media, ministry, noise, people, pollution, possessions, problems, technology, traffic, waste, and work.

So why do we overload? First, we are usually unaware of our overload until it's too late. Second, some people are too conscientious. Third, others get overloaded because their bosses are driven people who overload their employees. Generally people don't intend to go down the path to overload; they just think that "one more thing won't hurt." But if they are at or near overload, it will hurt.

As the author says, learning "to accept the finality and non-negotiability of the twenty-four hour day" will help us avoid overload and excessive stress.

Building Margin into our Lives

Of all the areas in which we need margin, having adequate emotional energy is the most important because with emotional

margin one can work to gain the other margins.

The amount of emotional energy we have is finite and must not be squandered. Though it is difficult to measure and quantify we must not be embarrassed to admit to ourselves or to others when our emotional reservoir is low. Then we need to replenish our emotional reserves for the good of others and ourselves.

Restoring emotional margin is aided by cultivating our social and family support network. Serving others or doing volunteer work is proven to enhance and lengthen life. Extending forgiveness and reconciling relationships can stop the negative drain on our emotional stores. Cultivating a spirit of gratitude, a hopeful outlook, and love for God and our fellow human beings is energizing, whereas their opposites are negative and debilitating. Finally, establishing appropriate limits and boundaries will help in maintaining emotional reserves.

Dr. Swenson's recommendations for gaining a margin in physical energy are fairly routine to the knowledgeable reader, but he puts particular stress on the need for the need for rest and sleep. The need for correction is clear since America has now become a 24-hour society: many of our cities never sleep and many businesses never close. People of all types, college students, policemen, nurses, taxi drivers, shift workers, and mothers of young children, may go long periods without a good night's sleep. Such people push (or are pushed) to their limits during the day and push on into or through the night. Sleep disorders plague more than 50 million of us; in fact, sleep deprivation "has become one of the most pervasive problems facing the U.S." Unfortunately the ability to go without sleep is sometimes a matter of pride for some, but sleep and rest are God's ideas, and we should not be ashamed of our need for both. The author gives several helpful suggestions on making sleep more natural and effective.

Dr. Swenson strongly stresses the need for all types of

physical exercise, but says that aerobic exercise for the heart “will do more to establish margin in physical energy” than anything else. He endorses exercise not only for its physical benefits but also for its emotional and mental benefits.

When the subject turns to time the author writes, “The spontaneous flow of progress is to consume more of our time, not less . . . to consume more of our margin, not less.” He adds that for “every hour progress saves by organizing and technologizing our time, it consumes two more hours through the consequences, direct or indirect, of this activity.”

Clearly time becomes a problem for a society like ours. Some the author’s suggestions for countering the time crunch are countercultural and tough to implement, but then continuing on in the same direction most of us are going is difficult as well. He suggests practicing saying “No,” turning off the television, practicing simplicity, and getting less done but doing the right things. Many of us need to make some thoughtful and hard choices.

The author’s suggestions for gaining a margin in time are preceded with a reminder that of the ten top stressors of family life, four have to do with insufficient time: insufficient couple time, “me” time, family play time, and overscheduled family calendars.

Why do we need to prune our time wasters? Because time is for people and relationships, subjects very dear to God.

A Plan of Action

There are many ways we can spend our time. We could follow the “Excellence” gurus and pour all our energy into one part of our lives. We would probably have no extra margin since other parts of our lives had been sacrificed and in a condition of “negative excellence.”

At some point, all things being equal, we would become quite accomplished in a given area. The end result, however, might be similar to having one magnificently developed right arm attached to puny, stooped shoulders, a scrawny left arm, and skinny, weak legs. This is like the person who is a powerhouse in his professional life and a dwarf in his relationships.

Dr. Richard Swenson suggests a different way in his book *Margin*. He suggests an approach to life that neglects no important area. He suggests being willing to sacrifice excellence in one or two areas in order that no area be in a condition of negative excellence. This would be similar to the athlete who is toned and conditioned all over, but not overly developed in any one area.

A similar balance in our lives will increase our emotional margin because we and and our families will be happier.

Simplicity has much to offer harried twentieth-century man. But it isn’t easy. It takes effort to discard the superfluous and concentrate on the core elements of life. There has always been an attraction to simplicity; the difficulty has been in achieving it. The simple life the author calls us to is not so much to escape modern life as to transcend it.

Envy is the enemy of contentment and form of self-inflicted torture. Yet because envy is the chief ingredient of advertising and the mainspring of political and social movements, it is difficult for many to see its destructiveness. We need to follow Paul who learned contentment in whatever circumstance he found himself (Phil. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 6:6-10). The practice of contentment brings margin into our lives.

The pain that progress has brought us is mostly in the area of our emotions, our relationships, and our spiritual natures. What are some additional steps start dealing with the pain and achieving some margin?

First, thank God for the pain. The pain pointed out that something is wrong. Second, repent in a way that leads to permanent, tangible change. Third, prune activities and habits that waste time, sap energy, and stifle relationships. Fourth, cooperate with God. Bathe plans in prayer and leave wiggle room for yourself, your family, and people God may send your way.

- How did we relate to God?
- How did we relate to ourselves?
- How did we relate to others?

The road to health and blessing in the path of relationship. Love and relationships are hard work, and sometimes costly because superfluous, unimportant things may need to be put aside, but the payoff is happiness, contentment, peace, and margin. I hope some of the things we have shared in this article turn you from the path of overload and start you down the path of margin.

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Edgar Cayce: The Sleeping (False) Prophet

This article is no longer available. Please see Michael Gleghorn's article "The Worldview of Edgar Cayce" instead.

We apologize for any inconvenience.

Four Pillars of a Man's Heart – A Biblical View of True Manhood

Lou Whitworth summarizes the key points of Stu Weber's book on this subject. He explalins that biblical masculinity is lived out in four aspects of a man's life, king, warrior, mentor, and friend. Understanding these aspects can aid us in living a Christian life that fully emulates the life of Christ sharing Him with the world around us.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Stu Weber, in his book, *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart: Bringing Strength into Balance,*(1) states that biblical masculinity rests on four pillars. The four pillars represent the four major facets of a man's life; these aspects of masculinity are: king, warrior, mentor, and friend. Weber believes that when all four "pillars" are balanced, peace and tranquility will prevail in our marriages, our families, our churches, and in the community and the nation. These institutions rest on the balanced pillars of biblical manhood, and they all collapse when the pillars lean out of balance. The major problems our society faces, for example, are the result of many men having one or more of their personal pillars out of balance—leaning one way or the other. For some men, the pillars have fallen down.

As we look at our society, it is clear that we are in trouble. Some of the pillars are leaning, and others have fallen down. It takes four sturdy, balanced pillars to hold up a building. "It takes four pillars to make a man. . . . who will bear the weight, stand against the elements, and hold one small civilization [a home] intact in a world that would like nothing better than to tear it down."(2)

Why is our civilization falling down around us? Because there is a war going on. The war of political correctness is part of it; sexual politics is part of it too, but it is larger than these. It is a war against the image of God. Listen as Weber draws a bead on the issue:

> Gender is primarily an issue of theology. And theology is the most foundational of all the sciences. Gender is at the heart of creation. Gender is tied to the image of God. Gender is central to the glory of God. And that is precisely why the armies of hell are throwing themselves into this particular battle with such concentrated frenzy.(3)

Remember that God created mankind as male and female to be His image in the world. Thus, there is no better way to attack God and His creation or to destroy His relationship with mankind than to deface the image of God.(4) “Satan’s effectiveness in destroying God’s image through male-female alienation, by whatever means, has been incalculably costly to the human race.”(5) This is where the current battle rages.

The first pillars started to wobble a long time ago. In the Garden of Eden, Adam began as a four-pillared man. But he disobeyed God and blamed Eve. Then the first pillar fell, and the remaining ones were weakened or compromised. For the first time enmity and tension came into his relationship with Eve. Since then there has always been the potential of strife between the sexes. In recent years there has been a concerted effort to blur gender distinctives. But blurring gender differences results in disintegration, disorientation, destruction, and death. No society that persists at it will survive. The answer is to return to the instruction book, the Bible.

The purpose of Weber’s book is to point the way for men to become all they should be biblically so that they and their wives and children can flourish in an often hostile world. Weber writes:

> What kind of man builds a civilization, a small civilization that outlives him? What kind of man has shoulders broad enough to build upon? A four-pillared man:
>
> A man of vision and character . . . a King.
> A man of strength and power . . . a Warrior.
> A man of faith and wisdom . . . a Mentor.
> A man of heart and love . . . a Friend.(6)

Man as Shepherd-King

In Stu Weber's new book, *Four Pillars of a Man's Heart*, the "first pillar" represents the kingly aspect of man's nature.

The king, as pictured by Weber, is a Shepherd-king. This figure is modeled after Jesus Christ, the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings, who sometimes spoke of himself as the Good Shepherd. The first pillar in Weber's book, therefore, is the pillar of the Shepherd-King who combines the position of a king with the heart of a shepherd.

Weber's key thought about the king or shepherd-king is that he is a provider, though it is a very broad conception of provision. If we say, "He is a good provider," we mean, "He makes a good living," or meets the *physical* needs of the family. The meaning here, however, is that the shepherd-king looks out for *all* the needs of his flock—emotional, physical, social, spiritual. The kingly man is looking ahead and planning for ways to meet tomorrow's needs as well as today's. His has a *vision to provide* the resources for the needs of his family.

Among the minimum requirements of the Shepherd-king is work to do that provides for the family. He works hard at whatever it is and stays with it. The work may not be exciting or glamorous, but he shoulders the load and provides for the little flock God has entrusted to him. His wife may work for paycheck; she may even make more than he does, but no matter

what she does, the *obligation and the burden of provision* is his, to see that it is done.

Another major duty of the shepherd-king is to provide direction for the family. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”(7) A shepherd-king points the way for his flock, followers, and his family. To lead or set the pace, one doesn’t need to be a master of every skill or field of knowledge. For example, Lee Iacocca doesn’t need to be a great mechanic; he can hire the best. What he does best is set the policies, give the company direction, and make sure the infrastructure is in place to make the automobiles. In the same way, the man with a king’s heart doesn’t have to know everything, but he is expected to set the tone, the boundaries, and point the way for the flock.

The king in a man cares deeply about every aspect of his family. He models by actions and words biblical standards of behavior. He is gracious and just. He shows justice, mercy, and honor to everyone he meets.

A shepherd-king never abandons his flock. To do so is to violate the most basic ingredient of his calling to—protect. To abandon one’s flock is cowardice, the equivalent of desertion in time of war.

The shepherd-king figure could also be called the servant-king. This is based on Christ’s service to his disciples.

If the king pillar is not in balance, it leans to one extreme or another. He becomes either a tyrant who uses his strength to force people to do his bidding, or an abdicator who is weak, passive, or absent (whether in fact or in effect). Such a man’s kingdom is filled with disorder, chaos, family dysfunction, or oppression. When the king pillar is in balance in a man’s life, harmony and tranquility are possible in the home and the community.

Next, we will discuss the second pillar which represents the

warrior aspect of man's makeup.

Man as Warrior

The primary duty of the warrior is to defend and guard his flock. Though he is primarily a protector of his family, he is also the protector of his church, the wider community or nation, and the weak and powerless.

The author's models for the warrior are Christ and David. Weber reminds us of the passage in Revelation 19 in which Christ, as a knight riding a white horse, leads the armies of heaven into battle. David was a bold and courageous fighter, but was also a man after God's own heart.

The warrior in a godly man doesn't love war. But, because he is a man of high moral standards and principles, he is willing to *live by* those principles and moral standards, spend himself for them, and, if necessary, *die for* them.

The warrior is not a popular figure in today's society. This attitude is understandable, particularly from those who have experienced life around men whose warrior pillar has leaned toward the brute. Women and children need to be protected from such men by faithful warriors whose lives are in balance.

Though the concern many have about the strong side of man's nature (king, warrior) is understandable to a degree, it can't be wished away. Someone once remarked that when most men are soft, a few hard men will rule. The reality is that the warrior is here to stay. So, the answer is not to deny the fact, but to channel the warrior energy to constructive ends.

The warrior in a man can be a great asset, but if the pillar of the warrior is out of balance, the situation can become disastrous. Consequently, the warrior must be under the authority of God because his energy needs to be focused, and the Holy Spirit must be allowed full control over his mind, soul, and body.

There is no such thing as a soldier or warrior without a line of authority. Even if no specific orders are in effect, every soldier is under the authority of what is called “general orders,” such as: “walk your post,” “be alert,” “remain on station until relieved,” etc. In a similar manner all Christian men are under general orders from the Lord of Hosts. We are “to spend time with the Lord,” “to love our wives at all costs,” “to bring up our children to know and honor God,” and “to be involved in the local church.” God’s warrior is not a mercenary; he is under God’s authority. God’s warrior remains on call. Oh, sure, he takes some needed rest and recreation, but at the first sign of need or danger, he reports for duty. He never becomes passive or careless during on his watch. On or off duty, he is alert for any threat to his flock.

A warrior’s life is full of sacrifice; he is called to sacrifice himself for his wife, his children, his church, the spiritually lost, and the weak and helpless. He sometimes finds it necessary to sacrifice his popularity by saying and doing the hard things that others won’t say. On the other hand, the godly warrior has a heart of mercy for the weak and the helpless. The price of being a warrior is high, but the rewards are great.

The third pillar represents the mentoring role inherent in a balanced man’s nature.

Man as Mentor

The primary function of the mentor is to teach. Weber’s key concept is that the mentor has something valuable (i.e., life wisdom) that is important to pass on to others. That process can be as formal and conscious as a Bible scholar instructing a seminary class of eager young men. Or, it can be as informal and unconscious as the ongoing presence of an older, more experienced man working beside a boy or a younger man. Said another way, mentoring can take the form of modeling over time

(even a lifetime), instinctive coaching (at appropriate times), or systematic teaching (at scheduled times). Jesus, for example, used all three methods of mentoring.

The mentor's core characteristic is the fact that he communicates transparently with the person he is mentoring. He imparts himself and his knowledge without undue self-consciousness. In other words, he is transparent enough to share his successes, and even his failures, if these experiences will edify his students. If a mentor fails to pass on the baton of knowledge or wisdom, then he has not succeeded in his role.

Weber emphatically believes that there is a mentor in every man's heart; that is, the potential for mentoring is inherent within us. Many men, however, are nervous about this and feel unqualified. But, in reality, we are all involved in mentoring already in one way or another, whether we realize it or not.

Mentoring is basically passing on the secrets of life: lessons from our life experiences. The purpose of mentoring is straightforward: mentoring builds men who understand life and pass their knowledge on to others. The attitude and posture of a good mentor is quite transferable to others because mentoring has its own built in process of duplication. In other words, when it is done well it is very duplicatable because it has already been modeled by the mentor. The expression, "It's easier caught than taught," can apply here. The goal of mentoring is to advance an ever increasing network of mentored mentors who will keep passing on their life wisdom to others. It helps us understand why Jesus spent so much time with 12 men, doesn't it? He apparently thought that mentoring a group of men was the most productive way of leaving a lasting and ongoing legacy. The fact that His message has spread to most areas of the globe and has persisted for 2000 years illustrates that He was correct.

It should be an encouragement to comprehend that God can use

both the good and the bad experiences from our lives to help others. And, we all have a measure of wisdom and experience to share. However, just because we are capable of mentoring at some level just as we are, we should not conclude that we can't or shouldn't try to improve as mentors. One of the primary ways for us to improve as mentors is to grow in our knowledge of the Bible. When our life experiences are filtered through a deep knowledge of the Bible and a life lived for Christ, then our mentoring potential is greatly enhanced. The consequence of vast networks of men mentoring others who will in turn mentor others can change the world.

Finally, we will look at man's role as friend to other men. This is the fourth pillar.

Man as Friend

The primary function of a friend is "to connect," that is, to link hearts. Someone is a true friend if that person loves to connect, or to link one heart, with another. A true friend is one who, in spite of his own needs at the time, connects deliberately with another who has a need or a burden. He doesn't just connect when it's convenient and he feels like it. If a man is unable or unwilling to connect, he has failed in his primary duty as a friend.

To truly connect in deep friendship or to minister to hurting people, we must be not be afraid of a rich variety of emotions—whether they be the emotions of others or our own. It is just here that many men have difficulty. We can usually express anger, but other emotions are tougher. Weber believes that *allowing* (notice the word) himself to weep (in appropriate situations) was a milestone in his life. He suggests that many men need to be able to weep and to express other emotions as well. In fact, it appears that for many men, allowing themselves to weep breaks up the emotional logjam in their lives and gives them a new sense of freedom. Follow the author's thoughts as he explains how he felt after witnessing

the birth of his youngest son:

> For the first time in my memory, I wept uncontrollably. . . . Me? Crying in front of people? Stu Weber, the football captain. The Airborne Ranger. The Green Beret trooper. The man. Bawling like a kid? Oh, I had cried before somewhere along the line. . . . But this was different. New. There was no shame, and there was lots of connection.(8)

He goes on to add:

> *And I have to admit something else. . . . Emotions are such a great gift from God. And after a lifetime of stuffing them for athletic, military, and "manly" purposes, I love them.(9)*

He sides against what he calls emotional*ism*, but calls for men to learn to express and enjoy real emotions. As an older soldier, with nothing left to prove, he could finally face his humanity and embrace the honest, clean emotions that earlier he had always stifled. If we do so, our ability to connect as a true friend will be greatly enhanced.

Man's Best Friend

Men need friends, but many American men have only acquaintances and no close friends. Thankfully, there is already a Friend out there looking for us, the Ultimate Friend, Jesus Christ. No discussion of friendship, then, would be complete without referring to Him. Our Ultimate Friend has been trying to connect with us, because He wants a relationship with us. Even the best human friend will disappoint us and let us down, but once connected with us, the Lord will never leave us or forsake us.

If our relationship with the Lord were dependent on our own steadfastness, then we'd have a reason to fear. Fortunately, the Lord who sought us can keep us safe because nothing can steal us from the Lord's hand (John 10:29).

> There is, my friend, somewhere down inside you, the power to connect. There is in every man's chest a friend, and emotionally connecting friend. Find yours. Unchain him. And find life on a richer level than you'd ever dreamed possible.(10)

Notes

1. Stu Weber, *Four Pillars of A Man's Heart: Bringing Strength into Balance* (Sisters, Ore.:Multnomah, 1997), 13.
2. Ibid., 13.
3. Ibid., 39.
4. Ibid., (Halverson, cited in *Four Pillars*, p. 39)
5. Ibid, Halverson, 40.
6. Weber, 13.
7. Joshua 24:15
8. Weber, 229.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 237.

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Knighthood and Biblical Manhood – A Christian Perspective on True Manliness

Lou Whitworth summarizes an inspiring book which lays out the characteristics of a godly man. The ceremonies and the code of conduct of knights are compared to a biblical perspective on Christian manhood. This model encourages us to live in Christ as examples of godly men.

A Vision for Manhood

In this essay we will be looking at an inspiring book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* in an effort to learn how we can motivate our sons to live lives of honor and nobility. This book, written by Robert Lewis, grew out his own experiences as he and some close friends struggled to lead their sons into balanced, biblical masculinity.

C. S. Lewis wrote that the disparate strands of manhood—fierceness and gentleness—can find healthy synthesis in the person of the knight and in the code of chivalry. Here these competing impulses—normally found in different individuals—find their union.(1)

Were one of these two bents given full rein, the balance required for authentic Christian manhood would be lost. Strength and power, without tenderness, for example, give us the brute. Tenderness and compassion without masculine firmness and aggressiveness produce a male without the fire to lead or inspire others.

Biblical examples of these two elements resident in one man are numerous. Jesus Christ, our Lord, revealed both tough and tender aspects in His humanity. Once Jesus expressed a desire to gather the citizens of Jerusalem together as a hen gathers her young under her wings.(2) We know that Christ wept at least twice: once at the tomb of Lazarus(3) and again as He looked out over the city of Jerusalem and reflected on the fate of those who rejected His witness.(4) However, Jesus could also be very stern. Once He made a whip, ran off the money changers in the temple area, and turned over their tables.(5) And, in the Garden of Gethsemane, His mere glance knocked grown men to the ground.(6)

In Paul, we see the same blend of firmness and gentleness. He poured himself out tenderly nurturing his spiritual children,(7) but he endured more hardship than most

soldiers(8) and didn't hesitate to castigate false teachers.(9)

In the Old Testament, we see David, who was a poet and singer, but also a warrior and king. He had the fierceness to kill Goliath, the giant, and the tenderness to provide for the needs of Jonathan's descendants after Jonathan was killed.

Keeping the right balance between our impulses toward power and aggression and the need to be gentle and tender is a challenge most men face. In his book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* author Robert Lewis says that Christian fathers can use knighthood as a symbol, an ideal, and a metaphor for guiding their sons into authentic manhood. In this way opposing drives can be harnessed and balanced.

Now, of course, everyone experiences difficulty balancing competing impulses, but it is specifically the violence by young males that is bringing our society to the verge of breakdown. Our young men need a vision for masculinity that challenges and inspires if our society is to be stable and healthy. In an age of great social, spiritual, and gender confusion, such as ours, there is a desperate need for clear guidelines and models that can inspire young men and harness their aggression for constructive ends.

This is where the image of the knight comes in. Since the Middle Ages these men in iron have fired the imaginations of young men. Knighthood is attractive because of its code and its call to courage and honor. Young men are intrigued by testing themselves against various standards, and the code is inspiring because of its rigor and strictness.

The Need for Modern-Day Knights

In his enthusiastic foreword to Robert Lewis's book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* Stu Weber writes:

> *Our culture is in deep trouble, and at the heart of its*

> *trouble is its loss of a vision for manhood. If it's difficult for you and me as adult males to maintain our masculine balance in this gender-neutral' culture, imagine what it must be like for our sons, who are growing up in an increasingly feminized world.(10)*

We must supply our young men with healthy, noble visions of manhood, and the figure of the knight, in this regard, is without equal. In the knight we find a conception of manhood that can lift, inspire, and challenge our young men to new heights of achievement and nobility. One authority asserted: "Not all knights were great men, but all great men were knights."(11) According to Will Durant, chivalry and knighthood gave to the world one of the "major achievements of the human spirit."(12)

C. S. Lewis, in his essay, "The Necessity of Chivalry," agreed.(13) He wrote that the genius of the medieval ideal of the chivalrous knight was that it was a paradox. That is, it brought together two things which have no natural tendency to gravitate towards one another. It brought them together for that very reason. It taught humility and forbearance to the great warrior because everyone knew by experience how much he usually needed that lesson. It demanded valour of the urbane and modest man because everyone knew that he was likely as not to be a milksop.(14)

In Malory's *Morte Darthur* a fellow knight salutes the deceased Lancelot saying: "Thou wert the meekest man that ever ate in hall among ladies; and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put spear in the rest." This expresses the double requirement made on knights: sternness and meekness, not a compromise or blend of the two. Part of the attraction of the knight is this combination of valor and humility.

Someone once said history teaches us that, "When most men are

soft, a few hard men will rule.” For that reason we must do everything we can to build into our boys the virtues of strength and tenderness so they can be strong, solid family men and so society will be stable.

The lack of connection between fathers and sons in our culture, made worse by broken homes and the busyness of our lives, has left many young men with a masculine identity crisis. That’s why the ideas in this book are so timely and important. Our sons are looking to their fathers for direction. Fathers are searching for real answers in their attempts to guide their sons into godly manhood. This book provides answers and guidelines for this search.

First, from the example of the knight, fathers have a way to point their sons to manhood with clear ideals: a vision for manhood, a code of conduct, and a transcendent cause. Second, the pattern of advancement from page to knight provides fathers with a coherent process for guiding their sons to manhood. Third, numerous suggestions for ceremonies equip dads with a variety of means to celebrate and validate their sons’ achievements.

The Knight and His Ideals

Now we will turn our attention to the knight and his ideals. In *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* author Robert Lewis suggests three major ideals for modern-day knights: a vision for manhood, a code of conduct, and a transcendent cause.

A Vision for Manhood – The author states four manhood principles: Real men (1) reject passivity, (2) accept responsibility, (3) lead courageously, and (4) expect the greater reward. He suggests that though men have a natural inborn aggressiveness, they tend to become passive at home and avoid social responsibility. These principles, if followed, prevent passivity from becoming a significant problem.

A Code of Conduct – The code for modern-day knights comes from the pages of the Bible. Lewis lists 10 ideal characteristics appropriate for modern-day knights taken from the Scriptures: loyalty, kindness, humility, purity, servant- leadership, honesty, self-discipline, excellence, integrity, and perseverance. Modern-day knights must be trained in three important areas. First, the modern-day knight needs to understand that there must be a will to obey (God's will) if there is to be spiritual maturity. The young man must come to know that life is inherently moral and that there is a God who knows everything and who rewards good and punishes evil. He must know that absolute values exist and that the commandments of God are liberating, not confining. Lewis states "True satisfaction in life is directly proportionate to one's obedience to God. In this context, moral boundaries take on a whole new perspective: they become benefits, not burdens."

Second, the modern-day knight needs to understand that he has a work to do that is in keeping with his inner design. This work is not just his profession or trade, but refers to work in his home, church, and community. Life is certainly more than a job, and your son should hear this from you lest he get the mistaken perception that manhood is just one duty and obligation after another.

A third realm of responsibility for the modern-day knight is a woman to love. The code of chivalry requires that all women be treated with respect and honor. Sons need to see and hear from their fathers the importance of caring for women in general and loving, leading, and honoring their wives in particular.

The knight in training should be taught the value of work, have summer jobs, do chores around the house, and study hard on his school work. The goal here is to establish patterns of industry and avoid sloth so that a solid work ethic is in place as he gets older.

A Transcendent Cause – Life is ultimately unsatisfying if it

is lived solely for self. Jesus said if you give up your life you will find it, so if you live for a cause greater than yourself, you'll be happy and fulfilled. A transcendent cause is a cause that a person believes is truly heroic (a noble endeavor calling for bravery and sacrifice), timeless (has significance beyond the moment), and is supremely meaningful (not futile).

The only antidote to the futility of life is a transcendent cause and a vision for life that "integrates the end of life with the beginning," and connects time and eternity. Obviously becoming a Christian, developing a personal relationship with Christ, and living for Him are basic, irreplaceable elements for having a meaningful life.

A Knight and His Ceremonies

At this point, we turn to focus on the importance of ceremonies in the life of a young man. It is said that a knight remembers the occasion of his dubbing (i.e., his installment as a knight) as the finest day of his life. Such is the power of ceremony that it makes celebrated events unforgettable. Ceremonies are also invaluable markers that state emphatically: "Something important has happened here!"

In much of the world, older men have instinctively seen the wisdom of providing for their sons markers of their journey to manhood. These markers have been in the form of periodic ceremonies or a significant, final ceremony. Following such events there is no doubt in the young man's mind that he has reached the stage in his development celebrated in the ceremony. Later he can always look back on the ceremony and remember what it meant.

After the elaborate physical, mental, and religious disciplines endured and passed in relation to his dubbing ceremony, no medieval knight ever wondered, "Am I a knight?" Such matters had been settled forever by the power of ceremony

in the presence of other men. This is what our sons need.

Our sons do not normally have such experiences. As Lewis writes, “One of the great tragedies of Western culture today is the absence of this type of ceremony. . . . I cannot even begin to describe the impact on a son’s soul when a key manhood moment in his life is forever enshrined and memorialized by a ceremony with other men.”(15)

The author suggests that there are natural stages in a young man’s life that lend themselves to celebration. Each stage has a parallel in the orderly steps toward knighthood.

Puberty: The Page Ceremony – The first step for a young boy on the path to knighthood was to become a page. He was like an apprentice, and he learned about horses, weapons, and falconry and performed menial tasks for his guardians. Since puberty occurs in a young boy’s life around 13 and is an important point in a young man’s journey toward adulthood, it is an excellent time for a simple ceremony involving the boy and his father celebrating this stage of the young man’s life.

High School Graduation: The Squire Ceremony – The next stage on the path to knighthood was the squire; he was attached to a knight, served him in many ways, and continued to perfect his fighting skills. This stage is roughly parallel to the time of high school graduation. It should be marked by a more involved ceremony led by the boy’s father but involving other men.

Adulthood: The Knight Ceremony – This is the stage in which the squire, after a period of testing and preparation, is dubbed a knight in an elaborate ceremony. This marks the end of youth and the arrival of adulthood for the knight. For the modern- day knight this stage of life is characterized by the completion of college or entering the world of work or military service. The author suggests this stage as a perfect time to have a celebration marking a son’s arrival at manhood and full adulthood. This ceremony should be very special; it

should involve the young man, his father, his family, and other men.

Some Final Thoughts on Knighthood

In this discussion we have been looking at Robert Lewis's book, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight,* and discussing knights and chivalry in an attempt to promote the knight as a worthy ideal, symbol, and metaphor for young men to emulate. A question left unasked is why young men might need a stirring, vivid image or concept like the knight as a model. After a lifetime of studying cultures and civilizations, both ancient and modern, the eminent anthropologist Margaret Mead made the following observation:

> *The central problem of every society is to define appropriate roles for the men.(16)*

Though Margaret Mead was a controversial figure, and I have sometimes disagreed with her myself, in this statement, I believe she is right on target. Author George Gilder adds a similar insight when he states: "Wise societies provide ample means for young men to affirm themselves without afflicting others."(17)

Men need appropriate roles, and they need the desire to live and perform those roles. They need to be inspired to do so. Men need roles that are considered valuable and held to be worthwhile. This is true because men are psychologically more fragile than women and suffer with their identity more than women do, though feminists would have us think otherwise. Why is this so? It is true because "Men, more than women, are culture-made."(18) This is why it is so important to have a culture-wide vision of manhood.

In modern Western society boys make the journey to manhood without a clear vision for what healthy manhood is. If they get out of control, the whole society suffers. Proverbs 29:18

states: “Where there is no vision, the people perish” [or, “are unrestrained”]. Knights and chivalry can supply a stirring vision of manhood that has been lacking. Yet some may think that the figure of the knight is an inappropriate image to use to inspire Christian young men. Such people need to take a close look at Scripture. The teachings of Jesus and the letters of Paul use the image of the hard working farmer, the athlete, and the soldier to illustrate the points they are trying to make.

Furthermore, there are numerous biblical passages that picture knight-like images, some of whom are angelic beings and others are Christ Himself. Specifically, Revelation is replete with images of courtly life familiar to medieval knights: kings, thrones, crowns, swords, censers, bows, armies, eagles, dragons, chariots, precious stones, incense, etc.

Actually, we are more indebted to the knightly virtue of chivalry than we realize. Many of the concepts and words have become part of our familiar vocabulary. It is from chivalry, for example, that we acquired the concept of the gentleman (notice the dual stress here—gentle-man) and our concepts of sportsmanship and fair play. It is perhaps no accident that the decline in chivalry parallels the rise of taunting and the “win at any price” attitude among our sports figures.

There is one more aspect to all of this that needs to be emphasized. If we are successful in inspiring our young men to seek to become modern-day knights, we need to remind them and ourselves that one can’t become a knight on his own. Our young knights need the company of godly men to be all that they can be; they need the Roundtable. As Robert Lewis states so well: “Boys become men in the community of men. There is no substitute for this vital component. . . . if your boy is to become a man, you must enlist the community.”(19) Why? “First, if a father’s presence is weighty, the presence of other men is weightier still. . . . Second, enlisting the community of men results in a depth of friendship that the lonely never

experience. . . . And third, the community of men expands a son’s spiritual and moral resources.”(20)

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, “The Necessity of Chivalry,” *Present Concerns* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), pp. 11-16.

2. Matthew 23:37.

3. John 11.

4. Luke 19:41.

5. John 2:13-16.

6. John 18:6.

7. Thessalonians 2: 5-9.

8. 1 Corinthians 11:23-27.

9. Galatians 5:12.

10. Stu Weber cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising A Modern-Day Knight: A Father’s Role in Guiding His Son to authentic Manhood* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Focus on the Family, 1997), vii.

11. Matthew Bennett, “The Knight Unmasked,” *The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, vol. 7, no. 4(Summer 1995): 10, cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 18.

12. Will and Ariel Durant, *The Story of Civilization—The Age of Faith 4* (New York: Simon & Schuster,1950), 578, cited in Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 18.

13. C. S. Lewis, “The Necessity of Chivalry,” 13-26.

14. Ibid.

15. Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight*, 99.

16. Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of the Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: Dell, 1968),168, cited in Lewis, 46.

17. George Gilder, *Men and Marriage* (Gretna, La.: Pelican, 1992), 34, cited in Lewis, 46.

18. David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America* (New York: Basic, 1995), 17, cited in Lewis, 46.

19. Lewis, 150.

20. Ibid., 150-51.

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The Religion of Baha'i – What Does a Baha'i Believe

Lou Whitworth looks at the principles and claim of the Baha'i faith from a biblical perspective. Then, he compares the beliefs of Baha'i with the teaching of Christianity so we can understand the significant differences between the two. He shows that Baha'i really offers nothing to our lives while Christianity offers an eternal relationship with our Creator God.

The Origin of Baha'i

The roots of the Baha'i faith go back to a nineteenth-century religion called "Babism." Babism, which broke off from the Shiite form of Islam, was founded in 1844 in Persia (now known

as Iran). The founder, a young businessman who assumed the title “Bab” (which means “the Gate” or door to spiritual truth), began to proclaim a new religious system that took a marked departure from his Islamic roots. For example, he stated that the religious prophets were divine “manifestations” of God himself. He then proclaimed himself a prophet or manifestation of God greater than Muhammad, and claimed that he was sent by God “to replace Muhammad’s religion and laws with his own.”(1) He also saw himself as a “forerunner” to an even greater manifestation destined to emerge later. This person would be “the World Teacher who would appear to unite mankind and usher in a new era of peace.”(2)

The Bab’s message fell on responsive ears, and soon he developed a strong following. In fact, the growth of this movement, called the Babis, so alarmed orthodox Muslim leaders that the Bab was arrested. The bulk of his ministry occurred during this six-year prison sentence. The years between 1848 and 1850 were marked by bloody clashes between the Babis and the Persian government. In 1850 the government, in an attempt to eradicate the movement, executed the Bab by firing squad and launched a widespread persecution of his followers. The persecution reached its height in 1852 when the government massacred approximately 20,000 Babis. In spite of this horrible persecution, Babism continued to spread.

Before his death, the Bab had chosen a young disciple to be his successor. The young man, Subh-I-Ezel, was not cut out for leadership and many of his responsibilities were performed by his older half-brother, Mirza Husayn Ali.(3) In 1863, the older half- brother, also a disciple of the Bab, declared himself the World Teacher. In other words, he claimed to be the fulfillment of the Bab’s prediction of a coming World Teacher who would unite the world and bring peace. He then assumed the name “Baha’u’llah” which means “the glory of God.”

Most of the Babis accepted Baha’u’llah as the World Teacher

(and became “Baha’is”). Some, however, remained loyal to the younger brother. Violent skirmishes occurred between the two factions, and the two leaders accused each other of attempted poisoning.(4) The government sent Subh-I-Ezel, the younger brother, to prison in Cyprus, and the older to prison at Akka (now in Israel).(5) The younger man’s following withered away, but Baha’u’llah’s following grew in numbers and intensity. This is largely because his disciples, the Baha’is, recorded everything he said over one hundred books and tablets in all, and thus were able to keep spreading the word.(6)

Baha’u’llah spent many years in prison and/or exile, but because of all the recorded teachings his movement continued to grow. He lived to the ripe old age of 75 and died in 1892. His oldest son Abdu’l- Baha was given sole authority to interpret his teachings. He was considered to be infallible in his interpretation of Baha’u’llah’s works, and he proved quite successful in spreading the faith outside of the Muslim world.(7)

Major Beliefs in Baha’i

Progressive Revelation Baha’i theology holds to the idea of progressive revelation. In their system there are different manifestations of God during different periods of time. For example, in the Baha’i religion, Abraham was a manifestation of God, but he was followed by Krishna, who was followed by Moses, then by Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, the Bab, and finally by Baha’u’llah. Each manifestation allegedly builds on the previous ones and brings new information and insight to man. Thus God’s message to man is progressively revealed and enhanced over time through different prophets. Though each manifestation is considered legitimate and appropriate for its time, in some sense the latter always overrules the former. Baha’is teach that Baha’u’llah is the manifestation to humanity for this time. In accordance with this principle, one of the leading Baha’i teachers said that,

“The fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Baha’i belief [is] the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive and not spasmodic or final.”(8)

Oneness and Unity The Baha’i faith teaches the oneness of God, the oneness of all religions, and the oneness of mankind. The emphasis on oneness is not window dressing; it is a core concept of the system. Unity is sought, taught, and preached today and is the goal for tomorrow. The mission of Baha’i life is to bring to fruition the unity of all mankind in a divine civilization based on the teachings of Baha’u’llah.

Laws and Obligations Every Baha’i should observe the following laws or obligations:

1. Pray every day.
2. Observe the Baha’i Fast from sunrise to sunset each day from March 2 through 21.
3. Consider work as worship.
4. Teach the Cause of God.
5. Avoid alcoholic drinks and drugs.
6. Observe Baha’i marriage.
7. Obey the government and not participate in politics.
8. Avoid backbiting and gossip.
9. Observe Baha’i Holy Days.
10. Contribute to the Baha’i Fund.(9)

The Twelve Principles Baha’i philosophy can be summed up in this statement: “The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens.” Behind this maxim are the twelve principles of Baha’i thought:(10)

1. Oneness of God.
2. Oneness of Religion.
3. Oneness of Mankind.
4. Elimination of prejudice of all kinds.
5. Individual search after truth.
6. Universal auxiliary language.
7. Equality of men and women.
8. Universal education.
9. Harmony of science and religion.
10. Elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty.
11. World government.
12. Protection of cultural diversity.(11)

Extravagant Claims Baha'u'llah made some claims about himself that are breathtaking in their boldness. "He claimed to be the fulfillment not only of all Christian prophecies, but of many Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Zoroastrian and Muslim prophecies as well. In glory, stature and importance, Baha'u'llah eclipsed Jesus and all other Manifestations. He denied being Almighty God Himself, but taught that he, like all other manifestations, was the only source of divine guidance in his cycle."(12)

Dawning of Peace Baha'is believe that "Mankind is currently headed toward a socio- economic cataclysm. Out of this tragedy a golden age' will dawn, and Baha'is will be the only ones prepared to rule in this *new world order*. [Emphasis added.] War shall cease,' said Baha'u'llah,and all men shall live as brothers.'"(13)

Contrasts Between Baha'i and Christianity

God and the Trinity In response to the Christian doctrine of one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Baha'i faith answers a resounding negative. The Baha'i's emphasis on unity (oneness of mankind, oneness of religion,

etc.) is true here too. The concept of the Trinity is inconsistent and repugnant to their theology. They attribute the Christian belief in this doctrine to misinterpretation of the Bible. They view God as one person in much the same way as Judaism and Islam.

Jesus Christ To followers of Baha'i, Jesus is one of the great prophets. His manifestation of God superseded the manifestation of Buddha which had superseded the manifestations of Zoroaster, Moses, Krishna, and Abraham, respectively. But then Jesus and His message was superseded; first by Muhammad, then by The Bab, and finally by Baha'u'llah. The idea of Jesus as the unique Son of God, both God and man, is rejected in Baha'i. To them, Jesus is just one of nine manifestations, each of which came to bring more spiritual light to the world. What each one taught was true for his time until he was superseded by a greater manifestation.

The Holy Spirit For Christians the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Triune Godhead, the revealer of truth, who inspired the Scriptures, and empowers believers for Christian service and evangelism. He is also involved in the work of convicting, regenerating, indwelling, baptizing, and sealing believers. Baha'is believe that Christ's promise of another Comforter refers not to the coming of the Holy Spirit, but to the coming of Baha'u'llah (John 14:16).

The Resurrection of Christ In Christianity the central fact is the Resurrection of Christ. Baha'is, however, do not believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ, though they do believe in a future resurrection of all human beings. They do believe that Jesus conquered death spiritually.

Atonement for Sin The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ's death on the cross paid the penalty for sin for all who will believe on (or place their trust in) Christ. Christ bore on His body the penalty of our sin. Forgiveness is a free gift to those

who believe; good works are an evidence of the inner faith. In Baha'i, on the other hand, one arrives at what we would call "salvation" by practicing the "principles laid down by Baha'u'llah and by making every effort through prayer and personal sacrifice to live in accord with the character of the divine being."(14) Even then Baha'is must hope for God's mercy without which "no one would escape the divine judgment."(15)

Heaven and Hell The Bible teaches that there will be a final judgment, that heaven will be the future reward of those who have trusted Christ, and that hell will the future home of those who have rejected Christ. Baha'i teaches that there will be a resurrection and a time of divine judgment. There is also an abode of the righteous, the paradise of God, but there is no concept of eternal flames or hell as taught in the Bible. Those who do not attain to the paradise apparently have the opportunity to progress spiritually until they are worthy of acceptance.

Baha'i's Organization and Goals

The Organizational Structure of Baha'i

Local Worship Centers In cities large enough to have at least nine adult members of the Baha'i faith, a "Spiritual Assembly" can be formed to hold official meetings and worship services. Worship services (usually held in homes) normally consist of singing and reading from the works of Baha'u'llah or Abdul Baha. In many countries the Baha'is build a National House of Worship. America has one in Wilmette, Illinois.

The Baha'i World Headquarters is located in Haifa, Israel, on the side of Mt. Carmel. A major building and landscaping program has resulted in a beautiful headquarters for the organization. It serves as a working headquarters as well as a tourist attraction and a very brilliant public relations center in which to expose the religion in a beautiful setting and win friends for the faith. One of those beautiful

buildings is the Universal House of Justice, from which the whole ministry is run by an elected nine-person committee elected to five-year terms. Notable among the other buildings are the International Archives and the International Baha'i Library. All this construction on Mt. Carmel seems less strange when you remember that Baha'is believe that this site is to be the center of a coming one-world government and that one day presidents and kings from around the world will come to this site in search of world peace. Also these structures are effective in attracting new members.

The Goals of the Baha'i Religion

World Unity Some who have studied Baha'i closely are concerned by its organizational structure and its goals of world unity. For example, how is this unity to be achieved? Also, what would happen to those who refused to conform? Some of the statements from its leaders about expecting people to give up personal and national rights are unsettling, to put it mildly. A modern religious movement with global aspirations, but very small in size is not intimidating to anyone. But, let that organization grow and set in place various institutions with power to police and enforce its vision, and the picture changes dramatically. At that point, the possibility for abuse of dissidents is dramatically increased. For this reason, Baha'i bears close watching. Some have commented that the goals of political and religious unity and of universal submission to the Baha'i leadership sound similar to the oppressive false world church system that will exist in the Last Days. (For more information, see the Book of Revelation.)

One World "When Baha'is talk about the unity of mankind, or about one world, the Kingdom of God, they do not mean a mere mood or ethos of togetherness. They mean an international political empire of which the Baha'i Faith would be the state religion."(16) In fact, Baha'is intend to institute "a Baha'i world Super-State, a commonwealth in which all the peoples of the world would be subject to a single global authority. All

nations would waive their national sovereignty and cede key rights to the Baha'i world Super-state."(17)

After the historian Arnold Toynbee examined the Baha'i faith, he came to believe that it could be the future world religion. Others have expressed similar thoughts. Though Baha'i seems small and innocuous at present, if it grows in size and influence to the point that it could succeed in its aims of unifying the world under its own terms, it could be a sinister force.

Weaknesses in the Religion of Baha'i

An Impersonal and Unknowable God In Baha'i, God is impersonal and unknowable. In Christianity, God is the believer's Father. Jesus spoke of God using a familiar, intimate term, "Abba," which means, "Daddy." The Muslim and the Baha'i know nothing of this intimacy.

No Assurance of Salvation In Baha'i, it is impossible to know whether or not you are spared from judgment and will go to the Paradise of God. Christians can know that we are forgiven and going to heaven (1 John 5:11 13). This knowledge is based not on our merit but on the mercy of God to all who will trust Christ as their sin-bearer. Apart from biblical Christianity which focuses on Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in payment for our sins, no religion, no philosophy, no program on earth has really dealt with man's sin problem. To the Baha'i, the Christian believer's claim of assurance of salvation is presumptuous. But this is a typical reaction of all non-Christian religions and cults because they all teach a program of works with no assurance of salvation.

Is the Baha'i God fickle and changeable?—Why are many "manifestations of God" necessary? According to the Bible, God never changes (He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, Heb. 13:8), and human nature doesn't change or evolve. The Baha'i faith, however, holds that the manifestations were

given because of different needs in different times of human history. It also teaches that after enough time has passed mankind has learned sufficiently from one cycle and needs to grow and be stretched by a new "manifestation of God."

Was Baha'u'llah an opportunist or a manifestation of God? How is it believable that the manifestation of Baha'u'llah followed that of the Bab by less than twenty years? Could mankind have grown, progressed, and mastered his teachings so rapidly? Hardly. For one thing, few outside of Middle East had even heard of the Bab and his new religion. Furthermore, the Bab himself had predicted that the next manifestations after him would be many years (1,511 and 2,001 years) in the future.(18) Note that he mentioned two manifestations. No wonder many of the Babis were surprised and rejected Baha'u'llah's claim.

There are many facts that we could cover, but this information in this essay is sufficient to show the open-minded person that the religion of Baha'i has some real credibility problems. There are, however, many noble-minded, sweet people in this cult who deserve to hear the truth in love and gentleness so they can be free from the grip of this false religion.

In a chapter on Baha'i from his book *The Kingdom of the Cults*, Walter Martin summarized in sad and melancholy fashion the emptiness of the Baha'i faith:

> *There was no virgin born Son, there was only a Persian student; there was no miraculous ministry, there was only the loneliness of exile; there was no power over demons, there were only demons of Islam; there was no redeeming Saviour, there was only a dying old man; there was no risen Saviour, there was only Abdul Baha; there was no Holy Spirit, there was only the memory of the prophet; there was no ascended High Priest, there was only the works of the flesh; and there was no coming King, there was only the promise of a new*

era.(19)

Notes

1. John Boykin, “The Baha’i Faith,” in Ronald Enroth, et al., *A Guide to Cults and New Religions* (Downers Grove, Ill.:InterVarsity, 1983), 26.

2. Edmond C. Gruss, “Baha’i,” *Cults and the Occult* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 1974, 3d ed., rev. and enl., 1994), 146-47.

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Living in the New Dark Ages

Former Probe staffer Lou Whitworth reviews Charles Colson's important book, Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages. *Colson argues that "new barbarians" are destroying our culture with individualism, relativism, and the new tolerance.*

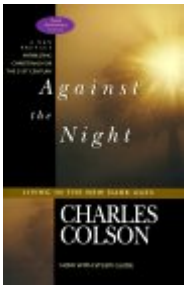
Is the Sun Setting On the West?

It was 146 B.C. In the waning hours of the day a Roman general, Scipio Africanus, climbed a hill overlooking the north African city of Carthage. For three years he had led his troops in a fierce siege against the city and its 700,000 inhabitants. He had lost legions to their cunning and endurance. With the Carthaginian army reduced to a handful of soldiers huddled inside the temple of their god Eshmun, the city was conquered. And with the enemy defeated, Scipio ordered his men to burn the city.(1)

Now, as the final day of his campaign drew to a close, Scipio Africanus stood on a hillside watching Carthage burn. His face, streaked with the sweat and dirt of battle, glowed with the fire of the setting sun and the flames of the city, but no smile of triumph crossed his lips. No gleam of victory shone from his eyes. Instead, as the Greek historian Polybius would later record, the Roman general "burst into tears, and stood long reflecting on the inevitable change which awaits cities,

nations, and dynasties, one and all, as it does every one of us men."

In the fading light of that dying city, Scipio saw the end of Rome itself. Just as Rome had destroyed others, so it would one day be destroyed. Scipio Africanus, the great conqueror and extender of empires, saw the inexorable truth: no matter how mighty it may be, no nation, no empire, no culture is immortal.



Thus begins Chuck Colson's book, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages*, a sober yet inspirational book on facing the future as involved Christians. He returns to this scene frequently in the book as a reminder of the transitory nature of nations and cultures. The author, chairman of Prison Fellowship and ex-Watergate figure turned Christian evangelist, sets forth a warning for the church and for individual believers.

Just as the Roman general Scipio Africanus saw in the flames of the city of Carthage the future fall of Rome and its empire, Colson believes that we are likely witnessing in the crumbling of our society the demise of the American experiment and perhaps even the dissolution of Western civilization.

And just as the fall of Rome led into the Dark Ages, the United States and the West are staggering and reeling from powerful destructive forces and trends that may lead us into a New Dark Ages. The imminent slide of the West is not inevitable, but likely unless current, destructive trends are corrected. The step-by-step dismantling of our Judeo-Christian heritage has led us to a slippery slope situation in which

destructive tendencies unchecked lead to other unhealthy tendencies. For example, as expectations of common concern for others evaporates, even those who wish to retain that value become more cautious, reserved, and secretive out of self-defense, further unraveling the social fabric. Thus rampant individualism crushes to earth our more generous impulses and promotes more of the same. Other examples could be enumerated, but this illustrates the way one destructive, negative impulse can father a host of others. Soon the social fabric is in tatters, and impossible to mend peaceably. At this point the society is vulnerable both from within and from without.

The New Barbarism and Its Roots

We face a crisis in Western culture, and it presents the greatest threat to civilization since the barbarians invaded Rome. Today in the West, and particularly in America, a new type of barbarian is present among us. They are not hairy Goths and Vandals, swilling fermented brew and ravishing maidens; they are not Huns and Visigoths storming our borders or scaling our city walls. No, this time the invaders have come from within.

We have bred them in our families and trained them in our classrooms. They inhabit our legislatures, our courts, our film studios, and our churches. Most of them are attractive and pleasant; their ideas are persuasive and subtle. Yet these men and women threaten our most cherished institutions and our very character as a people. They are the new barbarians.

How did this situation come to pass? The seeds of our possible destruction began in a seemingly harmless way. It began not in sinister conspiracies in dark rooms but in the paneled libraries of philosophers, the study alcoves of the British museums, and the cafs of the world’s universities. Powerful movements and turning points are rooted in the realm of ideas.

One such turning point occurred when Rene Descartes, looking

for the one thing he could not doubt, came up with the statement *Cogito ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am." This postulate eventually led to a new premise for philosophical thought: man, rather than God, became the fixed point around which everything else revolved. Human reason became the foundation upon which a structure of knowledge could be built; and doubt became the highest intellectual virtue.

Two other men, John Stuart Mill (1806-73) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) contributed to this trend of man-based philosophy. Mill created a code of morality based on self-interest. He believed that only individuals and their particular interests were important, and those interests could be determined by whatever maximized their pleasure and minimized their pain. Thus the moral judgments are based on calculating what will multiply pleasure and minimize pain for the greatest number. This philosophy is called utilitarianism, one form of extreme individualism.

Another form of individualism was expressed by Rousseau who argued that the problems of the world were not caused by human nature but by civilization. If humanity could only be free, he believed, our natural virtues would be cultivated by nature. Human passions superseded the dictates of reason or God's commands. This philosophy could be called experimental individualism.

Mill and Rousseau were very different. Mill championed reason, success, and material gain; and Rousseau passion, experiences, and feelings. Yet their philosophies have *self* as a common denominator, and they have now melded together into radical individualism, the dominant philosophy of the new barbarians.

According to sociologist Robert Bellah, pervasive individualism is destroying the subtle ties that bind people together. This, in turn, is threatening the very stability of our social order as it strips away any sense of individual responsibility for the common good. When people care only for

themselves, they are not easily motivated to care about their neighbors, community life devolves into the survival of the fittest, and the weak become prey for the strong.

The Darkness Increases and the New Barbarians Grow Stronger

Today the prevailing attitude is one of relativism, i.e., the belief that there is no morally binding objective source of authority or truth above the individual. The fact that this view tosses aside 2,500 years of accumulated moral wisdom in the West, a rationally defensible natural law, and the moral law revealed by God in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures seems to bother very few.

Relativism and individualism need each other to survive. Rampant individualism promotes a competitive society in which conflicting claims rather than consensus is the norm because everyone is his or her own standard of "right" and "wrong" and of "rights" and "obligations." The marriage of extreme individualism and relativism, however, has produced a new conception of "tolerance."

The word *tolerance* sounds great, but this is really tolerance with a twist; it demands that everyone has a right to express his or her own views as long as those views do not contain any suggestion of absolutes that would compete with the prevailing standard of relativism.

Usually those who promote tolerance the loudest also proclaim that the motives of religious people are suspect and that, therefore, their views on any matter must be disqualified. Strangely, socialists, Nazis, sadomasochists, pedophiles, spiritualists, or worshipers of Mother earth would not be excluded. Their right to free expression would be vigorously defended by the same cultural elite who are so easily offended when Christians or other religious people express their views.

But this paradoxical intolerance produces an even deeper consequence than silencing an unpopular point of view, for it completely transforms the nature of debate, public discussion, and consensus in society. Without root in some transcendent standard, ethical judgments become merely expressions of feelings or preference. “Murder is wrong” must be translated “I hate murder” or “I prefer that you not murder.” Thus, moral claims are reduced to the level of opinion.

Opponents grow further and further apart, differing on a level so fundamental that they are unable even to communicate. When moral judgments are based on feelings alone, compromise becomes impossible. Politics can no longer be based on consensus, for consensus presupposes that competing moral claims can be evaluated according to some common standard. Politics is transformed into civil war, further evidence that the barbarians are winning.

Proponents of a public square sanitized of moral judgments purport that it assures neutrality among contending moral factions and guarantees certain basic civil rights. This sounds enlightened and eminently fair. In reality, however, it assures victory for one side of the debate and assures defeat of those with a moral structure based on a transcendent standard.

Historically, moral restraints deeply ingrained in the public consciousness provided the protective shield for individual rights and liberties. But in today’s relativistic environment that shield can be easily penetrated. Whenever some previously unthinkable innovation is both technically possible and desirable to some segment of the population, it can be, and usually will be, adopted. The process is simple. First some practice so offensive it can hardly be discussed is advocated by some expert. Shock gives way to outrage, then to debate, and when what was once a crime becomes a debate, that debate usually ushers the act into common practice. Thus decadence becomes accepted. History has proven it over and over.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Questions arise in our minds: How bad is the situation? Is it too late to stop or reverse the downward trend? If it's too late, do we wait, preserve, and endure until the winds of history and God's purpose are at our backs?

When a culture is beset by both a loss of public and private values, the overall decline undermines society's primary institutional supports. God has ordained three institutions for the ordering of society: the family for the propagation of life, the state for the preservation of life, and the church for the proclamation of the gospel. These are not just voluntary associations that people can join or not as they see fit; they are organic sources of authority for restraining evil and humanizing society. They, and the closely related institution of education, have all been assaulted and penetrated by the new barbarians. The consequences are frightening.

The Family

The family is under massive assault from many directions, and its devastation is obvious. Yet the family and the church are the only two institutions that can cultivate moral virtue, and of these the family is primary and foremost because "our very nature is acquired within families."(2) Unfortunately when radical individualism enters the family, it disrupts the transmission of manners and morals from one generation to the next. Once this happens it is nearly impossible to catch up later, and the result is generation after generation of rude, lawless, culturally retarded children.

The Church

The new barbarians have penetrated our churches and tried to turn them into everything except what God intended them to be. Even strong biblical churches have not been immune to their influence. Yet only as the church maintains its

distinctiveness from the culture is it able to affect culture. The church dare not look for “success” as portrayed in our culture; instead its watchword must be “faithfulness”; only then will the church be successful. The survival of the Western culture is inextricably linked to the dynamic of reform arising from the independent and pure exercise of religion from the moral impulse. That impulse can only come from our families and from our churches. The church must be free to be the church.

The Classroom

The classroom has also been invaded by radical individualism and the secular ideas of the new barbarians. We must resist putting our young people under unbridled secularistic teaching, especially if it isn’t balanced by adequate exposure to Christian principles and a Christian worldview.

The State/Politics

Government has a worthy task to do, i.e., to protect life and to keep the peace, but it cannot develop character. To believe that it can do so is to invite tyranny. First, most people’s needs and problems are far beyond the reach of government. Second, it is impossible to effect genuine political reform, much less moral reform, solely by legislation. Government, by its very nature, is limited in what it can accomplish. We need to be involved in politics, but we must do so with realistic expectations and without illusions.

Our culture is indeed threatened, but the situation is not irreversible if we model the family before the world and let the church be the church.

A Flame in the Night

This is an important work, one that every Christian would benefit from reading. Though Colson’s subject—the ethical, moral, and spiritual decline that many observers forecast for

our immediate future—is bleak, the work isn't morose or gloomy. His focus is on opportunities and possibilities before us regardless of what the future holds. In the book's last section, he calls for the church and for individual Christians to be lights in the darkness by cultivating the moral imagination and presenting to the world a compelling vision of the good. He outlines three steps in that process.

First, we must reassert a sense of shared destiny as an antidote to radical individualism. We are born, live, and die in the context of communities. Rich, meaningful life is found in communities of worship, self-government, and shared values. We are not ennobled by relentless competition, endless self-promotion, and maximum autonomy, nor are these tendencies ultimately rewarding. On the other hand, commitment, friendship, and civic cooperation are both personally and corporately satisfying.

Second, we must adopt a strong, balanced view of the inherent dignity of human life. All the traditional restraints on inhumanity seem to be crumbling at once in our courts, in our laboratories, in our operating rooms, in our legislatures. The very idea of an essential dignity of human life seems a quaint anachronism today. As Christians we must be unequivocally and unapologetically pro- life. We cannot disdain the unborn, the young, the infirm, the handicapped, or the elderly. We cannot concede any ground here.

Third, we must recover respect for tradition and history. We must reject the faddish movements of the moment and look to the established lessons from the past. The moral imagination (our power to perceive ethical truth[3]) values reason and recognizes truth. It asserts that the world can be both understood and transformed through the carefully constructed restraints of civilized behavior and institutions. It assumes that to approach the world without consideration of the ideas of earlier times is an act of hubris in essence, claiming the ability to create the world anew, dependent on nothing but our

own pitiful intelligence.

In contrast to such an attitude, the moral imagination begins with awe, reverence, and appreciation for order within creation. It sees the value of tradition, revelation, family, and community and responds with duty, commitment, and obligation. But the moral imagination is more than rational. It is poetic, stirring long atrophied faculties for nobility, compassion, and virtue.

Imagination is expressed through symbols, allegories, fables, and literary illustrations. Winston Churchill revived the moral imagination of the dispirited British people in his speeches when he depicted the threat from Hitler not as just another war, but as a sacrificial, moral campaign against a force so evil that compromise or defeat would bring about a New Dark Ages. British backbones were stiffened and British hearts were ennobled because Churchill was able to unite rational, emotional, and artistic ideas into a common vision.

Western civilization and the church are currently engaged in a war of ideas with new barbarians. Whether we have the will to be victorious will depend in large measure on the strength and power of our moral imagination. Charles Colson's book, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages*, can give us guidance in this crucial task.

Notes

1. This essay is in large measure a condensation of several chapters of the author's work; consequently, quotations and paraphrase may exist side by side unmarked. Therefore, for accuracy in quoting, please consult the book: Charles Colson, with Ellen Santilli Vaughn, *Against the Night: Living in the New Dark Ages* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Servant, 1989).

2. Russell Kirk, *The Wise Men Know What Wicked Things Are Written on the Sky* (Washington:Regnery Gateway, 1987), 24.

3.For fuller discussion see Russell Kirk, *Enemies of the Permanent Things: Observations of Abnormity in Literature and Politics* (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Arlington House, 1969), 119.

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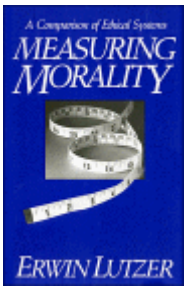
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Measuring Morality

What makes an action right or wrong? The answer to this question, when asked of various ethical systems, helps sort through the maze of beliefs that muddy the ethical waters. Lou

Whitworth provides a condensation of Erwin Lutzer's book Measuring Morality: A Comparison of Ethical Systems.



In evaluating ethical systems we can be lost in a maze of systems, details, and terminology. Such arguments lead nowhere, shed little light on the subject, and polarize people into opposing camps. A helpful way to sort through this subject is to ask a basic question which will make clear the assumptions underlying disparate views. That question could be stated this way: "What makes an action right or wrong in this system?"

Cultural Relativism

When the question is asked "What makes an action right or wrong?" one category of answer will be: "Culture," that is, culture determines what is right or wrong whatever a cultural group approves of is right; whatever the group disapproves of is wrong.

This is the ethical position known as cultural relativism. There are several key ingredients that make up this view.

1. Culture and Custom – In cultural relativism, moral standards are the result of group history and common experience which over time become enculturated ways of belief and action, i.e., customs, mores, and folkways.

2. Change – Since group experiences change with the passage of time, then naturally customs will change as a reflection of these new experiences.

3. Relativity – What is right (or normal) in one culture may be wrong (or abnormal) in another, since different forms of morality evolved in different places as a result of different experiences cultural adaptation. Thus, there are no fixed principles or absolutes.

4. Conscience – Cultural relativism holds that our consciences

are the result of the childhood training and pressures from our group or tribe. What our consciences tell us is what our culture has trained them to tell us.

An Evaluation of Cultural Relativism

In trying to evaluate cultural relativism some things must be clear. First, it is quite obvious that there are many things we can all learn from other cultures. No culture has a monopoly on wisdom, virtue, or rationality. Second, just because we may do things a certain way doesn't mean that our way is the best or the most moral way to do those things.

Having said this, however, there are some problems cultural relativism faces. First, it is not enough to say that morals originated in the world and that they are constantly evolving. Cultural relativism needs to answer how value originated out of non-value; that is, how did the first value arise?

Second, cultural relativism seems to hold as a cardinal value that values change. But, if the value that values change is itself unchanging, then this theory claims as an unchanging value that all values change and progress. Thus, the position contradicts itself.

Third, if there are no absolute values that exist transculturally or externally to the group, how are different cultures to get along when values collide? How are they to handle such conflicts?

Fourth, where does the group, tribe, or culture get its authority? Why can't individuals assume that authority?

Fifth, most of our heroes and heroines have been those who courageously went against culture and justified their actions by appealing to a higher standard. According to cultural relativism such people are always morally wrong.

Finally, cultural relativism assumes human physical evolution

as well as social evolution.

Situational Ethics

When the question “What makes an action right or wrong?” is asked another answer one hears is that “love” is the determining principle. This is the basis of situational ethics, a system made popular by Joseph Fletcher.

Three Types of Ethical Systems

Fletcher believes there are three approaches to making moral decisions. The first he calls legalism which he defines as “rules and regulations.” He rejects this system as being more concerned with law than with people.

Fletcher states that the second approach to morality is antinomianism, meaning “against law.” Antinomians reject all rules, laws, and principles regarding morality and see no basis for determining whether acts are moral or immoral. Fletcher rejects antinomianism because it refuses to take seriously the demands of love.

The third option, Fletcher’s personal choice, is situationism. It is often called situation ethics or the new morality. It argues for a middle road between legalism and antinomianism.

The Three Premises of Situationism

The first premise of situationism is that love is the sole arbiter of morality in any situation. This means that under certain conditions doing the loving thing may require us to break the rules or commandments of morality because they are only contingent, whereas love is the unchanging absolute.

Second, situationism holds that love should be defined in utilitarian terms. This means that to be truly loving an action should be judged by whether or not it contributes to the greatest good for the greatest number.

Third, situationism is forced to accept the view that the end justifies the means. The problem here is that the end in mind is often one chosen arbitrarily by the person who acts. This posture, of course, opens to the door for all sorts of brutality and abuse.

Criticisms of Situationism

The ethical system known as situationism is subject to several serious criticisms. The first is that love, as defined by Fletcher, is of no help whatsoever in making moral decisions because everyone may have a different opinion of what is loving or unloving in a given situation. The truth is, love without ethical content is meaningless, and without rules (or principles, or commandments), love is incapable of giving any guidance on making moral decisions. In fact, it isn't love that guides many of the decisions in Fletcher's system at all, but preconceived personal preferences.

A second criticism of situationism is that in a moral system based on the consequences of our actions, we have to be able to predict those consequences ahead of time if we want to know whether or not we are acting morally.

We may start out with the best of intentions, but if our prediction of the desired consequences does not come true, we have committed an immoral act in spite of our good intentions. And now we begin to see the enormity of the situationist's dilemma: (1) calculating the myriad possible outcomes of each and every ethical possibility before making the needed decisions, and then (2) choosing the very best course of action. Such calculations are impossible and thus render the moral life impossible.

Naturalism and Behaviorism

When the question, "What makes an action right or wrong?" is posed to the naturalist, the answer comes back "Whatever is,

is right.” To see how we came to this point, we must review how naturalism and behaviorism arose in reaction to dualism.

Dualism’s Difficulties

the philosophy of dualism holds that there are two principal substances in the universe: matter and mind (or soul or spirit). These two substances correspond to the material and immaterial aspects of human life and reality. The belief goes back all the way to Plato and is compatible with the Christian worldview.

When Descartes came along, he ascribed to the concept that matter and mind (or spirit) are different, but he eventually came to assert that matter and mind (spirit) are so diverse that they have no common properties and cannot influence each other. This led to what is known as the mind-brain problem: namely, if mind and body (matter) cannot interact, how do we explain the fact that the mind appears to affect the body and the body appears to affect the mind?

Naturalism Catches On

While philosophers and scientists pondered this dilemma, the growing implications of Newton’s discovery of the law of gravity served to further complicate things. Since observation and mathematical calculations revealed that all bodies (including human bodies) are subject to the same seemingly unbreakable laws, the existence of the mind (or spirit) became increasingly difficult to maintain. Consequently, some philosophers thought it much simpler to believe in only one substance in the universe.

Thus dualism (meaning two substances: matter and mind) lost popular appeal and naturalism or materialism (meaning one substance: matter) gained the ascendancy. If there is only one substance in the universe, then all particles of matter are interrelated in a causal sequence and the universe, human beings included, must be a giant computer controlled by blind

physical forces. Thus, according to naturalism, humans are mere cogs in the machine. We cannot act upon the world, rather the world acts upon us. In such a world the mind is just the by-product of the brain as the babbling is the by- product of the brook. Freedom, therefore, is an illusion, and strictly speaking there is no morality at all.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism grew out of naturalism and is an extension of it. One form of behaviorism is called sociobiology, a theory that morality is rooted in our genes. That is, all forms of life exist solely to serve the purposes of the DNA code. According to sociobiology, the ultimate rationale for one's existence and behavior is the preservation or advancement of the person's genes.

The more well-known form of behaviorism comes from B. F. Skinner. He stated that we are what we are largely because of our environmental training or conditioning.

Evaluating Behaviorism

When we remember that both forms behaviorism are built on naturalism, the implications are the same: man is a machine; all our actions are the product of forces beyond our control, and we possess no special dignity in the universe. Thus, strictly speaking, behaviorism does not propose a theory of morality, but it results in antimorality.

Emotive Ethics

In modern ethical thought an unusual answer has been given to the question, "What makes an action right or wrong?" The answer? "Nothing is literally right or wrong: these terms are simply the expression of emotion and as such are neither true nor false." This is answer of emotive ethics.

This theory of morality originated with David Hume and his

belief that knowledge is limited to sense impressions. Beyond sense impressions, our knowledge is unfounded. What difference does such a theory make? It renders intelligent talk about God, the soul, or morality impossible, because real knowledge is limited to phenomena observable by our physical senses. Discussion of phenomena not observable by our physical senses is considered to belong to the realm of metaphysics, a realm that cannot be touched, felt, seen, heard, nor smelled.

What can we know if our knowledge is limited to our sense experience? Hume claimed that all we can know are matters of fact. We can only make factually verifiable statements such as, “That crow is black” or “The book is on the table.” On the other hand, we cannot, in this system, make a statement like, “Stealing is wrong.” We cannot even say, “Murder is wrong.” Why? Because wrong is not a factual observation and cannot be verified empirically. In fact, it is a meaningless statement, and merely an expression of personal preference. We are really just saying “I don’t like stealing,” and “I dislike murder.” It is on the order of saying, “I like tomatoes.” Someone else can say, “I dislike tomatoes,” without factual contradiction because it’s just the statement of two different personal preferences.

In summary, emotive ethics holds that it is impossible to have a rational discussion about morals. This is because ethical statements cannot be analyzed since they do not meet the criteria of scientific statements; that is, they are not observation statements. Thus, in emotivism, all actions are morally neutral.

An Evaluation of Emotivism

Upon reflection, emotivism is less devastating than it first appears. For starters, emotivists can never say that another ethical system is wrong; they can only volunteer that they don’t like or prefer other systems. Likewise, they can’t say that we ought to accept their views. Emotivism, therefore, by

its own principles, allows us to reject this theory.

Second, unless emotivists provide some rational criterion for making moral choices, they must allow moral anarchy. Their only objection to terrorist morality would be, “I don’t like it.” The emotivist, then, is left with no reason to judge or oppose a dictator or terrorist.

Third, the thesis of emotivism that rational discussion of morality is impossible is false. Their assumption that the only meaningful utterances are statements of factual observation is one of emotivism’s basic philosophical flaws, and it cannot be factually verified! It does not fit into the “crow is black” model proposed by emotivists themselves. Morality is open to rational discussion. Emotivism’s arbitrary limitations on language cannot be maintained.

Traditional Absolutes

Earlier we considered four systems of ethics cultural relativism, situationism, behaviorism, and emotivism that in one way or another all self-destruct, ultimately destroyed by their own arbitrarily chosen principles.

Now we must reexamine traditional ethics: the Judeo-Christian ethic based on revelation, i.e., the Bible.

1. God’s moral revelation is based on His nature.

God is separate from everything that exists, is free of all imperfections and limitations, and is His own standard. No moral rule exists outside of Him. Holiness, goodness, and truthfulness indeed all biblical morality are rooted in the nature of God.

***2. Man is a unique moral being*.**

The biblical picture of mankind differs strikingly from the humanistic versions of mankind. We alone were created in the

image of God and possess at least four qualities that distinguish us from the animals: personality, ability to reason, moral nature, and spiritual nature.

3. God's moral principles have historical continuity.

If God's moral revelation is rooted in His nature, it is clear that those moral principles will transcend time. Although specific commands may change from one era to another, the principles remain constant.

4. God's moral revelation has intrinsic value.

God's standards, like the laws of nature, have built-in consequences. Just as we have to deal with the laws of nature, we will eventually have to deal with the consequences of violating God's standards unless we put our faith in Christ who took on the consequences of our disobedience by His death on the cross.

5. Law and love are harmonized in the Scriptures.

In the biblical revelation, love and law are not mutually exclusive, but are harmonized. Love fulfills the law. If we love God, we will want to keep His commandments.

6. Obedience to God's Law is not legalism.

The Bible speaks strongly against legalism since biblical morality is much more than external obedience to a moral code. No one can live up to God's standards without the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, because we are judged by our attitudes and motivations not just external performance.

7. God's moral revelation was given for our benefit.

Though in the short run it may sometimes appear that biblical moral standards are too restrictive, we can be sure that such injunctions are for our benefit because of His love for us. After all, in the long run God knows best since because of His

omniscience, He can calculate all the consequences.

8. Exceptions to God's revelation must have biblical sanction.

Biblical morality is not based on calculating the consequences since only God can do that perfectly. Our responsibility is to obey; God's responsibility is to take care of the consequences.

9. "Ought" does not always imply "can."

According to the Bible, we do not, and cannot, live up to what we know to be right. Yet God is not mocking us because He has left us a way out. He made provision for our weaknesses and failures because Christ's death on the cross in our behalf satisfied His moral requirements.

What makes an act right or wrong then? The answer is: the revealed will of God found in the Bible.

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The Angel Quiz

Origin and Background of the Angels and Demons

The subject of this essay is angels. The material is presented in a quiz format because we have learned that many people enjoy testing their biblical knowledge in this way. Before going to the quiz, however, a few introductory observations about angels are in order.

Angels are referred to in 34 of the 66 books of the Bible.

They are mentioned 108 times in the Old Testament and 165 times in the New Testament.{1}

The presence of good angels, and evil ones (demons), are recognized in most of the world's religions. Angels are important figures in Christianity, Judaism, Islam, many Christian cults, and in the occult. "The history of various religions from the earliest times shows belief in Satan and demons to be universal….The great ethnic faiths of India, China, and Japan major in demonism, as well as the animistic religions of Africa, South America, and some islands….To an amazing degree, the history of religion is an account of demon-controlled religion, particularly in its clash with the Hebrew faith and later with Christianity."{2}

Currently interest in angels is very high in the United States, and many books and seminars are being offered on the subject in an attempt to meet this heightened curiosity about angels.

Unfortunately most of these books and seminars are naive, at best, and more often than not, occultic in orientation. Now let's turn to the quiz.

1. What does the word angel mean?

The basic meaning of the word angel is "messenger." This is significant because a messenger is given a message by a higher person. Much of the contemporary romance with angels sees them as somewhat independent, if not totally autonomous, but a messenger is on a mission from someone higher, in this case from God…or Satan.

2. What are some of the other names used of angels?

Other terms used to describe angels are: ministers, hosts (the armies of God), chariots, watchers, sons of the mighty, sons of God, elohim (or sons of Elohim), holy ones, and stars.{3}

3. Are angels created or have they always been with God?

They were created by Christ (Col. 1:15-17; John 1:3).

4. When were they created?

They were created some time prior to the creation of the earth because Job 38:4-7 says that the sons of God (angels) sang with joy when the earth was created.

5. What about their appearance? How do angels look?

When angels appear on earth, they usually have the appearance of adult human males and are often described in the same passage both as men and as angels (Genesis 18:1-2). In Mark 16:5 an angel is described as a young man.

6. What do angels wear?

They are often reported to wear white (Acts 1:10), white robes (Mark 16:15), garments white as snow (Matt. 28:3), dazzling apparel (Luke 24:4), and shining garments (Acts 10:30).

7. Is it possible to encounter angels and not recognize them as angels?

Yes, in Hebrews 13:2 we are warned to show hospitality to strangers because "some have entertained angels without knowing it."

8. Do angels really have wings?

Some angels don't have wings, or, at least, they don't manifest wings. Some clearly do. Cherubim are pictured as having four wings in Ezek. 1:5-12; 10:15; 11:22) and seraphim, as having six wings in Isaiah 6:2.

9. How do people react upon encountering angels?

The reaction varies. Sometimes the people are calm, but usually they experience fear, anxiety, emotional upheaval,

terror, or the desire to worship the angels. Mary was greatly troubled at first (Luke 1:28-29); armed soldiers at the tomb shook with fear and became like dead men (Matt. 28:4); John, the author of Revelation, fell at the feet of the angel to worship (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9).

Angels in the Old Testament

10. What caused the fall of the angels?

Satan, the leader of the fallen angels, was before his fall the highest of all created beings, but he was consumed with pride and rebelled against God (Ezek. 28:12-19; Isa. 14:12-14). He seduced a third of the angels to follow him in his rebellion (Rev. 12:4). These treacheries brought about his condemnation by God (1 Tim. 3:6) and the condemnation of the other rebelling angels.

11. When did they fall?

They fell some time after their own creation and before the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3).

12. Does Satan make his first appearance in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3?

No, a close reading of the account of man’s fall in Genesis 3 reveals that Satan doesn’t appear in the Garden of Eden though his influence is felt. Though his name isn’t mentioned in the passage, he clearly inspired the actions of the serpent. Later, when God curses the serpent in verse 15, the last part of the curse is directed at Satan.

13. What do the opening verses of Genesis 6 have to do with angels?

There the sons of God took wives from among the daughters of men. One interpretation of the passage takes the sons of God to mean “angels” as the term is normally used. If this is so,

then these angels are the evil angels who, in a very unique occurrence, cohabited with human females and produced unusual offspring. For this heinous sin these angels are kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day (Jude 6). See also 2 Peter 2:4-12.

14. How would evil angels profit by these actions?

Aside from sensual pleasure, the purpose seems to be that they intended to pollute and pervert the human line. Since Christ needed to be born into the human family and be fully human as well as fully God, a degenerate hybrid-humanity would have prevented Him from being our authentic representative on the cross. This is the reason, some hold, for God's sending the world-wide flood: to wipe out the polluted line and start over with Noah's family.

15. Do angels marry?

No, this is clearly stated in Mark 12:25. It is commonly believed that angels do not procreate and are not a race.{4} (See also Matt. 22:30.) Generally they are portrayed as sexless apart from the difficulties mentioned in question 13.

They are probably sexless in their basic nature but possibly able to assume a variety of forms, just as they are normally invisible but able to manifest themselves when they desire. (See also 2 Cor. 11:14-15.)

Angels are referred to in the Scriptures by masculine word forms though neuter forms were available. They appear on earth as human males, but there is the possibility of a female angel in Zechariah 5:9.

16. What news did the Lord and two angels give Abraham?

The Lord and two angels (also described as three men and the Lord and two men) announced that Sarah would have a son and that Sodom would be destroyed.

17. What happened when the two angels left and went to Sodom?

The men of that city, not knowing that they were angels, asked Lot to send them outside so they could have sexual relations with them. The angels blinded the men and warned Lot and his family to leave the city because Sodom was about to be destroyed (Gen. 19:1-29).

18. What famous incident involved Jacob and many angels?

In Genesis 28 Jacob had a dream of a ladder stretching from earth into heaven, and he saw angels ascending and descending on the ladder. In the dream God gave the land around Jacob to him and to his descendants and proclaimed "in you and in your descendants shall all the earth be blessed" (Gen. 28:10-22).

19. What is the meaning of this dream and promise?

It was a reconfirmation of the Abrahamic covenant and indicated that the covenant would go through Jacob's line (not Esau's), that his descendants would be innumerable, and that wherever Jacob went God would be with him. It also looked forward to the coming of Christ through Jacob (Matt. 1:2).

20. What famous event involved Jacob and one angel? What happened?

Jacob, while fleeing from his brother Esau, wrestled all one night with an angel and persisted until the angel blessed him. The angel blessed him by changing his name from Jacob, meaning "trickster," to Israel, which means "he who persists with God." The angel also crippled one of Jacob's legs as evidence that the struggle had really occurred and was not merely a dream. The wrestling figure is described as a man and as God in Genesis 32:24-30 and as an angel in Hosea 12:4. So, the angel was probably the preincarnate Christ.

21. What Old Testament character was greeted by the angel of the Lord by this statement, "The Lord is with you, O valiant

warrior”?

Gideon (Judges 6:11-12).

Angels in the Earthly Life of Christ

22. Angels were involved in Jesus birth in several ways. Can you identify all these events?

The angel Gabriel (Luke 1:19) announced the coming birth of John the Baptist who would prepare the way for Jesus (Luke 1: 5-25). Gabriel also announced to Mary, who was a virgin, the miraculous coming birth of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38). An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him not to put Mary away but to marry her because the child she was carrying was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was also told to name the child Jesus. When he woke up he did as the angel commanded him (Matt. 1:18-25). On the night of Jesus’ birth, an angel announced the good news to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks. Then “suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God” (Luke 1:8-15).

23. Name the ways angels were involved in Jesus’ life and teachings?

After the coming of the magi, an angel warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt to avoid Herod’s search for the child. After Herod’s death an angel again appeared to Joseph. He told Joseph to return to Israel (Matt. 2:19-20). When Christ was in the wilderness for 40 days, Satan was tempting Him and the angels were ministering to Him (Luke 4:1-2; Mark 1:13). Jesus taught about angels (Luke 16:22) and about Satan and his demons (Luke 10:17-20). He cast out demons, and He gave the disciples power over demons (Luke 9:1, 37-42). Christ was strengthened by an angel in Gethsemane the night He was taken prisoner (Luke 22:43).

24. Immediately after He stilled the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Christ was met at the shore by a man who claimed to

be demon possessed. What evidence was there that the man was demon- possessed?

He had been bound, but had superhuman strength and had broken away from all human restraints, even chains; he was naked and lived among the tombs, constantly gashing himself with stones while screaming and crying (Mark 5).

25. How many demons did he have? What happened to the demons?

He said he had a legion, meaning literally several thousand. This was probably a figure of speech, but he doubtless had many demons. The demons begged not to be sent out of the country; Christ then sent them into some pigs grazing on a nearby mountainside, and the pigs ran over the cliff into the sea. This is one more evidence of Christ's total control over the demonic world (Mark 5).

26. How were angels involved after Christ's death?

On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to visit the grave. Before they got there, "a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord had descended from heaven and rolled away the stone and sat upon it" (Matt. 28:2). Angels at the tomb announced that Christ was risen (Luke 24:4). Immediately after He ascended, two angels appeared and told the disciples that Jesus would return in the same manner that He had departed (Acts 1:10).

Angels in the Rest of the New Testament

27. What person was described as having the face of an angel?

Stephen, a young man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, was taken before the Sanhedrin and charged with blasphemy. He began to preach. Then "fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15). His sermon, however, so angered the Council that they stoned him (Acts 7:1-60).

28. Who was taken by an angel on a missionary journey? What happened?

Philip was preaching in the villages of Samaria on his way to Jerusalem when an angel spoke to him and told him to go south on a road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. When he arrived the angel told him to approach an Ethiopian eunuch sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah. Philip explained the passage to the eunuch and baptized him upon hearing his statement of faith in Christ. After they come out of the water, the angel snatched Philip away and set him down in another city where he continued preaching the gospel (Acts 8:25-40).

29. What is the attitude of the heavenly angels toward God's plan of salvation?

There is great joy in heaven among the angels of God when a sinner repents and accepts Christ as Savior (Luke 15:10). They are clearly intrigued by what God is doing and long to know more (1 Pet. 1:10- 12). They observe with great interest the behavior of the church. In fact in a passage about orderliness in the worship (Christ submitting to God, men submitting to Christ, and wives submitting to their husbands), Paul concludes by writing that women in church should have a symbol of authority on their heads because of the angels (1 Cor. 11:1-10). There are different theories about what all this means, but it seems clear that our behavior is to be respectful to the angels present and perhaps even instructive to them. Remember that the sin of the fallen angels began with Satan's pride, his unwillingness to submit and his desire for prominence.

30. What individual was freed from prison by an angel?

Simon Peter (Acts 12:3-10).

31. What did the angel do to free Peter?

He appeared in the cell, struck Peter's side to wake him, caused his chains to fall off his hands, then told him to get up and get dressed, and to follow him. They passed several guards without being seen, then they came to the gate of the city, and it opened by itself. Then the angel vanished.

32. Is it possible for an angel to say or teach things contrary to the Scriptures or to God's will?

Yes, in Galatians 1:8 Paul writes "Even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed."

33. Can angels be deceptive in other ways as well?

Yes, 1 Timothy 4:1 states: "in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons (fallen angels)."

34. What Gentile man was told by an angel to send for Simon Peter?

Cornelius, a righteous, god-fearing Centurion who gave alms to the Jews (Acts 10).

35. Why did the angel direct Cornelius to send for Simon Peter come to Cornelius?

So Peter could tell Cornelius and his relatives and friends about salvation through Christ. And, so Simon Peter could see further evidence of how God was beginning a great wave of conversions among the Gentiles (Acts 9:32-11:30).

36. What happened?

The Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and all those listening to Simon Peter's sermon. They began speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter had them all baptized.

Future State of the Angels and Demons

37. What future roles will the good angels have?

They are sometimes involved in punishing unbelievers (Acts 12:23). They will act as reapers toward the end of the age (Matt. 13:39), be involved in the judgments of the Tribulation (Rev. 8, 9, 16), and live forever with the believers of all ages in the New Jerusalem.{5}

38. Will the good angels judge the actions of their former comrades, the fallen angels?

No, believers in their glorified state will judge the fallen angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3). Christ will rule and the believers will rule under Him. Hebrews 2:5 states, "For He did not subject to angels the world to come."

39. What happens to the evil angels and Satan?

The evil angels and Satan will finally be judged by God who will cast them into the lake of fire that burns forever (Luke 20:36; Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10).

Notes

1. C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), p. 13.
2. Merrill F. Unger, *Demons in the World Today* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1971), p. 10.
3. Dickason, pp. 58-61.
4. Ibid., p. 34.
5. Ibid., p. 108.

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Why Isn’t the Evidence Clearer? – The Truth of the Scriptures

Written by Lou Whitworth

[Note: “Why Isn’t the Evidence Clearer?” is the name of a chapter in the Probe book, *Evidence for Faith: Deciding the God Question*, an excellent collection of articles on Christian evidential apologetics. The chapter (pp. 305-17) was written by John A. Bloom (Ph.D. in physics, Cornell University, Ph.D. in Ancient Near Eastern Studies, Dropsie College, and now Associate Professor of Physics at Biola College). This essay is an edited and condensed version of the chapter as found in the book. For the documentation of this material, please see the original. The book was edited/compiled by Dr. John Warwick Montgomery, who holds eight earned degrees in philosophy, law, and theology.]

Sometimes unbelievers complain, “If God really exists, why isn’t the evidence more plain and simple?” “Is God tricking us by making us hunt and search for answers?” They say, “Why isn’t the evidence for the God of the Bible clearer?” That is, why isn’t the evidence for the truth of the Scriptures so obvious and undeniable that virtually everyone would acknowledge it, repent, and accept Christ as personal savior?

In his book, *Contact*, Carl Sagan satirically asks why God doesn’t place a glowing cross in the sky at night to serve as irrefutable proof of Jesus’ resurrection? One could extend this line of thought further and ask why God doesn’t have His own television channel and toll-free “hotline”?

Despite Sagan’s ridicule, he has a legitimate point. Why must we read a two-thousand-year-old book and study ancient history for proof of the existence of God? Why isn’t the evidence for

the existence of the God of the Bible made obvious to everyone, no matter how rebellious or blinded by sin? What we are really asking is, “Are there any reasons for the evidence to appear obscure other than the possibility that the God of the Bible doesn’t exist?” This question should be addressed seriously, and, as we do so in this brief discussion, I think we will find that the answer is more profound than many realize.

There are two reasonable demands for any set of evidence. First, the evidence should be clear enough to be intellectually sound at the same level of certainty one uses in making other important decisions. Second, the evidence must be clear enough to select one set of claims over another (that is, clear enough to select Christianity over other religions).

Some are tempted to apply the rule that “the more critical the decision, the clearer the evidence must be.” They demand that the evidence for Christianity must be extraordinarily and especially clear to win their allegiance. The problem with this standard is that it assumes that there are no consequences to the decision. If, however, there are cataclysmic consequences to the observer, he will have to settle for “sufficient evidence, or the most trustworthy evidence.”

The more appropriate rule is: “The more severe the consequences, the less we should take risks.” Therefore, even if biblical Christianity has a less than one-in-ten-million chance of being true, we should accept it because the possibility of an eternal Hell is such a great torment. If the available evidence shows that biblical Christianity is “the most trustworthy” of all religions, then we are on even firmer ground.

For the balance of this article, we’ll be looking at this issue of the clarity of the evidence from several perspectives. We’ll consider the scientific and historical

perspectives on this question; we'll attempt to look at it from God's point of view and from our own human vantage point. Finally, we'll summarize the results of our analysis in light of God's grace and our human accountability.

The Scientific Perspective

The chief task of the scientist is to comb through "raw" data and attempt to extract useful information from which he constructs a hypothesis. He then tests the hypothesis against the original data and against new data from experimentation. Often the data are inconclusive or ambiguous preventing a rigorous conclusion. However, abandoning the research and pronouncing that no one can ever discover the answer is poor methodology. The fact is that the natural order rarely produces ideal data, and nature appears to be more far more complex the more we know about it. Is it logical to expect the Creator to be less complex than His creation?

The scientist should have a healthy skepticism and desire careful experimentation. However, the extremely skeptical position we mentioned aboveCarl Sagan in demanding a glowing cross in the sky as proof of Christ's resurrection is not scientific. It is like not believing in galaxies unless someone has one in his laboratory. Some people may refuse to believe in the authority of the Ten Commandments because they aren't written on the surface of the moon, but those same people would consider a person an idiot if he said he doubted the authority of the periodic table because it wasn't written on the surface of the moon. The point is that clarity is relative, not absolute; thus skepticism must have practical limits.

In addition, the clarity and conclusiveness of experimental data must be judged relative to competition, that is, alternate explanations. In our case, the clarity of the evidence for the truth of biblical Christianity would be obscured by competition from other belief systems if any of

them had comparable evidence to support their truth claims. Scientists have learned that they cannot wait for irrefutable data.

The Historical Perspective

Arguments against the Bible based on a “Why isn’t it clearer?” foundation can appear stronger than they really are because of the distortions inherent in recording history. For example, a casual reading of the Bible might lead one to the conclusion that miracles were a daily occurrence in ancient Israel. Thus the absence of similar miracles in modern times could lead one to assume that “God is dead” or that those events which the ancients thought were miracles were only natural events which were not understandable at the time.

In fact, a close study of the Bible indicates that miracles were rare and mainly cluster around four specific points:

- Moses and the Exodus
- The time of Elijah and Elisha
- The lives of Jesus and the Apostles, and
- The still future Second Coming of Christ

The clusters of miracles appear in conjunction with some new aspect of God’s plan or new revelation and seem more prominent than they really are because of the historical compression of the biblical record.

God’s Perspective

We have been looking at the question of why the evidence for the truth of the Bible isn’t clearer, and now we will look at this question from God’s perspective. In other words, could God have reasons for not making the evidence so striking that even the most sinful and rebellious person would see it and repent?

First a few observations about God. Ancient thought often held

that the gods made man because they were in need of servants. Much modern thought argues that God made man because He was lonely or did not have anyone around to love or appreciate Him. However, the God of the Bible is in no way dependent upon mankind even for love or worship. That He reveals Himself at all is for our benefit, not His.

But even if He reveals evidence of Himself only to benefit us, why isn't He more forthright about it? This much seems clear: If He made His presence or the evidence too obvious, it would interfere with His demonstration, which is intended to draw out or reveal the true inner character of mankind. We know from several passages of Scripture that this is part of God's purpose for maintaining a relative silence. For example, in Psalm 50:21-22 we read, "These things you have done, and I kept silence; you thought that I was just like you; I will reprove you, and state the case in order before your eyes." From these statements we come to see that God is not struggling desperately to gain man's attention. Actually He is restraining Himself in order to demonstrate to human beings something about our inner character, or tendency to evil. We might call this "the Sheriff in the tavern" principle—people tend to be good when they think they are being watched by an authority. If a sheriff wants to find out or reveal who the troublemakers are in a tavern, he must either hide or appear to be an ineffective wimp, otherwise the bad guys will behave as well as everyone else.

Of course we should not push this analogy too far: unlike the Sheriff, God doesn't need to see men's evil actions in order to accurately judge them. Moreover, He has not stated His full reasons for allowing men to demonstrate their evil intent through their actions. The point we are trying to make here is that there are reasons that we can understand that may explain to some degree why God has chosen to run the world the way He has.

So why isn't the evidence clearer? To use another analogy, it

is because God is like a good scientist who doesn't want to disturb His experiment by intruding into it. The problem of disturbing an experiment while measuring it is the bane of the experimental sciences in that any and every measurement changes and thus distorts to some degree the system it measures. Of course God is not running an experiment because He already knows the outcome. It is more like a demonstration with the results saved for Judgment Day.

The Human Perspective

We have been dealing thus far in this essay the question of why the evidence for the truth of the Bible isn't clearer, that is, overwhelmingly and inescapably clear. Now we want to examine this question from man's viewpoint, that is, the human factor that is involved whenever a person tries to judge the quality of the evidence.

In Romans 1:1-8 Paul wrote that God has given human beings sufficient evidence that He exists. However, some people cannot bear to think that there is an authority or power greater than themselves, especially one that they cannot control and to which they should be subject. We should not be surprised, therefore, when we find that many people often distort the evidence that God has already given them (yet keep demanding more).

Given this tendency on the part of man, how clear does the evidence have to be before people would universally recognize the existence of the God of the Bible? Would a cross in the sky actually be sufficient to convert Carl Sagan? Would the performance of an undeniable miracle in a scoffer's presence be enough? However impressive such feats would be, the records of history show that most people choose to ignore whatever evidence they have, no matter how clear it may be.

During the wilderness wanderings, the Israelites, who had personally observed the miracles in Egypt and who were being

fed and guided daily by miraculous means (manna and the pillar of fire), repeatedly rebelled against the God-directed leadership of Moses. The miracles performed by Elijah and Elisha were not sufficient to convert he Northern Kingdom of Israel to unperverted forms of biblical worship. In the New Testament Jesus healed the lame and the blind and even raised the dead, yet the Jewish leaders, who could not dispute the genuineness of His miracles, wanted to kill Him.

In His account of an unnamed rich man and a poor man named Lazarus, Jesus Himself makes our point clear: The rich man, now in hell, pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus back from the dead to warn his brothers so they will not face the same torment that he is experiencing. Abraham replies, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

From the human perspective, why isn’t the evidence clearer? Because God knows, and has already demonstrated, that no matter how clear He makes the evidence, it will never be sufficient for some. More evidence by itself will not convince people whose minds are already emotionally attached to an opposing view, because people are not always rational. The mind is all too often the servant of the desired fantasy.

Is God frustrated and defeated by the fact that man is so sinful he will not pay attention to God no matter how big the flag is that God waves in front of him? Only if we assume that God’s purpose in giving evidence is to convert everyone.

God’s Grace and Man’s Accountability

In this discussion we have observed that the God of the Bible does not intend to make His presence so obvious that it curbs the actions of evil men, and that most men will ignore whatever evidence they receive anyway. This being the case, why does God bother to give any evidence at all? Why doesn’t He hide Himself even better? From the Bible we deduce that God

gives the level of evidence He does because He is both a gracious God and a God who holds men accountable for the evidence they receive.

Some people will repent on seeing even a low level of evidence; for others a higher level is required. Some people will get much more evidence than is needed to convert others but still not repent. Despite the varying levels of evidence to which people are exposed throughout various times and cultures, God states that He has given each person enough so that they know better than to continue doing evil. Given the willful rejection of the evidence which they do receive, God is not obligated to provide more.

At the very least, the evidence which God gives includes His glory as seen in nature, evidence which in our day we tend to obscure by ascribing it to less personally demanding causes like “chance” or the “laws of nature.”

However we might personally feel about it, God says that He has provided evidence clear enough that every human being is morally responsible to respond to it. The evidence He has provided is sufficient; therefore, He is saddened but not frustrated that many do not respond. Those who choose to ignore His evidence will have to answer to Him and it is not an enviable task—somewhat like arguing with a Judge over a speeding ticket: How can we say we did not see the sign when the Judge himself posted it? How foolish would we be if we tried to argue that we saw the sign but thought it was too small and too quaint to take seriously?

This points out the main purpose for miracles and biblical evidence: they are warning signs to get us to pay attention to the message associated with the sign. A traffic sign may simply advise us to slow down around a curve, but it may also warn us that a bridge is out ahead. We would be foolish indeed to accelerate past a “Bridge Out” sign because the sign seemed a little too small or too old. But the warning God gives

through miracles and biblical evidence is far worse than a bridge being out. Man is accountable to God, and there is eternal torment ahead for those who brush aside God’s warning signs and refuse to repent.

On the other hand, humble seeker for truth will find that the evidence is indeed sufficient. Why? Because the biblical data, when compared to that offered by other religions or by atheism, is clear enough to show that the God of the Bible really exists and that His warnings should be heeded.

In Matthew 12:38-39 the Pharisees challenged Jesus by demanding that He perform a sign impressive enough to force them to believe His warnings. But God does not feel obligated to cater to the egos of the morally and sexually corrupt who bend whatever evidence they receive to suit their own ends.

These demands express a sovereignty over God at the opposite extreme from repentance. Should we expect God to jump through any hoop we set up to please us? Is God so insecure that He needs our approval? Yet some people deal with the Creator of the universe as if He were a dog. But in spite of such attitudes, God provides sufficient evidence for self-centered people.

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