A Christian Worldview Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment

Steve Cable examines the Second Amendment from a biblical perspective.

In today’s America, the Second Amendment invokes intense arguments regarding its meaning and application. Events like the Newton school, the Aurora movie theater, and the Tucson shopping center shootings bring sorrow to our minds and prayers to our lips. Some say the way to prevent these tragedies is to remove the right for individuals to own and carry firearms. Others argue that firearms carried by responsible individuals could have prevented much, if not all, the carnage of these mass shootings.

Any discussion of the Second Amendment should begin by making sure we are familiar with the wording and the original meaning of this part of our Bill of Rights. The Second Amendment states: “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Although we can reasonably assume the authors of the Bill of Rights and the people of that day felt that this was an unambiguous statement, it is not the case today.

Some believe that the phrase “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms” creates an individual constitutional right. This view is referred to as the “individual right theory,” that legislative bodies are precluded from prohibiting firearm possession. Others argue that the phrase “a well-regulated Militia” means that it was only intended to restrict Congress from legislating away a state’s right of self-defense. This view is called the “collective rights theory.”

In all likelihood, the authors intentionally combined these two thoughts. The states could not muster a militia of their people unless the people were allowed to keep arms. This view is supported by people involved in crafting and/or approving the Bill of Rights. Samuel Adams wrote, “The said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to . . . prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms.” Similarly, Noah Webster wrote, “Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in American cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be on any pretense, raised in the United States.”

Does a Christian worldview provide guidance for our views on the Second Amendment? The Bible does not talk about guns, but does it provide instruction on this issue? In 1 Peter, we learn that governments bear the sword to implement justice. Under our Constitution, we, the people, are ultimately the ones who bear the sword to ensure justice.

The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?

As discussed above, those responsible for the Second Amendment intended to ensure individuals could bear firearms legally. What concerns led to this original amendment to our constitution?
To understand, we should review the context for the introduction of the Bill of Rights. When the Constitution was sent to the states for ratification in 1787, two groups formed around adding a bill of rights to the Constitution, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The Federalists supported the Constitution as written, believing that any attempt to list certain rights as remaining with individuals or states would be interpreted as making other rights subject to the federal government. The Anti-Federalists believed it was important to clearly state key fundamental rights over which the federal government would have no jurisdiction. Neither group was arguing against any of the Bill of Rights, but rather whether it was more effective to be silent or to list them explicitly.

The Federalists, who had the majority of delegates to the convention, were wrong in assuming that most people would agree with their hands-off approach. This situation led to many of the states ratifying the Constitution with the stipulation that a bill of rights be added. The right to bear arms was a common component of these stipulations. As James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, “The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation . . . forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition . . . The several kingdoms of Europe . . . are afraid to trust the people with arms.”

When the first Congress met, James Madison presented a bill of rights before the members of the House. The first Congress converted these into twelve amendments which were sent back to the states for ratification in September of 1789. The language which would become the Second Amendment was essentially unchanged from that offered by Madison. On March 1, 1792, Thomas Jefferson announced the ratification of the United States Bill of Rights.

In Romans, Paul wrote, “But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for (governing authorities) do not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.” However, if government officials hold all power, those who would control us will seek that power by taking over the government. In our constitutional system, the people are the ultimate governing authorities and thus are given the right to bear arms to protect the nation against those who would take over for the practice of evil.

The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?

As noted previously, two different thoughts arose in interpreting the Second Amendment, namely the “individual rights theory” and the “collective rights theory.” Which view is supported by the Supreme Court?

In the most recent ruling of 2008, the court ruled the amendment confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes such as self-defense. It also determined that the clause concerning a well-regulated militia does not limit the part which clearly states an individual’s right to keep and bear arms. Thus, the Court affirmed the “individual rights theory” of interpretation.

Remember, the framers of the Second Amendment were aware that guns held by individuals could be used for criminal activity. They felt that protecting individual liberty was more important than trying to create a perfectly safe environment. However, it should not be interpreted that everyone should have equal access to firearms. The Court has supported laws which 1) restrict those with mental problems or a criminal background in acquiring guns and 2) limit general access to specific types of weapons for mass destruction.

The difficult question is, when does the government cross the line into the realm of interfering with a person’s rights? First, what is meant by arms; does it include tanks, RPGs, etc.? Second, what could legally preclude a person’s right to bear arms? What type of personality or personality
disorder makes it dangerous to others for you to carry a gun?

On the first question, the answer is not defined by what is needed for hunting or protection from thieves. From the perspective of the Founding Fathers, it needs to be weapons such that if a sufficient number of people possess them, the government is unable through the force of an army to impose any unconstitutional burdens upon the people. The Court’s position is that rifles and handguns are sufficient and that the government has the right to control other types of weapons.

The second question is equally difficult: how does one determine who is sane enough to have the right to bear arms? The Court has allowed this to be defined in terms of mental deficiencies, mental problems and a criminal background.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, we are told to pray for those in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life with all godliness and dignity. Our Constitution indicates that we are to take up arms as necessary to protect a government supporting godliness and dignity. It is reasonable to preclude those without a sane concept of a quiet and peaceful life from accessing firearms, which would always be a small minority of the populace.

**The Second Amendment: Should It Be Ignored?**

To this point, we have laid out the history and the status of our right to bear arms. We have three possible responses: 1) accept and obey this law, 2) ignore it as counter to God’s greater law, or 3) work to repeal the law. Let us first consider the question, “Is this a law that we should ignore?”

As spelled out in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2, Christians are to uphold the laws of our land. Although no specific governmental system is promoted in the New Testament, we appreciate a system that protects our ability to worship God consistent with 1 Timothy 2:1-2. We support protecting the individual religious freedom offered by this country. At the same time, we want to limit robbery, murder and mayhem. How do these potentially conflicting desires relate to our view of the Second Amendment?

Remember, its underlying purpose is to ensure that our freedoms as individuals and as states are never trampled on by the federal government or others. The framers of the Constitution were worried about the tendency of large governments to attempt to consolidate their power at the expense of freedom. As Christians, we should desire to live in a society where we are free to worship God and share our faith with others.

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4, we see that we should pray for such a society because “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” As citizens of this nation, the Second Amendment makes it clear that we have a responsibility to protect our rights from those who would attempt to abuse their position, to maintain our freedoms including our freedom to live godly lives and share Christ freely.

In 2 Peter 2:13-14, we are to submit “for the Lord’s sake to every human institution,“ whether to a king or his representatives. Within our structure of government, we submit to our Constitution and its principles. The Second Amendment calls for us (if needed) to be armed and ready as individuals to participate in a state militia or, in the absence of a militia, to act as individuals to protect our liberty. In 2008, the Supreme Court ruled that this also confers an individual right to possess a firearm for traditionally lawful purposes.

Clearly, the right to bear arms as defined in our Constitution and explained by Supreme Court rulings is not counter to biblical teaching. Therefore, we are to act in accordance with this
amendment to our Constitution. Whether we should try to repeal this law is discussed below.

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?

If the Second Amendment creates more harm than good, we can support repealing it. The main argument for this position is that guns are used by some to harm the innocent. If guns are freely available to the citizenry, does the harm done outweigh the value envisioned by the Second Amendment?

Many innocent people have been killed by deranged individuals and criminals with guns; at the same time, we cannot remember a time when American citizens were called to the streets to protect our Constitution. Have we reached a point where the nature of today’s weapons and our society make the Second Amendment a detriment?

One group argues that if private ownership was illegal and strictly enforced, it would severely limit gun violence. An opposing view believes the problem is actually worsened by the lack of gun ownership by the public. If more law abiding citizens were armed and prepared to respond, the number of people killed would drop due to the deterrent effect.

What is the problem with repealing the Second Amendment? To have no guns among the citizenry, the government must be very proactive in removing guns from society as a whole. Guns must be removed from those not inclined to obey—a very difficult task as evidenced by the prevalence of alcohol during Prohibition. If accomplished, the government must assume unprecedented powers which may be fine as long as the Constitutional is not usurped. But if a future government decides to do so, there will be nothing to stop it.

Swords were used to kill people in Jesus’ day. Did Jesus rail against the presence of swords and demand that no one but soldiers should carry them? No, in fact, he told His disciples that he who had no sword should buy one because of the troubled days ahead. Peter was carrying his sword in the garden when Jesus was arrested. While Jesus kept Peter from interfering with His arrest, Jesus did not use that situation to initiate a “sword control” campaign.

Perhaps a more sensible way to control gun violence would be to encourage law-abiding citizens to carry weapons, particularly in public areas. This approach creates a deterrent against the insane, the criminal, and a future government gone amok.

According to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, in the last days, swords will be beaten into plowshares and nations will no longer lift up the sword against other nations. We are clearly not in those last days now. Keeping the Second Amendment in place highlights our commitment to a government “of the people, by the people and for the people,” while we wait for Christ’s bodily return.

Notes

1. Second Amendment, Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second_amendment
2. Ibid.
4. Ibid., Noah Webster, “An Examination of the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution.” Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States Published During Its Discussion by the People
Ex-Christians: Ways to Bring Back the Leavers

Steve Cable provides an overview of why young people leave the church based on Drew Dyck’s book Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith . . . And How to Bring Them Back.

Over the last several years, Probe has been reporting on a changing young adult society that is marginalizing the church at an increasing rate. When we analyzed relevant survey data and our own survey taken of 18- to 40-year-old, born again Christians, the data revealed that even among Evangelicals, cultural captivity was the norm for the vast majority of Christians. One result of culturally captive Christians is that their children often become “leavers,” leaving the faith entirely once they are out on their own.

Are there others who are seeing the same degree of disconnect with the truths of Scripture in the life styles and life choices of young, adult Americans? I want to
Six Types of Leavers

Dyck’s book is not primarily driven by general survey data. Instead, it tells a more personal story. He connected with people who had left their Christian upbringing. He talked with them about their life choices and he attempted to share Christ in a way that would be meaningful in the context of their personal journeys. As a result of this experience, he felt that those leaving their Christian influenced youth to enter into adulthood without a total faith in Christ could be placed into one of six different categories. He entitled these categories:

• Postmodern leavers — those adopting a postmodern view where no meta-narrative is to be trusted
• Modern leavers — those who believe only what they can prove and Neo-Darwinism seems more provable
• Neo-pagan leavers — those who gravitate to an earth-based religion where they are essentially their own gods
• Rebel leavers — those for whom a sinful lifestyle appears more appealing or who don’t want to “give in” to God
• Recoilers — leavers who withdraw because of an emotional hurt associated with people claiming to represent Christianity, and
• Drifters — perhaps the largest group of leavers who gradually drift away because their faith was never that deep to begin with.

Each category of leaver creates a different challenge for one who desires to lead them into a true knowledge of Jesus. Just as Paul used different approaches to share the gospel in the synagogue, the marketplace and the philosopher’s meeting place in Athens, so we need to tailor our approach to communicate effectively with our audience. In what follows, we will consider each of these categories and some of the ways one can best share with them.

Postmodern and Modern Leavers

Postmodern thinking is becoming the cultural norm for young adults. The postmodern view holds that there is no objective truth applying to all, but rather each person or group of people defines their own truth. As J. P. Moreland puts it, “In a postmodernist view, there is no such thing as objective truth, reality, value, reason and so forth.” Yet, many young adults still adopt modernity, the dominant view throughout the twentieth century. Those with a modern view believe linear thinking and rational thought can lead us to objective truths valid for all. In his book Generation Ex-Christian, Drew Dyck finds both of these viewpoints create stumbling blocks for belief.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is true for all people in every age. This view runs counter to the “true for you but not for me” mentality of the postmodern generation. Many young adults influenced by postmodern thought have a difficult time accepting the all-encompassing, meta-narrative of the gospel. These leavers believe that Christianity is too narrow and judgmental to be a part of their own truth sphere.

Dyck points out that those with a postmodern perspective are not really interested in hearing your apologetic arguments. Even if you weave a compelling logical argument, they will nod, smile, and
ignore you. They need to see the impact of the truth of Jesus lived out in your life before them. Invite them to participate with you in serving others, creating an opportunity to share your story. They are, initially, more interested in your personal story. How has Jesus Christ made a difference in your life?

Conversely, those with a modern perspective are not as interested in your personal story. With moderns, ask questions to understand how they decide if something is true. Model a concern for the truth before laying “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” on their plate. Focus on the truth of the gospel, not letting ourselves get sidetracked into other arenas. How satisfying is their alternative view, and what are the consequences if they are wrong in their perception of truth?

Many modernists report that most Christians hastened their departure from the church through trite, unhelpful answers to the questions they were asking. Be willing to do the research to answer their questions thoughtfully and with confidence. Remember, there are good cogent explanations to their questions and their objections.

As Dyck discovered, effectively sharing with a leaver today requires us to know whether their general thought process is more shaped by modernism or postmodernism. Their answer determines whether we start with our personal experience or with the total truth of the gospel.

**Neo-Pagans and Rebels**

Two more groups of leavers Dyck labels Neo-pagans and Rebels.

Dyck discovered a surprisingly large number of Neo-pagan leavers. Neo-pagans have gravitated to the beliefs that they are ultimately gods living in a society where the earth is to be nourished and women are as important, if not more so, than men. One common example of this religious view is Wicca. Another example is Oprah’s mishmash of Eastern mysticism.

As with other leavers, begin by asking them questions to understand what they believe and what attracted them to it. With Neo-pagans, Dyck suggests starting by sharing with them our appreciation for nature and our sense of responsibility to care for it as God commanded. We also can share the honor that Christ and the church gave to women. They need to understand that women are “fellow heirs,” not maidservants in Christ’s kingdom. Upon earning a listening ear, we can share how we have experienced God’s presence in our midst. Share our spiritual experiences with them. Above all, recognize that you are engaging in a spiritual battle that must include fervent pray on their behalf.

As he examined his relationships with different types of leavers, Dyck realized that some of them leave not to follow after a different belief system but, instead, to rebel against their view of a creator who is attempting to limit their self expression. Some rebels are motivated by a desire to do their own thing and participate fully in the short-lived pleasures of this world. Others are motivated by a desire to spit in the face of God, declaring their independence.

To effectively reach out to spiritual rebels, we need to let them know we care about them as persons. The world is already showing them that in their rebellion they are not really free. Everybody serves something. Get them to talk about what they are serving, whether it is money, success, clothes, power, etc. Then share with them how you experience true freedom as a captive of the source of all true freedom, Jesus Christ. As Paul tells us in Galatians, “For you were called to freedom, only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).
Drifters and Recoilers

Drifters and Recoilers are two more kinds of leavers.

Dyck identifies the Drifters as the largest group of leavers, exhibiting “that entrenched human defect—the tendency to drift from God.”\(^5\) They did not set out to walk away from the faith of their parents. Over time it became less important to them, until it played no real role in their lives. As Dyck put it, “the biggest danger to Christianity is Christians.”\(^6\)

Recent surveys showed 18- to 29-year-olds who indicated they had no religion growing from 11 percent in 1990 to 22 percent in 2008.\(^7\) Of these young adults, two-thirds of them were leavers from an earlier point in their life where they considered themselves Christians. Their most common reason for leaving was not some intellectual epiphany, but rather they “just gradually drifted away from the religion.”\(^8\)

Drifters are not driven by specific intellectual objections. They may have no real objections or arguments against Christian beliefs. Instead, they are apathetic toward it. It just is not important in their life.

To reach Drifters, one must redefine their perception that a Christian life is not worth pursuing. They need to see us loving Jesus because of who He is and not because of what He can do for us. It is not about getting God to do something for us. It is about the opportunity for eternal fellowship with the One who created us all.

The Drifters need to be connected with older adults who are living with an eternal perspective. Who are “redeeming the time because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:16). We need to raise the bar on the Christian life. It is more than the sterile, play-acting game they may have seen from their parents. You cannot call them back to a watered down Christianity that was unable to hold their allegiance in the first place. Instead, we need to live out before them the radical lifestyle of a true follower of Jesus Christ.

The final group of leavers are the ones Dyck calls the Recoilers. These people are a special case. Their lives have been marred by significant pain. They relate the source of this pain to their Christian experience. For the Recoilers, it is typically only in the context of a relationship that healing can take place. On the one hand, we need to empathize with them, while, on the other, they need to see the joy our faith brings to our lives. Gradually, we may be able to help them delineate between God who loves them and the people who hurt them.

Reaching This Generation

In *Generation Ex-Christian*, Drew Dyck identified six different types of faith leavers: Postmoderns, Moderns, Neo-pagans, Spiritual Rebels, Drifters, and Recoilers. Recognizing that we are called to be “all things to all men so that we may by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22), we can tailor our approach to more effectively reach each type of leaver.

Let’s consider five aspects that need to be consistent regardless of which type of leaver you are dealing with.

*Listen to them to understand* which type they may be. If we jump into sharing without knowing, we run the risk they will tune us out permanently.

*Articulate why we believe what we believe.* We need to have a good basic understanding of why we
believe the gospel is true. If we have a good grasp of the basics, we can tailor our approach to the type of leaver we are addressing.

*Enter into relationship with the long view in mind.* Don’t expect to reverse their dismissal of Christianity overnight. Over time we want clear away some of the obstacles standing between them and a vibrant faith. Be prepared for this effort to take time.

*Focus on forging loving relationships.* All the intelligent words in the world won’t matter if they view us as hired guns adding another notch to our tally. Paul reminded Timothy, “The aim of our instruction is love proceeding from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5). Demonstrating Christian love makes them more willing to sincerely listen to us.

*Consistently pray for the leavers in our lives.* As Dyck put it, “We can give our loved ones who have strayed no greater gift than time spent in the presence of God on their behalf. Plead, ramble, cry, rage—but don’t stop.” Pray that “God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ . . . that we may make it clear in the way we ought to speak” (Col. 4:2). If we are not bringing God into the relationship through prayer, we are not speaking with His effectiveness.

I don’t believe the God who “desires all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4) would at the same time desire a large portion of our young adults to leave behind faith in Jesus Christ. We are not to throw up our hands in surrender, but rather to dedicate ourselves to sharing Christ in ways that communicate the truth to different sets of ears. Let’s commit together to reach out and bring these leavers into an eternal relationship with Christ.

**Notes**

2. Ibid., Chapter 2.
6. Ibid.

© 2013 Probe Ministries

---

**Darwinism: A Teetering House of Cards**

*Steve Cable examines four areas of recent scientific discovery that undermine evolution.*
The Origin of Life: A Mystery

Confidence in Darwinism erodes as new discoveries fail to produce supporting evidence. Three books released in 2017,

- *House of Cards* by journalist Tom Bethel
- *Zombie Science* by biologist Jonathan Wells
- *Undeniable* by biologist Douglas Axe

address areas where Darwin’s grand idea is weaker now than 150 years ago. As Bethel states, “Today, it more closely resembles a house of cards, built out of flimsy icons rather than hard evidence, and liable to blow away in the slightest breeze.”{1} It is not just critics who recognize this weakening. In 2016, the Royal Society in London convened a meeting to discuss “calls for revision of the standard theory of evolution.”{2}

Four areas where Darwin hoped future work would support his theory will be examined. The first area is the origin of reproducing beings.

Darwin only hoped that life may have originated in a “warm little pond.” But as one scientist states, “The origin-of-life field is a failure—we still do not have even a plausible coherent model, let alone a validated scenario, for the emergence of life on earth.”{3}

Darwin assumed the first reproducing cells were very simple. In truth, the simplest cells are composed of impressively complex machines which could not have arisen directly from inorganic components. But there are no known simpler life forms. As Michael Behe commented, “The cell’s known complexity has increased immeasurably in recent years, and points ever more insistently to an intelligent designer as its cause.”{4}

The probability of even one of the amino acids necessary for life appearing by random mutations is effectively zero even given billions of years. As Doug Axe writes, “(Examining how) accidental evolutionary processes are supposed to have invented enzymes without insight, we consistently find these proposals to be implausible.”{5}

Another professor states, “Those who think scientists understand the issues of prebiotic chemistry are wholly misinformed. Nobody understands them. . . . The basis upon which we . . . are relying is so shaky we must openly state the situation for what it is: a mystery.”{6}

Facing insurmountable odds against life appearing, some materialists propose an infinite number of parallel universes.{7} With infinite chances, even the most unlikely events could occur. But, as Axe points out, “The biological inventions that surround us (are) fantastically improbable, with evolution explaining none and the multiverse hypothesis explaining only those absolutely necessary for wondering to be possible, . . . this hypothesis fails to explain what we see.”{8}

Even after resorting to unobservable fantasy situations, the challenges presented by the origins of life cannot be overcome. A Darwinian model begins with a self-replicating life form. Currently, this appears to be a hill that no one knows how to climb.
An Example of Macro-evolution: Still Searching

Darwin’s theory is dependent upon the unobserved concept of macro-evolution, i.e. intergenerational differences accumulating into different species over time. Darwin believed his magic wand of natural selection could direct this process toward increasingly complex beings. Has further research confirmed his belief?

Let’s begin with fossil evidence.

The number of fossils studied has blossomed over the last 150 years. All the types of species which exist today appear in the fossil record over a relatively short period of time. And, in most cases, with no transitional forms between them undermining Darwin’s theory. As science historian Stephen Meyer concludes, “As more . . . fossils are discovered (failing) to document the great array of intermediate forms, it grows ever more improbable that their absence is an artifact of either incomplete sampling or preservation.”

And evolution proponent Stephen Gould wrote, “The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology. The evolutionary trees . . . have data only at the tips and nodes of their branches; the rest is inference.” Nature editor Henry Gee put it this way: “To take a line of fossils and claim that they represent a lineage is not a scientific hypothesis that can be tested, but an assertion that carries the same validity as a bedtime story.”

Cleary, the fossil record challenges rather than supports conventional evolutionary theory.

Let’s continue by looking at experimental evidence.

Perhaps someone has recreated macro-evolution in the lab. Studies of fast replicating populations have shown no ability to accumulate multiple changes. Attempts to create macro-evolution in fruit flies, bacteria and viruses concluded “Neither in nature nor under experimental conditions have any substantial effects ever been obtained through the systematic accumulation of micro-mutations.”

Bethel points out, “The scientific evidence for evolution is not only weaker than is generally supposed, but as new discoveries have been made . . . , the reasons for accepting the theory have diminished rather than increased.”

Yet biology departments still spout their unfounded belief in the “magic wand” ability to produce an unimaginable array of advanced creatures in what “amounts to the triumph of ideology over science.” Even some materialists see through this charade. One geneticist at Harvard wrote, “If scientists are going to use logically unbeatable theories about the world, they might as well give up natural science and take up religion.”

“Darwin might well have been dismayed (at) the meager evidence for natural selection, assembled over many years. . . . It is worth bearing in mind how feeble this evidence is any time someone tells you that Darwinism is a fact.”

The Challenge of Irreducible Complexity

Darwin wrote his theory would “absolutely break down” if an organ could not be formed by “numerous, successive, slight modifications.” Have such organs been found? Irreducible complexity and functional coherence say yes.

Irreducible complexity means that some known functions require multiple parts that have no
purpose without the other parts. For a Darwinian process to create these functions would require useless mutations to be indefinitely maintained until combined with other useless mutations. Michael Behe’s analysis has shown the 4 billion years of the earth’s existence are not sufficient for such complex functions to be created by random mutations.

Even if an improbable series of events occurred allowing one of these complex forms to arise through a set of random mutations, it would need to happen thousands, if not millions, of times to produce our complex life forms.

In *Undeniable*, Axe introduces “functional coherence,” defined as “The hierarchical arrangement of parts needed for anything to produce a high-level function—each part contributing in a coordinated way to the whole.” Axe examines the role of functional coherence as a microscopic level and concludes, “The fact that mastery . . . of protein design is completely beyond the reach of blind evolution is . . . evolution’s undoing. . . . The evolutionary story is . . . something much less plausible than hitting an atomic dot on a universe-size sphere over and over in succession by blindly dropping subatomic pins.”{18}

In *Zombie Science*, Jonathan Wells considers the number of irreducibly complex subsystems required to evolve fully aquatic whales. These features include flukes with specialized muscles, blowholes with elastic tissues and specialized muscles, internal testicles with a countercurrent heat exchange system, specialized features for nursing, and many others. For Darwinism, these changes are insurmountably large. Whales certainly appear to be the product of design, not unguided evolution.

He also points to advanced optical systems. The process by which light detection becomes an intelligent signal to the brain is irreducibly complex. Two scientists wrote, “the prototypical eye. . . cannot be explained by selection, because selection can drive evolution only when the eye can function at least to a small extent.”{19} These scientists determined the eye was irreducibly complex and could not be developed by natural selection.

Richard Lewontin, a committed materialist, does not believe natural selection can explain complex life forms. He cannot conceive of any gradual set of useful incremental changes resulting in a flying being. Unless a small change gives an advantage, “the change won’t be selected for, and obviously, a little bit of wing doesn’t do any good.”{20}

So we can agree with Darwin on this issue: his theory “absolutely breaks down.”

**DNA and Molecular Science Muddy the Scenario**

Has uncovering the role of DNA filled the gaping holes in Darwinism or created more?

A species’s DNA sequence, we are told, contains all the information needed to create new members. But Douglas Axe states, “(We) would be shocked to know the . . . state of ignorance with respect to DNA. The view that most aspects of living things can be attributed neatly to specific genes has been known . . . to be FALSE for a long time.”{21}

The higher-level components making up a species are not entirely specified by its DNA. As Wells explains, “After DNA sequences are transcribed into RNAs, many RNAs are modified so they do not match the original transcript. . . .(changing) over time according to the needs of the organism.” The claim that “DNA makes RNA makes protein” is false.”{22}

Creating new complex functions requires multiple changes in the DNA sequence AND in other
elements making the chance of random mutations creating new species untenable.

The original conflicting “trees of life” were created examining the morphology, i.e. the structures of species. These trees suggest different major nodes but almost no transitional forms. Can DNA analysis help? Research has shown that groupings based on morphology are not supported by DNA analysis. As Wells notes, these conflicts “are a major headache for evolutionary biologists.”{23}

This disconnect from recent gene research is not limited to a few cases. As reported in 2012, “incongruence between (trees) derived from morphology . . . , and . . . trees based on different subsets of molecular sequences has become pervasive.”{24}

But DNA analysis alone has a great degree of uncertainty. In one study looking at fifty genes from seventeen animal groups, multiple conflicting ideas on the evolutionary relationship between the animal groups were proposed.{25} All had seemingly absolute support from the DNA evidence, but all could not be true.

Originally scientists thought DNA was primarily junk sequences not contributing to the characteristics of a species. This junk represented functions which were replaced or had no current usefulness. As Francis Crick, one of the discoverers of DNA’s structure, said, “The possible existence of such selfish DNA is exactly what might be expected from the theory of natural selection.”{26}

But recent research shows at least eighty percent of the human genome contributes. As Wells reports, “The evidence demonstrates that most of our DNA is transcribed into RNA and that many of those RNAs have biological functions. The idea that most of our DNA is junk, . . . is dead.”{27}

The facts uncovered about the functioning of DNA and other elements in passing on characteristics to the next generation appear to make more holes in evolutionary theory.

A Philosophy Props Up Its Poster Child

Recent, scientific insights have weakened Darwin’s theory. Yet many are unwilling to discuss its weakness. Why this reluctance? It falls into two camps: 1) a commitment to materialism and 2) a desire for academic acceptance. Materialism is a religious viewpoint where everything has a natural explanation. A spiritual component or events resulting from an outside force are rejected. Science is not materialism. Science attempts to identify and quantify the forces that make the universe. A materialist scientist adds a religious restriction: only natural forces can be considered.

Bethel states, “Although Darwinism has been promoted as science, its unstated role has been to prop up the philosophy of materialism and atheism.”

Wells suggests, “Priority is given to proposing and defending materialistic explanations rather than following the evidence wherever it leads. This is materialistic philosophy masquerading as empirical science, . . . zombie science.”{28}

Atheist Colin Patterson offers an honest view regarding the theory of evolution as “often unnecessary” in biology. Nevertheless, it was (taught as) “the unified field theory of biology,” holding the whole subject together. Once something has that status it becomes like religion.”{29}

Until they have a better theory, they will stand behind it rather than consider alternatives. They fear any uncertainty will lead to questioning other aspects of materialism, such as that free will and love for others are simply a façade promoted by natural selection.
Bethel points out, “If our minds are . . . accidental products of a blind process, what reason do we have for accepting materialist claims as true?”{30} After all, our minds are selected to improve our survivability, not to discern what is true.

Many scientists are not die-hard materialists. They believe there may be a spiritual aspect of our existence. Yet they promote the materialistic view. For most, this inconsistent approach is a reaction to the threat of censure from the establishment.

Axe claims, “The religious agenda is the enemy that threatens science. . . . Everything that opposes the institutionalized agenda is labeled ‘anti-science.’”{31}

The same arguments used against intelligent design apply more accurately to Darwinism. Bethel states, “(Some) have said that design can’t be measured and therefore it is a religious belief. . . . They might also have said the macro-evolution has not yet been measured, or so much as observed.”{32}

In this review, we have seen

1. No materialistic concept for life’s origin
2. Little evidence for transitional life forms
3. Strong evidence complex functions could not arise through random changes
4. DNA playing havoc with the basic tenets of Darwinism.

Now we wait for the façade raised by supporters of a flawed concept to collapse.

Notes

A Christian Purpose for Life - Proclaiming the Glory of Christ

Steve Cable answers the question, Why does God leave Christians on earth after we are saved?

Misconceptions and Our Identity

Examining the beliefs and behavior of born-again emerging adults over the last few years, one common deficiency is a misunderstanding of their relationship to eternity. Many believers either have not thought about the question of “Why did God leave me here on earth once I was saved?” or they harbor misconceptions about the answer. Let’s begin by considering some common misconceptions.

The first misconception is being purposeless. These people believe that thinking about their eternal purpose is a waste of time. Just live for the moment. My eternal destiny is secure so why bother myself with asking, “Why am I still here? I’ll worry about the things of heaven after I die.” This viewpoint devalues the sacrifice of Christ. He did not give His life for us so that we can be unconcerned about what concerns Him. {1}
The second misconception is focusing on this life’s pleasures. Many young people say things like “I don’t want Jesus to return until after I have traveled, married, had children, gotten that promotion, etc.” They assume these things are of ultimate importance in their lives. Yet, the Bible teaches us that this attitude will choke out God’s fruit in our lives. As Jesus said, “[T]he worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things, enter in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful.”\(^2\)

A third misconception is becoming prepared for heaven. Some think that God needs to get our character up to some entrance level requirement before we are ready to move on to heaven. Most people with this view are not really working hard to match their lifestyle to a biblical standard, but they figure at some point they will. However, since our righteousness is not our own, but rather that of Jesus’,\(^3\) we don’t need to get more righteous to enter heaven. In fact, when we see Him then we will be like Him.\(^4\) The fastest way to make us completely mature is to take us out of this world.

One final misconception is providing for one’s family. Caring for our family is certainly part of God’s desire for our lives. However, if our sole purpose is to provide for our own family and our children have the same purpose and so on, the church will be limited to us and our progeny—and no one else.

These common misconceptions as to our purpose fall under the warning Paul gave us in Philippians, For many walk, of whom I often told you, . . . that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, . . . whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.\(^5\)

Paul goes on to explain, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ . . .”\(^6\)

We are to live our lives constantly aware of our heavenly citizenship, eagerly awaiting the return of our Lord. In this article, we examine the book of 1 Peter to see what Peter has to say about our purpose in life and how we are to live it out.

**Called to a Critical Mission**

Peter begins the book of 1 Peter by reminding us what Christ has done for us. Let’s read the first few verses of this amazing letter.

According to his great mercy, [God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Through the resurrection of Jesus we are born again and are looking forward to an eternal inheritance kept in heaven for us to be revealed in the last time. What a wonderful truth helping us to realize that we are already living in eternity as we wait for our inheritance to be revealed. In the meantime, we are living on this earth in a temporary “earthsuit” called to fulfill God’s purpose for our lives.

In the remainder of his letter to the churches, Peter addresses what we are to do while we are living on this earth. He first tells us that we are likely to encounter trials and suffering in this world. Then, beginning with verse 13 of chapter 1, Peter conveys to us the importance of our mission, giving us instructions we would expect a military commander to give before sending his team out on a dangerous and critical mission. He tells us to:
Prepare our minds for action — we are to be action oriented, not passively waiting for our life to pass by.

Be alert and focused on the mission — we are to keep our minds focused on God’s purpose for our life on this earth.

Keep a long term perspective — don’t be deceived into putting your thoughts and your hope on the temporary temptations of the world, and

Realize God has entrusted you with the priceless resource of time — Peter tells us that we are to conduct ourselves in the fear of the Lord while we are on this earth.

In the latter parts of chapter 1, Peter reminds us that we have been redeemed at a very high cost, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. We owe a tremendous debt which motivates us to desire to faithfully carry out our mission on this earth.

The calls to action listed above must be accompanied by two critical components to be effective in this life. Specifically, Peter calls on us to purify our hearts not conforming to our former lusts and to love other believers not only as a friend, but also with sacrificial love by which Jesus loves you. The actions listed above are not our purpose on this earth, but rather activities we need to address if we are fulfill our purpose.

Our Purpose: To Proclaim His Excellencies

Why does God leaves us on this earth after we are saved? In the second chapter of his letter, Peter begins by reminding us that we are living stones, part of the holy building God is building on the cornerstone Jesus Christ. This building made up of the lives of Christians is to be a beacon proclaiming the glory of God and the good news of redemption in Jesus.

In verses 9 and 10 of Chapter 2, Paul clearly states the purpose of our lives and of the church when he writes:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

We are a special people on this earth, God’s own people. Peter uses the terms used by Yahweh of the Israelites in the wilderness where God told them through Moses,

Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.{7}

The Israelites discovered that they could not obey His voice or keep His covenant even when ruled by kings who desired to serve the Lord. Jesus Christ had to “become sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God through Him.”{8} In Jesus’ righteousness, we now become the special people of God given His purposes to accomplish on this earth.

We are left here so that we may proclaim His excellencies. We are to proclaim more than just the general attributes of our Creator. We are to let people know that our Creator is prepared to deliver them out of darkness and let them live in His marvelous light. God has entrusted us with His glory, His light. We have the privilege of proclaiming His glory and offering His grace. At a basic level, we
proclaim His excellencies by obeying His commands to proclaim Christ, make disciples, and be available for God to use us on this earth.

If we are to proclaim the glories of Christ and the gospel of redemption to eternal life, how are we to accomplish this wonderful goal?

**Fulfilling Our Purpose Through Excellent Behavior and Right Relationships**

In this article we have been looking at the question, “What purpose does God have for my life as a Christian here on planet Earth?” We have seen that God leaves us here primarily for the purpose of bringing others into His kingdom. As Paul said, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain . . . if I am to remain on in the flesh if will mean fruitful labor for me.”

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul stated, “We proclaim [Christ] by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ.” The apostle Peter put it this way, “[You are] a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

If we are to proclaim Christ in this world, the next obvious question is, how are we to do this? Is the best approach to rent a large electronic bull horn and drive the streets preaching the good news? Or in today’s world perhaps we can start a Facebook page or send out a tweet with John 3:16? These techniques may be appropriate in some circumstances, but that is not where the apostle Peter says we should begin.

Peter follows his statement that we are called to proclaim Christ with this interesting instruction:

> Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Instead of following this primary purpose with instructions on how to best verbalize our faith, he first focuses on how we live out our faith. He clearly points out that our behavior if kept excellent in purity and good deeds will attract the attention of non-Christians, of evil doers, causing them to consider the work of Christ in this world. We see that the reason God calls us to excellent behavior is not so that we will be good enough to get into His heaven, but rather to convict others of their need for a savior.

Peter continues to address ways in which we should proclaim Christ in the remainder of the second chapter. He points out that having godly relationships is an important way of proclaiming Christ. What types of relationships does Peter address? He specifically calls out our relationships with unbelievers, government authorities, our bosses, our co-workers, husbands and wives, other believers and the elders He has placed over us.

Relationships are the biggest part of life. As people observe your relationships, they can see that they are different because you offer supernatural love, and your eternal perspective allows you to approach them with a servant’s heart. As Christians, our relationships are not about getting what we deserve, but rather about giving to others the same way Jesus has given to us.

**Fulfilling Your Purpose Through Your Testimony and Your Prayers**

Above we have seen that our post-salvation purpose of life on earth is to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus Christ through the gospel. We also looked at the first two ways that we should use to proclaim
Christ in this world. The first way is through excellent behavior lived out before an unbelieving world. The second is through living out right relationships with those with whom we deal in this world. As you can see, these first two ways that Peter addresses do not require us to explain our faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, they draw unbeliever’s attention to our lives, building up questions in their minds.

For example, in 1 Peter 2:18-19, Peter tells us,

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

Having a good attitude toward our boss even in those times when they are unreasonable finds favor with God and testifies to others of our different perspective.

After dealing with a comprehensive list of life relationships, from the government to our husbands and wives, Peter brings up our spoken testimony as well. In 3:15, he says:

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

Not only are we to live our lives in ways that proclaim the glories of our Savior, we are to be prepared to give an account for the hope that is in us. We know from the first chapter of 1 Peter that the hope that is in us is the hope that comes from being born again and knowing that we have obtained an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven. We need to be prepared to share with others that through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ they too can share in this same hope that drives our lives. The phrase in the verse, to make a defense, is a translation of the Greek word apologia from which we obtain our English word “apologetics.”

It is important to note the context in which this call to apologetics is placed. First, it is to be done with gentleness and reverence, not with arrogance and self-righteousness. The object is not to demonstrate you are right, but rather to help the questioner come to grips with the truth of grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, Peter reiterates his instruction found in 2:12, reminding us that we are to focus on living sanctified lives so that even those who slander us know in their hearts of our good behavior in Christ.

Finally, in 1 Peter 4:7, we are called to be “of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.” If we are to be effective in proclaiming Christ in this world we must be consistently praying about the people and the obstacles we face.

Peter makes it clear that our purpose as a church on this earth is to proclaim the goodness of Christ who delivered us out of the domain of darkness and into the eternal kingdom of God. Proclaiming Christ in this way involves our excellent behavior, our right relationships, our gentle defense of the gospel, and a commitment to prayer. Let us examine our lives to see how this call is being lived out in us.

Notes

1. 2 Cor 5:14 and 1 Peter 1:13-17
2. Mark 4:19
Is Theistic Evolution the Only Viable Answer for Thinking Christians?

Steve Cable examines Francis Collins’s arguments for theistic evolution from his book *The Language of God* and finds them lacking.

**Francis Collins and Theistic Evolution**

Dr. Francis Collins, recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom for cataloging the complete human DNA sequence, put forth his views on science and Christianity in his 2006 book, *The Language of God*. Could his theistic evolution view resolve the apparent conflict between modern science and the Bible? In this article, we will examine this belief and his arguments for it.

Collins grew up agnostic but became an atheist in his student years. At twenty six, he took on the task of proving Christianity false. Like many before him, this hopeless task resulted in accepting Christianity as true: Jesus as God in the flesh bringing us eternal life. In his role as a medical researcher into the genetics of man, he found himself dealing in a world where many questioned the validity of Christian thought as anti-science.

These conflicting forces led him to develop views reconciling the current positions of science and the
truths of the Bible. As Collins states, “If the existence of God is true (not just tradition, but actually true), and if certain scientific conclusions about the natural world are also (objectively) true . . ., then they cannot contradict each other. A fully harmonious synthesis must be possible.”{3} Certainly, this statement is one we all should agree on if we can agree on which scientific conclusions are objectively true.

His resulting beliefs rest on the following premises{4}:

1. God formed the universe out of nothingness 14 billion years ago.
2. Its properties appear to have been precisely tuned for life.
3. The precise mechanism of the origin of life remains unknown,
4. Once evolution got under way, no special supernatural intervention was required.
5. Humans are part of this process, sharing a common ancestor with the great apes.
6. But humans are unique in ways that defy evolutionary explanation, pointing to our spiritual nature.

Rather than interceding as an active creative force, God built into the Big Bang the properties suitable for receiving the image of God at the appropriate time. Purely random mutations and natural selection brought about this desired result. Being outside of time, God would know that this uninvolved approach would result in beings suitable to receive the breath of God.

The Argument for Theistic Evolution

Is Francis Collins’ theistic evolution the way to reconcile theology and science?

Collins argues the Big Bang and the fine-tuning of this universe are clearly the work of God. After that, no intelligent intervention occurred, even though scientists have no idea how life began.{5} At some point, God intervened—first, by giving humans moral and abstract thinking, and second, by sending Jesus Christ to perform miracles, be crucified and resurrected, and bring us eternal life.

In Collins’s view, God is allowed to perform miracles to redeem mankind, but not in creating physical humans. The alternative theories make the scientific process messy and unpredictable. This position allows him to side with the naturalist scientists who hold sway today. However, it does not prevent naturalists from laughing at your silly faith.

He also appears to believe we are looking forward to new glorified bodies living in a new earth with Jesus. Apparently, at that time, God will disavow His penchant for not making changes in nature.

Collins wrote{6} that our DNA leads him to believe in common ancestry with chimpanzees and ultimately with all life. His conclusion is partially based on the large amount of “junk DNA” similar across humans and other animals. If similar segments of DNA have no function, these must be elements indicating a common ancestry.

Subsequent research undermines this belief. “DNA previously dismissed as “junk” are . . . crucial to the way our genome works, . . . For years,. . . more than 98% of the genetic sequence . . . was written off as ‘junk’ DNA.”{7} Based on current research,{8} almost every nucleotide is associated with a function. Over 80% of the genome has been shown to have a biochemical function and “the rest . . . of the genome is likely to have a function as well.”{9} Collins agrees that his earlier position
In this case, the argument of reuse by an intelligent designer now makes more sense.

On theistic evolution, Collins could be right and it would not tarnish the absolute truth of the Bible. However, in all likelihood, Collins is wrong. From both Scripture and current observations, it appears much more likely God actively interceded in creation.

**Irreducible Complexity**

One area of Intelligent Design Francis Collins attacks is the concept of irreducible complexity.

ID researchers define it as: “[A] system of several well-matched, interacting parts that contribute to the basic function, wherein the removal of any one of them causes the system to cease functioning. [It] cannot be produced directly by slight, successive modifications of a precursor system, because any precursor . . . that is missing a part is by definition nonfunctional.”  

A mindless evolutionary process cannot create a number of new, unique parts that must function together before creating any value.

However, Collins believes nothing is too hard for evolution given enough time. He states, “Examples . . . of irreducible complexity are clearly showing signs of how they could have been assembled by evolution in a gradual step-by-step process. . . Darwinism predicts that plausible intermediate steps must have existed, . . . ID . . . sets forth a straw man scenario that no serious student of biology would accept.”

One of Collins’s examples, the bacterial flagellum, is “a marvelous swimming device” which includes a propeller surface and a motor to rotate it. ID researchers identify it as an irreducibly complex. Collins suggests this conclusion has been “fundamentally undercut,” stating that one protein sequence used in the flagellum is also used in a different apparatus in other bacteria. “Granted, [it] is just one piece of the flagellum’s puzzle, and we are far from filling in the whole picture (if we ever can). But each such new puzzle piece provides a natural explanation for a step that ID had relegated to supernatural forces, . . .”

Today, seven years later, ID researchers are not backing off. A recent article concludes, “The claim . . . to have refuted . . . the bacterial flagellum is unfounded. Although there are sub-components . . . that are dispensable . . ., there are numerous subsystems within the flagellum that require multiple coordinated mutations. [It] is not the kind of structure that one can . . . envision being produced in Darwinian step-wise fashion.”

Evolutionists have been trying for over 15 years to attack irreducible complexity. Rather than discrediting the theory, their efforts have shown how difficult it is to do so. Collins’s claims put him in the company of those relying on the ignorance of their audience to cow them with logically flawed arguments.

**God of the Gaps and Ad Hominem Attacks**

Francis Collins states, “ID is a ‘God of the gaps’ theory, inserting . . . the need for supernatural intervention in places its proponents claim science cannot explain.”

This statement mischaracterizes Intelligent Design. “ID is not based on an argument from ignorance.” It looks for conditions indicating intelligence was required to produce an observed result. The event must be exceedingly improbable due to random events and it must conform to a
meaningful pattern. “Does a forensic scientist commit an ‘arson-of-the-gaps’ fallacy in inferring that a fire was started deliberately. . .? To assume that every phenomenon that we cannot explain must have a materialistic explanation is to commit a converse ‘materialism-of-the-gaps’ fallacy.”{18}

ID researchers identify signs that are consistent with intelligent design and examine real world events for those same signs. In addition, a number of non-ID scientists having reached the conclusion that Darwinism is not sufficient, are looking at other mechanisms to explain certain features of life.

Another aspect of Collins’s defense of theistic evolution is using overstated and unsubstantiated attacks to discredit other views.

Of the young earth creationists, he states, “If these claims were actually true, it would lead to a complete and irreversible collapse of the sciences of physics, chemistry, cosmology, geology, and biology.”{19} This is a gross overstatement. In truth, belief in a young earth creation does not prevent one from making predictions based on micro-evolutionary effects or investigating the physical laws of the universe from a microscopic to an intergalactic level.

Collins also states, “No serious biologist today doubts the theory of evolution.”{20} And, “ID’s central premise . . . sets forth a straw man scenario that no serious student of biology would accept.”{21} So, those differing with Collins are not even serious students of biology. Collins ignores the over 800 Ph.D.s who signed a document questioning the ability of Darwinian theory to explain life.{22}

In discrediting ID, he misrepresents the premise of this field, saying ID is designed to resist an atheistic worldview. As one researcher, William Dembski, explains, “Intelligent Design attempts only to explain the arrangement of materials within an already given world. Design theorists argue that certain arrangements of matter, especially in biological systems, clearly signal a designing influence.”{23}

Collins would rather pursue an answer that was wrong and exclude the actions of an intelligent designer, than consider the possibility of intelligent design.

**Perverting the Views of C. S. Lewis**

Did C. S. Lewis support theistic evolution? Francis Collins quotes Lewis{24}, postulating God could have added His image to evolved creatures who then chose to fall into sin. Although consistent with theistic evolution, Lewis’ thoughts are more consistent with ID tenets.

Lewis begins, “For long centuries, God perfected the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself. He gave it hands whose thumb could be applied to each of the fingers, . . .”{25} So, God was actively involved in bringing about the human form; God intervened to produce the desired outcome. This view contrasts with Collins’s view that God took whatever evolution produced and breathed into it His image.

BioLogos extends the thought, stating “(Lewis) is clearly a Christian Theistic Evolutionist, or an Evolutionary Christian Theist.”{26} They point out passages from Lewis showing the evolutionary theory of physical change was not contradictory to the gospel. They suggest Lewis would accept today’s theories as truth and reject ID.

John West’s research{27} finds Lewis was not saying evolutionary theory was definitely true, but rather that it did not refute Christian belief. Lewis wrote, “belief that Men in general have immortal
& rational souls does not oblige or qualify me to hold a theory of their pre-human organic history—if they have one.”{28} In Miracles he wrote, “the preliminary processes within Nature which led up to” the human mind “if there were any”—“were designed to do so.”{29} In both these quotes, Lewis caveats evolutionary theory by adding a big “if.”

Lewis did not embrace a simple-minded view of natural science as fundamentally more authoritative or less prone to error than other fields of human endeavor. Lewis argued that scientific theories are “supposals” and should not be confused with “facts.” . . . We must always recognize that such explanations can be wrong.{30}

Clearly, Lewis did not feel that a young earth view a necessity. But, he was adamantly against the thought that science trumped theology. Although, one cannot know with certainty, it appears that Lewis would resonate with the methodology and claims of Intelligent Design theorists.

I appreciate Collins’ faith journey. However, I wish he would say “We really don’t know the details of man’s creation, but we know God was intimately involved.”

Notes

2. See for example, Josh McDowell’s story in Undaunted: One Man’s Real-Life Journey from Unspeakable Memories to Unbelievable Grace, Lee Strobel’s story in The Case for Faith, and Viggo Olsen’s story in Daktar, Diplomat in Bangladesh.
8. ENCODE is an acronym for the Encyclopedia of DNA Elements project.
13. Behe, Darwin’s Black Box.
18. Ibid.
22. www.dissentfromdarwin.org
Eichenwald begins by parroting negative stereotypes about American evangelicals. Adding rigor to his rant, he states, “A Pew Research poll in 2010{2} found that evangelicals ranked only a smidgen higher than atheists in familiarity with the New Testament and Jesus’s teachings.”{4}

He referred to a table showing the average number of questions out of twelve answered correctly. However, only two of the twelve related to the New Testament and none to Jesus’s teachings.(5) Two questions are not enough to evaluate someone’s knowledge of the New Testament, But, for the record, the two questions were “Name the four gospels” and “Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born?” 53% of those professing to be born again answered these correctly versus 20% of atheists. Apparently to Eichenwald, a “smidgen higher” must mean almost three times as many.
Eichenwald spends two pages bemoaning the translation problems in the New Testament. But as pointed out by Dr. Wallace and others, his critique really serves to highlight the excellence of today’s translations. The areas he points out as having questionable additions in the text are clearly marked in all of today’s popular translations and if removed make no difference in the overall message of the New Testament (i.e. the woman caught in adultery in John and snake handling in Mark).

He also lists three short passages, claiming they did not appear in earlier Greek copies. Upon examination, we find that one of those passages does not appear in modern translations. The other two do appear in the translations. Why? Because they appear in numerous early Greek manuscripts. Once again his scholarship is found wanting.

All scholars agree there are variations between ancient manuscripts from different areas but they do not change the message. As Wallace points out, “We are getting closer and closer to the text of the original. . . . The New Testament has more manuscripts that are within a century or two of the original than anything else from the Greco-Roman world. If we have to be skeptical . . . , that skepticism . . . should be multiplied one thousand times for other Greco-Roman literature.”

Supposed Biblical Contradictions

Eichenwald continues attacking the Bible with nine different topics he claims reveal contradictions in the biblical record. Let’s examine three of them to see if his arguments have substance.

**First**, he claims there are three different creation models, stating that “careful readers have long known that the two stories of Genesis 1 and 2 contradict each other.”

However, a clear-headed examination sees chapter 1 describing the overall creation while chapter 2 talks about the creation of Adam and Eve. As commentators explain, “what follows Genesis 2:4 is not another account of creation but a tracing of events from creation through the fall and judgment.”

In his third creation model “the world is created in the aftermath of a great battle between God and . . . a dragon . . . called Rahab.”

Reading the relevant verses shows no creation story but rather the creature Rahab representing Egypt. Job 9:13 says “under (God) the helpers of Rahab lie crushed.” Some speculate this could relate to the Babylonian Creation Epic. Even if this speculation were true, rather than a third creation story one would say this reference tells us God destroys all idols raised up by others.

Eichenwald’s claim of three different creation models is an illusion.

**His second claim** states the Gospel of John was written “when gentiles in Rome were gaining dramatically more influence over Christianity; that explains why the Romans are largely absolved from responsibility for Jesus’s death and blame instead is pointed toward the Jews,” implying the other gospels put much of the blame on the Romans.

Examining his claim, in Luke we read, “The chief priests . . . were trying to find some way to execute Jesus.” While the Roman governor did not find Jesus guilty of anything worthy of death. In Acts, Peter squarely places the responsibility onto the Jewish leaders and nation. We find similar verses in Matthew and Mark. All the gospels place the blame on the Jewish nation. There is no shift in perspective in John.
In a third supposed contradiction Eichenwald writes, “As told in Matthew, the disciples go to Galilee after the Crucifixion and see Jesus ascend to heaven; in Acts, written by Luke, the disciples stay in Jerusalem and see Jesus ascend from there.”{17}

The gospel of Matthew ends saying **nothing** about Jesus ascending to heaven. In Acts, Luke says the Lord was with His disciples over a forty-day period and could have easily traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee and back.

Not surprisingly, his other six so-called “contradictions” all fail to hold up when one examines the Scriptures.

**Faulty Interpretation Part 1**

Eichenwald wants to show that what we think the Bible teaches about homosexuality is not what God intended. He begins by pointing out “the word homosexual didn’t even exist until . . . 1,800 years after the New Testament was written . . . these modern Bibles just made it up.”{18}

But this could be said of many English words used today. A respected dictionary of New Testament words{19} defines the Greek word he questions as “a male engaging in same-gender sexual activity, a sodomite. . .”

He then tells us not to trust 1 Timothy when it lists homosexuality as a sin because “Most biblical scholars agree that Paul did not write 1 Timothy.”{20}

The early church fathers from the second century on and many contemporary scholars{21} do not agree it is a forgery.{22} Regardless, the same prohibition appears in other epistles and not just in Timothy.

Eichenwald points out Romans, Corinthians and Timothy discuss other sins in more detail than homosexual behavior. He writes, “So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality . . . and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government.”

Most people understand that explaining our relationship to the government is more complex than forbidding homosexuality which is clearly understood.

He claims people are not banished for other sins such as adultery, greed, and lying.

But if you proclaimed you practice those actions regularly and teach them as truth, your church is going to remove you from any leadership position. They should still encourage you to attend worship services out of a desire to see God change your heart.{23} Mr. Eichenwald would be surprised to learn that most evangelical churches handle issues with homosexuality in the same way.

Then he declares, “plenty of fundamentalist Christians who have no idea where references to homosexuality are in the New Testament . . . always fall back on Leviticus.”{24}

Personally, I have never run into another church member who was unfamiliar with the New Testament, but knew the details of Leviticus.

In summary, Eichenwald believes we should declare homosexuality is not a sin and those who practice it should be honored as leaders within the church. He does not suggest that we treat any other sins that way. He does not
present a cogent argument that the New Testament agrees with his position. He is saying that we should ignore biblical teaching. But, we really do love those struggling with homosexual behavior and we want to help them gain freedom from those lusts just as much as someone struggling with opposite sex issues.

Faulty Interpretation Part 2

To strengthen his position on homosexuality, Eichenwald calls out “a fundamental conflict in the New Testament – arguably the most important one in the Bible.”{25} As Christians, are we to obey the Mosaic Law or ignore it?

He claims, “The author of Matthew made it clear that Christians must keep Mosaic Law like the most religious Jews, . . . to achieve salvation.”{26} He says this is contrary to Paul’s message of salvation through grace not works.

What a mistaken understanding. In Matthew, Jesus explains that to enter God’s kingdom “our righteousness must surpass that of (the most religious Jews){27}. “ We must not get angry, call people names, or lust even once. In fact, “You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”{28} Jesus clearly taught we cannot be good enough. Only through His sacrifice can we be made righteous.

In Acts 15, some believers with Pharisaical backgrounds brought the Mosaic Law up to the apostles. Peter told them, “Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? . . . we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as (the Gentiles) also are.”{29} The apostles and the whole church agreed to send the Gentiles word that they were not required to follow the Law.

Eichenwald is right: we are not required to follow the Law. The New Testament is very careful to identify actions and attitudes which are sin so may try to avoid them. This truth is why sexual sins are specifically mentioned in the New Testament.{30} Even in Acts 15, the apostles tell Gentile Christians to abstain from fornication{31}, a term covering all sexual activity outside of marriage.

Eichenwald also castigates us for disobeying the biblical teaching about government. He says Romans has “eight verses condemning those who criticize the government.”{32} Pat Robertson sinned by stating, “We need . . . to pray to be delivered from this president.”

Actually, Romans says, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. . . . the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God.”{33} We are not required to say good things about the government, but rather to obey the law. Our Bill of Rights states that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.”{34} So, if we do not voice our opinions about our government, we are not availing ourselves of the law established by our governing authorities.

Faulty Interpretation Part 3

As we examine popular arguments against the Bible, we will conclude by looking at prayer. In his Newsweek article, Kurt Eichenwald castigates a Houston prayer rally{35} saying, “(Rick) Perry . . . boomed out a long prayer asking God to make America a better place . . . babbling on . . . about faith and country and the blessings of America.” He claimed Perry “heaped up empty phrases as the Gentiles do.”
In reality, Perry prayed succinctly for about two minutes with no empty phrases.

Eichenwald explains, Perry is just an example of our error. Most Christians are disobeying by praying in front of people. Jesus told us, “Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray . . . so that they may be seen by others.”

But someone can speak a prayer before others without being a hypocrite. Jesus does tell us to make our prayers a personal conversation with our God. But Jesus prayed often before synagogue attenders, in front of His disciples, and before over 5,000 people. Those times, although numerous, were less than the time He spent praying alone as should be true for us.

Eichenwald states we should repeat the Lord’s prayer verbatim.

But in Matthew, Jesus gave an example of how to pray, not a set of words to repeat meaninglessly. The New Testament contains many prayers offered by the apostles and none repeat the words from the Lord’s prayer. If Eichenwald were there to instruct them, the apostles would not have sinned so grievously.

Eichenwald claims the only reason anyone could pray in front of a large crowd, or on television, is “to be seen.” This claim does not make sense; the people he is judging can build themselves up without having to resort to prayer.

In this article we have seen that critics use an incomplete, shallow examination of Scripture to claim it is not accurate and our application is faulty. In every case, we have seen that these claims leak like a sieve.

Dan Wallace concludes, “But his numerous factual errors and misleading statements, his lack of concern for any semblance of objectivity, his apparent disdain for . . . genuine evangelical scholarship, and his uber-confidence about more than a few suspect viewpoints, make me wonder. . . . Eichenwald’s . . . grasp of genuine biblical scholarship (is), at best, subpar.”

If Eichenwald’s article represents the best arguments discrediting the Bible, one rejoices in our firm foundation. However, realizing many readers of such pieces don’t know their flimsy nature, one is saddened by the potential impact on a society inclined to ignore the Bible.

Notes

2. There are numerous web postings placed after release of Eichenwald’s article. Two you may find interesting that deal with areas of the article not addressed herein are as follows: Daniel B. Wallace, “Predictable Christmas fare: Newsweek’s Tirade against the Bible,” blogpost December 2014; and Darrell Bock, “Darrell Bock Responds to Kurt Eichenwald’s Newsweek Article on the Bible,” blogpost December 2014.
5. The 12 questions are as follows:

   1. What is the first book of the Bible? (Open-ended)
   2. What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels?
   3. Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born? Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?
4. Which of these is NOT in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others . . ., no adultery, no stealing, keep Sabbath?
5. Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Job, Elijah, Moses or Abraham?
6. Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Moses, Job, Elijah or Abraham?
7. Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Abraham, Job, Moses or Elijah?
8. What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become body and blood, or are symbols?
9. Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
10. Was Mother Teresa Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Mormon?
11. What is the name of the person whose writings and actions inspired the Reformation? Luther, Aquinas or Wesley?
12. Who was a preacher during the First Great Awakening? Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Billy Graham?

6. Check your footnotes and the italics applied to the story of the woman caught in adultery and the last few verses of the Gospel of Mark.
8. Wallace.
9. Ibid, paragraph .
11. Ibid, paragraph 66.
12. Eichenwald, paragraph 51.
17. Eichenwald, paragraph 52.
18. Ibid, paragraph 68.
20. Eichenwald, paragraph 70.
22. In Daniel Wallace, Intro to 1st Timothy, Dr. Wallace writes, “In sum, although the evidence against the authenticity of the pastorals is as strong as any evidence against the authenticity of any NT book, it still cannot overthrow the traditional view. The traditional view, however, must be modified by the substantial linguistic evidence against authenticity: an amanuensis (possibly Luke) had great freedom in writing these letters for the apostle Paul.”
23. See the Watermark Community Church story: www.watermark.org/statement.
24. Eichenwald, paragraph 80.
25. Eichenwald, paragraph 81.
26. Eichenwald, paragraph 82.
30. For example in Mt 5:xx, Luke x:xx, John x:xx, Romans x:xx, Ephesians x:xx, Phil x:xx, 1 Peter x:xx, 1 John x:xx.
The Qur’an From a Christian Perspective

Steve Cable provides a biblical understanding of Islam’s holy book, drawing on James White’s book What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur’an. Christians interacting with Muslims will benefit from a basic understanding of the development and the teaching of the Qur’an.

Introduction and Background

Beginning with the basics, we need to understand how the Qur’an came into our possession and how it is viewed by most Muslims. The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was born in Mecca around AD 570 and began to receive instruction leading to the religion of Islam at the age of 40 in AD 610. “The classical belief is that while [the Qur’an’s] entirety was “sent down” in one night, the Night of Power, but Muhammad himself received it piecemeal over twenty-two years.” Muhammad did not receive a written version as Joseph Smith claimed to have received for the Book of Mormon. Rather he memorized what was told him by the Angel Gabriel and passed it on to certain followers.

The popular Muslim belief is summarized in a recent guide to Islam as follows: “The Qur’an is the literal word of God, which He revealed to His Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It was memorized by Muhammad, who then dictated it to his Companions. They, in turn, memorized it, wrote it down, and reviewed it with the Prophet Muhammad. . . . Not one letter of the Qur’an has been changed over the centuries.”

“From the position of Sunni Islamic orthodoxy, the Qur’an is as eternal as Allah himself. It is the very Word of God, without even the slightest imperfection. The finger of man has no place in it, as the book held reverently in the hand today is an exact copy of a tablet in heaven upon which the Qur’an has been written from eternity past.”

How this view holds up to a critical review of the history of Muhammad and the early days of Islam following his death will be addressed later in this document. For now it is important to understand
that to a devout Muslim, the Qur’an in its original Arabic is above analysis and above question, for it is a matter of faith that it has been perfectly transmitted and maintained. Note the Qur’an exists only in Arabic. Even though most Muslims depend upon a translation for their access to the teachings of the Qur’an, Muslims still would say the Qur’an itself is not translatable and the public prayers must also be done in Arabic.

It is interesting to realize that the Qur’an in multiple places states that Allah “sent down the Torah and the Gospel” as works that serve as guidance to mankind. One cannot help but wonder, why God would send down the Torah and the Gospels when the Qur’an existed from eternity past and according to Muslim thought supersedes and corrects misconceptions men developed from reading these earlier texts. Why didn’t God protect the Gospels in the same way as the Qur’an?

In what follows, we will look at where teachings of the Qur’an are counter to the truth of the Bible and to the historical facts. We will also consider how the current Qur’an came into existence, asking why the creator of the world would pass down his truth in such an uncontrolled fashion.

The Qur’an and Biblical Beliefs

Most Muslims, if they know anything about Christianity, will point to three primary problems with our faith:

1. the Trinity,
2. the resurrection of Jesus, and
3. the corruption of the Scriptures.

Is there anything taught in the Qur’an that causes them to reject the Christian concept of trinity?

In his book, James White describes the key Islamic belief in this way, “Ask any sincere follower what defines Islam, and they will answer quickly tawhid, the oneness of Allah, as expressed in Islam’s great confession, “I profess that there is only one God worthy of worship and Muhammad is His messenger.” . . . Without tawhid, you have no Islam.”

Interestingly, the word tawhid in that form does not appear in the Qur’an just as the word trinity does not appear in the Bible. They are words to describe a concept clearly taught in those two books. The difference between these two words is a major difference between these religions. The Islamic concept of tawhid is that Allah has only and can only exist in one form, the creator of the universe. The Christian understanding is that the one God is expressed in three ways or persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. All the persons of God were involved in the creation of this universe and reflect the full nature of God. The Bible is very clear that the Trinity is one God as shown for example in 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6:

“There is no God but one . . . for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.”

In Islam, the most feared of all sins is called shirk, associating anyone, or anything with Allah. A person who dies in this state of idolatry cannot be forgiven. In Islamic thought, Allah is free to forgive any other sin if he so desires, but he will not forgive anyone who dies in idolatry.

This teaching causes the Trinity to become an unforgivable sin for Christians. “Many Muslims believe that the doctrine of the Trinity and, in particular, the worship of Jesus is an (unforgivable) act of shirk. This has led many of them to conclude that Christians, as a group, are bound for
The Qur’an attempts to address the Trinity but does it show knowledge of the concept so that the criticisms offered are accurate and meaningful? “The reason for the question is self-evident: If the Qur’an is the very words of Allah without admixture of man’s insights or thoughts, then it would follow inevitably that its representations will be perfectly accurate and its arguments compelling.”

What does the Qur’an say about the Trinity? First, it holds up monotheism as the correction for the false Christian claim of the “three.” By holding to this concept of the “three,” Christians are actually polytheists, denying that God is one. The author of the Qur’an does not understand that Christians are saying there is one God who manifests in three distinct forms or persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the misunderstanding goes much further than this. The Qur’an is very clear that the “three” are the Father, the Son, and Mary. As stated in Surah 5:116,

And when Allah said: “O Jesus son of Mary! Did you say to mankind: ‘Take me and my mother for two gods other than Allah?’” He said: “Transcendent are you! It was not mine to say that of which I had no right. . .”

And this view is reiterated in the Islamic commentaries, the hadith. “Nothing in the Qur’anic text actually addresses the essence of Christian faith, even though it is painfully clear the author thought he was doing so.”

White believes this distinction helps us respond to the oft-asked question, “Is Allah the same god as Yahweh?” Although Muslims make reference to the one God of Abraham, they deny the witness of the incarnation and the resurrection. Thus denying the entirety of the Christian faith. “If worship is an act of truth, then Muslims and Christians are not worshiping the same object. We do not worship the same God.”

So, we see the Qur’an misrepresents the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and relegates Allah to a lower status than omnipotent God by declaring that Allah is not capable of appearing in multiple forms.

The Qur’an, Jesus and Salvation

As we consider what Muslims are taught in the Qur’an, we next look at the second stumbling block in their view of Christianity: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

The Qur’an has quite a bit to say about Jesus as a prophet of God, specifically stating He was not God and was not crucified. The name of Jesus appears 25 times in the Qur’an, almost always as Isa ibn Mariam, i.e. Jesus the son of Mary. Jesus is presented as the result of a miraculous virgin birth. In the Qur’an, Surah 3:47, it is written, “She said, My Lord! How can I have a child, when no man has touched me? He replied, “such is the will of Allah. He creates what He will. When He decrees a thing He only says: ‘Be!’ and it is.”

The question of how Jesus came to be is an important topic for comparison. First, we see the Qur’an says that Allah created Jesus by declaring His existence and having Him born of a virgin. Second, we understand that the author of the Qur’an believed Christians teach that Jesus came into being as the child of a physical, sexual union between God and Mary. Third, Christianity actually teaches that Jesus was the preexistent creator of the universe (John 1:1-3, Colossians 1:16-17), always and fully God, who became fully man being born of a virgin. Note that the primary difference between the
Qur’an’s view of Jesus’ birth and a biblical view of Jesus’ birth is not the role of Mary, but rather the Qur’an says that Jesus was created at His human conception and the Bible clearly states that Jesus is eternal and was not created but rather took on a new form at his birth:

Although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

The words attributed to Jesus in the Qur’an, beginning with words spoken from the crib, are not found in any source from the 1st through 5th centuries. “But the Muslim understanding is that no such historical foundation is needed for lengthy portions of narrative for its words to be true. This is the Qur’an. It has been preserved. For the large majority, that ends the discussion, even when the same believers will then embrace historical criticism to question the value of His words in the Gospels.”{11}

When it comes to the cross, the Qur’an stands firmly and inalterably against the mass of historical evidence and the almost universal view of the populace of its day. This Qur’anic view is not sprinkled throughout the teaching, but rather appears in only one verse, namely Surah 4:157—

“They slew him not, nor crucified him, but it appeared so to them; and those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge of it except the pursuit of a conjecture; [but] certainly they slew him not. But Allah raised him up to Himself.”

This verse stands alone in the Qur’an and surprisingly without commentary in the hadith literature as well. This verse, written six hundred years after the events, in a place far removed from Jerusalem, takes a position counter to the gospel texts from the first century and counter to six centuries of Christian teaching. In more recent times, various Muslim apologists have surmised various tales to build upon this one verse. For example, some Muslims believe that someone else died on the cross and Jesus fled to India to continue his ministry there.{12} Regardless of what unsubstantiated fairy tales one conjures up to support its claim, this verse is based on no historical knowledge of the events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus.

“This suggests the author did not have even the slightest knowledge of the centrality of God’s redeeming act in Christ on the cross. . . . The Qur’an places itself, and all who would believe in it, in direct opposition not only to the Gospels but also everything history itself says on the subject. The question must be asked: Who, truly, is following mere conjecture here? Those who were eyewitnesses on the Hill of the Skull outside Jerusalem? Or the author of the Qur’an, more than half a millennium later?“{13}

Without the cross, salvation in the Qur’an comes through an unknowable mixture of predestination, good works, and the capricious will of Allah. “In Islam, forgiveness is an impersonal act of arbitrary divine power. In Christianity, forgiveness is a personal act of purposeful and powerful yet completely just divine grace.”{14}

One cannot attribute these differences between the Qur’an and the New Testament to a minor corruption of the biblical text as they reflect the core themes of these books.

**Corrupting the Gospels**

As discussed above, most Muslims have been taught there are three primary problems with our
faith: the Trinity, the resurrection of Jesus, and the corruption of the scripture. We have dealt with the Trinity and the resurrection of Jesus. Now let us turn to the corruption of scripture.

Most Muslims will affirm to you that the Christian scriptures cannot be relied upon because they have been changed and corrupted over the years and do not reflect the true message of Jesus. But is this affirmation what is taught by the Qur’an, and does it have any basis other than hearsay?

The Qur’an is very clear that the messages sent to the prophets of the Bible are to be believed. For example, Surah 3:84 says, “We believe in Allah . . . and that which was sent down to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes; and that which was given to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have surrendered.” Or as stated in a hadith, “Therefore, faithful Muslims believe in every Prophet whom Allah has sent and in every Book He revealed, and never disbelieve in any of them.”

Very clearly, the Qur’an states that what was given to the Old Testament prophets and to Jesus was the truth of God. It is not just the prophets themselves who were from the Lord, for the Qur’an states that Allah “sent down the Torah and the Gospel” as works that serve as “guidance to mankind.” If this is the case, why do Muslims not interpret the Qur’an in light of the truth from the Gospels, assuming that Allah’s truth never changes?

In contrast, it is a virtual pillar of Islamic orthodoxy to hold that the Bible has undergone significant revisions so much as to make them totally unreliable and thus, useless to a modern day Muslim. As James White puts it, “Muslims around the world are taught that the Jews and the Christians altered their Scriptures, though there is no agreement as to when this took place. If anything unites Islamic apologists, it is the persistent assertion of Qur’anic perfection in contrast to the corrupted nature of the Bible, particularly the New Testament.”

This position certainly makes sense from a human perspective. For if one takes the position presented by the Qur’an that we are to believe every word of the Bible, then the huge differences between the theology of the New Testament and the theology of the Qur’an leave one little choice: either reject the Qur’an as not from God, or assume that all of the differences are the result of some massive corruption of the message of the Bible. The normal assumption taught to Muslims today is this corruption happened early on, perhaps even with the apostle Paul.

However, the preponderance of verses in the Qur’an which address this issue point to the corruption as being a distortion of the meaning (not the words) of the text. One example is found in Surah 3:78, “And there is a party of them who distort the Book with their tongues, that you may think that what they say is from the Book, when it is not from the Book.” As White observes, “We must conclude that the now predominant claim of the biblical texts themselves, having undergone major alteration and corruption, is a later polemical and theological perspective not required by the Qur’anic text itself. It comes not from the positive teachings of Muhammad but through the unalterable fact of the Qur’anic author’s unfamiliarity with the actual biblical text.”

As noted by a Christian, Al-Kindi, writing to a Muslim around AD 820, “The situation is plain enough; you witness to the truth of our text—then again you contradict the witness you bear and allege that we have corrupted it; this is the height of folly.”

In Surah 5:47, we are urged as Christians to judge by what Allah has revealed in the Gospels. If this admonition has any meaning at all, it must assume that Christians had access to a valid gospel in the 7th century during the life of Muhammad. What Christians had as the Gospels in the 7th century is what we have as the Gospels today. In fact, “each canonical gospel we read today we can document to have existed in that very form three centuries before Muhammad’s ministry. A Christian judging
Muhammad’s claims by the New Testament and finding that he was ignorant of the teachings of the apostles, ignorant of the cross, the resurrection . . . and meaning of the gospel itself, is simply doing what the Qur’an commands us to do in this text.”{19}

Thus, while modern Muslims claim the Bible is corrupt and unreliable, the Qur’an appears to teach that the scriptures available to Jews and Christians during Muhammad’s day were correct and should be followed; as long as one did not reinterpret the meaning into something that was not really said. However, doing so would lead one to the conclusion that the Qur’an was written by someone who was not knowledgeable concerning Jewish and Christian scripture.

The Perfection of the Qur’an

As noted earlier, one of the primary objections Muslims voice toward Christianity is their belief that our Scriptures have been changed and corrupted while the Qur’an in Arabic is exactly the words given to Muhammad fourteen hundred years ago. Does this belief stand up to impartial scrutiny?

The modern Muslim view of the Qur’an does not allow for the critical examination of sources and variations as has been done for the New Testament. Many bible scholars such as Dallas Theological Seminary professor, Daniel Wallace{20}, point out that the large number of ancient manuscripts from different locations and times give us a richness of sources allowing us to identify the original text of the Christian New Testament with a high degree of confidence. Muslims on the other hand are relying on a specific follower, Uthman the third Caliph, who was purported to have assimilated the correct version and to have ordered the destruction of all other versions.

If the Qur’an is a perfect representation of the message from Allah, what accounts for the differences in multiple accounts of the same story recorded in the Qur’an? For example, four different Surahs contain the story of Lot in Sodom. Each recounting of the story is different from the others even when quoting what Lot said to the Sodomites. Thus we have Muslims pointing to differences in accounts among the Gospels but ignoring accounts of the same events throughout the Qur’an which differ in detail, order, and content.

When we find this type of variation in the Gospels, we recognize that each gospel was written by a different author with a different perspective inspired by the Holy Spirit. But if the Qur’an was preexistent in heaven and given to one man by one angel, one would not expect these types of variants. But as James White notes, “We could provide numerous examples of parallel passages all illustrating with clarity that the serious Muslim exegete must face the reality that the Qur’anic text requires exegesis and harmonization.”{21}

In addition to these troubling passages recounting different versions of the same events, we also find legendary stories about the life of Jesus which do not appear in any of the known accounts from the first century. White points out, “The Qur’an fails to make any differentiation between what is clearly legendary in character and what is based on the Hebrew or the Christian Scriptures. Stories that developed centuries after the events they pretend to describe are coupled directly with historically based accounts that carry serious weight and truth content. . . . This kind of fantastic legendary material is hardly the kind of source that can be trusted, and yet the Qur’an’s author shows not the slightest understanding of its nature and combines them with historical materials.”{22}

In addition to the inconsistencies in retelling stories and the incorporation of legends generated centuries after the actual events, we also should consider whether the current Qur’an is the perfectly accurate version of the earliest version supposedly shared verbally by Muhammad with certain followers. The common Islamic claims are strong and clear:
“The Qur’an is the literal word of God, which He revealed to His Prophet Muhammad through the Angel Gabriel. It was memorized by Muhammad, who then dictated it to his Companions. They, in turn memorized it, wrote it down, and reviewed it with the Prophet Muhammad . . . Not one letter of the Qur’an has been changed over the centuries.”{23}

“It is a miracle of the Qur’an that no change has occurred in a single word, a single [letter of the] alphabet, a single punctuation mark, or a single diacritical mark in the text of the Qur’an during the last fourteen centuries.”{24}

Interestingly, the hadiths give us early insight into one view of how the written Qur’an was collected and who was involved. At the time Muhammad died, there was no written version of the Qur’an. It was carried about in the minds of a set of men called the Qurra, each of whom had memorized at least a portion of the Qur’an. However, a number of these Qurra were being killed in battles, raising the prospect that a significant portion of the Qur’an might be lost. According to one hadith, Zaid bin Thabit undertook the task of collecting a written version.

“To many outside the Muslim faith, the Qur’an’s organization looks tremendously haphazard and even Islamic literature notes how one surah can contain materials Muhammad gave at very different times in his life. Many Muslims assume Muhammad was behind this organization, but there is little reason to believe it. Zaid and his committee are far more likely to have been responsible.”{25}

Eighteen years later the third Caliph, Uthman, charged Zaid and others with rewriting the manuscripts in perfect copies. In the process of doing this, Zaid reportedly found at least two more passages that he had missed in his earlier compilation. Once this was accomplished, “Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur’anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt.”{26}

Not every scholar agrees that this story from a hadith is accurate and many suggest a much later date after AD 705 for the compilation of the Qur’an we find today. Whether it was Uthman or some later compilation effort, since the eighth century, we have had a fairly stable text for the Qur’an with few variants. “Muslims see this as a great advantage, even an example of divine inspiration and preservation. In reality, just the opposite is the case. When a text has a major interruption in transmission, one’s certainty of being able to obtain the original text becomes limited to the materials that escape the revisionist pen. For the Muslim, Uthman had to get it right, because if he was wrong, there is little hope of ever undoing his work.”{27}

Al-Kindi, the Christian apologist writing around AD 820, had much to say on the formation of the Qur’an. He records that multiple versions were collated during the time of Uthman stating, “One man, then, read one version of the Qur’an, his neighbor another, and differed. One man said to his neighbor: “My text is better than yours,” while his neighbor defended his own. So additions and losses came about and falsification of the text.”{28} According to Al-Kindi, this situation caused Uthman to take his action while his rivals, such as Ali (Muhammad’s cousin and the 4th Caliph), created and kept their own manuscripts. Al-Kindi listed alterations and changes made to the earlier documents in creating Uthman’s version. One of the reasons Al-Kindi had access to this type of information was the open warfare between the Sunnis and the Shiites, led to charges and countercharges of corruption.

Al-Kindi concludes his discussion stating, “You know what happened between Ali, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, how they hated each other and quarreled and corrupted the text; how each one tried to oppose his neighbor and to refute what he (had) said. Pray, how are we to know which is the true text, and how shall we distinguish it from the false?”{29}
As White states, “It is self-evident that no matter how stable or even primitive the Uhtmanic tradition is, it is not the only stream that can claim direct connection to Muhammad and the primitive period of Qur’anic compilation. The greatest concern for any follower of Muhammad should be what he said (or what he received from the Angel Gabriel), not what an uninspired Caliph later thought he should have said.” {30}

The study of manuscripts shows beyond all possible question that the Qur’an was neither written down in perfection in the days of Muhammad, nor was it never altered or changed in its transmission.

White concludes his study with this thought, “When we obey the command of Surah 5:4 and test Muhammad’s claims in the light of the gospel, of history, and of consistency and truthfulness, we find him, and the Qur’an to fail these tests. The Qur’an is not a further revelation of the God who revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. The author of the Qur’an did not understand the gospel, did not understand the Christian faith, and as such cannot stand in the line of Moses to Jesus to Muhammad that he claimed.” {31}

Notes

5. White, p. 59.
6. White, p. 68.
7. White, p. 75.
8. White, p. 98.
11. White, p. 113
14. White, p. 158.
16. White, p. 171.
20. Dr. Daniel Wallace, Executive Director of CSNTM & Senior Professor of NT Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, speaking at Prairie Creek Baptist Church on August 30, 2015.
23. Ibrahim, p. 5.
25. White, p.258.
27. White, p. 262.
Are We Significant in This Vast Universe? - The Evidence Supports Belief in God

Steve Cable considers the question of why could we possibly be important in such a vast universe. Current research shows that there are reasons why God needed such a vast universe to house life on this planet. Understanding this idea can make it an apologetic for our faith rather than a fact which detracts from our faith. Science is the study of God’s creation and the more we delve into it the clearer the hand of God becomes.

Why Is the Universe So Vast? Are We Truly Insignificant?

What do you feel when you look at the night sky? Awe? Insignificance? Adoration? Recently, my wife and I took three Ph.D. students from China for an overnight outing at a lake in West Texas. One of the things that impressed them most was the opportunity to view the night sky on a moonless night. Due to “light pollution,” people in most cities can only make out a few hundred stars with the naked eye. These young women had never seen the night sky as King David did when he declared, “The heavens declare the glory of God!” (Psalm 19:1, NASU). They were so taken by the stars and the Milky Way that they spent several hours lying on the dock, looking up at the night sky.

These students were not Christians, and I was glad to have an opportunity to use what we know about the stars to talk to them about the overwhelming evidence for a Creator who is intensely interested in humans. However, another host may have used the same night sky to argue that if there is a God, we must not be very significant to God. Which view is correct? In this article, we will look into the Bible and into current scientific theories to better equip us to answer this important question.

According to the Bible, the transcendent Creator of this universe made humans in His own image as the focal point of His creation. Skeptics of a biblical worldview often point to the vastness of the universe as evidence that humans cannot be the focal point of a theistic creation. The famous astronomer, author, and television personality Carl Sagan put it this way:

Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.\textsuperscript{1}
Famous physicist Stephen Hawking wrote, “Our Solar System is certainly a prerequisite for our existence . . . . but there does not seem to be a need for all these other galaxies.”[2]

In other words, why would God create this huge universe, if He was primarily interested in His relationship with one species occupying a tiny planet?

I think this is a reasonable question. After all, based on observations from the Hubble Telescope, the current best estimate for the number of stars in the observable universe is 5 times 10 to the 22nd power; that is a 5 with 22 zeros after it. How many stars is that? Well, if you were to count one star every second, it would take you only fifteen hundred trillion years to count them. These stars are spread over billions of light years. Amazingly, all of these stars account for only about 1% of the total mass of the universe. Why did God create such a vast universe, placing us on a single small planet with no reasonable hope of ever traveling beyond our solar system? Does the size of our universe run counter to a biblical worldview?

**A Biblical Perspective of Humankind and the Vast Heavens**

If God is the Creator of the universe, and the Bible is revelation directly from God, then accurate observation of the universe will ultimately prove to be consistent with His revelation. By combining the general revelation of science with the special revelation of the Bible, we should be rewarded with a greater understanding of the nature of our Creator and His intentions for mankind. Let’s see if this is true in addressing the vastness of the universe.

First let’s consider what God’s special revelation for us, the Bible, has to say about the vastness of the universe. The Bible often refers to God’s creative work in “stretching out the heavens” and filling it with stars (e.g. Job 9:8, Zechariah 12:1). A review of Bible passages on the stars and the heavens reveals a number of reasons why a vast universe is consistent with humans being the most significant part of creation.

We need to realize that creating a vast universe is not harder for God than creating a smaller universe. God brought the universe into existence out of nothing. He had no limits on the amount of matter and energy created. Consequently, it is meaningless to say that it would be a tremendous waste for God to create so many lifeless galaxies. The concept of waste only applies when there is a limited supply. When there is an unlimited supply, you can use all you desire; there is plenty more where that came from.

Within this vast universe, God placed earth in potentially the only place in the universe capable of supporting advanced life. There are many aspects of the universe that are hidden from the casual observer, but the vastness of the heavens is not one of them. God created the earth and positioned it in an ideal place so that humans could observe the vastness of the heavens and the enormous number of stars. The Bible points out at least five purposes for humans observing this vast universe:

1. **To reveal His majesty and power.** Job refers to this understanding as he reflected on his sufferings stating,

   Who commands the sun not to shine,
   And sets a seal upon the stars;
   Who alone stretches out the heavens
   And tramples down the waves of the sea;
   Who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades,
   And the chambers of the south;
Who does great things, unfathomable, 
And wondrous works without number. 
Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him; 
Were He to move past me, I would not perceive Him. 
Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him? 
Who could say to Him, “What are You doing?” (Job 9:7-12).

Later, God confronts Job with His lack of understanding the full power and majesty of His Creator:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? 
Tell Me, if you have understanding, . . . . 
Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, 
Or loose the cords of Orion? 
Can you lead forth a constellation in its season, 
And guide the Bear with her satellites? 
Do you know the ordinances of the heavens, 
Or fix their rule over the earth? (Job 38:4, 31-33).

As we see in this passage, God intentionally did creative, wondrous works without number so that we could glimpse His greatness.

2. To emphasize our insignificance without God. The vastness of the heavens highlights how insignificant humans are apart from God’s concern for us. The primary lesson that Job learned through his experience was that we are in no position to critique God’s actions over His creation. God’s creation is so vast that any significance we have comes solely from God’s choice to be concerned with us. Job stated it this way: “Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to You?” (Job 40:4)

King David was the most significant person in Israel during his reign, but when he considered the vastness of God’s creation he acknowledged our insignificance:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, 
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained; 
What is man that You take thought of him, 
And the son of man that You care for him (Psalm 8:3-4)?

3. As a measure of His loving kindness toward us. God uses the vastness of the heavens to help us understand the magnitude of His love for us, stating, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His loving kindness toward those who fear Him” (Psalm 103:11).

God’s love for us is greater than the billions of light years which separate us from the most distant galaxies.

4. As a picture of His faithfulness and forgiveness. In a similar way, God uses our inability to completely grasp the breadth and depth of the universe to emphasize spiritual truths. Through Jeremiah, God promised a new covenant where He will remember our sins no more. God used the vastness of the heavens to convey His promise to never cast those in the new covenant away from Him with these words,

Thus says the LORD, “If the heavens above can be measured 
And the foundations of the earth searched out below, 
Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel
For all that they have done," declares the LORD (Jeremiah 31:37).

Even today astronomers recognize that the universe we can observe is much smaller than the state of the universe as it exists today. Due to the finite speed of light, it is impossible to directly observe the current size of the universe or count the exact number of stars. Just as the heavens can never be measured, God will never cast us off from His presence.

5. As a reminder that our understanding is limited. Our Creator understands the universe from one end to the other and from the beginning of time to its end. As humans, we are just beginning to probe its mysteries. So, God reminds us, “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

It is clear that God intended us to observe and study the stars and the heavens. As a part of God’s general revelation, the magnitude of the universe speaks to His greatness. Through God’s special revelation, we see God using the vastness of His creation to teach us lessons about who we are and how we relate to Him. For a Creator who was willing to sacrifice His only Son on the cross for our redemption, it would be child’s play to create a vast universe solely for our instruction. With this understanding, the vastness of the universe becomes a testament to our importance to God rather than evidence of our insignificance.

A Scientific Perspective of Humankind and the Vast Universe

If God is the Creator of the universe and the author of the Bible, accurate observation of the universe will ultimately prove to be consistent with His revelation. By combining the general revelation of science with the special revelation of the Bible, we should be rewarded with a greater understanding of the nature of our Creator and His intentions for mankind.

In his book *Why the Universe is the Way It Is*{3}, Hugh Ross points out a number of areas where combining the latest observations of astronomy and physics with biblical theology provides us with fuller answers for some of the tough questions of life. One area he focuses on is the question we have been examining: “Does the vastness of this universe mean that we are insignificant and/or accidental?”

If we assume, as most skeptics and seekers would, that the physical laws of this universe have remained constant from the beginning of the universe until now, then the current state of scientific knowledge points to three reasons why the universe must occupy the mass and volume that it does in order for advanced carbon based life to exist on this planet.

1. **The exact mass of the universe was necessary for life supporting elements to exist.** Life requires heavier elements such as oxygen, carbon, and nitrogen. These elements are produced in the nuclear furnaces of stars. If there were less mass in the universe, only lighter elements such as helium would be produced. If there were more mass, only heavier elements, such as iron, would be produced. In fact, the amount of mass and dark energy in the universe must be fine tuned to less than one part in $10^{60}$, or one part in one trillion trillion trillion trillion, to have a universe that can create a life supporting solar system and planet.

2. **The exact mass of the universe was required to regulate the expansion of the universe to allow the formation of the sun and the solar system.** Amazingly, it turns out that the same total mass that results in the right mix of life supporting elements also results in the right amount of gravity to dampen the expansion of matter across the surface of the space-time continuum to allow the formation of stars like the sun which are capable of supporting a planet like earth. If the universe
were expanding faster, stars and solar systems would not form. If the universe were expanding slower, giant stars and black holes would dominate the universe. Once again the total matter in the universe is fine tuned to support life. And what an amazing coincidence: the number that creates the right mix of elements also creates the right expansion rate. This dual fine tuning is much less likely than achieving the financial returns guaranteed by Bernie Madoff!

3. The vast volume of the universe is required to give the earth just the right amount of light and other electromagnetic radiation to support life and not destroy it. Life not only requires a planet with the right mix of elements orbiting the right kind of sun in just the right solar system; it also requires a “just right” galactic environment. Astronomers has discovered what they call “the galactic habitable zone” for our Milky Way galaxy at a distance of about 26,000 light years from the center of the galaxy. Any planet closer to the center will experience deadly radiation levels. Any planet further away from the center would lack the mix of heavy elements necessary for advanced life. But the vast majority of this habitable zone is inside one of the uninhabitable spiral arms of the galaxy. Since stars revolve around the galactic center at a rate different than the spiral arm structure based on their distance from the center of the galaxy, most solar systems pass through deadly spiral arms over the course of time. Our solar system occupies a very special place as Hugh Ross points out: “The solar system holds a special position in the Milky Way . . . the one distance from the core where stars orbit the galaxy at the same rate as its spiral arm structure does.”

Once again we are faced with a divine “coincidence”: the same fine-tuned distance required to safely place a habitable planet is also the exact distance required to keep that planet out of the deadly spiral arms.

Not only must the earth be located far from the center of the Milky Way, the Milky Way must be located far enough away from other galaxies to maintain the stability of its spiral structure. Many aspects of the Milky Way appear to be very rare or unique in the universe.

As you can see, a logical application of current scientific orthodoxy based on the Big Bang and constant natural laws overwhelmingly supports the view that the vastness of the universe does not imply that human life is unremarkable and insignificant. On the contrary, the most reasonable conclusion from the evidence is that life on this planet is the primary purpose behind the vastness of our universe. Both the Bible and the results of scientific observation agree: our vast universe is the work of a Creator who considers life on earth as very significant.

Consequently, we don’t have to convince a seeker that the world is much younger than it appears in order to answer the question, “Are we significant to our Creator?” We can say, “Whether you look to the teaching of the Bible or you look at the current prevailing models from the scientific community, the answer is definitely yes!” The important question is, “Is it possible to know more about my Creator and have a relationship with Him?” Beginning with the death and resurrection of Jesus, we can explain how to have an eternal relationship with God and why we believe the Bible is the reliable source of information about our Creator and our universe.

- Check out our article “The Answer is the Resurrection” at Probe.org for more information on using the resurrection to respond to key questions from seekers.
- For more information on topics related to the origins of our universe and other science topics, check out our Faith and Science section.
- For further discussion on the age of the universe see “Christian Views of Science and Earth History” in our Faith and Science section.
- For further discussion of how the age of the universe debate relates to this discussion see Appendix A: Theology vs. Science or Theology plus Science? and Appendix B: Apologetics and the Age of the Universe.
Faith Trends in America: How Is Christianity Faring as We Enter the Third Decade of the 21st Century

In looking at the state of American Christianity, Steve Cable examines how handling data inaccurately can produce wildly varying conclusions.

Recent reports on the current state of Christianity in America could create emotional whiplash, making one feel elated one moment and depressed the next. People are quick to comment on survey results and their own experiences. Within the last year, we have run the gamut from Glenn Stanton’s book, *The Myth of the Dying Church: How Christianity is Actually Thriving in America and the World*, to a Pew Research article, *In U.S. Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*. These titles appear to represent two very different viewpoints. Which is it? Are we thriving or declining at a rapid pace?

Finding the answer requires one to thoughtfully articulate your question in at least two ways:

1. What do you mean by Christianity? Are you referring to all potential Christians both Protestant and Catholic or are you focused on a subset, such as Evangelicals? And,

2. Is anything beyond affiliation with a church necessary to be considered an active Christian? Examples might include a biblical understanding of how one gets to heaven and belief in the Bible.

You also need to thoroughly understand the available survey data that might throw light on your question. You need to understand what questions are asked and how they are worded. Then you analyze the responses to the set of relevant questions to gain insight on your topic of interest. Remember, no survey asks the exact questions you would ideally use. That sounds like more work than most of you want to attempt. Unfortunately, most of the pundits writing today do not attempt to
do that work either. Generally, they take fragmented data and attempt to draw intelligent inferences.

In this article, I have done this work for you, drawing primarily on data from the Pew Research Group and the General Social Survey. We will look at which groups are growing as a percent of our population and which groups are not. Both Pew and the GSS have taken surveys over an extended period of time, helping us identify trends in religious affiliation and beliefs.

As you will see, the picture is certainly not rosy, but perhaps better than you expect. Although the growth of non-Christian segments is continuing at a fairly rapid pace, Evangelical Christianity is only declining slightly as a percentage of the population. However, I will point out how some data has been misunderstood to paint either a rosier picture or a gloomier picture than the actual current state of affairs.

**Evangelicals: Thriving or Declining**

All surveys we have reviewed covering this century show the same general result: the percent of people claiming an affiliation with a Protestant or Catholic church has been declining.

GSS surveys\(^3\) found across all ages the percentage who identify as Protestant or Catholic has dropped from 84% of the population in 1988 down to 69% in 2018. Looking only at Protestants (both Evangelical and Mainline), the drop was from 58% down to 46%. Considering those who are Millennials now, that is ages 18 to 34, we find a decline from 53% down to 36% over this thirty-year period. And the data does not show any leveling off in the rate of decline.

But we may ask, “Are Evangelicals participating in this general decline or are they thriving as some authors claim?”

The bottom-line answer is that Evangelicals are declining as a percent of the overall population but at a much slower rate. Across all ages, the percentage who identify as Evangelical has dropped from 30% to 28% over this twenty-year period. For those aged 18 to 34 the drop was from 29% down to 25%. In October 2019, Pew released a report showing that from 2009 to 2018, the percentage of Evangelicals of all ages dropped from 28% to 25%, a significantly faster rate of decline.

Even with a slow rate of decline, if Evangelicals make up around 25% of the population, they can have a significant impact on American culture and life and perhaps begin to grow again.

However, does Evangelical affiliation equate to an active Evangelical practice? We need to know how many who affiliate with an Evangelical church are active Christians as opposed to just being affiliated if we want to truly assess the strength of the American Evangelical movement.

Using the GSS surveys, we can look for people who:

1. Know God really exists
2. Pray multiple times per day
3. Attend church at least twice a month
4. Believe the Bible is the inspired word of God, and
5. Call themselves a strong Christian

I think an active, evangelical Christian would have these basic beliefs and practices.

The percentage of the population who meet these criteria has dropped from about 9% down to just over 7% of the population over the last twenty years. This result is a large enough group to have
some impact but not enough to crow about the growing Evangelical presence. We can say that
Evangelical Christianity is certainly not thriving but clinging to a position of some relevance.

What’s Happening with the Nones

Nones are people who state their religious affiliation is either atheist, agnostic or nothing at all.\(^4\)
The dramatic growth of the Nones has been an ongoing headline story.

Surveys\(^5\) indicate the Nones were 8% of the population in 1988. By 2018 they had grown to over
23% of the population. For ages 18 through 29, they tripled from 13% to 35% of the population. No
one denies this growth, but some question the importance of this trend.

For example, Glenn Stanton states, “(The Nones) are simply reporting their actual faith practices in
more candid ways, largely due to new ways in which polling questions have been asked in the last
ten years or so.”\(^6\) Oddly enough, he primarily relies on data from GSS for long term trends and
they have asked exactly the same question regarding Nones since 1972.\(^7\)

Some suggest Nones are primarily Christians who will return to the fold as they move into marriage
and child rearing. Is there any indication that this is happening?

Well, in 2007, among those aged 18 to 32, 24% of them are classified as Nones. In 2014, for this
same group now seven years older, 32% of them are Nones. As this group began rearing children, \_a
significantly larger percentage of them were Nones than when they were younger.\_ Also, instead of
attending church, only 4% of these Nones attend church more than once a month.

Instead of emerging adult Nones turning into church-attending Christians as they age, more of them
are becoming Nones. It appears that the cultural pressures against Christianity are outweighing the
tendency of prior generations returning to seek religious training for their children.

The Barna Group has found that there are genuine differences between Millennials and older
generations that will not be removed as they age. As Dave Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group,
states in his book, \_UnChristian,\_ \(^8\) “I would caution you not to underestimate the widening gap
between young people and their predecessors. Those who think that in due time Mosaics . . . will
‘grow up’ and look like everyone else should prepare to have unfulfilled expectations.” Dave’s
comment is based on their analysis of multiple surveys covering thousands of individuals and a large
number of in-depth interviews with young adults.

Are the Nons THE Major Growth Story?

Is the growth of nondenominational Christians a more important trend than the Nones? Glenn
Stanton states, “Growth of nondenominational churches has been many times larger than the nones.
. . . it is not the rise of the nones that is the major story . . . It’s the “nons” and not the nones that are
mushrooming.”\(^9\)

This condition would be an amazing finding if true. However, it is not true for three major reasons
which we will discuss today:

1. The percentage growth of the “nons” is \_not many times larger.\_ From 2007 to 2014, “nons”
grew their percentage of the population by 44%. But, Nones grew by almost the same rate at
42%. Looking at absolute growth, the “nons” grew by four million people versus the Nones’ 19
million—almost five times the number of “nons.” The growth of the “nons” is relegated to a
minor factor when compared to the Nones.
2. The “nons” are a subset of the Evangelicals. And Stanton states, “Evangelicals have benefited more from these ecclesiastical exoduses than anyone else. They even . . . outpaced the nones.”{10} In fact, most of the “nons” growth came as a result of switching between evangelical denominations. Thus, any growth by the “nons” is offset by declines in other evangelical groups, resulting in an overall decline of about 1%. Evangelicals have not even come close to outpacing the Nones.

In fact, for the first time, we have the total number of nones exceeding the number of Evangelicals in America.

3. Stanton says, “It’s the evangelical churches identifying as nondenominational that have been growing faster than any others including the nones and the atheists.”{11} Taking a look at percentage growth, the atheists and agnostics have shown the most explosive growth by far, growing their numbers from 9 million in 2007 to 17.4 million in 2014—a growth of 92%—while the “nons” grew from 8 million to 12 million over the same time period, a growth of 56%. So perhaps Stanton meant to say, “It’s the non-believers and not the Nones that are mushrooming.”

In summary, the growth of the “nons” may be of interest to those who study the relative make-up of Evangelicals in America. But to those interested in how Evangelicals are doing as a whole it is not relevant. The fact that the “nons” are increasing just reflects some churning of affiliations within the Evangelical realm. On the whole, Evangelicals are decreasing at a slow, but steady pace.

Confusing Expansion with Same-Store Growth

A commercial enterprise may report sales growth. But the savvy investor wants to know why. Opening new stores may increase sales. But if it masks lower sales per existing store, it is a red flag. They are actually losing market share.

Similarly, with parachurch ministries, their number of locations gives little indication as to the health of Christianity. However, their growth rate per location can signal increased interest in Christianity.

Unfortunately, this distinction is often overlooked. For example, one pundit points to impressive growth by two respected student ministries in adding new locations as evidence to support an optimistic projection of Evangelical growth. However, they are not reporting an increased impact on a per site basis.

Looking at their annual reports,{12} {13} we see that one of them reports per location attendance declining at a rate of almost 1% per year over the last decade.{14} The other is declining even faster, reporting a growth rate of negative 3% per year.{15}

These declines could be caused by several different factors such as lower attendance at new locations, competition with other student groups, lower interest in their Christian message, etc. But we can be sure that these two ministries do not indicate an overall growth trend for Evangelicals.

Surveys and statistics can be very helpful in understanding the status of a ministry. However, we can be seriously misled by listening to those who do not know how to interpret the data contained in these sources.

Wrapping up our look at faith trends, in this article we saw:

1. American Evangelicals are declining slightly in the overall population with actively engaged Evangelicals holding about 7% of the population.
2. The Nones continue to grow and now exceed Evangelicals. Their growth clearly reflects the unimportance of religious affiliation among a large percentage of Americans.
3. The growth of Non-denominationals (although interesting) made no impact on the overall size of American Evangelicals and is less than the growth of atheists and agnostics.
4. Looking at growth per location of parachurch ministries is more important than growth in number of locations in assessing the growth of Christianity.

We live in a challenging time but Evangelical churches are strong enough to make a huge difference in America if we will follow the Holy Spirit’s lead and present the eternal truth of the gospel in ways that communicate to today’s “nothing in particular” culture.

Notes
4. Terms used in the Pew Research Surveys; the GSS survey uses None to capture all of those responses and other surveys use variations of these approaches.
5. Ibid.
10. Stanton, p. 28.
11. Stanton, p. 31.
12. Young Life Annual Reports 2009 and 2017;
13. Intervarsity Annual Reports 2007 and 2017;
14. The years looked at were 2009 and 2017.
15. For Intervarsity, we looked at 2007 and 2017.

©2020 Probe Ministries

The Rise of the Nones - Reaching the Lost in Today’s America

Steve Cable addresses James White’s book The Rise of the Nones in view of Probe’s research about the church.
Probe Ministries is committed to updating you on the status of Christianity in America. In this article, we consider James White’s book, *The Rise of the Nones, Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated.*{1} His book addresses a critical topic since the fastest-growing religious group of our time is those who check “none” or “none of the above” on religious survey questions.

Let’s begin by reviewing some observations about Christianity in America.

From the 1930’s{2} into the early 1990’s the percentage of *nones* in America{3} was less than 8%. But by 2012, the number had grown to 20% of all adults and appears to be increasing. Even more alarming, among those between the ages of 18 and 30 the percentage grew by a factor of three, from 11% in 1990 to nearly 32% in 2012.

Another study reported Protestantism is no longer the majority in the U.S., dropping from 66% in the 1960’s down to 48% in 2012.

The *nones* tend to consider themselves to be liberal or moderate politically, in favor of abortion and same-sex marriage being legal, and seldom if ever attend religious services. For the most part, they are not atheists and are not necessarily hostile toward religious institutions. However, among those who believe in “nothing in particular,” 88% are not even looking for a specific faith or religion.

One report concludes, “The challenge to Christianity . . . does not come from other religions, but from a rejection of all forms of organized religions. They’re not thinking about religion and rejecting it; they are not thinking about it at all.”{4} In fact, the 2011 Baylor survey found that 44% of Americans said they spend no time seeking “eternal wisdom,” and a Lifeway survey found that nearly half of Americans said they never wonder whether they will go to heaven.

As White notes, these changes in attitude come in the wake of a second major attack on traditional Christian beliefs. The first set of attacks consisted of:

1. Copernicus attacking the existence of God
2. Darwin attacking God’s involvement in creation, and
3. Freud attacking our very concept of a creator God.

The second storm of attacks focuses on perceptions of how Christians think in three important areas.

1. An over entanglement with politics linked to anti-gay, sexual conservatism, and abrasiveness
2. Hateful aggression that has the church talking in ways that have stolen God’s reputation, and
3. An obsession with greed seen in televangelist transgressions and mega-pastor materialism, causing distrust of the church.

These perceptions, whether true or not, create an environment where there is no benefit in the public mind to self-identifying with a Christian religious denomination.

**Living in a Post-Christian America**

A 2013 Barna study\(^5\) shows America rapidly moving into a post-Christian status. Their survey-based study came to this conclusion: over 48% of young adults are post-Christian, and “The influence of post-Christian trends is likely to increase and is a significant factor among today’s youngest Americans.”\(^6\)

White suggests this trend is the result of “three deep and fast-moving cultural currents: secularization, privatization, and pluralization.”\(^7\)

**Secularization**

Secularization teaches the secular world is reality and our thoughts about the spiritual world are fantasy. White states: “We seem quite content to accept the idea of faith being privately engaging but culturally irrelevant.”\(^8\) In a society which is not affirming of public religious faith, it is much more difficult to hold a vibrant, personal faith.

**Privatization**

Privatization creates a chasm between the public and private spheres of life, trivializing Christian faith to the realm of opinion. Nancy Pearcy saw this, saying, “The most pervasive thought pattern of our times is the two-realm view of truth.”\(^9\) In it, the first and public realm is secular truth that states, “Humans are machines.” The second and private realm of spirituality states, “Moral and humane ideals have no basis in truth, as defined by scientific naturalism. But we affirm them anyway.”\(^10\)

**Pluralization**

Pluralization tells us all religions are equal in their lack of ultimate truth and their ability to deliver eternity. Rather speaking the truth of Christ, our post-modern ethic tells us we can each have our own truth. As reported in our book, *Cultural Captives*\(^11\), about 70% of evangelical, emerging adults are pluralists. Pluralism results in making your own suit out of patches of different fabrics and patterns and expecting everyone else to act as if it were seamless.

White sums up today’s situation this way: “They forgot that their God was . . . radically other than
man . . . They committed religion functionally to making the world better in human terms and intellectually to modes of knowing God fitted only for understanding this world.”

This combination of secularization, privatization and pluralization has led to a mishmash of “bad religion” overtaking much of mainstream Christianity. The underlying basis of the belief systems of nones is that there is a lot of truth to go around. In this post-modern world, it is considered futile to search for absolute truth. Instead, we create our own truth from the facts at hand and as necessary despite the facts. Of course, this creates the false (yet seemingly desirable) attribute that neither we, nor anyone else, have to recognize we are sinners anymore. With no wrong, we feel no need for the ultimate source of truth, namely God.

If You Build It, They Won’t Come

We’ve been considering the beliefs and thinking of the nones. Can we reach them with the gospel, causing them to genuinely consider the case for Christ?

We are not going to reach them by doing more of the same. Statistics indicate that we are not doing a good job of reaching the nones.

As James White notes, “The very people who say they want unchurched people to . . . find Jesus resist the most basic . . . issues related to building a relationship with someone apart from Christ, . . . and inviting them to an open, winsome, and compelling front door so they can come and see.”

Paul had to change his approach when addressing Greeks in Athens. In the same way, we need to understand how to speak to the culture we want to penetrate.

In the 1960’s, a non-believer was likely to have a working knowledge of Christianity. They needed to personally respond to the offer of salvation, not just intellectually agree to its validity. This situation made revivals and door-to-door visitation excellent tools to reach lost people.

Today, we face a different dynamic among the nones. “The goal is not simply knowing how to articulate the means of coming to Christ; it is learning how to facilitate and enable the person to progress from [little knowledge of Christ], to where he or she is able to even consider accepting Christ.”

The rise of the nones calls for a new strategy for effectiveness. Today, cause should be the leading edge of our connection with many of the nones, in terms of both arresting their attention and enlisting their participation.

Up through the 1980s, many unchurched would respond for salvation and then be incorporated into the church and there become drawn to Christian causes. From 1990 through the 2000s, unchurched people most often needed to experience fellowship in the body before they were ready to respond to the gospel. Today, we have nones who are first attracted to the causes addressed by Christians. Becoming involved in those causes, they are attracted to the community of believers and gradually they become ready to respond to the gospel.

We need to be aware of how these can be used to offer the good news in a way that can penetrate through the cultural fog. White puts it this way, “Even if it takes a while to get to talking about Christ, (our church members) get there. And they do it with integrity and . . . credibility. . . Later I’ve seen those nones enfolded into our community and before long . . . the waters of baptism.”

Relating to nones may be outside your comfort zone, but God has called us to step out to share His
Combining Grace and Truth in a Christian Mind

Every day we are on mission to the unchurched around us. James White suggests ways we can communicate in a way that the nones can understand.

We need to take to heart the three primary tasks of any missionary to an unfamiliar culture. First, learn how to communicate with the people we are trying to reach. Second, become sensitized to the new culture to operate effectively within it. Third, “translate the gospel into its own cultural context so that it can be heard, understood, and appropriated.” {16}

The growth of the nones comes largely from Mainline Protestants and Catholics, right in the squishy middle where there is little emphasis on the truth of God’s word. How can we confront them with truth in a loving way?

The gospel of John tells us, “Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” {17} Jesus brought the free gift of grace grounded in eternal truth. As we translate the gospel in today’s cultural context for the nones, this combination needs to shine through our message. What does it look like to balance grace and truth?

• If we are communicating no grace and no truth, we are following the example of Hinduism.
• If we are high on grace – but lacking in truth, we give license to virtually any lifestyle and perspective, affirming today's new definition of tolerance.
• On the other hand, “truth without grace: this is the worst of legalism . . . - what many nones believe to be the hallmark of the Christian faith.” The real representative of dogma without grace is Islam.” In a survey among 750 Muslims who had converted to Christianity, they said that as Muslims, they could never be certain of their forgiveness and salvation as Christians can.
• Grace is the distinctive message of Christianity but never remove it from the truth of the high cost Christ paid. Jesus challenged the religious thought of the day with the truth of God’s standard. Recognizing we cannot achieve that standard, we are run to the grace of God by faith.

To communicate the truth, we need to respond to the new questions nones are asking of any faith. As White points out, “I do not encounter very many people who ask questions that classical apologetics trained us to answer . . . Instead, the new questions have to do with significance and meaning.” Questions such as, “So, what?” and “Is this God of yours really that good?”

We need to be prepared to “give a defense for the hope that is within us” in ways that the nones around us can resonate with, such as described in our article The Apologetics of Peter on our website.

Opening the Front Door to Nones

The nones desperately need the truth of Jesus, yet it is a challenge to effectively reach them. “Reaching out to a group of people who have given up on the church, . . . we must renew our own commitment to the very thing they have rejected – the church.” {18} The fact that some in today’s culture have problems with today’s church does not mean that God intends to abandon it.
The church needs to grasp its mandate “to engage in the process of ‘counter-secularization’. . . There are often disparaging quips made about organized religion, but there was nothing disorganized about the biblical model.”{19} We all have a role to play in making our church a force for the gospel in our community.

It must be clear to those outside that we approach our task with civility and unity. Our individual actions are not sufficient to bring down the domain of darkness. Jesus told us that if those who encounter the church can sense the unity holding us together they will be drawn to its message.

How will the nones come into contact with the unity of Christ? It will most likely be through interaction with a church acting as the church. As White points out, “If the church has a “front door,” and it clearly does, why shouldn’t it be . . . strategically developed for optimal impact for . . . all nones who may venture inside?”{20} Surveys indicate that 82 percent of unchurched people would come to church this weekend if they were invited by a friend.

One way we have a chance to interact with nones is when they expose their children to a church experience. Children’s ministry is not something to occupy our children while we have church, but is instead a key part of our outreach to the lost nones in our community. “What you do with their children could be a deal breaker.”

In today’s culture, we cannot overemphasize the deep need for visual communication. Almost everyone is attuned to visually receiving information and meaning. By incorporating visual arts in our church mainstream, “it has a way of sneaking past the defenses of the heart. And nones need a lot snuck past them.”{21}

We need to keep evangelism at the forefront. “This is no time to wave the flag of social ministry and justice issues so single-mindedly in the name of cultural acceptance and the hip factor that it becomes our collective substitute for the clear articulation of the gospel.”{22}

White clearly states our goal, “Our only hope and the heart of the Great Commission, is to stem the tide by turning the nones into wons.”{23}

Notes

6. Ibid.
7. White p. 46.
8. White p. 47.
11. Stephen Cable, Cultural Captives: The Beliefs and Behavior of American Young Adults, 2012, p. 60.
15. White, p. 108.
16 White, p. 114.
17. John 1:15.
20. White, p. 152.
21. White, p. 163.
22 White, p. 180.

©2016 Probe Ministries