

# Christianity: The Best Thing That Ever Happened to Women

*Sue Bohlin examines the facts to show us that a Christian, biblical worldview of women lifted them from a status equivalent to dogs to a position a fellow heirs of the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Christianity, accurately applied, fundamentally changed the value and status of women.*

## The Low Status of Women in Jesus' Day

Some feminists charge that Christianity, the Bible, and the Church are anti-female and horribly oppressive to women. Does God really hate women? Did the apostle Paul disrespect them in his New Testament writings? In this article we'll be looking at why Christianity is the best thing that ever happened to women, with insights from Alvin Schmidt's book *How Christianity Changed the World*.[\[1\]](#)

“What would be the status of women in the Western world today had Jesus Christ never entered the human arena? One way to answer this question,” writes Dr. Schmidt, “is to look at the status of women in most present-day Islamic countries. Here women are still denied many rights that are available to men, and when they appear in public, they must be veiled. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, women are even barred from driving an automobile. Whether in Saudi Arabia or in many other Arab countries where the Islamic religion is adhered to strongly, a man has the right to beat and sexually desert his wife, all with the full support of the Koran. . . .[\[2\]](#) This command is the polar opposite of what the New Testament says regarding a man's relationship with his wife. Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, ‘Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.’ And he added, ‘He who loves his wife loves himself.’”[\[3\]](#)



Jesus loved women and treated them with great respect and dignity. The New Testament's teaching on women developed His perspective even more. The value of women that permeates the New Testament isn't found in the Greco-Roman culture or the cultures of other societies.

In ancient Greece, a respectable woman was not allowed to leave the house unless she was accompanied by a trustworthy male escort. A wife was not permitted to eat or interact with male guests in her husband's home; she had to retire to her woman's quarters. Men kept their wives under lock and key, and women had the social status of a slave. Girls were not allowed to go to school, and when they grew up they were not allowed to speak in public. Women were considered inferior to men. The Greek poets equated women with evil. Remember Pandora and her box? Woman was responsible for unleashing evil on the world. [{4}](#)

The status of Roman women was also very low. Roman law placed a wife under the absolute control of her husband, who had ownership of her and all her possessions. He could divorce her if she went out in public without a veil. A husband had the power of life and death over his wife, just as he did his children. As with the Greeks, women were not allowed to speak in public. [{5}](#)

Jewish women, as well, were barred from public speaking. The oral law prohibited women from reading the Torah out loud. Synagogue worship was segregated, with women never allowed to be heard.

## **Jesus and Women**

Jesus' treatment of women was very different:

*The extremely low status that the Greek, Roman, and Jewish woman had for centuries was radically affected by the appearance of Jesus Christ. His actions and teachings raised*

*the status of women to new heights, often to the consternation and dismay of his friends and enemies. By word and deed, he went against the ancient, taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that defined woman as socially, intellectually, and spiritually inferior.*

*The humane and respectful way Jesus treated and responded to the Samaritan woman [at the well] (recorded in John 4) may not appear unusual to readers in today's Western culture. Yet what he did was extremely unusual, even radical. He ignored the Jewish anti-Samaritan prejudices along with prevailing view that saw women as inferior beings.* [{6}](#)

He started a conversation with her—a Samaritan, a woman—in public. The rabbinic oral law was quite explicit: “He who talks with a woman [in public] brings evil upon himself.” Another rabbinic teaching prominent in Jesus’ day taught, “One is not so much as to greet a woman.” [{7}](#) So we can understand why his disciples were amazed to find him talking to a woman in public. Can we even imagine how it must have stunned this woman for the Messiah to reach out to her and offer her living water for her thirsty soul?

Among Jesus’ closest friends were Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who entertained him at their home. “Martha assumed the traditional female role of preparing a meal for Jesus, her guest, while her sister Mary did what only men would do, namely, learn from Jesus’ teachings. Mary was the cultural deviant, but so was Jesus, because he violated the rabbinic law of his day [about speaking to women].” [{8}](#) By teaching Mary spiritual truths, he violated another rabbinic law, which said, “Let the words of the Law [Torah] be burned rather than taught to women. . . . If a man teaches his daughter the law, it is as though he taught her lechery.” [{9}](#)

When Lazarus died, Jesus comforted Martha with this promise containing the heart of the Christian gospel: “I am the

resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26) These remarkable words were spoken to a woman! "To teach a woman was bad enough, but Jesus did more than that. He called for a verbal response from Martha. Once more, he went against the socioreligious custom by teaching a woman and by having her publicly respond to him, a man." {10}

"All three of the Synoptic Gospels note that women followed Jesus, a highly unusual phenomenon in first-century Palestine. . . . This behavior may not seem unusual today, but in Jesus' day it was highly unusual. Scholars note that in the prevailing culture only prostitutes and women of very low repute would follow a man without a male escort." {11} These women were not groupies; some of them provided financial support for Jesus and the apostles (Luke 8:3).

The first people Jesus chose to appear to after his resurrection were women; not only that, but he instructed them to tell his disciples that he was alive (Matt. 28, John 20). In a culture where a woman's testimony was worthless because she was worthless, Jesus elevated the value of women beyond anything the world had seen.

## **Paul, Peter, and Women**

Jesus gave women status and respect equal to men. Not only did he break with the anti-female culture of his era, but he set a standard for Christ-followers. Peter and Paul both rose to the challenge in what they wrote in the New Testament.

In a culture that feared the power of a woman's external beauty and feminine influence, Peter encouraged women to see themselves as valuable because God saw them as valuable. His call to aspire to the inner beauty of a trusting and tranquil spirit is staggeringly counter-cultural. He writes, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided

hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful."

Equally staggering is his call to men to elevate their wives with respect and understanding: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Consideration, respect, fellow heirs; these concepts sound good to us, but they were unheard of in the first century!

The apostle Paul is often accused of being a misogynist, one who hates and fears women. But Paul's teachings on women reflect the creation order and high value God places on women as creatures made in his image. Paul's commands for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5 provided a completely new way to look at marriage: as an earthbound illustration of the spiritual mystery of the union of Christ and His bride, the church. He calls wives to not only submit to their husbands as to the Lord, but he calls husbands to submit to Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). He calls men to love their wives in the self-sacrificing way Christ loves the church. In a culture where a wife was property, and a disrespected piece of property at that, Paul elevates women to a position of honor previously unknown in the world.

Paul also provided highly countercultural direction for the New Testament church. In the Jewish synagogue, women had no place and no voice in worship. In the pagan temples, the place of women was to serve as prostitutes. The church, on the other hand, was a place for women to pray and prophecy out loud (1 Cor. 11:5). The spiritual gifts—supernatural enablings to build God's church—are given to women as well as men. Older women are commanded to teach younger ones. The invitation to

women to participate in worship of Jesus was unthinkable—but true.

## Misogyny in the Church

Author Dorothy Sayers, a friend of C.S. Lewis, wrote:

*Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there had never been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, who never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as ‘The women, God help us!’ or ‘The ladies, God bless them!’; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took their questions and arguments seriously, who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious.*

She continues: “There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words of Jesus that there was anything ‘funny’ about woman’s nature.”[\[12\]](#) And this is one of the unfortunate truths about Christianity we have to acknowledge: over the centuries, many Christ-followers have fallen far short of the standard Jesus set in showing the worth and dignity of women.

In the second century Clement of Alexandria believed and taught that every woman should blush because she is a woman. Tertullian, who lived about the same time, said, “You [Eve] are the devil’s gateway. . . . You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die.” Augustine, in the fourth century, believed that a woman’s image of God was inferior to that of

the man's. [{13}](#) And unfortunately it gets even nastier than that.

Some people mistakenly believe these contemptuous beliefs of the church fathers are rooted in an anti-female Bible, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. People held these misogynistic beliefs *in spite of*, not because of, the biblical teachings. Those who dishonor God by dishonoring His good creation of woman allow themselves to be shaped by the beliefs of the surrounding pagan, anti-female culture instead of following Paul's exhortation to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). The church in North America does the same thing today by allowing the secular culture to shape our thinking more than the Bible. Only nine percent of Americans claiming to be born-again have a biblical worldview. [{14}](#) The church in Africa and Asia does the same thing today by allowing animism, the traditional folk religion, to shape their thinking more than the Bible.

It's unfortunate that some of the church fathers did not allow the woman-honoring principles found in Scripture to change their unbiblical beliefs. But that is the failing of imperfect followers of Jesus, not a failure of God nor of His Word. Jesus loves women.

## **Effects of Christianity on Culture**

As Christianity spread throughout the world, its redemptive effects elevated women and set them free in many ways. The Christian ethic declared equal worth and value for both men and women. Husbands were commanded to love their wives and not exasperate their children. These principles were in direct conflict with the Roman institution of *patria potestas*, which gave absolute power of life and death over a man's family, including his wife. When *patria potestas* was finally repealed by an emperor who was moved by high biblical standards, what a tremendous effect that had on the culture! Women were also

granted basically the same control over their property as men, and, for the first time, mothers were allowed to be guardians of their children.[{15}](#)

The biblical view of husbands and wives as equal partners caused a sea change in marriage as well. Christian women started marrying later, and they married men of their own choosing. This eroded the ancient practice of men marrying child brides against their will, often as young as eleven or twelve years old. The greater marital freedom that Christianity gave women eventually gained wide appeal. Today, a Western woman is not compelled to marry someone she does not want, nor can she legally be married as a child bride. But the practice continues in parts of the world where Christianity has little or no presence.[{16}](#)

Another effect of the salt and light of Christianity was its impact on the common practice of polygamy, which demeans women. Many men, including biblical heroes, have had multiple wives, but Jesus made clear this was never God's intention. Whenever he spoke about marriage, it was always in the context of monogamy. He said, "The two [not three or four] will become one flesh." As Christianity spread, God's intention of monogamous marriages became the norm.[{17}](#)

Two more cruel practices were abolished as Christianity gained influence. In some cultures, such as India, widows were burned alive on their husbands' funeral pyres. In China, the crippling practice of foot binding was intended to make women totter on their pointed, slender feet in a seductive manner. It was finally outlawed only about a hundred years ago.[{18}](#)

As a result of Jesus Christ and His teachings, women in much of the world today, especially in the West, enjoy more privileges and rights than at any other time in history. It takes only a cursory trip to an Arab nation or to a Third World country to see how little freedom women have in countries where Christianity has had little or no



presence.<sup>{19}</sup> It's the best thing that ever happened to women.

## Notes

1. Schmidt, Alvin. *How Christianity Changed the World*. Originally published under the title *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), which is the copy I reference in these notes.
2. "Men stand superior to women... But those whose perverseness ye fear, admonish them and remove them into bedchambers and beat them; but if they submit to you then do not seek a way against them" Sura 4:34, as quoted in Schmidt, p. 97.
3. Schmidt, p. 97-98.
4. Ibid., p. 98-99.
5. Ibid., p. 101.
6. Ibid., p. 102-03.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 103-104.
10. Ibid., p. 104.
11. Ibid., p. 104-105.
12. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 47.
13. Schmidt, p. 109.
14. "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," The Barna Research Group, Ltd. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=154>.

15. Ibid., p. 111.

16. Ibid., pp. 111-112.

17. Ibid., p. 115.

18. Ibid., pp. 118-119.

19. Ibid., p. 115.

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# **Is the World Flat? How Should Christians Respond in Today's Global World**

*Drawing from Thomas Friedman's book, *The World is Flat*, Kerby Anderson looks at some of the major new factors in our world which cause not only countries and companies, but also individuals to think and act globally. Most of the factors discussed are givens against which Kerby helps us to consider their impact on Christianity and the spread of the gospel on a global basis.*

## **Introduction**

Is the world flat? The question is not as crazy as it might sound in light of the book by Thomas Friedman entitled *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*. His contention is that the global playing field has been leveled or flattened by new technologies.

In fourteen hundred and ninety-two when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, he used rudimentary navigational equipment to

prove that the earth was *round*. More than 500 years later, Friedman discovered in a conversation with one of the smartest engineers in India that essentially the world was *flat*. Friedman argues that we have entered into a third era of globalization, which he calls Globalization 3.0 that has flattened the world.

The first era of globalization (he calls Globalization 1.0) lasted from when Columbus set sail until around 1800. "It shrank the world from a size large to a size medium. Globalization 1.0 was about countries and muscles."[{1}](#) The key change agent in this era was how much muscle your country had (horsepower, wind power, etc.). Driven by such factors as imperialism and even religion, countries broke down walls and began the process of global integration.

The second era (he calls Globalization 2.0) lasted from 1800 to 2000 with interruptions during the Great Depression and World Wars I and II. "This era shrank the world from size medium to a size small. In Globalization 2.0, the key agent of change, the dynamic force driving global integration, was multinational companies."[{2}](#) At first these were Dutch and English joint-stock companies, and later was the growth of a global economy due to computers, satellites, and even the Internet.

The dynamic force in Globalization 1.0 was *countries* globalizing, while the dynamic force in Globalization 2.0 was *companies* globalizing. Friedman contends that Globalization 3.0 will be different because it provides "the newfound power for *individuals* to collaborate and compete globally."[{3}](#)

The players in this new world of commerce will also be different. "Globalization 1.0 and 2.0 were driven primarily by European and American individuals and businesses. . . . Because it is flattening and shrinking the world, Globalization 3.0 is going to be more and more driven not only by individuals but also by a much more diverse—non-Western,

non-white—group of individuals. Individuals from every corner of the flat world are being empowered.”{4}

## The Flatteners

Friedman argues in his book that the global playing field has been flattened by new technologies.

The first flattener occurred on November 9, 1989. “The fall of the Berlin Wall on 11/9/89 unleashed forces that ultimately liberated all the captive peoples of the Soviet Empire. But it actually did so much more. It tipped the balance of power across the world toward those advocating democratic, consensual, free-market-oriented governance, and away from those advocating authoritarian rule with centrally planned economies.”{5}

The economic change was even more important. The fall of the Berlin Wall encouraged the free movement of ideas, goods, and services. “When an economic or technological standard emerged and proved itself on the world stage, it was much more quickly adopted after the wall was out of the way.”{6}

Thomas Friedman also makes a connection between the two dates 11/9 and 9/11. He noted that in “a world away, in Muslim lands, many thought [Osama] bin Laden and his comrades brought down the Soviet Empire and the wall with religious zeal, and millions of them were inspired to upload the past. In short, while we were celebrating 11/9, the seeds of another memorable date—9/11—were being sown.”{7}

A second flattener was Netscape. This new software played a huge role in flattening the world by making the Internet truly interoperable. Until then, there were disconnected islands of information.

We used to go to the post office to send mail; now most of us send digitized mail over the Internet known as *e-mail*. We used

to go to bookstores to browse and buy books, now we browse digitally. We used to buy a CD to listen to music, now many of us obtain our digitized music off the Internet and download it to a MP3 player.

A third flattener was work flow software. As the Internet developed, people wanted to do more than browse books and send e-mail. "They wanted to shape things, design things, create things, sell things, buy things, keep track of inventories, do somebody else's taxes, and read somebody else's X-rays from half a world away. And they wanted to be able to do any of these things from anywhere to anywhere and from any computer to any computer—seamlessly."[\[8\]](#)

All the computers needed to be interoperable not only between departments within a company but between the systems of any other company. Work flow software made this possible.

Where will this lead? Consider this likely scenario. When you want to make a dentist appointment, your computer translates your voice into a digital instruction. Then it will check your calendar against the available dates on the dentist's calendar. It will offer you three choices, and you will click on the preferred date and hour. Then a week before your appointment, the dentist's calendar will send you an e-mail reminding you of the appointment. The night before your appointment, a computer-generated voice message will remind you.

The fourth flattener is open-sourcing. Open-source comes from the idea that groups would make available online the source code for software and then let anyone who has something to contribute improve it and let millions of others download it for free.

One example of open-source software is Apache which currently powers about two-thirds of the websites in the world. Another example of open-sourcing is blogging. Bloggers are often one-

person online commentators linked to others by their common commitments. They have created essentially an open-source newsroom.

News bloggers were responsible for exposing the bogus documents use by CBS and Dan Rather in a report about President Bush's Air National Guard service. Howard Kurtz of *The Washington Post* wrote (Sept 20, 2004): "It was like throwing a match on kerosene-soaked wood. The ensuing blaze ripped through the media establishment as previously obscure bloggers managed to put the network of Murrow and Cronkite on the defensive."

Another example of open-sourcing is the Wikipedia project which has become perhaps the most popular online encyclopedia in the world. Linux is another example. It offers a family of operating systems that can be adapted to small desktop computers or laptops all the way up to large supercomputers.

A fifth flattener is outsourcing. In many ways, this was made possible when American companies laid fiber-optic cable to India. Ultimately, India became the beneficiary.

India has become very good at producing brain power, especially in the sciences, engineering, and medicine. There are a limited number of Indian Institutes within a population of one billion people. The resulting competition produces a phenomenal knowledge meritocracy. Until India was connected, many of the graduates would come to America. "It was as if someone installed a brain drain that filled up in New Delhi and emptied in Palo Alto." [\[9\]](#)

Fiber-optic cable became the ocean crosser. You no longer need to leave India to be a professional because you can plug into the world from India.

A sixth flattener was offshoring. Offshoring is when a company takes one of its factories that is operating in Canton, Ohio and moves the whole factory to Canton, China.

When China joined the World Trade Organization, it took Beijing and the rest of the world to a new level of offshoring. Companies began to shift production offshore and integrate their products and services into their global supply chains.

The more attractive China makes itself offshoring, the more attractive other developed and developing countries have to make themselves. This created a process of competitive flattening and a scramble to give companies the best tax breaks and subsidies.

How does this affect the United States? "According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, nearly 90 percent of the output from U.S.-owned offshore factories is sold to foreign consumers. But this actually stimulates American exports. There is a variety of studies indicating that every dollar a company invests overseas in an offshore factory yields additional exports for its home country, because roughly one-third of global trade today is within multi-national companies."[\[10\]](#)

The seventh flattener is supply chaining. "No company has been more efficient at improving its supply chain (and thereby flattening the world) than Wal-Mart; and no company epitomizes the tension the supply chains evoke between the consumer in us and the worker in us than Wal-Mart."[\[11\]](#)

Thomas Friedman calls Wal-Mart "the China of companies" because it can use its leverage to grind down any supplier to the last halfpenny. And speaking of China, if Wal-Mart were an individual economy, it would rank as China's eighth-biggest trading partner, ahead of Russia, Australia and Canada.

An eighth flattener is what Friedman calls *insourcing*. A good example of this is UPS. UPS is not just delivering packages, the company is doing logistics. Their slogan is Your World Synchronized. The company is synchronizing global supply chains.

For example, if you own a Toshiba laptop computer under warranty that you need fixed, you call Toshiba. What you probably don't know is that UPS will pick up your laptop and repair it at their own UPS-run workshop dedicated to computer and printer repair. They fix it and return it in much less time than it would take to send it all the way to Toshiba.

A ninth flattener is in-forming. A good example of that is Google. Google has been the ultimate equalizer. Whether you are a university professor with a high speed Internet connection or a poor kid in Asia with access to an Internet café, you have the same basic access to research information.

Google puts an enormous amount of information at our fingertips. Essentially, all of the information on the Internet is available to anyone, anywhere, at anytime.

Friedman says that, "In-forming is the ability to build and deploy your own personal supply chain—a supply chain of information, knowledge, and entertainment. In-forming is about self-collaboration—becoming your own self-directed and self-empowered researcher, editor, and selector of entertainment, without having to go to the library or movie theater or through network television."[\[12\]](#)

A tenth flattener is what he calls "the steroids." These are all the things that speed the process (computer speed, wireless).

For example, the increased speed of computers is dazzling. The Intel 4004 microprocessor (in 1971) produced 60,000 instructions per second. Today's Intel Pentium 4 Extreme has a maximum of 10.8 billion instructions per second.

The wireless revolution allows anyone portable access to everything that has been digitized anywhere in the world. When I was at graduate school at Yale University, all of us were tied to a single mainframe computer. In order to use the computer, I had to hand computer cards to someone in the



computer lab in order to input data or extract information. Now thanks to digitization, miniaturization, and wireless I can do all of that and much more from my home, office, coffee shop, airport—you name it.

## **Biblical Perspective**

Although futurists have long talked about globalization and a global village, many of these forces have made that a reality. At this point it might be valuable to distinguish between *globalization* and *globalism*. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, I want to draw some important distinctions. Globalization is used to describe the changes taking place in society and the world due to economic and technological forces. Essentially, we have a global economy and live in the global village.

Globalism is the attempt to draw us together into a new world order with a one world government and one world economy. Sometimes this even involves a desire to develop a one world religion. In a previous article ([“Globalism and Foreign Policy”](#)), I addressed many of the legitimate concerns about this push towards global government. We should be concerned about political attempts to form a new world order.

On the other hand, we should also recognize that globalization is already taking place. *The World is Flat* focuses on many of the positive aspects of this phenomenon, even though there are many critics would believe it may be harmful.

Some believe that it will benefit the rich at the expense of the poor. Some believe it will diminish the role of nations in deference to world government. These are important issues that we will attempt to address in future articles.

For now, let's look at some important implications of a flat world. First, we should prepare our children and grandchild for global competition. Thomas Friedman says that when he was

growing up his parents would tell him “Finish your dinner. People in China and India are starving.” Today he tells his daughters, “Girls, finish your homework—people in China and India are starving for your jobs.”[\[13\]](#)

Another implication is the growing influence of the two countries with the largest populations: China and India. Major companies are looking to these countries for research and development. The twentieth century was called “the American Century.” It is likely that the twenty-first century will be “the Asian Century.”

These two countries represent one-third of the world’s population. They will no doubt transform the entire global economy and political landscape.

Students of biblical prophecy wonder if these two countries represent the “Kings of the East” (Rev. 16:12). In the past, most of the focus was only on China. Perhaps the Kings (plural) represent both China and India.

A final implication is that this flattened world has opened up ministry through the Internet and subsequent travel to these countries. Probe Ministries, for example, now has a global ministry. In the past, it was the occasional letter we received from a foreign country. We now interact daily with people from countries around the world.

Last month the Probe website had nearly a quarter of a million visitors from over 140 countries. These online contacts open up additional opportunities for speaking and ministry overseas.

The flattening of the world may have its downsides, but it has also opened up ministry in ways that were unimaginable just a few years ago. Welcome to the flat world.

## **Notes**

1. Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 9.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 10.
4. Ibid., 11.
5. Ibid., 49.
6. Ibid., 52.
7. Ibid., 55.
8. Ibid., 73.
9. Ibid., 105.
10. Ibid., 123.
11. Ibid., 129.
12. Ibid., 153.
13. Ibid., 237.

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# **Video Games – Evaluating Them From a Christian Perspective**

## **Grand Theft Auto**

The best-selling video game in America last year was “Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.” The recent controversy over this popular video game is just another reminder of the deception of ratings and the need for parental direction and discernment when it comes to buying video games.

The game in question already has a bad reputation. The National Institute on Media and the Family described it this way: “Raunchy, violent and portraying just about every deviant

act that a criminal could think of in full, living 3D graphics. Grand Theft Auto takes the cake again as one of the year's worst games for kids. The premise—restore respect to your neighborhood as you take on equally corrupt San Andreas police.”[\[1\]](#)

Ironically what caused the controversy over the game was not its overt violence and sexuality. What caused a national stir was what was hidden within the game. Those playing the game (known as gamers) could download a modification of “Grand Theft Auto” that would allow them to see graphic sex scenes on screen.

Initially the distributor distanced itself from what hackers could do with their product once it was on the market. But that argument fell flat when it was found that the downloaded modification merely unlocked pornographic material already within the game. It now turns out that skilled players can unlock the pornographic content without downloading the key from the Internet. The game initially had a “Mature” rating. The Entertainment Software Ratings Board now requires that it be labeled “Adults Only.”

“Grand Theft Auto” has already been a lightning rod for controversy because it rewards players for committing crimes and engaging in dangerous and immoral behavior. Gamers can buy and sell drugs, steal cars, run down pedestrians, even feed people into a wood chipper. Nevertheless, the game has sold more than five million copies in the United States.

Who is buying this game? Some are adults buying the game for themselves, but a large percentage of the people buying this game are parents or grandparents buying the game for their kids or grandkids.

Columnist Mona Charen points out that the original concerns about this game surfaced when a Manhattan grandmother bought the game for her fourteen-year-old grandson. Then she was

shocked to find out that he could modify the game by downloading material from the Internet. Charen asks, "So, a kindly eighty-five-year-old lady has no qualms about purchasing a gang-glorifying, violence-soaked, sick entertainment for her teenage grandson, but is shocked when it turns out to contain explicit sex? Wasn't the rest enough?"[{2}](#)

In most cases, parents and grandparents are buying these games and need to exercise discernment. Many games are harmless and even can help stimulate the mind. Some are questionable. And others are violent and sexually explicit. We need to use discernment in selecting these games.

## **Benefits of Video Games**

A recent article in *Discover* magazine talked about the perception most people have of video game players. It said this is "the classic stereotype of gamers as attention-deficit-crazed stimulus junkies, easily distracted by flashy graphics and on-screen carnage."[{3}](#) Yet new research shows that gaming can be mentally enriching with such cognitive benefits as: pattern recognition, system thinking, and even patience.[{4}](#)

One of the best-known studies (done by Shawn Green and Daphne Bavelier) found that playing an action video game markedly improved performance on a range of visual skills related to detecting objects in briefly flashed displays. They found that gamers exhibit superior performance relative to non-gamers on a set of benchmark visual tasks.[{5}](#)

What they found was the action video gamers tend to be more attuned to their surroundings. While this occurs while performing within the video game, it also transfers to such things as driving down a residential street where they are more likely than a non-gamer to pick out a child running into the street after a ball.

They found that gamers can process visual information more quickly and can track 30 percent more objects than non-gamers. These conclusions came from testing both gamers and non-gamers with a series of three tests.

The first test flashed a small object on a screen for 1/160 of a second and the participant would indicate where it flashed. Gamers tended to notice the object far more often than non-gamers.

The second test flashed a number of small objects on a screen at once. The subjects had to type the number of objects they saw. Gamers saw the correct number more often than non-gamers.

The third test flashed black letters and one white letter on a screen in fast succession. The one white letter was sometimes followed by a black "X." Gamers were able to pick out the white letter more often than non-gamers and could more accurately say whether it was followed by a black "X."

The researchers also wanted to know whether the superior performance of gamers was acquired or self-selected. In other words, do video games actually improve visual attention skills or is it possible that visually attentive people choose to play video games?

Green and Bavelier trained a selection of non-gamers on one of two video games. One group played the World War II action video game "Medal of Honor." The other group served as the control group and played the puzzle game "Tetris." The researchers found that after two weeks, the group trained on the World War II game showed a marked increase in performance over the control group.

The researchers therefore concluded: "By forcing players to simultaneously juggle a number of varied tasks (detect new enemies, track existing enemies and avoid getting hurt, among others), action-video-game playing pushed the limits of three rather different aspects of visual attention."[\[6\]](#)

Video games can also train our brain to be more efficient. In the early 1990s, Richard Haier (University of California at Irving's Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior), scanned the brains of "Tetris" players. He found that in first-time users, the brain requires lots of energy. In fact, cerebral glucose metabolic rates actually soar. But after a few weeks, these rates sink to normal as performance increases seven-fold.[\[7\]](#) In essence, "Tetris" trains your brain to stop using inefficient gray matter.

## Types of Video Games

Let's now focus on the rating of video games and the major video game categories. As we mentioned earlier, the video game industry is self-regulated, so we need to exercise discernment.

**EC – Early Childhood (age 3 and older)** – These games are appropriate for anyone who can play a video game and contains no inappropriate material.

**E – Everyone (age 6 and older)** – These games are designed for younger players and are the equivalent of a PG movie.

**T – Teen (age 13 and older)** – Generally these games are not appropriate for younger ages and are equivalent of a PG-13 movie.

**M – Mature (age 17 and older)** – These games are not appropriate for children. They may be rated as such because of overt violence, sexual content, and profanity.

**A0 – Adults Only (ages 18 and older)** – These games involve excessive violence, sexual content, and explicit language.

There are a number of different types of video games.

**Puzzles** – Puzzle games are usually acceptable for all ages and generally are rated "E." These games involve logic and spatial

arrangements. The best known puzzle game is "Tetris."

**Strategy** – These games may be as straightforward as "Chessmaster" or involve the use of tactical moves of troops or players such as "Advanced Wars."

**Simulation games** – Some games like "SimCity" require creativity and advanced problem-solving skills. Others involve driving or flying simulations that can be relatively tame or highly offensive such as the "Grand Theft Auto" series of video games.

**Arcade games** – The classic arcade games include such favorites as "Pacman" or "Frogger." However, the newer arcade games may include games like the violent "Street Fighter."

**Role playing games** – This is a type of game where players assume the roles of via role-playing. Although these games may be less graphic, they often involve fantasy and even the occult.

**Action games** – These games most often have an "M" rating. Many of these action games involve point-and-shoot games that are especially dangerous.

## **Violent Video Games**

There is cause for concern about violent video games. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, playing violent video games increases the likelihood of adolescent violent behavior by as much as 13 percent to 22 percent.[{8}](#)

A 2005 meta-analysis of over thirty-five research studies (that included 4000 participants) found that "playing violent video games significantly increases physiological arousal and feelings of anger or hostility, and significantly decreases pro-social helping behavior."[{9}](#) Another study has shown a relationship between playing violent video games and being



involved in violent acts.[{10}](#)

Testimony before the United States Senate documents the following: (1) that violent video games increase violent adolescent behavior, (2) that heavy game players become desensitized to aggression and violence, (3) that nearly 90 percent of all African-American females in these games are victims of violence, and (4) that the most common role for women in violent video games is as prostitutes.[{11}](#)

One of the people speaking out against violent video games is Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, whom I have interviewed on a number of occasions. He is a former West Point professor and has written books on the subject of killing.[{12}](#) He has also testified that these violent video games are essentially “killing simulators.”

Grossman testified on the shooting in Paducah, Kentucky. Michael Carneal, a fourteen-year-old boy who had never fired a handgun before, stole a pistol and fired a few practice shots the night before. The next morning he fired eight shots and had eight hits (four of them head shots, one neck, and three upper torso). This is unprecedented marksmanship for a boy who only fired a .22 caliber rifle once at a summer camp.

The typical response in firing a gun is to fire at the target until it drops. Carneal instead moved from victim to victim just like he had learned in the violent video games he played.

The goal in these games is to rack up the “highest score” by moving quickly. Grossman points out that many of the games (such as “House of the Dead” or “Goldeneye” or “Turok”) give bonus points for head shots.[{13}](#)

Does that mean that anyone who plays these games will be a killer? Of course not. But Grossman says that the kind of training we give to soldiers (operant conditioning, desensitization, etc.) is what we are also giving to our kids through many of these violent video games.

Ironically, the U.S. Marine Corps licensed one of these popular video games (“Doom”) to train their combat fire teams in tactics and to rehearse combat actions of killing.<sup>{14}</sup> The video game manufacturers certainly know these are killing simulators. In fact the advertising for one game (“Quake II” that is produced by the same manufacturer as “Doom”), says: “We took what was killer, and made it mass murder.”

## **Biblical Discernment**

If we look back at the list of different types of video games, it is pretty easy to see that it is possible to find acceptable games as well as questionable and even dangerous video games in just about any category. That is why parental direction and discernment are so important.

The latest controversy over “Grand Theft Auto” demonstrates that the video game industry has not been effective at self-regulation. And children cannot be expected to exercise good judgment unless parents use discernment and teach it to their kids.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” We should focus on what is positive and helpful to our Christian walk.

As Christians, we should develop discernment in our lives. See my article on “Media and Discernment” ([www.probe.org/faith-and-culture/culture/media-and-discernment.html](http://www.probe.org/faith-and-culture/culture/media-and-discernment.html)) for suggestions on how to develop discernment in your life and the life of your child.

Parents need to determine the possible benefits to playing videos and whether those benefits outweigh the negatives. Many of the games available today raise little or no concern. As one commentator put it, “The majority of video games on the

best-seller list contain no more bloodshed than a game of Risk.”[\[15\]](#)

But even good, constructive games played for long periods of time can be detrimental. Over the last few years I have been compiling statistics for my teen talk on media use. The number of hours young people spend watching TV, listening to music, surfing the Internet, going to movies, etc. is huge and increasing every year. Young people spend entirely too much time in front of a screen (TV screen, computer screen, movie screen).

So even good video games can be bad if young people are staying indoors and not going outdoors for exercise. Obesity is already a problem among many young people. And good video games can be bad if they take priority over responsibilities at home and schoolwork.

Parents should understand the potential dangers of video games and make sure they approve of the video games that come into their home. They may conclude that the drawbacks outweigh the benefits. If their children do play video games, they should also set time limits and monitor attitudes and behaviors that appear. They should also watch for signs of addiction. The dangers of video games are real, and parents need to exercise discernment.

## Notes

1. National Institute on Media and the Family, “Expanded Game Reviews,” [www.mediafamily.org/kidscore/games\\_gta4.shtml](http://www.mediafamily.org/kidscore/games_gta4.shtml)
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8. Lori O'Keefe, "Media Exposure Feeding Children's Violent Acts," *American Academy of Pediatrics News*, January 2002.

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10. Jeanne B. Funk, et. al. "An Evidence-Based Approach to Examining the Impact of Playing Violent Video and Computer Games," *Studies in Media and Information Literacy Education*, Vol. 2, Issue 4 (November 2002), University of Toronto Press.

11. Craig Anderson, "Violent Video Games Increase Aggression and Violence," U.S. Senate Testimony, Hearing on The Impact of Interactive Violence on Children, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, 106th Congress, 1st Session.

12. David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 1995) and David Grossman and G. DeGaetano, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence* (New York: Crown Books, 1999).

13. Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, given before the New York State Legislature, October 1999, [www.fradical.com/statement\\_of\\_lieutenant\\_colonel\\_dave\\_grossman.htm](http://www.fradical.com/statement_of_lieutenant_colonel_dave_grossman.htm).

14. Ibid.

15. Johnson, *Discover*, 41.

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# The Worldview of Star Wars – A Christian Evaluation

*Dr. Zukeran takes a critical, balanced view of this popular movie series to help us understand the worldview it presents in light of a biblical worldview. From a Christian perspective, he points out the positive themes of the movies presented from a pantheistic worldview. We can use these movies to generate conversations about the differences between the worldview of Star Wars and a genuinely Christian worldview.*

## George Lucas

The *Star Wars* series has come to a climatic finale. Many of us can still remember the year 1977 when people stood in long lines at theaters several blocks long. It was not uncommon to hear of individuals who returned to see the movie, some over a dozen times. Few movies have generated the same excitement and following as this series. Through its production, special effects, and cinematography, *Star Wars* had a tremendous impact on the arts, setting a new standard for the movie industry.

Not only did *Star Wars* have an impact on the entertainment industry, it also opened our eyes to the worldview of pantheism. Pantheism comes from the Greek word “pan” meaning all and “theism” meaning God. It is the belief that the impersonal God is one essence with the universe. God inhabits all things. The universe is God and God is the universe. In other words, God is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. This worldview lies at the foundation of most Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age religions. This worldview gained popularity in the sixties, at a time when Eastern ideas began to enter the West. It drew public attention through celebrities such as The Beatles and Shirley McClain who embraced the teachings of the Eastern religions. *Star Wars*,

with its success, continues to stir interest in the ideas of pantheism.

George Lucas borrowed themes from several religions and ancient myths in creating the story line for *Star Wars*. Lucas was not intending to introduce or promote a particular religion in his movie. However, he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. He created his movies to “. . . make young people think about the mystery. Not to say, ‘Here’s the answer.’ It’s to say, ‘Think about this for a second. Is there a God? What does God look like? What does God sound like? What does God feel like? How do we relate to God?’ Just getting young people to think at that level is what I’ve been trying to do in the films. What eventual manifestation that takes place in terms of how they describe their God, what form their faith takes, is not the point of the movie.”<sup>[1]</sup>

George Lucas should be commended in his desire to inspire people to wrestle with such issues. This is a movie rich in theology and deep in philosophical ideas that are sure to generate some profitable discussions. C.S. Lewis, J.R. Tolkien, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, in their classical fiction writings, presented answers to life’s questions from a theistic worldview. In *Star Wars*, Lucas has accomplished a similar classic work presenting answers to life’s questions from a pantheistic worldview. For this reason *Star Wars* is a fun movie that is full of theological ideas.

In the following sections, we will examine how Lucas’ pantheistic worldview is illustrated in *Star Wars*, and present a biblical critique of this fine movie series.

## **The Worldview of Pantheism**

What are some of the major tenets of pantheism?

First, there is the concept of monism, the notion that all

things are essentially of the same nature or essence. In other words, God is the universe; he is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. The universe is eternal and flows out of the divine. Therefore, creation is *ex deo* (out of God), meaning out of the hands of God. The Greek philosopher Plotinus stated that everything flows from God, be it life or flower from a seed. Good and evil, light and darkness all flow out of God.

Pantheists also believe in the absence of a divine personal being who created the universe. Instead, they attest to a divine essence, an impersonal force, a cosmic energy that flows throughout all things in the universe. This energy is called "the One," "the divine," "Chi," or "Brahma." In *Star Wars*, it is called the Force.

Following their logic, if all is one in essence, all is divine. Hence, God and man are of the same essence, so man is essentially divine. Here is an illustration. God is the large ocean and we are all drops in that ocean. As a drop of water from a rain cloud must make its journey to unite with the ocean, so every individual must make their journey to become one with the divine. Spiritual guru Deepak Chopra writes, "Your body is not separate from the universe, because at quantum mechanical levels there are no well-defined edges. You are like a wiggle, a wave, a fluctuation, a convolution, a whirlpool, a localized disturbance in the larger quantum field. The larger quantum field – the universe – is your extended body."[\[2\]](#) He also states, "In reality we are divinity in disguise, and gods and goddesses in embryo that are contained within us seek to be fully materialized. True success therefore is the experience of the miraculous. It is the unfolding of the divinity within us."[\[3\]](#)

Since we are divine, true knowledge is attained by awakening the god within through an experience known as enlightenment. The One or the divine is not understood through the senses or rational thinking but by mystical union which is beyond the

conscious self. This union comes through various means such as meditation, yoga, and channeling, among others. The process includes letting go of our conscious self and reaching out with our emotions.

The ultimate destiny of man is to become absorbed into the divine. All individuals are involved in an endless cycle of reincarnation until they attain enlightenment and eventually break the cycle of reincarnation to be absorbed into the divine. These are some of the basic teachings of pantheism that are depicted in *Star Wars*.

## God and The Force

George Lucas stated that he wanted *Star Wars* to inspire young people to ask spiritual questions about God. In *Star Wars*, the idea of God is found in the Force. Lucas states, "I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people – more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system."<sup>{4}</sup> Master Jedi Obi Won Kenobi first introduces us to the Force in 1977. Sitting in his desert hut, Obi Won explains to Luke Skywalker the nature of the Force. He states, "The Force is what gives the Jedi his power. It is an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together." The Jedi Knights and their adversaries the Siths use this cosmic energy to perform supernatural feats.

The Force reflects one of the main tenets of the pantheistic worldview, the concept of monism, that all is in essence one. The Force is not a personal being. It is an impersonal energy that is made up of and resides in all living things. Therefore, all of life has the spark of divinity because all is essentially one unified entity.

George Lucas borrows a lot of his ideas from Eastern pantheistic religions. Chinese religions such as Taoism teach



that this cosmic energy is called the Chi Force. Chi flows through all living things, and therefore the powers of the universe reside in each individual. Through meditation, yoga, and other techniques of altering one's consciousness, one can master this energy within and perform supernatural feats.

Some Christians have mistakenly equated the Force with the Holy Spirit; however, there are several major differences. First, the Force is an impersonal energy field while the Holy Spirit is a personal being, the third member of the Trinity. He has a personality, intelligence, and will. Second, the Force is made up of all living things in the universe while the Holy Spirit is not contained in the universe. The Holy Spirit is an eternal being who was involved in creating the universe out of nothing (Genesis 1). Being God, the Holy Spirit is involved in the universe but He is not contained in the universe and exists independent of living things. Third, the Force can be manipulated by the Jedi who use it to accomplish their will, but the Holy Spirit cannot be manipulated by those He indwells. Instead He guides, teaches, and empowers them to do the will of God the Father. Christians do not master the Holy Spirit to accomplish their will, but rather the Holy Spirit guides them to do His will. Finally, the Force has a good side and a dark side which exist in a state of balance while the Holy Spirit has no dark or evil side but only the attributes consistent with a holy and good God.

## **Salvation**

The story of *Star Wars* centers on one figure, Anakin Skywalker, who is identified by the master Jedi Qui Gon Jin as the "chosen one." Anakin's birth was miraculous in that he was born of a virgin and his body has a high level of metachlorines. Qui Gon states that as the chosen one, Anakin will restore the "balance of the Force," a hope anticipated throughout the entire series. What does Lucas mean by this

statement?

As stated previously, Lucas illustrates the teachings of the pantheistic worldview throughout the movie series. He borrows several concepts from Taoism, one of them being the idea of restoring the balance of the force.

Taoism teaches that there are equal and opposing forces throughout the universe that balance one another. This is known as the yin/yang duality. Opposing forces such as positive and negative energy, light and darkness, life and death, have always been in a state of opposition. Neither side has dominance over the other, but there is a balance of these opposing forces. These forces are mutually dependent, and one cannot be known apart from the other. When these forces are not in balance, there is disharmony. When they exist in a balance, there is harmony.

Every individual must accept and live in harmony with this balance of opposing forces. When there is an imbalance of one over the other in a person, there is disharmony in one's life. When disturbed, this balance must be restored in the individual and in the world. Once balance is restored, harmony and peace returns. Darkness, death, and evil, are never defeated; they are only to be brought into balance with the opposing forces of light, life, and goodness. In *Star Wars*, the Force has two sides, a good side and a dark side. Imbalance has occurred because one side, the dark side, has become too pervasive and must be brought into balance by the opposing force of good. The dark side is not to be defeated permanently by the good but balance is to be restored to the Force. This is the concept George Lucas presents throughout the series.

In the Bible, the universe is not eternal but was created by God from nothing. The original creation was good. Evil, death, and suffering came as the result of the fall, which marred creation. The conflict between light and darkness, life and

death, good and evil has not been an eternal struggle. The two forces are also not equal and in a balance. The Bible teaches that God is light, holy, good, and the life. He is not locked in an eternal struggle with opposing forces. One day at His appointed time, He will not bring balance but restoration to the universe. This will occur when God judges the world, defeats evil permanently, and establishes a new heaven and earth where sin and its effects are no longer present.

## **The Jedi Masters**

The heroes in the *Star Wars* are the Jedi Knights. These select few individuals have mastered the Force and are powerful warriors. They function as the guardians of peace in the galactic empire and use their powers only in times of danger. Where did Lucas get his idea for the Jedi?

In a Discovery Channel documentary entitled "The Science of *Star Wars*," Lucas reveals the source of his idea. Once again, he borrows concepts from the pantheistic religions. Lucas reveals that his idea came from studying the Shao-Lin monks of China. The Shao-Lin monks are priests known for originating and becoming the masters of the martial arts. Their fighting skills were legendary throughout the land of China.

Not only are the Shao-Lin monks skillful fighters, they were also men who mastered the use of the Chi force. As previously mentioned, Chi is believed to be the cosmic energy that flows through all things including individuals. The Shao-Lin monks teach that through altering one's consciousness in meditation and other exercises, one can tap into the power of the Chi resident in each individual and use it to perform superhuman feats.

Using the Chi force, Shao-Lin monks believe they can deliver punches and kicks with devastating force. They are also able to withstand punishing blows from opponents and objects. Some

even believe a master can strike down an opponent without physical contact by simply utilizing Chi energy.

In Star Wars, we see this parallel. The Jedi are dressed in garments similar to the Shao-Lin monks, are headquartered at the Temple, and are masters of the Force. Using the Force, they are able to move objects, foresee future events, manipulate people's thoughts, and strike down opponents without any physical contact. For the Jedi, truth is ultimately found in their feelings. When questions arise, the phrase among the Jedi is, "Search your feelings. What do they tell you?" True knowledge for the Jedi is beyond the rational and instead found in feelings and intuitions beyond the rational mind. The Jedi are another example of Lucas' pantheistic worldview.

There is much to like regarding the Jedi. They are noble heroes who are self-sacrificing, disciplined, and courageous. However, Christians should reject the idea of the Force that is the power behind the Jedi. The Bible does not teach that there is a cosmic energy or Chi that flows through objects and individuals. Throughout their training, Jedi are taught to let go of the conscious mind and reach out with their feelings. Christians are taught to love God "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Christians do not abandon their mind but develop it to understand truth and God's will (Romans 12:1-2). The mind and heart work together through prayer, study of the Word, and guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern truth and God's will in situations.

## **What Happens After Death?**

What happens after death? This is another question George Lucas hoped young people would ask as they viewed this series. *Star Wars* presents an answer that once again reflects the teaching of pantheism. Pantheism teaches that we are all in an

endless cycle of reincarnation until we attain enlightenment. It is then that we escape this cycle and become one with the divine meaning and become absorbed into the cosmic energy of the universe.

In *The Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin Skywalker is haunted with nightmares of his wife Padme dying at the birth of their child. Tormented by this dream he seeks the counsel of Yoda, the master of the Jedi. Yoda imparts to Anakin that death is a natural part of the universe. In other words, we should accept it without emotion. He adds that one should not grieve for those who have died and become part of the Force. Anakin must not become attached to things, including people, for attachment to objects leads to jealousy and the dark side of the Force. One must release all feelings from things, for it is only then that one's thinking will be clear.

Thus, in *Star Wars* those who die become absorbed into the Force. We also learn that the Jedi are able to delay this absorption and appear as spirit guides to aid those in the physical world. Those with special insight may learn how to communicate with these ascended masters.

This teaching is another fundamental tenet of pantheistic religions. Pantheism teaches that the material world is an illusion. Therefore, one should not grow attached to earthly things for they are merely an illusion and are not permanent. Several schools of Hinduism and Buddhism teach that this world is an illusion and, as such, we must rid ourselves of all desires. The most holy of followers will therefore live lives of celibacy and poverty, releasing themselves from any desire and spending their days in meditation and study. At death, some holy men will delay their union with the divine and remain as spirit guides to aid those on the journey to enlightenment.

The Bible teaches that at death, we will not be absorbed into an impersonal energy field but we will retain our personhood

and stand before God in judgment. There is no reincarnation or second chance. Hebrews 9:7 states that "It is appointed for each person to die once and then comes the judgment." Those who know Jesus will spend eternity with the Lord and fellow believers for all eternity. Those who have rejected Christ will spend eternity separated from God in Hell. The Bible presents a destiny that is just, but also filled with hope for those who know Jesus.

The answer presented in *Star Wars*, the annihilation of one's consciousness and absorption into a cosmic energy field, is a false one that even if true, would provide insufficient hope.

## **How to Watch *Star Wars***

When it comes to movies, there are three basic responses among Christians. Some choose to avoid any movie that may teach contrary beliefs for fear that they or their children may be negatively influenced. Others are consumers and watch any movie believing it is harmless fun and entertainment. A third option is to select appropriate movies and then view them with discernment. I take the third position. The arts are meant to be enjoyed and to glorify God. Creation itself reflects the creative mind of God who designed man with the capacity to produce art. Man, however, many times uses the arts for less than noble reasons. However, Christians can learn valuable lessons about other belief systems and use movies as great teaching tools to help younger believers become more discerning and understand other worldviews.

In *Star Wars* we have a great teaching and discussion topic. There is much we should commend George Lucas for in this series. *Star Wars* is creative, entertaining, and family-friendly. It also promotes several good themes such as friendship, courage, and the dangerous corrupting power of selfish ambition. We should furthermore commend Lucas on his desire to make a movie that would inspire young people to think about deeper issues in life.

In the *Time Magazine* interview, Lucas states that he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. I certainly agree with Lucas, and wish more movies were designed for such purposes.

*Star Wars* is a great discussion piece because it creatively reflects the tenets of pantheism. Christians can use this film to discuss spiritual lessons revealed in the series. I have had profitable discussions with teens and adults on the spiritual principles illustrated in *Star Wars*. Questions such as “What do you think about the whole idea of the Force?”, “Is there such a thing as a cosmic energy field?”, “Can we master the power of this energy?”, “What did *Star Wars* teach regarding what happens after death?”, or “What do you think really happens after death?” have arisen in conversations.

Answers to these questions often lead to great discussions regarding worldviews, the nature of truth, and eternal life. *Star Wars* offers answers from a pantheistic worldview, which Christians can point out and explain why these answers are false. Movies like *Star Wars* can be a great teaching tool when Christians are equipped and informed to discern truth from error.

## Notes

1. Bill Moyer, “Of Myth and Men,” *Time Magazine*, (26 April, 1999), 93.
2. Deepak Chopra, *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, p.68, quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), 68.
3. Ibid., 96.
4. Ibid., 92.

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# Dungeons and Dragons and FRPGs

Dungeons and Dragons is a fantasy role playing game (or FRPG). Role playing in and of itself can be a useful exercise of the imagination, such as helping kids practice saying no to drugs or alcohol when offered them at a party, or learning to set boundaries by practicing with a part of one's support group. Fantasy can also be a legitimate exercise of the imagination, and learning to distinguish fantasy from reality is an essential part of maturing intellectually. The problem comes when the values and content in the fantasy affect a person adversely.

In this way, D&D or any other FRPG can be compared to rock music: the genre itself is not inherently evil or dangerous, but the content (lyrics, in the case of rock music) is what makes the difference. (For more on that concept, see Jerry Solomon's article ["Rock Music"](#) on our website.)

The content of D&D and its effect on players are worth examining.

## Worldview

In contrast to a Christian worldview, D&D was created with a magic worldview (and this has not changed over the years). Rather like "the force" of Star Wars, magic is a neutral force, something like gravity, that pervades reality. Characters learn to use magic to manipulate the universe to get what they want. It's a very mechanistic universe, like a vending machine where you insert your coin and out comes a product only in this universe, people use spells and magical instruments to manipulate the magic toward their desired end.



Magic can be used for good or evil.

Two insightful writers, Brian Onken and Elliot Miller, offer a responsible analysis of D&D and FRPGs in general in a paper from Christian Research Institute, "Fantasy Games People Play."[\[1\]](#) They point out that many proponents of D&D try to draw a parallel between their game of choice and the Christian fantasy of J.R.R. Tolkien in *Lord of the Rings*. There are some common elements, but it's the great differences that are a real problem, differences which proponents of FRPGs "either ignore or rationalize away. Christian fantasy works by Tolkien, Lewis, and others are accepted and considered to be a good use of fantasy because they offer a reflection of an essentially Christian world view."[\[2\]](#)

"Though the creators of Dungeons and Dragons may have borrowed many aspects from Tolkien's 'middle earth,' one part they did not consider was the overall setting in which everything took place and from which everything derived its ultimate meaning Tolkien's Christian world view. As a result, the game's world view does not represent the moral universe God created. In place of the creator God, its universe is governed by a multiplicity of gods and demigods. Moreover, its universe is not infused with an absolute, inherent morality. The more thoroughly one investigates the writings of Tolkien, Lewis, and others and compares them to FRP games, the more one will see that there are not only crucial differences in the theological and moral perspectives but also in the context and motives of their respective inventors. Furthermore, there are important differences in the kind and extent of participation required in each (e.g., the cultivation of fantasy in the participatory amoral milieu of Dungeons and Dragons versus the passive moral universe of Tolkien)."[\[3\]](#)

The worldview of D&D is anti-biblical because it presents a universe without a transcendent, good God. The deities of D&D are mythical, like the ancient pantheon of the Roman gods and goddesses.

## Morality

Because most FRPGs pit good against evil, some of their proponents point to the games as moral. But their overall morality is pragmatic (what works to get what you want) at best and amoral at worst.<sup>{4}</sup> “[T]he universes created in fantasy role-playing games generally tend to be confused on the issue of morality. Though they have borrowed many aspects of Tolkien’s ‘Middle Earth,’ the makers of Dungeons and Dragons and other FRP games have not created theistic ‘universes.’ Rather, their universes are generally governed by a multiplicity of gods and demigods. While in a theistic universe, good is determined by the attributes of God Himself, in FRP worlds good and evil are presented as equal and opposite impersonal poles, and the gods as well as the creatures may align themselves with either. Since there is no supreme God, and since good does not ultimately triumph over evil, many players eventually find themselves preferring to play evil roles; fewer demands are placed on them that way. “Cornerstone [magazine] quotes Rett Kipp, a college student who plays FRP games forty hours a week: “‘In D&D it’s better to be evil. You get more advantages being evil, and it’s easier to go on and not have to think of what to do and what not to do. If for some reason you had the idea in your head that you no longer trust someone, if you chop him down from behind as an evil character there’s no penalty for it...’”<sup>{5}</sup>

## Time-eating Monster

You can find any number of family members who have watched FRPGs gobble up their loved ones as they spend hours every day, or each week, engrossed in “their game,” either online or in real life. Students have flunked out of school because they didn’t go to class or do their homework. People have lost their jobs because they were more committed to playing their game than keeping their commitments at work. And nobody knows how many relationships have collapsed because people were

consumed by their games to the exclusion of all else. The popular online game “EverQuest” has been aptly nicknamed “EverCrack” by many players.[{6}](#)

Brian Onken writes, “In a world where more and more demands are made on our time and there seems less and less time available to accomplish the tasks at hand, Dungeons & Dragons (and other fantasy role-playing games) is indeed a creature with a voracious appetite. One of the main requirements of the game is time, and lots of it. Gary Gygax, the originator of Dungeons & Dragons, says: ‘the most extensive requirement is time.’[{7}](#)

“As advocates of the game get more involved it has a tendency to become a sort of time eating monster in and of itself. After playing the game with her family, a New West magazine researcher noted that, ‘Good or evil, it becomes a compulsive force in the lives of those who play.’[{8}](#) “What is the problem here? Well, we are exhorted to ‘walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil’ (Eph. 5:15, 16). In the light of such words, a fantasy game with a ferocious appetite for time is hardly the wise way to walk. To play one will require a tremendous amount of time, and since no one wants to play badly, perhaps such time consumption would best be exchanged for more profitable pursuits.”[{9}](#)

Bill Schnoebelen, who spent years in the occult before coming to Christ, says, “Remember, as a Christian, we are exhorted to bring ‘into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:5). How can this be done with so many hours being spent in a game which never mentions Christ and pushes the very sorcery He forbids?”[{10}](#)

## **Blurred Reality**

While many people have no trouble distinguishing between reality and fantasy, some FRPG players are sucked into what

could be called “reality distortion.” Players sometimes begin to think of their characters as real people with separate existences. (This is not limited to FRPG, however. I know of one person so caught up in the Left Behind series that she fell asleep thinking about the characters and action in the book she was reading, and upon waking, found herself praying for a character in crisis! And many fans of TV shows don’t really “get it” that the actor who plays a character has a real-life, different existence from the one he or she plays on TV. Not to mention the many letters the author of the Harry Potter books has received from children begging for acceptance into the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!)

One Dungeon Master (the person with the most control and power in a D&D game) noted that sometimes, when a player’s character gets killed, the game player sometimes suffers psychic shock and may go into depression.[{11}](#)

## **Magic and the Occult**

Whether the discussion is Harry Potter or D&D, the objection inevitably arises that this is make believe, it’s fiction, and fairy-tale magic doesn’t exist in the real world, so what’s the big deal?

Elliot Miller of CRI points out, “We must agree that there is a fundamental difference between actually attempting to work magic, and only pretending to do so (this point has not been sufficiently recognized in some of the Christian reviews). However real this distinction may be in the minds of the players, though, I feel no assurance that the spirit world will not respond when it is beckoned.”[{12}](#)

Others experienced in spiritual warfare have observed that the very real demonic realm are quite legalistic and literal: when anyone opens a door to them, they will come through it! Most people are completely oblivious to the reality of their choices opening a door to the demonic, but the consequences

catch up with them. This is one reason God has said that all forms of magic are an abomination to Him (Deut. 18) out of His loving desire to protect us.

Miller continues, "Though the possibility of actual contact with the satanic realm through role-playing cannot be denied, my greatest concern is that FRP involvement can create a predisposition toward actual occult activity. There are certain needs and desires which draw people to FRP in the first place. Many sensitive teenagers and adults continually bombarded with evolutionary theories and naturalistic philosophies, seek through FRP an escape from the cold, mechanistic view of the universe which they've been led to believe is 'reality.' Who wouldn't prefer an adventurous existence in a magical, purposeful world over the complex, impersonal 'real world' being pushed on young people by our educational institutions and the media?" [{13}](#)

I would suggest that that "predisposition toward actual occult activity" is indeed, a door propped open for demons to enter in. When players' views of magic and occultic exercises of power (even pretend) are shaped to see them in a positive, friendly light, they are accepting the very things God condemns. They are buying a lie, and intentionally or not, embracing rebellion against one of God's absolutes. Internalizing lies and rebellion provides a place for the Enemy to gain first a foothold (Eph. 4:27) and then a stronghold (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

So the occultic magic element of D&D and any other FRPG can be spiritually dangerous.

Bill Schnoebelen says, "Even if you have no intention to 'do magic' when you play D&D, you are immersing yourself in an alien, magic worldview which can gradually change the way you think about life and spiritual matters." [{14}](#)

But what about the magic in the works of Tolkien and Lewis?

That kind of fantasy magic is different because the worldview of the literature is biblical, and consistent with the world God made. Behind all the magic is a good, transcendent, holy God. Magic doesn't have a life and power of its own, as a force to be manipulated. Furthermore, the magic in the books of Tolkien and Lewis and other Christian fantasy writers is viewed passively by the reader. In D&D, the player is immersed in the story, and actively uses occult magic as part of the game.

## Lust for Power

Elliot Miller writes, "The human craving for power is also given an avenue for expression in FRP games. . . The various magical abilities that players exercise in these imaginary worlds can also whet their appetites for power. The same young man who is unable to prevent his parents from separating, or to make the cute blonde in his history class notice him, can, through FRP, conquer a kingdom or obtain immense treasure simply by casting a spell.

"What happens, then, when the inevitable occurs and this young man is befriended by someone who can introduce him to the occult world? He will discover that practices he has enjoyed in his fantasy world actually go on in the real world. He would like nothing more than to believe that he can divine the future, project his soul outside of his body, perform healings, or cast a spell and get results. The transition from make-believe sorcery to actual sorcery would not be all that difficult. Once he encounters the real power that exists in the occult world, he will happily accept the magical world view of occultism in place of the naturalism he had absorbed." [{15}](#)

Bill Schnobelen makes an excellent point about the lust for power: "Make no mistake about it, magic and sorcery ARE spiritual. It does not matter if they are 'make believe' magic or not. It is the mind that is the battleground. I just

recently had a D&D player who professed Christ tell me that everything he did had Christ in it, because Christ lived in him, even as he was playing D&D. While that may be true of a Christian, the question needs to be asked: is Christ pleased with what His servant is doing? "I used the metaphor of a porn role-playing game, where the participants play acted in various forms of sexual sin such as fornication, adultery or homosexuality. There was no actual sexual touching involved among the players, nor any nudity required. It was all in the mind. Would Jesus be pleased with that? "See, most of us can understand that concept better because most of us are more familiar with the power human sexuality can have over our minds. It is one of the most powerful forces God created within us. Yet, what most Christian gamers do not understand that magic is a kind of spiritual lust. Allowing the concepts of magic and sorcery into our minds awakens within us a kind of sexual itch that has no definable source or cause. It is, however subtle, an itch for power. Magic, at its root, is about power and about rebellion. It is about not liking how God runs the universe and thinking you can do a better job yourself.

"Now of course, we are not saying that everyone who plays D&D is going to end up a sorcerer or a Satanist. But we are saying that being exposed to all these ideas of magic to the degree that the game requires cannot but help have a significant impact on the minds of the players, no matter if they are Christian or unbeliever, and no matter what the 'template.'

"This is not just chess, football or bridge. This is a game that envelops the player in an entirely different fantasy world in which the power of magic and violence is pervasive. It is a game with a distinct and seductive spiritual worldview that is diametrically opposed to the Bible. Yes, sorcery appears in the Bible. But it is NEVER in the context of a good thing to do. It is always presented as something dangerous and utterly contrary to the will of God.

“The question still stands. Why would a Christian wish to involve themselves in such a game?”[{16}](#)

## Heart Issue

Onken and Miller offer this insightful analysis of the heart issue:

“[N]either fantasy nor fantasy role playing is wrong in and of itself. When carried out within the context of the Christian world view, it can serve as a useful and creative activity. We are creatures made in the image of an imaginative God, and we should consider it a privilege to possess and exercise this precious gift of imagination. But we must also realize our obligation before God to use this gift in a wholesome way, and to guard against any misuse.

“Discerning the difference between a wholesome use and misuse begins with the question, ‘To what end or for what purpose (is the imagination) being exercised in a particular direction?’ This certainly appears to be the question Jesus had in mind in His Sermon on the Mount when He stated, ‘Every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart’ (Matthew 5:28). “If Jesus taught that lust is tantamount to adultery (which God condemns see Deuteronomy 5:18, 22:13-27), would He approve of the deliberate cultivation and enjoyment of fantasy regarding other things that God condemns? Obviously not. To fantasize about those things that God has forbidden in His Word (immorality, the occult, the pursuit of other deities all elements of Dungeons and Dragons) is tantamount to doing them. This cannot be understood in any other way than a misuse of our God-given imagination.

“With the Bible as our guide, this is what we as Christians must guard against ‘so that [we] may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects’ (Colossians 1:10).”[{17}](#)



## Notes

1. "Fantasy Games People Play," Christian Resource Institute, <http://www.equip.org/free/DD401.pdf>
2. Ibid, p. 2.
3. Ibid., p. 2-3.
4. "Should a Christian Play Dungeons and Dragons?", William Schnoebelen, [www.chick.com/articles/frpg.asp](http://www.chick.com/articles/frpg.asp).
5. "Fantasy Games People Play," p. 7.
6. "When Games Stop Being Fun," April 12, 2002, [http://news.com.com/2100-1040\\_3-881673.html](http://news.com.com/2100-1040_3-881673.html)
7. Gary Gygax, Dungeons and Dragons, basic manual. TSR Hobbies, Inc., 1979, 3. Quoted in "Fantasy Games People Play," p. 4.
8. Moira Johnston, "It's Only a Game Or Is It?", New West, (August 25, 1980), 34. Quoted in "Fantasy Games People Play," p. 4.
9. Fantasy Games People Play, p. 4.
10. Should a Christian Play Dungeons and Dragons?, op.cit.
11. John Eric Holmes, "Confessions of a Dungeon Master," *Psychology Today* (November 1980), 89. Cited in "Fantasy Games People Play," p. 4.
12. Fantasy Games People Play, p. 5.
13. Ibid.
14. Should Christians Play Dungeons and Dragons? Op cit.
15. Fantasy Games People Play, p. 5-6.
16. Should Christians Play Dungeons and Dragons? Op cit.
17. Ibid., p. 3.

# Terrorist Attack in London

July 7, 2005

The recent terrorist attack in London once again reminds us that we are still engaged in a war on terrorism. For some reason we seem to forget this fundamental fact. The March 2004 bombing in Madrid was a reminder. The July terrorist attack in London was another. Yet there is abundant evidence that we still have not learned some fundamental lessons in our war on terrorism.

I was on two different talk shows (one as host, one as guest), and I was struck by the number of times I heard comments about bringing the terrorists to justice. But let me ask a basic question: is a terrorist a common criminal?

If terrorists are only common criminals, then biblically speaking, they should merely be dealt with by their host governments. In Romans 13, the Apostle Paul says, "he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil."

Paul's teaching on government shows that criminals are those who do evil and threaten the civil peace. Any outside threat to the existence of the state is not a criminal threat but an act of war which is also to be dealt with by the government.

In other words, criminals threaten the state from within, while foreign armies threaten the state from outside. In the case of seeking domestic peace, Paul outlines how governments

will approve of good works, but that governments should bring fear to those who are wrongdoers.

When terrorists attack, we should not view them as criminals but as foreign soldiers who attempt to threaten the very existence of the American government or the British government. To borrow a phrase from President Bush, we should not try to "bring them to justice," we should "bring justice to them."

Another important lesson we must learn is the need to place our governments on a war footing. That is, there are certain steps governments must take if we are to truly win the war on terrorism. At the outset, we need to develop the mindset that we are fighting a war with radical Muslim terrorists (often called Islamofascists). We can't negotiate with them as some of the callers to my talk show suggested. They are enemy combatants willing to die for their perverted religious views.

Governments shouldn't negotiate with them or bring them to justice. Governments must fight a war on terrorism. This requires governments to press their advantages over terrorists in terms of military hardware, intelligence gathering, and technological applications. It also demands that our governmental leaders think clearly about what terrorism is and how it is being advanced by Muslim terrorists around the world.

The terrorist attack in London (as well as the bombing in Madrid) also reminds us of the role each of us can play in stopping terrorism. Each involved citizen multiplies the eyes and ears of the government. These attacks were not high tech attacks using nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. They used bombs and timers. An alert citizen might have discovered these bombs before they went off.

To prevent future attacks, we must pay attention to our surroundings and those around us. That doesn't mean we need to

be paranoid of everything and suspicious of everyone. But it does mean that we need to be alert.

One terrorist expert I interviewed said that a successful terrorist attack occurs when all the pieces of the puzzle come together. Terrorism is like a jigsaw puzzle with lots of pieces that all must be present for success. This includes funding, organizers, explosives, location, a plan of operation, research, a dry run, trusted people, etc. Alert citizens who report suspicious activity can help law enforcement thwart the plans of terrorists.

Countering terrorism in the 21st century will not be easy, but understanding, resolve, and alertness are key ingredients in our success. This is our generation's challenge. We need to meet it with wisdom and boldness.

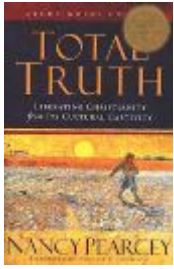
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## **Total Truth – The Importance of a Christian Worldview**

*Total Truth is a book about worldview, its place in every Christian's life, and its prominent role in determining our impact on a culture that has hooked itself to the runaway locomotive of materialism and is headed for the inevitable cliff of despair and destruction.*

## **Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity**



“This is a book of unusual importance by an author of unusual ability.”[\[1\]](#) This is a strong recommendation from any reviewer, but when the reviewer is best-selling author and Darwinian critic, Phillip Johnson, people pay attention. As well they should. Nancy Pearcey’s *Total Truth* is probably the most significant book of 2004. I pray its influence and impact will be felt for decades.

This is a book about worldview, its place in every Christian’s life, and its prominent role in determining our impact on a culture that has hooked itself to the runaway locomotive of materialism and is headed for the inevitable cliff of despair and destruction.

While the concept of worldview has wiggled its way into the consciousness of some in the Christian community, it remains largely a buzzword used in the context of political discussions and fundraising for Christian parachurch organizations. But politics only reflects the culture, so working to change the political landscape without changing the way we think is not as productive as some thought it would be.

One of the extreme threats to Christianity in this country is the effect of the culture on our youth and, consequently, on the future of the church in America. Pearcey says, “As Christian parents, pastors, teachers, and youth group leaders, we constantly see young people pulled down by the undertow of powerful cultural trends. If all we give them is a ‘heart’ religion, it will not be strong enough to counter the lure of attractive but dangerous ideas... Training young people to develop a Christian mind is no longer an option; it is part of their necessary survival equipment.”[\[2\]](#)

Here at Probe Ministries we have recognized this threat for all of our thirty-two years of ministry. We continue the fight with our Mind Games conferences, Web site, and radio ministries. We address young people particularly in our week-long summer [Mind Games Camp](#). Students are exposed to the competing worldviews and challenged to think critically about their own faith, to be able to give a reason for the hope that they have with gentleness and respect.

In the rest of this article we will look at the four parts of Pearcey's *Total Truth*. In Part 1, she documents the attempts to restrict the influence of Christianity by instituting the current prisons of the split between sacred and secular, private and public, and fact and value. In Part 2 she deftly shows the importance of Creation to any worldview and summarizes the new findings of science which strongly support Intelligent Design. In Part 3, she peels back the shroud of history to discover how evangelicalism got itself into this mess. And in Part 4, she revisits Francis Schaeffer's admonition that the heart of worldview thinking lies in its personal application, putting all of life under the Lordship of Christ.

## **The Sacred/Secular Split**

In the first part of the book, Pearcey explores what has become known as the sacred/secular split. That is to say that things of religion, or the sacred, have no intersection with the secular. Another way of putting it is to refer to the split as a private/public split. We all make personal choices in our lives, but these should remain private, such as our religious or moral choices. One should never allow personal or private choices to intersect with your public life. That would be shoving your religion down someone else's throat, as the popular saying goes.

One more phrase of expressing the same dichotomy is the

fact/value split. We all have values that we are entitled to, but our values are personal and unverifiable choices among many options. These values should not try to intersect with the facts, that is, things everyone knows to be true. The creation/evolution discussion is a case in point. We are told repeatedly that evolution is science or fact and creation is based on a religious preference or value. The two cannot intersect.

The late Christopher Reeve made this split quite evident in a speech to a group of students at Yale University on the topic of embryonic stem cell research. He said, "When matters of public policy are debated, no religions should have a place at the table."[\[3\]](#) In other words keep your sacred, private values to yourself. In the public square, we can only discuss the facts in a secular context.

Far too many Christians have bought into this line of thinking or have been covered into it. Pearcey tells of a man who was a deacon in his church, taught Sunday School, tithed generously and was looked upon as a model Christian. Yet his job at the law firm was to investigate the contracts with clients no longer wanted by the firm to see what loopholes were available to get them out of the contract. He saw no link between his Christian faith and his work.[\[4\]](#)

We fall into these thinking traps because we don't understand worldviews in general and the Christian worldview in particular. Pearcey outlines a threefold test of any worldview to help get a grasp on what they mean for thought and life: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. Every worldview has some story of where everything came from – Creation. Then each worldview proceeds to tell us that something is wrong with human society – the Fall – and then each worldview offers a solution – Redemption. Using this tool you will be better able to diagnose a worldview and whether it speaks the truth.

## The Importance of Beginnings

The second part of Pearcey's book discusses the vitally important controversy over evolution and how it is taught in our schools. There is a clear philosophical filibuster masquerading as science in classrooms around the country.

In the opening chapter of this section, she tells the all too familiar story of a religious young man who is confronted with evolution in the seventh grade. Seeing the immediate contradiction between this theory and the Bible, the young man receives no help from teachers or clergy. He is left thinking that his "faith" has no answers to his questions. By the time he finishes school in Harvard, he is a committed atheist.[{5}](#)

The same story is repeated thousands of times every year. The faith of many young people has been wrecked on the shoals of Darwinism. Whoever has the power to define the story of creation in a culture is the *de facto* priesthood and largely determines what the dominant worldview will be.

On *Probe* we have discussed the problems of evolution and the evidence for Intelligent Design numerous times. Now Pearcey makes the case that this is far more than a scientific discussion. It is at the heart of the culture war we are immersed in. Darwinism has had a far reaching impact on American thought, and we need a better grasp of the issue to better fight the battle we are in.

To show the prevalence of naturalistic Darwinian thinking Pearcey quotes from a Berenstain Bears book on nature titled *The Bears Nature Guide*. "As the book opens, the Bear family invites us to go on a nature walk; after turning a few pages, we come to a two-page spread with a dazzling sunrise and the words spelled out in capital letters: Nature... is all that IS, or WAS, or EVER WILL BE."[{6}](#) Clearly this is presented as scientific fact and should not be doubted.



Pearcey guides the reader through a well presented description of the major problems with the evidence concerning Darwinism. But more importantly, she clearly shows that the problem is not just the evidence. Most Darwinists accept the meager evidence because their worldview demands it. Naturalism requires a naturalistic story of creation, and since they are convinced of naturalism, some form of evolution must be true. She quotes a Kansas State University professor as saying, "Even if all the data point to an intelligent designer, such an hypothesis is excluded from science because it is not naturalistic." [\[7\]](#)

Pearcey goes on to show that Darwinism has continued to progressively influence nearly all realms of intellectual endeavor. From biology to anthropology to ethics to law to philosophy to even theology, Darwinism shows its muscle. Darwinism is indeed a universal acid that systematically cuts through all branches of human thought. We ignore it at our peril.

## **How Did We Get in This Mess?**

Nancy Pearcey titles the third section of her book, "How We Lost Our Minds." She begins with a typical story of conversion from sin of a young man named Denzel. As Denzel seeks to grow and understand his newfound faith, he is stymied by leaders who can't answer his questions and is told to just have faith in the simple things.

When Denzel gets a job, he is confused by those from other religions and cults who all seem to have answers for people's questions. Only the Christians are unable to defend themselves from skeptics and believers of other stripes. Eventually he finds work at a Christian bookstore and finds the nectar he has been hungry for. But he had to look and look hard. Denzel has learned that many in the evangelical movement have a largely anti-intellectual bias.

Where did that come from? Today one can still hear preachers of various stripes make fun of those of higher learning whether philosophers, scientists, or even theologians. The root of this anti-intellectualism is found in the early days of our country. America was founded by idealists and individualists. Many had suffered religious persecution and were looking for someplace to practice their faith apart from ecclesiastical authority. The democratic ideals of the original colonies and the newly independent United States of America seemed like just the right place.

When the early American seminaries became infected with the theological liberalism spawned by the Enlightenment, many rebelled against any form of church hierarchy, believing it couldn't be trusted. With the opening of the great frontiers, great opportunities for evangelism sprouted at the same time. Out of this came the First Great Awakening. The early revivalists directed their message to individuals, exhorting them to make independent decisions, Jonathan Edwards being a notable exception. Emotional and experiential conversions brought bigger crowds. Some began to even see a formula that brought about large numbers of conversions.

There arose a suspicion that Christianity had become hopelessly corrupted sometime after the apostolic age. The task at hand was to leapfrog back 1,800 years to restore the original purity of the church. Suddenly, the great works of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and others were seen as unnecessary. [\[8\]](#) Evangelicals were cut off from their historical and theological roots. The evangelical movement as a whole became focused on rugged American self-interest and self-assertion, a strong principle of Darwinian naturalism.

This is still evident today in the prevalence of church-hoppers. Many view their church through an individualistic grid which says if the church leadership doesn't do things the way I would prefer and doesn't listen to me, I will take my family and go elsewhere.

The roots of anti-intellectualism run deep and find surprisingly fresh support from Darwinian naturalism. So how do we recover?

## Living It Out

In the final chapter of *Total Truth*, Pearcey rings out a call to authenticity, not just with respect to the intellectual underpinnings of the Christian worldview, but also to how we live it out.

On the final page she cites a Zogby/Forbes poll that asked respondents what they would most like to be known for. Intelligence? Good looks? Sense of humor? Unexpectedly, fully one half of all respondents said they would most like to be known for being authentic.

Pearcey concludes: “In a world of spin and hype, the postmodern generation is searching desperately for something real and authentic. They will not take Christians seriously unless our churches and parachurch organizations demonstrate an authentic way of life – unless they are communities that exhibit the character of God in their relationships and mode of living.”[\[9\]](#)

For most of the chapter Pearcey highlights examples of both sides of this call, people and ministries who claim Christ but use the world’s naturalistic methods, particularly in fund-raising, marketing, and focusing on a personality rather than the message. She also points to people such as Richard Wurmbrand and Francis Schaeffer who lived out their Christian worldview without flashy results and hyped conferences and campaigns.

Most of us at Probe Ministries were heavily influenced by Francis Schaeffer, his ministry at L’Abri Switzerland, and his books. Many Christians whose youth spanned the turbulent ‘60s and ‘70s found Schaeffer a glowing beacon of truth and

relevance in a world turned upside down by protests, drugs, war, crime, racism, and skepticism. Essentially, Schaeffer believed the gospel to be total truth. If that was the case, then living by a Christian worldview ought to be able to give real answers to real questions from real people.

We believe that what the postmodern world is searching for, what will most satisfy its craving for authenticity, is the person of Jesus Christ. They can only see Him in our lives and our answers to real questions. Our Web site at Probe.org is filled with the total truth of the Christian worldview. In our ["Answers to E-Mail" section](#) you can see authenticity lived out as we answer real questions and attacks with truth, respect, and gentleness.

We're certainly not perfect. We have much to learn and correct as we search out the answers to today's questions. We struggle with the funding and marketing of our ministry using methods that work but do not manipulate, coerce, or misrepresent who we are and what we do. Nancy Pearcey has challenged all of us in ministry, no less those of us at Probe Ministries, to always put Jesus first, people second, and ministry third.

## Notes

1. Phillip Johnson, in the Foreword to Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 11.
2. Pearcey, 19.
3. Christopher Reeve quoted by Pearcey, 22.
4. Pearcey, 97-98.
5. Ibid., 153-154.
6. Ibid., 157.
7. Ibid, 168.
8. Ibid., 280-281.
9. Ibid., 378.

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# The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands: A Christian View

*Sue Bohlin looks at this important book from a distinctly Christian perspective. Filtering the advice through a biblical worldview increases the purity and strength of the message on how to minister effectively to your husband.*

## Why We Need This Book

Talk show host Dr. Laura Schlessinger has written a book that is improving thousands of marriages: *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands*.<sup>{1}</sup> We need this book because millions of wives either don't know how to love their husbands wisely and well, or they're too self-centered to see it as important. Dr. Laura credits this dismal condition to forty years of feminist philosophy, "with its condemnation of just about everything male as evil, stupid, and oppressive, and the denigration of female and male roles in families."<sup>{2}</sup> While the women's movement certainly had a hand to play in the disintegration of relationships and the family, I believe the core cause is our sinful self-centeredness, just as the Bible says.<sup>{3}</sup>

Which is why we need help, and God instructs older women to train younger women to love their husband and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.<sup>{4}</sup> *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* is a great resource for learning these important values and skills.

God gives us great power as women. Dr. Laura says, "Men are borne of women and spend the rest of their lives yearning for a woman's acceptance and approval. . . . Men admittedly are

putty in the hands of a woman they love. Give him direct communication, respect, appreciation, food and good lovin', and he'll do just about anything you wish—foolish or not.”[\[5\]](#)

We'll be looking at these aspects of the proper care and feeding of husbands in this article, starting with a man's need for *direct communication*.

- We can improve on communication by doing it less. God made us verbal creatures, which can frustrate men with the overwhelming amount of our words. Instead of expecting her husband to be a girlfriend (and men make wonderful husbands, but not girlfriends), the wise wife selects for true connecting value, gives the bottom line first, and chooses her timing well.

- Men make terrible mind readers, so be direct. Dropping subtle hints doesn't work with most men, and it doesn't mean a man is insensitive, uncaring, or oblivious.

- Spell out whether you want help and advice, or if you're just venting. God made men to want to be our heroes, so understand you can frustrate him if he can't fix what's hurting you because all you want is someone to listen.

- And finally, take whatever he says at face value. Women tend to overanalyze men when they are just not that complicated.

## **Respect**

A listener to Dr. Laura's radio show named Edgar wrote, "There are a few things that men want so bad they would do anything for it. I think a good number of men want respect more than love. They like to feel they have some power. I nearly cry when you tell a woman caller to respect her husband. There is so much selfishness in the world—in marriages. Prosperity has allowed women to be so independent, and thus so selfish. I always feel as though I come last—my feelings come last, my

needs come last.”{6}

“A good number of men want respect more than love.” God knew this when He made us. His commands to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:33 reflects each one’s deepest needs: “Each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” Dr. Emerson Eggerichs of [LoveandRespect.com](http://LoveandRespect.com) points out that this verse commands a husband to love his wife. Why? She needs love like she needs air to breathe. This same verse commands a wife to respect her husband. Why? He needs respect like he needs air to breathe.{7}

- Respect means treating someone in a way that builds him up and doesn’t tear him down, never denigrating or attacking.{8}
- Respect means always treating the other person with the dignity they deserve as a person made in the image of God.
- Respect means grasping that a man’s needs and wants are every bit as valid and important as a woman’s needs and wants.
- Respect means not venting to others, *especially* the children. One woman wrote to Dr. Laura, “No emotional outlet is worth damaging my husband’s reputation.”{9}

There are three A’s that men long for from their wives: attention, affection, and affirmation. Respect involves paying attention to what they do simply because they’re the ones doing it.

Respect means allowing the other person to be different and do things differently than you. One repentant wife told Dr. Laura, “And in the end, it doesn’t much matter that they eat PBJ sandwiches for breakfast, lunch and dinner for a day or that one tooth brushing gets overlooked or whatever little thing that used to set me off!”{10}

One way to give respect is to give grace instead of resenting

the things he does that complicate your life (like leaving drinking glasses in the living room or clothing on a chair). Ask yourself, “Is he *intentionally* doing this to bug me? To make my life difficult? If he were to die tomorrow, what wouldn’t I give to have him back leaving these things out?”

## Appreciation

Ask any woman what she wants, and near the top of her list she’ll tell you, “I want to be acknowledged and appreciated for the things I do.” Well, men want the same thing!

A man named Evan wrote to Dr. Laura: “My wife feels that if she doesn’t remind me again and again, something won’t get done. But the fact is, it makes me feel like her child and that Mommy needs to check up on me. It’s degrading. I want to be admired. I want to be acknowledged for being the breadwinner and making sure that we are all well taken care of. My greatest pleasure is when I feel like her hero. Like her ‘man.’ Not her boy.”[\[11\]](#)

It doesn’t matter what a husband’s primary love language is, every man wants to be shown appreciation for who he is and what he does.

I love to suggest to young wives and mothers, “Keep a gratitude journal to help you be on the lookout for the things your husband does that you appreciate. Every night, write down three things you noticed. And then *tell him* the kinds of things that are in your book!”

- Thank him for going to work every morning even when he doesn’t feel like it.
- Thank him for being faithful to you.
- Thank him for loving you.
- Thank him for giving you children—or even desiring to.



- Thank him for taking out the garbage, and changing the oil in your car, and mowing the yard.
- Thank him for bringing home his paycheck and not spending it on gambling or booze or drugs or women.

And then there's the opposite of appreciation. The universal complaint of men who e-mailed Dr. Laura about her book "was that their wives criticize, complain, nag, rarely compliment or express appreciation, are difficult to satisfy, and basically are not as nice to them as they'd be to a stranger ringing their doorbell at three A.M.!"[{12}](#) So allow me to make some suggestions:

- Request, don't demand. Demanding is rude and disrespectful.
- Don't nag. If you have to ask more than once, ask as if it were the first time you were making the request.
- Keep your mouth shut about things that don't matter. Ask yourself, is this the hill you want to die on?
- Don't be controlling—which is micromanaging. Dr. Laura wrote, "When women micromanage, their husbands give up trying to please them, and then the wives complain that their men don't do anything for them."[{13}](#)

Proverbs says, "Kind words are like honey—sweet to the soul and healthy for the body."[{14}](#) (This is truer no place more than in marriage.) Let your words be kind and full of appreciation.

## Support

A man named Roy wrote to Dr. Laura with some good advice for wives: "If you can't accentuate the positive, at least acknowledge it. The world is full of messages to men that

there are standards we don't meet. There is always another man who is more handsome, more virile, or more athletic than we are. None of that matters if the most important person in our life looks up to us, accepts us as we are, and loves us even though we aren't perfect. . . . All I know is that the husband who has a wife who supports him and praises him for the positive things he does is the envy of all the other men who have to live with criticism, sarcasm, and constant reminders of their failures." {15}

Men desperately want and need the support of their wives. This is reflected in what God reveals in His Word when He says, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." {16} And through the apostle Paul, God instructs wives to relate to their husbands in a way that meets this need when He says, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord." {17}

Submission is basically giving support with a willing, cooperative heart.

A wife's submission includes knowing her gifts and strengths, and using them to serve her husband and family.

Service has a bad name, but both husbands and wives are called to serve God first and then each other; husbands are called to sacrificially love and serve their wives with Jesus as their pattern. {18}

So what does support look like?

- Believing in him. Telling him, "You have what it takes." Being his #1 fan.
- Cultivating a cooperative heart.
- Being generous and openhearted—willing to use your gifts and strengths to help him succeed.
- Understanding the importance of making him look good: never

saying anything negative in public.

- Creating a home that's a safe haven from the world.
- Having a warm heart with a positive, cheerful demeanor. Women set the temperature of the home; we are thermostats, not thermometers, of the family. (On the other hand, Proverbs says "A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping on a rainy day; restraining her is like restraining the wind or grasping oil with the hand."[{19}](#))
- Being interested in him and his life.
- Showing thoughtfulness. What does he like? Do it.
- And though by no means exhaustive, it also means being a person of faithfulness and integrity. That means keeping your promises and being dependable. As Proverbs 31 puts it, "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value."[{20}](#)

## **Good Lovin'**

Dr. Laura writes that men need to feel the approval, acceptance and attachment from their women that comes from physical intimacy.[{21}](#) For women, emotional intimacy leads to physical intimacy. For men, it's the other way around; physical intimacy is the key to opening their hearts.

A man named Chris writes: "I don't understand why women don't understand that sex is a man's number one need for his wife. It's not just the act and sensation of pleasure, but it's the acceptance by a woman of her man. There's a communion that happens during intercourse that will bond a man to his woman, and he in turn will then begin to give of himself emotionally to her."[{22}](#)

Wives can discover that giving themselves sexually to their husbands with a warm, open-hearted, loving spirit, can be the

most effective encouragement to getting their husbands to open up emotionally.

“What attracts men to women is their femininity, and femininity isn’t only about appearance, it’s also about behaviors. Looking womanly and behaving sweetly and flirtatiously are gifts wives give to their husbands.” We see this modeled in the Song of Solomon, where the King’s bride displays her feminine charms in a holy seduction of her husband, and the way she tells him what she loves about his body. [{23}](#)

Instead, our culture has things backward; many unmarried girls and women flaunt their bodies with a total lack of modesty or propriety. Once they marry, it’s flannel nightgowns, wool socks, and no makeup.

Dr. Laura calls wives to give themselves sexually to their husbands, even when they don’t feel like it, as an act of love. It’s really no different, she points out, than the fact that they expect their husbands to go to work and earn money to support the family even on days they don’t feel like it.

She’s echoing what God said in 1 Corinthians 7 about husband and wife both fulfilling their marital duty to each other because each one’s body belongs not just to themselves but to each other. He also said not to deprive each other for extended periods of time lest we be tempted.

Consider the wisdom of radio listener Herb: “Sex is to a husband what conversation is to a wife. When a wife deprives her husband of sex for days, even weeks on end, it is tantamount to his refusing to talk to her for days, even weeks. Think of it that way, wives, and realize what a deleterious impact enforced sexual abstinence has on a good man who is determined to remain faithful.” [{24}](#)

I can’t recommend *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands* highly enough. In fact, I gave a copy to my new daughter-in-

law! Let me close with one more piece of wisdom from Dr. Laura: “[M]en are simple creatures who come from a woman, are nurtured and brought up by a woman, and yearn for the continued love, admiration and approval of a woman. . . Women need to better appreciate the magnitude of their power and influence over men, and not misuse or abuse it.”<sup>{25}</sup> Amen!

## Notes

1. Laura Schlessinger, *The Proper Care and Feeding of Husbands*, New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
2. Schlessinger, 3.
3. Jeremiah 17:9
4. Titus 2:4
5. Schlessinger, xvii.
6. Schlessinger, 1.
7. <http://www.loveandrespect.com/Articles/article.asp?aid=43&cat=1>
8. Schlessinger, 157.
9. Schlessinger, 159.
10. Schlessinger, 158.
11. Schlessinger, 31.
12. Schlessinger, 37-38.
13. Schlessinger, 57.
14. Prov. 16:24
15. Schlessinger, 47-48.
16. Gen. 2:18.
17. Eph. 5:22, 24.
18. Eph. 2:25, 28.
19. Prov. 27:15.
20. Prov. 31:11.
21. Schlessinger, 25.
22. Schlessings, 129.
23. Song of Solomon 5:10-16
24. Schlessinger, 119.
25. Schlessinger. 10.

# The Five People You Meet in Heaven – A Biblical Worldview Critique

Written by Patrick Zukeran

*Dr. Zukeran presents a biblical worldview critique of the story by Mitch Albom, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. Albom's story presents some interesting ideas about the afterlife, but falls far short of expressing a complete understanding of God's description of heaven. It misses the importance of being created in God's image, being redeemed to be able to spend eternity with our Creator, and the fellowship with God and all the saints for eternity.*

## Brief Synopsis

Eddie lives an insignificant life as a maintenance man for the rides at the Ruby Pier amusement park. One day a mechanical failure causes a fatal accident. Eddie rescues a young girl from her death but in the effort, he is killed. This is when the adventure begins.

Eddie enters heaven and discovers it is not a garden but a place where he will meet five people whose lives intersected with his in some significant way on earth, some readily known to Eddie and some unknown to him. These five explain the meaning of Eddie's life and the purpose of heaven. Through this best-seller fictional story, *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, author Mitch Albom teaches us his understanding of the

meaning of life.

In heaven, Eddie learns five key lessons from the five individuals. First, every life is interconnected so each person impacts others throughout his or her lifetime in ways that may not be recognized. Second, we should live sacrificing for others, for such acts inevitably lead to good outcomes. Third, forgiveness is necessary to find inner peace. Fourth, love is a powerful virtue that lasts eternally. And finally, our life, as insignificant as it may seem, has a purpose.

Heaven is a place where we find inner peace with ourselves when we learn these lessons. Through this process, we are cleansed of negative thoughts and scars we carried in our lifetime and find true inner peace. After this, we will choose our heavenly dwelling. There we will wait for newcomers whose lives intersected ours on earth. We will be one of the five people they will meet as they learn the meaning of their life on earth.

What accounts for the popularity of Albom's work? He addresses two life questions that every individual wrestles with and desperately seeks answers to: What is the meaning of my existence? and What happens after death? In a creative way, here is a story that offers significance to each person's life and hope beyond the grave.

Albom is an excellent writer and is sincere in his effort. This story causes each one of us to wrestle with these key questions of our existence and eternal destiny, issues many choose to ignore but must inevitably face. He also teaches some valuable life lessons. For these reasons, the story is enjoyable and thought provoking.

But after reading the story, I found that Albom's answers fall short of providing satisfactory solutions to every person's dilemma. In some ways he gets us closer to the answer, but never really gets there. Christians will find that he gives us

some appetizers, but fails to deliver the main dish. In what follows, I will present a biblical critique of this story and explain how Algom scratches the surface but never finishes the quest for meaning, significance, and eternal hope.

## The Quest for Meaning

What is the meaning of my existence? Does my ordinary life make a difference? Will I look back on my life with regret, feeling that I contributed nothing significant in my lifetime? These are issues most people ask throughout their lifetime and seek answers for.

In *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*, Mitch Algom teaches that one does not have to be famous or powerful to impact the lives of others. Every person who has understanding can know his or her life was worthwhile.

In Algom's story, the meaning of life comes from understanding that everyone's life is interconnected. Therefore, even small decisions and actions we take can significantly affect the lives of others. In a CBS interview, Algom stated, "I think the meaning of life is that we're all kind of connected to one another. I'm living proof of the influence that one person can have on other people. Look at what Morrie did for me talking to me. And I wrote a book to try to pay his medical bills and went from one person to another person and people come up and say your book changed my life. How did that happen? I'm convinced that everybody has an effect on everyone."[\[1\]](#)

It is true that our life does affect others, some in very significant ways. However, we are still left empty at the end of the novel because Algom's proposed solution falls short of providing ultimate meaning for our existence.

In the story, the main character Eddie learns in heaven that he impacted the lives of others both positively and negatively, often unintentionally. Knowing our life led to



another's tragedy or greater enjoyment still begs the question, "So what?" It may feel good temporarily to know I made a difference, but that will not bring everlasting satisfaction. Why should we care if our lives affected others? Before we can answer the question, "What is the meaning of life?" we must first answer the question, "Why were we created?"

If we are a cosmic accident as Darwinian evolutionary theory teaches, there is no intended purpose for our existence. Therefore, our lives have no ultimate meaning, and impacting the lives of others is meaningless, for our final destiny is extinction.

If God created us for a purpose, then we need to find out why He created us. The answer to the meaning of life is directly tied to the origins question. Since Algom does not answer the origin question, he cannot provide an adequate answer for the meaning of life question. The Bible teaches that we were created by God to love Him, love others, and fulfill His calling upon our lives. Any answer that does not include God as a centerpiece of the answer will fall short, and Algom basically leaves God out of his version of heaven.

## **Algom's Heaven**

Could the traditional Christian view of heaven be wrong? Algom gives us a very different picture. Algom developed his idea from a story his uncle, Edward Beitchman, told him when he was a child. One night his uncle was lying near death and woke up to see his deceased relatives standing at the foot of the bed. When asked, "What did you do?" his uncle responded, "I told them to get lost. I wasn't ready for them yet." [\[2\]](#) Algom remembered this story and began to develop his concept of heaven for the story.

Algom states, "Somewhere, swimming in my head, was the image

my uncle had given me around that table, a handful of people waiting for you when you die. And I began to explore this simple concept: what if heaven was not some lush Garden of Eden, but a place where you had your life explained to you by people who were in it—five people—maybe you knew them, maybe you didn't, but in some way you were touched by them and changed forever, just as you inevitably touched people while on earth and changed them, too.”

His idea that heaven is a reunion with five people who explain the meaning of your life is masterfully pictured in this work. With each encounter the main character Eddie is taught a new lesson that puts the pieces of his earthly life together so that it begins to make sense. Some lessons bring joy, others bring remorse, but the pain is a cleansing process that results in inner peace. After this, individuals will choose their happiest moment on earth and that will be their eternal abode where they await the opportunity to teach a recently deceased newcomer the meaning of that person's life.

If heaven was a place similar to Albom's story, we would be very disappointed, for it is too small and shallow. Our souls are much bigger than this. How quickly we would get bored once we discovered the impact our life made and then spent eternity in a heaven we dream up for our pleasure. Earthly pleasure becomes painful when we get too much of it. The heaven described in the Bible is very different from this earth. Our joy is not wrapped in repeating earthly pleasures but is found in a person, Jesus Christ, who is the center of all creation. Our present earth is fallen and suffers the effects of sin. In heaven, sin and its consequences are not present.

God is the main focus in heaven, but unfortunately, in Albom's story, God plays a very small role. Psalm 16:11 states, “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” Only a heaven created by and centered on God will be big enough for our soul.

## Do All People Go to Heaven?

Albom's bestseller presents a new and creative vision of heaven. I agree with Albom that there is a heaven and an existence beyond the grave. However, it appears that Albom implies that everyone will go to heaven, and with this I disagree.

Albom portrays realistic characters in his story, none of whom lived a perfect life. All are guilty of some sin and negative behaviors that have consequences, some greater than others. There is some remorse when individuals in heaven learn how their actions caused negative results, but there is not a just payment for their sin.

Albom appears to assume that everyone will eventually find peace when they learn their lessons from the five people they meet. Although this is a comforting note, it is not what the Bible teaches. Albom's story doesn't reveal the dilemma facing all human beings: sin, failing to perfectly live up to God's perfect standard. It is because of sin that the Bible teaches that not everyone can enter heaven. Jesus states in Matthew 7:13, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The reason is found in the biblical understanding of human nature and God's nature. Man is sinful while God is holy, perfect, and without sin. The Bible teaches that all are guilty of sin and cannot enter into the eternal presence of a holy and just God. Romans 6:23 states, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." What is required is a perfect savior who will pay the price for sin. Albom does not deal with the true nature of God, man, heaven's purpose, man's dilemma of sin, and the solution that God freely offers.

The Bible also teaches that there is a price for rejecting God's gift of grace, Jesus Christ. Jesus states, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:17-18). All who reject Christ cannot stand before a holy God, and will be separated from Him eternally in Hell.

Fiction can often teach principles that are true. However in this work, Albom's foundational idea of heaven misses the mark because he does not present a proper understanding of human nature and God's holiness.

## **The People You Will We Meet In Heaven**

Who will we really meet in heaven? Our answer is revealed in the Bible, the Word of God. The Bible is proven to be God's inspired word through miraculous confirmation and the testimony of Jesus Christ the Son of God. Jesus confirmed His claim to be God through His miraculous life and resurrection, and He affirms the authority of the Bible. The truth about heaven then is revealed not in a novel but in this divine revelation.

The next people we will meet in heaven are the saints of all the ages past (Rev. 7:9 and 19:1). There will be more than five; there will be a multitude! Along with them will be the angelic host.

Will we understand the meaning and see the impact of our life on earth? We will know everything about our life and much more. **We will come to a full understanding of God's plan for all of creation.** Only then will we see how our lives played a role in God's overall plan. We will see things from a renewed perspective because our minds will be transformed and freed

from the limitations that resulted from sin. 1 Cor. 13:12 states, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." If we knew the glory of the real heaven, we would say Albom's, and any human attempt to describe heaven, is too small.

## Notes

1. CBSNews.com, The Early Show, "Five People You Meet In Heaven," Sept. 25, 2003, <http://www.cbsnews.com>.
2. The Five People You Meet in Heaven Web site, <http://www.albomfivepeople.com/abouteddie.htm>, 5/25/2005

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# Media and Discernment

*We live in the midst of a media storm, and Christians need to develop discernment in their consumption of various media (TV, movies, music, videos, computer, etc).*

## Media Exposure

We live in the midst of a media storm. Every day we are confronted by more media messages than a previous generation could even imagine.

For example, more homes have TV sets (98 percent) than have indoor plumbing. In the average home the television set is on for more than six hours a day. Children spend more time watching television than in any other activity except sleep.[{1}](#) Nearly half of elementary school children and 60 percent of adolescents have television sets in their bedrooms.[{2}](#)

But that is just the beginning of the media exposure we encounter. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* estimates that the average teenager listens to 10,500 hours of music during their teen years.[{3}](#) Families are watching more movies than every before since they can now watch them on cable and satellite and rent or buy movies in video and DVD format.

The amount of media exposure continues to increase every year. Recent studies of media usage reveal that people spend more than double the time with media than they think they do. This amounts to nearly twelve hours a day total. And because of media multitasking, summing all media use by medium results in a staggering fifteen hours per day.[{4}](#)

Student use of the Internet has been increasing to all-time levels. A study done at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst found the following:[{5}](#)

- Nearly 90 percent of the students access the Internet every day.
- Students spent over ten hours per week using IM (instant messaging).
- Those same students spent over twenty-eight hours per week on the Internet.
- Nearly three-fourths spent more time online than they intended.

In addition to concerns about the quantity of media input are even greater concerns about the quality of media input. For

example, the average child will witness over 200,000 acts of violence on television, including 16,000 murders before he or she is 18 years old. And consider that the average child views 30,000 commercials each year.

A study of adolescents (ages 12-17) showed that watching sex on TV influences teens to have sex. Youths were more likely to initiate intercourse as well as other sexual activities.[{6}](#)

Over 1000 studies (including reports from the Surgeon General's office and the National Institute of Mental Health) "point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children."[{7}](#)

To put it simply, we are awash in media exposure, and there is a critical need for Christians to exercise discernment. Never has a generation been so tempted to conform to this world (Rom. 12:1-2) because of the growing influence of the proliferating forms of media.

## **Biblical Discernment**

Although the Bible does not provide specific instructions about media (you can't find a verse dealing with television, computers, or DVDs), it nevertheless provides broad principles concerning discernment.

For example, the apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 2:22 instructs us to "Flee from youthful lusts." We should stay away from anything (including media) that inflames our lust. Paul also goes on to say that in addition to fleeing from these things, we should also "pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace." We should replace negative influences in our life with those things which are positive.

Paul says in Colossians 3:8, "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." Now, does that mean you could

never read something that has anger or rage or slander in it? No. After all, the Bible has stories of people who manifest those traits in their lives.

What Paul is saying is that we need to rid ourselves of such things. If the input into our lives (such as through media) manifests these traits, then a wise and discerning Christian would re-evaluate what is an influence in his or her life.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” We should focus on what is positive and helpful to our Christian walk.

We are also admonished in Romans 13:13 to “behave decently as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.”

As Christians, we should develop discernment in our lives. We can do this in three ways: stop, listen, and look. Stop what you are doing long enough to evaluate the media exposure in your life. Most of us just allow media to wash over us everyday without considering the impact it is having on us.

Second, we should listen. That is, we should give attention to what is being said. Is it true or false? And what is the message various media are bringing into our lives?

Finally, we should look. We need to look at the consequences of media in our lives. We should rid ourselves of influences which are negative and think on those things which are positive.

## **Worldview of the News Media**

Of all the forms of media, the news media have become a primary shaper of our perspective on the world. Also, the



rules of journalism have changed in the last few decades. It used to be assumed that reporters or broadcasters would attempt to look at events through the eyes of the average reader or viewer. It was also assumed that they would not use their positions in the media to influence the thinking of the nation but merely to report objectively the facts of an event. Things have changed dramatically in the news business.

The fact that people in the media are out of step with the American people should be a self-evident statement. But for anyone who does not believe it, there is abundant empirical evidence to support it.

Probably the best-known research on media bias was first published in the early 1980s by professors Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman. Their research, published in the journal *Public Opinion*{8} and later collected in the book *The Media Elite*,{9} demonstrated that reporters and broadcasters in the prestige media differ in significant ways from their audiences.

They surveyed 240 editors and reporters of the media elite—*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, ABC, NBC, and CBS. Their research confirmed what many suspected for a long time: the media elite are liberal, secular, and humanistic.

People have always complained about the liberal bias in the media. But what was so surprising is how liberal members of the media actually were. When asked to describe their own political persuasion, 54 percent of the media elite described themselves as left of center. Only 19 percent described themselves as conservative. When asked who they voted for in presidential elections, more than 80 percent of them always voted for the Democratic candidate.

Media personnel are also very secular in their outlook. The survey found that 86 percent of the media elite seldom or never attend religious services. In fact, 50 percent of them

have no religious affiliation at all.

This bias is especially evident when the secular press tries to cover religious events or religious issues. Most of them do not attend church, nor do they even know people who do. Instead, they live in a secularized world and therefore tend to underestimate the significance of religious values in American lives and to paint anyone with Christian convictions as a “fundamentalist.”

Finally, they also found that the news media was humanistic in their outlook on social issues. Over 90 percent of the media elite support a woman’s so-called “right to abortion” while only 24 percent agreed or strongly agreed that “homosexuality is wrong.”

For a time, members of the media elite argued against these studies. They suggested that the statistical sample was too small. But when Robert Lichter began to enumerate the 240 members of the news media interviewed, that tactic was quickly set aside. Others tried to argue that, though the media might be liberal, secular, and humanistic, it did not affect the way the press covered the news. Later studies by a variety of media watchdogs began to erode the acceptance of that view.

A second significant study on media bias was a 1996 survey conducted by the Freedom Forum and the Roper Center.<sup>{10}</sup> Their survey of 139 Washington bureau chiefs and congressional correspondents showed a decided preference for liberal candidates and causes.

The journalists were asked for whom they voted in the 1992 election. The results were these: 89 percent said Bill Clinton, 7 percent George Bush, 2 percent Ross Perot. But in the election, 43 percent of Americans voted for Clinton and 37 percent voted for Bush.

Another question they were asked was, “What is your current political affiliation?” Fifty percent said they were

Democrats, 4 percent Republicans. In answer to the question, "How do you characterize your political orientation?" 61 percent said they were liberal or moderately liberal, and 9 percent were conservative or moderately conservative.

The reporters were also asked about their attitudes toward their jobs. They said they see their coverage of news events as a mission. No less than 92 percent agreed with the statement, "Our role is to educate the public." And 62 percent agreed with the statement, "Our role is sometimes to suggest potential solutions to social problems."

A more recent survey by the Pew Research Center further confirms the liberal bias in the media. They interviewed 547 media professionals (print, TV, and radio) and asked them to identify their political perspective. They found that 34 percent were liberal and only 7 percent were conservative. This compares to 20 percent of Americans who identify themselves as liberal and 33 percent who define themselves as conservative.[{11}](#)

It is also worth questioning whether a majority of media professionals who labeled themselves as moderate in the survey really deserve that label. John Leo, writing for *U.S. News and World Report*, says that it has been his experience "that liberal journalists tend to think of themselves as representing the mainstream, so in these self-identification polls, moderate usually translates to liberal. On the few social questions asked in the survey, most of the moderates sounded fairly liberal."[{12}](#)

Once again we see the need for Christians to exercise discernment in their consumption of media.

## **Dealing with the Media**

Christians must address the influence of the media in society. It can be a dangerous influence that can conform us to the

world (Rom. 12:2). Therefore we should do all we can to protect against its influence and to use the media for good.

Christians should strive to apply the following two passages to their lives as they seek discernment concerning the media: Philippians 4:8, which we quoted above, and Colossians 3:2–5:

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

Here are some suggestions for action.

First, control the quantity and quality of media input. Parents should set down guidelines and help select television programs at the start of the week and watch only those. Parents should also set down guidelines for movies, music, and other forms of media. Families should also evaluate the location of their television set so that it is not so easy to just sit and watch TV for long hours.

Second, watch TV with children. One way to encourage discussion with children is to watch television with them. The plots and actions of the programs provides a natural context for discussion. The discussion could focus on how cartoon characters or TV characters could solve their problems without resorting to violence. What are the consequences of violence? TV often ignores the consequences. What are the consequences of promiscuous sex in real life?

Third, set a good example. Parents should not be guilty to saying one thing and doing another. Neither adults nor children should spend long periods of time in front of a video display (television, video game, computer). Parents can teach their children by example that there are better ways to spend time.

Fourth, work to establish broadcaster guidelines. No TV or movie producer wants to unilaterally disarm all the actors on their screens for fear that viewers will watch other programs and movies. Yet many of these TV and movie producers would like to tone down the violence, even though they do not want to be the first to do so. National standards would be able to achieve what individuals would not do by themselves in a competitive market.

Fifth, make your opinions known. Writing letters to programs, networks, and advertisers can make a difference over time. A single letter may not make a difference, but large numbers of letters can even change editorial policy. Consider joining with other like-minded people in seeking to make a difference in the media.

While the media has a tremendous potential for good, it can also have some very negative effects. Christians need wisdom and discernment to utilize the positive aspects of media and to guard against its negative effects.

## **Notes**

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