

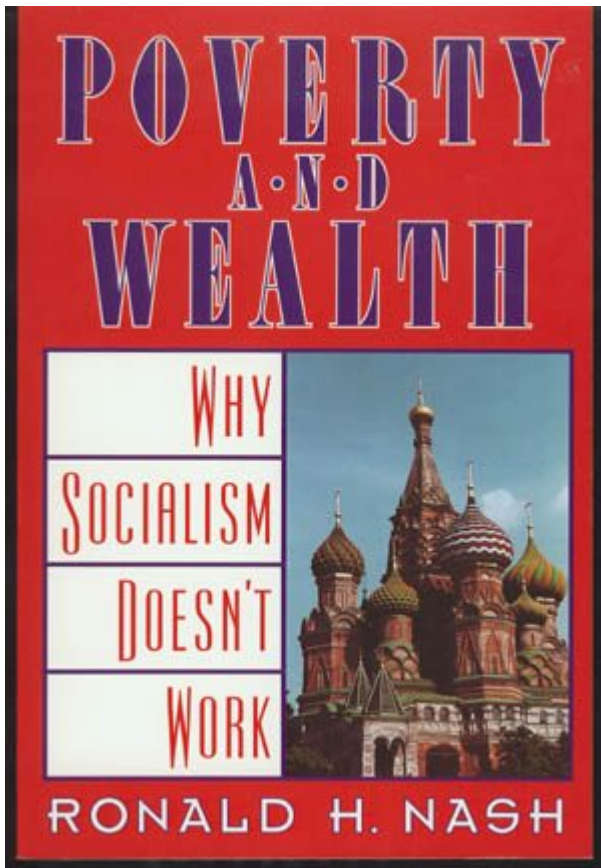
# Poverty and Wealth

*Don Closson examines the arguments in Ronald Nash's book Poverty and Wealth: Why Socialism Doesn't Work and concludes that capitalism is compatible with biblical ethics.*

It's disheartening to meet young Christians who are convinced of the immorality of capitalism and the free market system. Sincere Christians often quote the second chapter of Acts which describes how the church in Jerusalem held all things in common as proof that socialism or collectivism is more biblical than the free market. Sometimes they use the Marxist critique that "poor nations are poor because rich nations oppress them." It's unusual to meet students who wholeheartedly endorses capitalism. They recognize that it works well enough to make the U.S. the richest nation on earth, but it's not something to be proud of or openly endorse.

There continues to be a heated debate in our country over which economic system is the most just and best able to weather the inevitable economic ups and downs in today's complex worldwide economy. Christians wonder if capitalism is inherently incompatible with Christian ethics. Is it driven by greed and self-interest alone? Does it thrive on oppression? Does it conflict with a biblical view of human nature?





Ronald Nash's book *Poverty and Wealth: Why Socialism Doesn't Work*<sup>{1}</sup> faces these questions head on and concludes that free market capitalism leads to abundance and political freedom because it is based on the laws of economics and the truth about human nature. Social and economic programs that ignore these laws will inevitably cause more harm than good. Even more importantly, Nash argues that capitalism is compatible with biblical ethics. He writes,

Capitalism is quite simply the most moral system, the most effective system, and the most equitable system of economic exchange. When capitalism, the system of free economic exchange, is described fairly, there can be no question that it, rather than socialism or interventionism, comes closer to matching the demands of the Biblical ethic.<sup>{2}</sup>

In order to understand Dr. Nash's point we will define some basic economic concepts and compare capitalism with socialism and interventionism. Neither Dr. Nash's book nor I question the intentions of Christians who have accepted Marxist solutions, but we do question their wisdom. In the words of Dr. Nash,

“Unfortunately, many Christians act as though the only thing that counts is intention. But when good intentions are not wedded to sound theory, especially sound economic theory, good intentions can often result in actions that produce consequences directly opposite to those we planned.”

Even the acceptance of free markets by China and Eastern Europe have not swayed the true believer of Marxist thinking. Our young people will encounter a Marxist critique of capitalism and the free market system at some point in their education. As parents we owe it to our children to have an answer to their certain questions.

## **The Market System**

The market system is the set of rules that creates a voluntary system of exchange resulting in the price, selection, and quantity of products that are made and sold in an economy. Those who support capitalism believe that both parties benefit from the voluntary exchange of goods and services. Marxists, on the other hand, often argue that the free market system results in a win/lose relationship. What are the rules that define a free market system and what role should government play in maintaining it?

The rules of a free market system are simple. First, people should not be coerced into making economic exchanges. This means that they should be free from force, fraud, or theft. Another rule is that people must honor their contracts to buy or sell with another party. Just as local government provides for the traffic signals in a town, government is responsible for enforcing the basic rules of the free market. Traffic signals create order out of potential chaos on our roads. Likewise, the rules of the free market system create order out of potential economic chaos. But in neither case do the rules tell people where to go or what to trade. Both systems are neutral to an individual's personal goals.

The decentralized actions of producers and consumers encourage the production of a vast array of products at prices that people are willing to pay. These goods and services are produced, not because someone is forced to, but because they know that by satisfying needs they can earn an income and satisfy their own desires. Free market capitalism is based on this principle of mutual accommodation. The market also encourages the efficient use of resources. Price is a factor of demand for a product and the scarcity of its components. It is the market which takes into account an almost infinite number of decisions and variables to make goods available at the best possible price. Profits and losses within the market encourage producers to move into or out of the production of a given item. Inefficient production or over-production of an item will result in losses sufficient enough to change a producer's behavior.

Government is necessary for enforcing the basic rules of a free market economy. Its interest should be to make sure that justice prevails, and to ensure the common good. This includes the right to own and exchange property, the enforcement of contracts, as well as laws forbidding the use of force, fraud, and theft. If the government itself begins to intervene beyond this role, it becomes a detriment to the market and can itself become the source of injustice. A system based on, or highly influenced, by government coercion cannot be called a free market system.

## **Capitalism vs. Socialism**

A former president of the Evangelical Theological Society has written that capitalism violates "the basic ethical principles of Christianity" and that there is an essential political and economic dimension to the Kingdom of God which capitalism defiles. This thinking has the effect of placing supporters of capitalism among the heretics and against the Kingdom of God. Does capitalism really violate the gospel message and a

biblical worldview? Does socialism offer the only righteous means for creating and distributing wealth?

Capitalism argues that individuals have the right to make decisions about what they own. This not only assumes the right to own property, but to exchange what one owns for something else, and to be free from force in the form of fraud, theft, or the violation of a contract. The moral base of "thou shalt not steal" and "thou shalt not lie" are essential to the success of a capitalistic system. In fact, these basic rules of capitalism are very similar to an Old Testament view of righteousness which focused on the completion of covenant agreements. God is considered a righteous God partially because He fulfills His covenants with His creation.

Marxists love to point to examples like the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos in order to criticize capitalism. This corrupt regime can surely be criticized, but not as an example of capitalism. It is representative of what might be called an interventionist economy. There are three general types of economies: capitalist, interventionist, and socialist. Capitalism and socialism are at the two ends of the continuum with interventionism in the middle. The two opposites represent two possible means of exchange. Capitalism is defined by its advocacy of free or peaceful exchange, allowing individual choice regarding the use of personal property. Socialism is defined by centralized planning, using force to get individuals to conform to its decisions. A system becomes less capitalistic and more interventionist as more and more economic decisions are coerced by the government. It becomes socialistic when basic needs are met only by the government, forcing people to deal with it exclusively. The ideal of capitalism is freedom; the ideal of socialism is forced compliance with government planning.

Critics of capitalism condemn economic systems in which interest groups use the power of government to intervene on their behalf, forcing consumers via taxes or mandates to spend

their money or use their talents in a way they would not freely choose. But this isn't capitalism; it's interventionism, and unfortunately a pretty good description of where the U.S. is headed.

## **Economic Systems and Human Nature**

Is capitalism the primary cause of world poverty? Although the Bible does teach that exploitation is one cause of poverty, it also teaches that it results from indigence and sloth as well as accidents, injuries, and illness. When the prophet Amos condemned the Jews for forcing the poor to give them grain, for taking bribes, and depriving the oppressed justice, he was highlighting violations of free market capitalism as well.

Some believe that capitalism is built on greed, which the Bible condemns. However, the Bible does teach a certain level of self-interest. For example, 1 Timothy 5:8 is critical of anyone who does not provide for the needs of his family. And although selfishness exists in capitalistic countries, it is not inherent to the system; it is inherent to humanity. Either we allow people to make choices based on their own self-interest and moral virtue, or we turn those decisions over to a central government. Could it be naïve to think that government officials will use wealth in a morally superior way to those outside of government? History teaches that when power is centralized it has the tendency to be abused.

In a non-coercive free market environment, those who serve the needs of others will prosper. As long as the rule of law prevails and the government isn't allowed to stack the deck for one particular group against another, the market protects us from the greed of others. The free market is by definition one place where coercion is not possible.

Socialists contend that competition is another evil of capitalism, but is competition itself an evil? We can agree

that using force, fraud, or theft to compete is morally wrong, but can we really say that all competition is wrong? Scarcity demands competition; as long as resources are limited we will find some competitive means for allocating them. Socialist societies use long waiting lines and bureaucratic red tape to dole out limited goods, and competition is intense for political positions that result in material gain.

There are only two ways to resolve conflict that results from scarcity. One is by force, the other is by free market competition. Non-violent free market competition has helped to alleviate the effects of scarcity by stirring people to high levels of excellence in manufacturing and services. Socialist countries are not usually known for the quantity or quality of their goods and services.

Economist Walter Williams notes that “Capitalism has a strong bias toward serving the common man. . . . Political allocation of resources, regardless of its stated purpose, is strongly biased in favor of the elite.”[\[3\]](#) Maybe that is why the elite have such disdain for capitalism.

## **Critiquing Socialism**

Highly collectivist economies are not known for producing what people need at a price they can afford. In the 1920s, economist Ludwig von Mises showed why central planners can never replace the market: they are unable to gather the necessary information to plan accurately. The market system provides incentives to both producers and buyers that are missing in socialistic countries. Under socialism “rewards are not related to effort and commercial risk-taking, but to party membership, bureaucratic status, political fiat and corruption.”[\[4\]](#) Sociologist Peter Burger writes, “Simply put, Socialist equality is shared poverty by serfs, coupled with the monopolization of both privilege and power by a small (increasingly hereditary) aristocracy.”[\[5\]](#)

One evangelical writer contends that Marxism has “a deep compassion for people. Unlike present political systems—big business, even the Church—it [Marxism] does not seem to have any particular vested interests to defend.”<sup>{6}</sup> In other words, only Marxists really care about people. However, history has not been kind to Marxist collectivism. Some of the worst human rights records have been accumulated by Marxist regimes in the U.S.S.R., China, Cambodia, North Korea and Cuba. I find it hard to imagine that the millions who died at the hands of Stalin, Mao Tse Tung, or the Khmer Rouge were very impressed by the compassion of their nation’s Marxist leaders.

But what about the example in Acts of all Christians sharing their goods in common or of Barnabas selling his property for the good of other believers? What some people miss is that both of these examples are of individuals making free moral choices to use their property for the good of others. They are making free market decisions regarding their possessions. This can only occur when individuals have the freedom to use their possessions to help others. If all economic decisions are made by centralized planners, moral choice is removed and the option to act upon personal moral convictions is reduced.

Living within a capitalistic society allows believers to exercise their personal responsibility to provide for the poor and less fortunate. This has resulted in remarkable examples of philanthropy in America and other capitalistic nations. In fact, no other people on earth have given as much to other nations as have Americans.

A properly functioning market system is an effective tool against oppression and corruption because it promotes the rule of law for all citizens. However, a strong moral system is necessary to keep it from being controlled by special interests. There are too many examples of economies that have been shaped for the benefit of a few. Christ’s advocacy for the poor should make us a strong moral barrier to this kind of corruption.



## Notes

1. Ronald H. Nash, *Poverty and Wealth: Why Socialism Doesn't Work* (Dallas: Probe Books, 1986).
2. *Ibid.*, 80.
3. *Ibid.*, 75.
4. *Ibid.*, 87.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Andrew Kirk, *The Good News of the Kingdom Coming* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 45, quoted in Nash, *Poverty and Wealth*, 191.

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# Gen-Z: The Generation That Ends Christian Influence in America?

*In order to grow the number of Gen-Z Christians, we need an understanding of ways to build bridges from their pluralistic, secular worldview to seriously contemplating the unique grace of God. Steve Cable draws upon the wisdom of two pastors who are making a real difference in the lives of young adults to address this important topic.*

## What Are Gen-Zs Like?

In this article we look beyond the Millennials to consider the latest generation and what they tell us about the future of Evangelicals in America. Gen-Z is the generation born between 1995 and 2010.



This year, half of the Gen-Z generation are 18 or older. By the time they are all at least 18, the Millennials and Gen-Zs will make up almost 50% of the adult population. We will consider how this generation compares with previous generations. We want to understand this generation to truly communicate the good news of the gospel to them; to help them “to walk in a manner worth of the Lord.”[{1}](#)

In their book, *So the Next Generation Will Know*[{2}](#), Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace identified some key traits common among Gen-Zs. They are:

1. Digital Multitaskers – “spending nearly every waking hour interacting with . . . digital technology,” often while watching television
2. Impatient – quickly moving from thing to thing with an attention span of around 8 seconds
3. Fluid – constantly blurring the lines; making truth, genders, and family structures personal choices
4. Lonely – swamped in social media where personal relationships are minimized while personal troubles follow them everywhere. Sean points to “the availability of endless counterfeits that claim to be able to fill their hearts with meaning.”[{3}](#)
5. Individualistic – individual feelings more important than facts while judging the choices of others is avoided. As James White points out in *Meet Generation Z*[{4}](#), “the ability to find whatever they’re after without the help of intermediaries . . . has made them more independent. . . . Like no other generation before, Gen-Z faces a widening chasm between wisdom and information.”[{5}](#)

Most importantly, most of these young Americans are thoroughly secular with little exposure to Christian theology. As White opines, “They are lost. They are not simply living in and being shaped by a post-Christian cultural context. They do not even have a memory of the gospel. . . . They have endless

amounts of information but little wisdom, and virtually no mentors.”{6}

As they enter adulthood, the culture around them will not encourage them to consider the claims of Christ. In fact, the Millennials going before them are already seen leaving any Christian background behind as they age into their thirties.

## Gen-Z: How Are They Trending?

What can we truly know about the religious thinking of Gen-Zs age 11 to 25? Pew Research surveyed teens and their parents giving us a glimpse into both{7}.

They found *one third* of American teens are religiously Unaffiliated.{8} In contrast, their parents were less than *one quarter* Unaffiliated. Another Pew survey{9} found more than *half* of young adult Gen-Zs are unaffiliated. This group is easily the largest religious group among Gen-Zs.

Teens attend church services with their parents, but lag behind in other areas. Less than *one fourth* of teens consider religion very important. And on an absolute belief in God and praying daily, the teens trail their parents significantly.

Using an index of religious commitment{10}, almost *half* of the parents but only *one third* of teens rated high. In fact, almost half of teenagers with parents who rated high did not rate high themselves.{11}

Perhaps the minds of teenagers are mush. Their views will firm up as they age. In reality, older Gen-Zs and Millennials also trail older adults by more than 20 points in believing in God and praying daily.{12} Also, church attendance drops dramatically among these young adults who are no longer attending with parents.

If religion were important to teens, they would look to religious teaching and beliefs to help make decisions about

what is right and wrong. But less than *one third* of teens affiliated with a religion turned to its teachings to make such decisions.

As George Barna reports, [{13}](#) “The faith gap between Millennials and their predecessors is the widest intergenerational difference identified at any time in the last seven decades.” It seems that Gen-Z will increase this gap.

## **Gen-Z: Worldview and Apologetics**

Why have the Unaffiliated been growing dramatically over the last 25 years while doctrinally consistent Christians have been declining? At one level, we recognize the watered-down gospel taught in many churches encourages people to pursue other things and not waste time on church. That may have been the primary issue at one time. But in this decade, we are seeing a real reduction in the number of Evangelicals as well. The self-professed Evangelicals [{14}](#) among those ages 18 to 29 has reduced from 29% down to 20%, a reduction of almost one third.

One major driver is the dominant worldview of our young adult society. The worldview promoted by our schools, media, and entertainment industry has changed from a Christian inspired worldview to a worldview which is secular and specifically anti-Christian. As James White observes, “It’s simply a cultural reality that people in a post-Christian world are genuinely incredulous that anyone would think like a Christian—or at least, what it means in their minds to think like a Christian.” [{15}](#)

Almost all Gen-Zs have been brought up hearing the worldview of Scientism espoused. This worldview teaches “that all that can be known within nature is that which can be empirically verified . . . If something cannot be examined in a tangible,

scientific manner, it is not simply unknowable, it is meaningless.”[{16}](#) At the same time, most Gen-Zs have not even been exposed to an Evangelical Christian worldview. Consequently, apologetics is critical for opening their minds to hear the truth of the gospel. Many of them need to understand that the basic tenets of a Christian worldview can be true before they will consider whether these tenets are true for them. Answering questions such as: “Could there be a creator of this universe?” and “Could that creator possibly be involved in this world which has so much pain and suffering?” is a starting point to opening their minds to a Christian view.

Encouraging Gen-Zs to understand the tenets of their worldview and comparing them to a Christian worldview begins the process of introducing them to the gospel. As White points out, “I have found that discussing the awe and wonder of the universe, openly raising the many questions surrounding the universe and then positing the existence of God, is one of the most valuable approaches that can be pursued.”[{17}](#) The Christian worldview is coherent, comprehensive and compelling as it explains why our world is the way it is and how its trajectory may be corrected into one that honors our Creator and lifts up people to a new level of life.

## **Gen-Z: Removing the Isolation of Faith**

What will it take to reach Gen-Z? James White says, “. . . the primary reason Gen-Z disconnects from the church is our failure to equip them with a biblical worldview that empowers them to understand and navigate today’s culture.”[{18}](#) If we want to equip Gen-Zs to embrace faith, we must directly discuss worldview issues with them.

The challenge is exacerbated as most Gen-Zs are taught a redefined tolerance: to not only accept classmates with different worldviews, e.g. Muslims and the Unaffiliated, but to believe that it is as true for them as your parents’

worldview is for them. As Sean McDowell states, “Gen-Zs are exposed to more competing worldviews—and at an earlier age—than any generation in history.”[{19}](#)

The new tolerance leads directly to a pluralistic view of salvation. Christ stated, “No one comes to the Father except through me,”[{20}](#) and Peter preached that “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved.”[{21}](#) Yet the survey of American teens[{22}](#) finds *less than one third* believe that only one religion is true, broken up into *two-thirds* of Evangelicals and *less than one-third* of Mainlines and Catholics.

Compounding these issues is the growing practice of limiting the impact of religious beliefs on real life. Sean points out, “The biggest challenge in teaching worldview to young people is the way our increasingly secular culture fosters the compartmentalization of faith.”[{23}](#) We need to help them see how a consistent Christian worldview applies to all issues. It is foolish to segregate your spiritual beliefs from your life decisions.

As an example, many Gen-Zs are enamored by a socialist view that the government should provide everything we need, equally distributing goods and services to all. Those who work hard and excel will have their productivity redistributed equally. It sounds like a possibly good approach and yet it has destroyed the economies of many countries including Russia, Cuba, and Venezuela. It fails because it is based on a worldview that “assumes greed comes from inequality in the distribution of material goods in society.”[{24}](#) In contrast, the Bible is clear that greed is part of the fallenness of the human heart. As a result, any centralized function with no competition discourages productivity and becomes an inefficient bureaucracy.

## Reaching Gen-Zs

Today, most Gen-Zs move into adulthood with little exposure to the gospel. The majority are either Unaffiliated, another religion, or have a nominal Christian background. Current surveys find that 98% of young Americans do not have a Christian worldview.[{25}](#)

This sobering data does not mean giving up on reaching Gen-Z. But if we are not intentional about it, we are not going to stem the tide. As James White observes, “What is killing the church today is (focusing) on keeping Christians within the church happy, well fed, and growing. The mission . . . must be about those who have not crossed the line of faith.”

And Sean McDowell points out that we need “to teach the difference between subjective and objective truth claims and make sure they understand that Christianity falls in the latter category.”[{26}](#)

Sean encourages a focus on relationships saying, “Relationships are the runway on which truth lands. Take the time to listen with empathy, monitor from a place of wisdom, and demonstrate your concern.”[{27}](#) White agrees, saying, “If we want (them) to know the faith, we have to teach, model and incarnate truth in our relationship with them.”[{28}](#) From a place of relationship, we can address challenges keeping them from truly hearing the gospel.

One key challenge is the role of media. As Sean notes, “Media shapes their beliefs, and it also shapes the orientation of their hearts.”[{29}](#) To counter this pervasive influence, he suggests engaging them in a skeptic’s blog. Help them consider 1) what claim is being made, 2) is the claim relevant if true, and 3) decide how to investigate the claim.[{30}](#) By learning to investigate claims, they are examining the truth of the gospel. We should never fear the gospel coming up short when looking for the truth.

Key ways White's church is connecting with the Unaffiliated include:

1. Rethinking evangelism around Paul's message in Athens. Tantalizing those with no background to search for truth in Christ.
2. Teaching the grace/truth dynamic in quick segments consistent with their learning styles.
3. Being cultural missionaries – learning from those who have not been Christians.
4. Cultivating a culture of invitation by creating tools to invite friends all the time.

If we focus on growing the number of Gen-Z Christians, we could change the trajectory of American faith. If we devote ourselves to prayer, the leadership of the Holy Spirit, and reaching the lost in America rather than continuing church as usual, God can use us to turn the tide.

## Notes

1. Colossians 1:9.
2. Josh McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So the Next Generation Will Know*, 2019, David C. Cook.
3. McDowell and Wallace, p. 66.
4. James White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*, Baker Books, 2017.
5. White, p. 44.
6. White, p. 64-65.
7. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens Take After Their Parents Religiously, Attend Services Together and Enjoy Family Rituals, September 10, 2020.
8. These are people who self-identify as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular. In previous surveys, we referred to them as the Nones. Calling them the "unaffiliated" helps us avoid the confusion between "Nones" and "nuns."
9. Call out Pew survey from 2019.
10. The index of religious commitment looks at the answers to questions on church attendance, belief in God, prayer, and



importance of religion and rates a respondents commitment from high to low based on their answers.

General Social Survey, 2018.

11. 42% of the teenagers with parents with a high index had a medium or low index.

12. General Social Survey, 2018

13. American Worldview Inventory 2020, Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University.

14. Pew Research surveys 2007, 2014, 2019.

15. White, p. 130.

16. White, p. 141.

17. White, p. 139.

18. White, p. 80.

19. McDowell and Wallace, p. 81.

20. John 14:6b.

21. Acts 4:12.

22. Pew Research Center, U.S. Teens.

23. McDowell and Wallace, p. 87.

24. Ibid, p. 93.

25. American Worldview Inventory 2020.

26. McDowell and Wallace, p. 113.

27. McDowell and Wallace, p. 78.

28. White, p. 64.

29. McDowell and Wallace, p. 164.

30. Ibid, p. 173-4.

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## Woke Theology

We frequently hear the term “woke” in current discussions. Campuses, corporations, and even some churches are described as being woke. What does the term mean? How are these ideas

influencing society? Is there any connection to ESG mandates and stakeholder capitalism? And how should Christians respond to the influence of wokeness?

## Definition of the Term

The term means that one is “awake” to the true nature of the world at a time when so many in society are asleep. In his book on *Christianity and Wokeness*, Owen Strachan explains that “wokeness occurs when one embraces the system of thought called critical race theory. CRT teaches that all societal life is structured along racial power dynamics.”

According to this view, race is a “social construct,” not biologically based, and merely exists in our imagination. This is one place where there might be some agreement between wokeness and the Bible. The Bible teaches that we are “one race.” Some translations, for example, for Acts 17:26 refer to all humans as “one blood.” Another verse would be Galatians 3:28 which says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

I have found that woke theology often surfaces in the non-Christian world as a substitute religion. Woke theology also surfaces in some churches that are legitimately concerned about injustice. They want to be relevant to the cultural dialogue and thus adopt wokeness.

These terms are sometimes misused, which is why Strachan also devotes a section on explaining what wokeness is *not*. Here are just five statements of the fifteen he discusses:

- Wanting societal harmony across backgrounds does not make you woke.
- Seeing massive failings in American and Western history, sustained patterns of racist thought, does not make you woke.

- Doing everything you can and know to do to build bonds with people different from you in various ways does not make you woke.
- Praying for greater diversity in your church through saving of fellow sinners does not make you woke.
- Wanting greater justice in the world doesn't make you woke.

In this article we will be looking at various aspects of woke theology. What is the ideology? How does it relate to critical race theory? What about corporations that have adopted a woke ideology? And how can we as Christians respond to this current cultural trend?

## Woke Ideology

Wokeness includes the ideas of critical race theory and antiracism but is broader than just these ideas about race and racial justice. It also includes other social, legal, and even environmental concerns. These ideas were first developed and promoted on university campuses but have made their way into government, corporations, and nearly every part of society.

It is most visible through the actions of people who call themselves "social justice warriors." Critics might describe them as "virtue-signaling liberals" or merely call them "the woke." Whatever name you give to these groups, they have been successful in influencing nearly every institution in America and much of the Western world.

They use inflamed rhetoric and what one commentator calls "*ex-cathedra* incantations of pseudo-values so absurd that only a few years ago it would have seemed like they must be kidding." That's a fancy way of saying that you can't believe people are completely serious when they are saying crazy things about race, gender, and science.

Much of this began on university campuses across the nation.

Professors promoted ideas about cultural transformation that influenced the young minds who became the future opinion-forming elite of today. These ideas were reinforced because of a liberal media forming a feed-back loop between a leftist academy and a liberal establishment media.

This is an important principle to understand. In the past, we used to hear parents and others argue that the nutty ideas in the heads of college students would fade away as they had to earn a living and deal with the realities of the world of business. What happened was the fact that these college graduates found previous graduates in some of these corporations who were woke soul mates. The woke ideas on campus often became the foundational ideas in business and government. The media continued to reinforce those crazy woke ideas.

In her book, *Awake: Not Woke*, Noelle Mering explains how many in this emerging generation do not believe they are defined as being in the image of God but instead are called to fight evil in society. They are merely one entity in a group identity rather than someone made in the image and likeness of God. They aren't praised or criticized by their actions and attitudes. Instead, they are elevated or condemned based on their group, their racial background, or their gender. They are not only being indoctrinated by critical theory on race but also by critical theory on sex and gender. And obedience to these ideas is achieved through thought and speech control.

## **Critical Race Theory**

One aspect of wokeness is critical race theory. Critical theory began at the University of Frankfurt's Institute for Social Research, which came to be known as the "Frankfurt School." The Frankfurt scholars fled to Columbia University's Teachers College in New York in 1934 to escape the Nazis.

Critical theory traces all social injustice to inequities in

power that are based on class, race, gender, or sexual orientation. In classical Marxism, the focus was on class, with the assumption that the working class would rise up against the capitalist oppressors. By contrast, critical theory is a form of cultural Marxism that seeks a radical transformation of society by uprooting present social authorities. Cultural Marxism retains basic Marxist assumptions but advocated a “long march through the institutions,” to quote a leading thinker, Antonio Gramsci.

You are either in power or out of power. If you are in power, you are automatically discredited. If you are underprivileged, you are immune from criticism. The underprivileged can make demands, but they need not make arguments, since the whole system, including basic rationality, is rigged against them. This also means that the claims of critical race theory are unfalsifiable.

At its core, critical race theory is impractical. James Lindsay asks you to imagine you own a small tailor shop where you must assist each customer individually. Two people enter your store: one is white, and the other is black. If you choose to serve the black person first, it shows you are racist because you don't trust a black person in the store unsupervised. If you choose to serve the white person first, it shows you are racist because you value white people over black people.

How should we respond to these claims? First, the Bible teaches that truth exists and can be discerned (Proverbs 30:5, John 8:32, 2 Timothy 3:16). Racial bias may be a problem, but the real impediment to proper biblical interpretation is our sin (John 3:19-20). Proponents of the woke agenda reject rational arguments and censor contrary ideas about race and society.

Christians are to love God with our minds (Mark 12:30). We are to “destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up

against the knowledge of God” because we are to “take every thought captive to obey Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Second is the issue of grace. According to their view, members of an “oppressor” race will never really be forgiven because they will always be part of that race. By contrast, the Bible teaches that we are guilty because we are sinful (Romans 3:23, 6:23) not because of our racial status. We cannot earn salvation by good works because salvation is a gift of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are redeemed through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22-24).

## **Woke Corporations**

Corporations that have gone woke have been increasingly involved in politics. Here are just a few examples from the last year.

When the Georgia legislature debated and then passed voter integrity laws, the CEOs of several corporations took to the media to express their displeasure. For example, the CEO of Coca-Cola complained the voting law was oppressive, which then brought attention to the fact that the company was doing business in China with oppressive human rights violations. The CEO of Delta Airlines complained about voter IDs as other critics were reminding them that you couldn't get on a Delta flight without showing a form of ID. But if these Georgia laws were supposedly an attempt at voter suppression, they failed since the number of voters in the latest election set records.

Many of these companies seem to be reevaluating their past actions. They can see the downward financial trajectory of past woke companies. The common phrase “get woke, go broke” seems to be true.

They also have noticed how members of Congress have responded. Senator Rick Scott wrote an open letter to “Woke Corporate America,” saying that he hoped they were having fun with their

virtue signaling and the attempts to one-up each other. But he reminded them they destroyed working people's jobs and destroyed some small businesses.

Although there are some members in Congress who want to pressure corporations to be less woke, there are other significant pressures on these companies to be more woke. This comes from the enforcing of ESG standards. The "E" stands for environmental concerns. What is the company doing to address the threat of climate change by lowering carbon emissions? The "S" stands for social and looks at the company's relationship with stakeholders (often called stakeholder capitalism). The "G" stands for governance and desires diversity on the board of directors and corporate transparency.

While many of the ESG goals are admirable, recent examples show how it has been used as a political tool against anyone who dissents. A senior HSBC banker was canceled merely because he correctly observed that some of the climate change rhetoric was shrill and unsubstantiated.

Recently Tesla was removed from the S&P 500 ESG Index, even though they are the largest producer of electric cars and a few months ago had the fourth largest weighting in the index. Could it be that this change had more to do with the words and actions of Elon Musk than anything at Tesla?

## **How Should We Respond?**

We are living in a time when we can be canceled for something we say or even for our lack of enthusiasm for a particular policy or piece of legislation. That is why Rod Dreher warns us in his book, *Live Not by Lies*, of a coming "soft totalitarianism." The old, hard totalitarianism came from the state (Germany, Russia) and was dedicated to the eradication of Christianity. This new totalitarianism usually comes from the Left in society but is also dedicated to the eradication of Christianity.

The soft totalitarianism of today demands allegiance to a set of progressive beliefs. Compliance is forced less by the state than by elites who form public opinion, and by private corporations that control our lives through technology. Citizens won't be taken away in handcuffs by the state, but their lives will be devastated by Leftist elites that will do what they can to destroy their lives.

Dissenters from the woke party line find their businesses, careers, and reputations destroyed. They are pushed out of the public square, stigmatized, canceled, and demonized as racists, sexists, and homophobes.

His book is full of stories from Christians who endured hard totalitarianism and provide us with models for how to address this more insidious form of soft totalitarianism. Often this is coming from business and the media.

What is a biblical perspective on race and gender? Christians and churches are facing persecution because many of these woke ideas are contrary to Scripture. Nevertheless, many of these woke ideas are making their way into the pulpits and Sunday School classes of many churches.

Woke religion rejects the salvation of Christ and supplants it with a utopian view that true salvation can be found in environmental activism, racial activism, and stakeholder capitalism. We can applaud young people looking to make the world a better place, but they have put their allegiance into a worldview contrary to biblical principles.

Woke faith at its core is atheistic and denies God and Christ. Much of it is rooted in a Marxist view of the world. Second, it also replaces the biblical idea of sin (Romans 3:23) with salvation through environmental activism and racial struggle. Third, it is a utopian vision that assumes we can create "heaven on Earth" without Christ.

If we want to address real social problems in our society, we



need to come back to biblical principles. Many of the successful social movements in the last two centuries (abolition, suffrage, civil rights) rested on a biblical foundation. We don't need woke theology to bring salt and light to our fallen world.

### **Additional Reading**

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Wokeness*, Point of View booklet, 2022.

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical View on Critical Race Theory*, Point of View booklet, 2021.

Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, New York: Sentinel, 2020.

Noelle Mering, *Awake: Not Woke, A Christian Response to the Cult of Progressive Ideology*, Gastonia, NC: Tan Books, 2021.

Vivek Ramaswamy, *Woke, Inc.*, New York: Center Street, 2021.

Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel and the Way to Stop It*, Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021.

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## **Realignment of America**

*We are witnessing some dramatic changes in this country. The U.S. is experiencing various kinds of realignment: marriage and cohabitation, geography, political and economic.*

In this article I want to talk about the realignment of America. We are witnessing some dramatic changes in this country. Some are political changes; some are economic changes; and some are geographic changes. If you are building a business, planting a church, or just trying to understand

some of these fundamental changes, you need to pay attention to these changes in America.

First, we need to understand the times in which we are living. 1 Chronicles 12:32 says that the sons of Issachar were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.” Likewise we need to understand our time with knowledge of what we as Christians should do.



Second, we should also plan for the future. Isaiah 32:8 says that “the noble man devises noble plans, and by noble plans he stands.” You, your family, and your church should have plans for the future based upon some of the things we will be discussing.

Proverbs 16:9 says “the mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps.” So we should not only plan for the future, but commit those plans to the Lord and be sensitive to His leading in our lives.

One place where we see a dramatic shift in both attitudes and behavior is marriage. America is in the midst of redefining marriage. Some of these redefinitions are taking place in the legislatures and courtrooms. But marriage is also being redefined through cohabitation.

Over the last few decades, the U.S. Census Bureau has documented the increasing percentage of people who fit into the category of “adults living alone.” These are often lumped into a larger category of “non-family households.” Within this larger category are singles that are living alone as well as a growing number of unmarried, cohabiting couples that are “living together.” The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that in 2000 there were nearly ten million Americans living with an unmarried opposite-sex partner and another 1.2 million Americans living with a same-sex partner.

These numbers are unprecedented. It is estimated that during

most of the 1960s and 1970s, only about a half a million Americans were living together. And by 1980, that number was just 1.5 million.[{1}](#) Now that number is more than twelve million.

Cohabiting couples are also changing the nature of marriage. Researchers estimate that half of Americans will cohabit at one time or another prior to marriage. And this arrangement often includes children. The traditional stereotype of two young, childless people living together is not completely accurate; currently, some forty percent of cohabiting relationships involve children.[{2}](#)

Marriage may not yet be in the endangered species list, but many more couples are choosing to live together rather than get married. This is just one example of the realignment of America.

## **Geographic Realignment**

Another realignment in America is geographic realignment. If you haven't noticed, people move around quite a bit. And I am not just talking about your neighbors who drove off the other day in a U-Haul truck. I am talking about the realignment of America.

I think we have all heard that the U.S. population is flowing from the Snow Belt to the Sun Belt. But Michael Barone in an article in *The Wall Street Journal* explains that the trends are a bit more complex than that.[{3}](#) Let's start with what he calls the "Coastal Megalopolises" (New York, Los Angeles, Miami, etc.). Here you find that Americans are moving out and immigrants are moving in with a low net population growth.

Contrast this with what he called "the Interior Boomtowns." Their population has grown eighteen percent in six years. And this means that the nation's center of gravity is shifting. Dallas is now larger than San Francisco, Houston is larger

than Boston, Charlotte is now larger than Milwaukee.

Another section would be the old Rust Belt. The six metro areas (Detroit, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Buffalo, Rochester) have lost population since 2000. And you also have "the Static Cities." These eighteen metropolitan areas have little immigrant inflow and little domestic inflow or outflow.

The political impact of this realignment is significant. Many of the metro areas voted in significant proportions for John Kerry in 2004 while the Interior Boomtowns voted for George W. Bush. But there is more at stake than just the presidential election.

In less than two years we will have another census, and that will determine congressional districts. House seats and electoral votes will shift from New York, New Jersey, and Illinois to Texas, Florida, Georgia, Arizona, and Nevada.

That is why Michael Barone says in another column that it is time to throw out the old electoral maps.<sup>{4}</sup> The old maps with red states and blue states served us well for the last two presidential elections, but there is good evidence that it is now out-of-date. In 2000 and 2004, the Republicans nominated the same man, and the Democrats nominated men with similar views and backgrounds. All of that has changed in 2008.

It is clear that some of the states that went Democratic in 2004 may be available to Republicans. And it is also clear that some of the states that went Republican that same year are possibilities for the Democrats. And let's not forget the surge of new voters coming into the electoral process that are potentially available to either candidate.

Social scientists say: "Demography is destiny." That is a simple way of saying that demographic changes alter our future. But you don't have to be a social scientist to see the impact. We all know that people move around, and that changes the political landscape.

# Political Realignment

In addition to marriage and geographical realignment, political realignment is also taking place due to differences in fertility. Does fertility affect voting patterns? Apparently it does much more than we realize. And this has been a topic of discussion for both liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans.

Arthur Brooks wrote about the “Fertility Gap” in a column in *The Wall Street Journal*.<sup>{5}</sup> He said: “Simply put, liberals have a big baby problem: They’re not having enough of them . . . and their pool of potential new voters is suffering as a result.”

Brooks noted that “...if you picked 100 unrelated politically liberal adults at random, you would find that they had, between them, 147 children. If you picked 100 conservatives, you would find 208 kids.” That is a “fertility gap” of forty-one percent.

We know that about eighty percent of people with an identifiable party preference grow up to vote essentially the same way as their parents. Brooks says that this “fertility gap” therefore “translates into lots more little Republicans than little Democrats to vote in future elections.” He also points out that over the past thirty years this gap has not been below twenty percent which he says explains to a large extent the current ineffectiveness of liberal youth voter campaigns.

Brooks also points out that the fertility gap “doesn’t budge when we correct for factors like age, income, education, sex, race—or even religion.” Even if all these factors are identical between a liberal and a conservative, “the liberal will still be 19 percentage points more likely to be childless than the conservative.” This fertility gap is real and will no doubt affect politics for many years to come.

So what could this mean for future presidential elections? Consider the key swing state of Ohio which is currently split fifty-fifty between left and right. If current patterns continue, Brooks estimates that Ohio will swing to the right and by 2012 will be fifty-four percent to forty-six percent. By 2020, it will be solidly conservative by a margin of fifty-nine percent to forty-one percent.

Now look at the state of California that tilts in favor of liberals by fifty-five percent to forty-five percent. By the year 2020, it will be swing conservative by a percentage of fifty-four percent to forty-six percent. The reason is due to the "fertility gap."

Of course most people vote for politicians, personalities, and issues, not parties. But the general trend of the "fertility gap" cannot be ignored especially if Democrats continue to appeal to liberals and Republicans to conservatives.

## **Economic Realignment**

Earlier we talked about political and geographical realignment in America. It turns out that some of that realignment is due to economic factors.

A recent survey by United Van Lines uncovers some interesting patterns of movement in America.[{6}](#) An average of twenty thousand Americans relocate across state lines each day for a record eight million Americans each year. The general pattern is for people to move from the Northeast and Midwest to the South and West. But the details are even more interesting than the general trends.

The survey found that the most reliable indicator of movement was income tax. People tend to move from states with high income-tax rates to states with little or no income taxes. Families are leaving Michigan, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Now consider the eight states that

have no income tax (Florida, Nevada, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, and Wyoming). Every one of these states gained in net domestic migrants. And each one except Florida (which has sky-high property taxes) “ranked in the top 12 of destination states.”

In order to see the phenomenon in action, compare North Dakota to South Dakota. Both states are essentially the same in terms of geography and climate. But they couldn't be more different in terms of migration. North Dakota lost a greater percentage of citizens than any other state except Michigan. South Dakota ranked in the top twelve states in terms of net domestic migration. People are moving out of North Dakota, but they are moving to South Dakota in droves. North Dakota has an income tax. South Dakota does not.

For many years now, demographers have noted the flight of upper income, educated families from California. California is the only Pacific Coast state to lose migrant population in 2007. One of the major reasons is the fact that California has the highest state income tax in the nation. So now more than one and a half million Californians have left the state in the last ten years.

So where are many of these people going? They are moving to neighboring Nevada, which has no income tax. “High income Californians can buy a house in Las Vegas for the amount they save in three or four years by not paying California income taxes.”

An old adage says high taxes don't redistribute income, they redistribute people. Once again we see the realignment of America. People vote with their feet, and it seems that taxes are one of the reasons they leave one state for another state.

# Income Realignment

I would like to conclude by looking once again at economic statistics, but this time focus on family income. If you turn on a television or open a newspaper, and you are certain to hear or read someone say that the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. But would it surprise you to know that other governmental data says just the opposite?

The latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau does seem to indicate that the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. But these numbers do not reflect the economic improvement of individuals and families.

Data from the Internal Revenue Service does show this movement. It shows that people in the bottom fifth have nearly doubled their income in the last ten years. It also shows that the top one percent saw their incomes decline by twenty-six percent. [\[7\]](#)

Why do these two set of governmental statistics differ? It turns out that the IRS tracks people over time. After all, people don't stay in the same income brackets throughout their lives. Millions of people move from one bracket to another.

The IRS tracks people each year and thus reflects real changes to real people while the Census Bureau merely creates the illusion of tracking people. The best way to follow people is to actually follow people. That's what the IRS statistics do, and so they are more accurate.

What about the claims that family income has stagnated? First, we need to make a distinction between household income and per capita income. Household or family income can remain essentially unchanged for a decade while per capita income is increasing.

The reason is simple: the number of people per household and per family is declining. If annual household income is



\$60,000, the per capita income for a family of six would be \$10,000 but for a family of three would be \$20,000.

The difference in the number of people also affects economic statistics for different ethnic groups. Hispanics have higher household incomes than African-Americans. But blacks have higher individual incomes than Hispanics. The reason for the difference is family size.

Second, we should also take a second look at the statistics that say income has stagnated. If we go back to the IRS numbers, we find that the average taxpayer's real income has increased by twenty-four percent in the last decade.

The point to all of this is that economic statistics can sometimes be misleading. They may be true but they lead to misleading conclusions.

As we've seen, there have been some dramatic shifts in the social, political, economic, and geographic nature of this country. A wise and discerning Christian will pay attention to this realignment and make wise plans for the future. Isaiah 32:8 says that "the noble man devises noble plans, and by noble plans he stands." As Christians we need to wisely plan for the future.

## Notes

1. U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports*, Series P20-537; America's Families and Living Arrangements: March 2000 and earlier reports.
2. Larry L. Bumpass, James A. Sweet, and Andrew Cherlin, "The Role of Cohabitation in the Declining Rates of Marriage," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 53 (1991), 926.
3. Michael Barone, "The Realignment of America," *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 May, 2007.
4. Michael Barone, "Throw Out the Old Electoral Maps in 2008," [Townhall.com](http://Townhall.com), 1 March 2008.
5. Arthur C. Brooks, "The Fertility Gap," *The Wall Street*

*Journal*, 22 August 2006.

6. "States of Opportunity," *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 February 2008.

7. Thomas Sowell, "Income Confusion," [Townhall.com](http://Townhall.com), 21 November 2007.

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## Coddling of the American Mind

*Drawing on the book The Coddling of the American Mind, Kerby Anderson examines the insanity on college campuses where students cannot handle ideas and people they disagree with.*

In this article we will talk about what is happening on college campuses, and even focus on why it is happening. Much of the material is taken from the book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*. [\[1\]](#)



Greg Lukianoff was trying to solve a puzzle and sat down with Jonathan Haidt. Greg was a first amendment lawyer working with the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). He was trying to figure out why students (who used to support free speech on campus) were now working to prevent speakers from coming on campus and triggered by words or phrases used by professors.

Greg also noticed something else. He has suffered from bouts of depression and noticed some striking similarities with some of the comments by students. He found in his treatment that sometimes he and others would engage in "catastrophizing" and assuming the worst outcome. He was seeing these distorted and irrational thought patterns in students.

After a lengthy discussion they decided to write an article about it for *The Atlantic* with the title, "Arguing Towards Misery: How Campuses Teach Cognitive Distortions." The editor suggested the more provocative title, "The Coddling of the American Mind." The piece from *The Atlantic* was one of the most viewed articles of all time and was then expanded to this book.

That book used the same title: *The Coddling of the American Mind*. Jonathan was on [Point of View](#) last year to talk about the book. The authors believe that these significant psychological changes that have taken place in the minds of students explain much of the campus insanity we see on campus today.

They point out that two terms rose from obscurity into common campus parlance. Microaggressions are small actions or word choices that are now thought as a kind of violence. Trigger warnings are an alert the professors now must use if they may be discussing a topic that might generate a strong emotional response.

Before we talk about some of the insight in the book, it is worth mentioning that though there is a psychological component to all of this insanity, there is also an ideological component. When the original article appeared, Heather MacDonal asked if "risk-adverse child-rearing is merely the source of the problem. For example, why aren't heterosexual white males demanding safe spaces?"[\[2\]](#) They all had the same sort of parents who probably coddled many of them.

It would probably be best to say that the mixture of psychological deficits also with the liberal, progressive ideological ideas promoted on campus have given us the insanity we see today. We have had liberal teaching on campuses for a century, but the problem has become worse in the last decade because of the psychological issues described

in the book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*.

## Three Untruths (Part 1)

The book can easily be summarized in three untruths that make up the first three chapters of the book. The first is the "Untruth of Fragility: What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Weaker." Nietzsche's original aphorism was, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." The younger generation has turned this idea on its head.

It is true that some things are fragile (like china teacups), while other things are resilient (and can withstand shocks). But they also note that some things are *antifragile*. In other words, they actually require stressors and challenges to grow. Our muscles are like that. Our immune system is like that. And university education is supposed to be like that. Students are supposed to be challenged by new ideas, not locked away in "safe spaces."

Unfortunately, most young people have been protected by a culture that promotes what they refer to as "safetyism." It has become a cult of safety that is obsessed with eliminating threats (whether real or imagined) to the point where fragility becomes expected and routine. And while this is true for the millennial generation (also called Generation Y), it is even truer for the iGen generation (also called Generation Z) who are even more obsessed with safety.

Part of the problem in these untruths is what they call "concept creep." Safety used to mean to be safe from physical threats. But that has expanded to the idea that safety must also include emotional comfort. In order to provide that comfort, professors and students a few years ago introduced the idea of creating "safe spaces" for students. And in order to keep those students emotionally safe in the classroom, professors must issue "trigger warnings" so these students

don't experience trauma during a classroom lecture or discussion.

The second untruth is the "Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: Always Trust Your Feelings." You can get yourself in some difficult circumstances quickly if you always trust your emotions. It is easy in this world to get frustrated, discouraged, and even depressed. Psychologists have found that certain patients can get themselves caught in a feedback loop in which irrational negative beliefs cause powerful negative feelings. We are seeing that on college campuses today.

Psychologists describe "the cognitive triad" of depression. These are: "I'm no good" and "My world is bleak" and "My future is hopeless." Psychologists have effective ways of helping someone break the disempowering feedback cycle between negative beliefs and negative emotions. But very few adults (parents, professors, administrators) are working to correct mistaken ideas.

## **Three Untruths (Part 2)**

In a college classroom, students are apt to make some sweeping generalization and engage in simplistic labeling of the lecture or reading material. In that case, we would hope that a professor would move the discussion by asking questions or even challenging the assertion.

Instead, many professors and colleges go along with the student comments. In fact, many even argue that any perceived slight adds up to what today are called "microaggressions." In many cases, slights may be unintentional and actually wholly formed from the listener's interpretation.

Here is how it develops. First, you prevent certain topics from being discussed in class. Next, you prevent certain speakers from coming to campus because they might present a perspective that aggrieved students believe should not be

discussed. In the book is a chart illustrating how many speakers have been disinvited from universities. Five years ago, the line jumps up significantly.

The third untruth follows from that assumption. It is the "Untruth of Us Versus Them: Life is a Battle Between Good People and Evil People." The authors argue that "the human mind is prepared for tribalism." They even provide psychological research demonstrating that. But that doesn't mean we have to live that way. In fact, conditions in society can turn tribalism up, down, or off. Certain conflicts can turn tribalism up and make them more attentive to signs about which team a person may be on. Peace and prosperity usually turn tribalism down.

Unfortunately, in the university community, distinctions between groups are not downplayed but emphasized. Distinctions defined by race, gender, and sexual preference are given prominence. Mix that with the identity politics we see in society, and you generate the conflict we see almost every day in America.

The authors make an important distinction between two kinds of identity politics. Martin Luther King, Jr. epitomized what could be called "common-humanity identity politics." He addressed the evil of racism by appealing to the shared morals of Americans using the unifying language of religion.

That is different from what we find on college campuses today that could be called "common-enemy identity politics." It attempts to identify a common enemy as a way to enlarge and motivate your tribe. Their slogan sounds like this: Our battle for identity and survival is a battle between good people and bad people. We're the good guys and need to defeat the bad guys.

## An Example: Evergreen State College

One good example of how these untruths play out can be found at what happened on a college campus in Olympia, Washington. The entire story is described in chapter five but also is featured prominently in the opening chapter of the book *No Safe Spaces* and in the movie with the same title.

Just a few years ago, Evergreen State College was probably best known as the alma mater for rapper Macklemore and Matt Groening, the creator of *The Simpsons*. That all changed with an email biology professor Bret Weinstein sent.

In the past, the school had a tradition known as the “National Day of Absence.” Usually, minority faculty and students leave the campus for a day to make a statement. But in 2017, the college wanted to change things and wanted white students and faculty to stay away from campus.

Professor Weinstein argued in an email that there is a difference between letting people be absent and telling people “to go away.” And he added that he would show up for work. When he did, he was confronted by a mob of students. When the administration tried to appease the demonstrators, things got worse.

Weinstein has described himself as a political progressive and left-leaning libertarian. But his liberal commitments did not protect him from the student mob. The campus police warned him about a potential danger. The next morning, as he rode his bike into town, he saw protesters poised along his route tapping into their phones. He rode to the campus police department and was abruptly told: “You’re not safe on campus, and you’re not safe anywhere in town on your bicycle.” Weinstein and his wife eventually resigned and finally received a financial settlement from the university.

The Evergreen students and faculty displayed each of the three great untruths. The Untruth of Fragility (What doesn't kill you makes you weaker) came from a faculty member who supported the protesters and addressed some of her faculty colleagues in an angry monologue. She warned, "I am too tired. This [blank] is literally going to kill me." A student at a large town hall meeting verbalized her anxiety and illustrated the Untruth of Emotional Reasoning (Always trust your feelings). She expressed, "I want to cry. I can't tell you how fast my heart is beating. I am shaking in my boots."

And the whole episode illustrates the Untruth of Us Versus Them (Life is a battle between good people and evil people). The students and faculty engaged in common-enemy identity politics by labeling a politically progressive college and liberal professors as examples of white supremacy. One student (who refused to join the protest) later testified to the college trustees, "If you offer any kind of alternative viewpoint, you're the enemy."

## **What Can We Do?**

The book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, identifies many disturbing trends on college campuses that are beginning to spill over into society. What can we do to stem the tide?

Obviously, the long-term solution to the insanity on campus and in society is to pray for revival in the church and spiritual awakening in America. But there are some practical things that must be done immediately.

First, college administrators must get control of their campus. The riots at some of these universities resulted in violence and property destruction. Often the campus police and even the local police failed to take action. Sadly, the university administration rarely took action afterwards.

Some form of deterrence would have prevented future actions on



the University of California, Berkeley campus. Instead, the inaction established a precedent that likely allowed the conflict at Middlebury College. Students not only shut down the lecture, but they assaulted one of the campus professors. Once again, no significant action was taken against the students and outside agitators. The problem will get worse if there is no deterrence.

Second, professors must get control of their classrooms. Students cannot be allowed to determine what subjects cannot be taught and what topics cannot be discussed. The authors of this book are concerned about the tendency to encourage students to develop extra-thin skins just before they enter into the real world. Employers aren't going to care too much about their feelings. Students don't have the right not to be offended.

Third, we need to educate this generation about free speech. One poll done by the Brookings Institute discovered that nearly half (44%) of all college students believe that hate speech is NOT protected by the First Amendment. And since many students label just about anything they don't like as hate speech, you can see why we have this behavior on college campuses. More than half (51%) of college students think they have a right to shout down a speaker with whom they disagree. A smaller percentage (19%) of college students think it is acceptable to use violence to prevent a speaker from speaking on campus.

Finally, the adults need to make their voice heard. We pay for public universities through our tax dollars. Parents send their kids off to some of these schools. We should not tolerate the insanity taking place on many college campuses today.

The authors have identified certain concerns that colleges and universities need to address. They remind us how hostile the academic world has become, not only to traditional Christian

values, but also to mere common sense. We need to pray for what is taking place in the college environment.

## Notes

1. Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff, et al., *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. New York City: Penguin Press, 2018.

2.

[www.thecollegefix.com/heres-the-9-best-takeaways-from-heather-mac-donalds-new-diversity-delusion-book/](http://www.thecollegefix.com/heres-the-9-best-takeaways-from-heather-mac-donalds-new-diversity-delusion-book/)

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# Stranger Than Fiction

*T.S. Weaver processes the 2006 fantasy comedy-drama film Stranger Than Fiction through a biblical worldview lens.*

I recently watched the movie *Stranger Than Fiction*. I thought it would be profitable to practice apologetic engagement using this form of popular culture, and an ideal opportunity to explore some apologetic themes found in the movie. Most literature has echoes of the biblical storyline since it's the foundation of understanding life in this world. As taught to the [Mind Games camp](#) participants every summer, properly understood, film can be of excellent value in discerning the philosophical positions and shifts in society and can enable the Christian to better respond to his or her culture. When interpreting a film, one should ask the following questions:

1. Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your interpretation?

2. Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to decide if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that agrees with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality.

3. Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film look to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone?

The main character, Harold, lives a strait-laced, boring, lonely life as an IRS agent, and he realizes he is the main character of a novel being written by a stranger. The novel plot affects his life as the author writes. He realizes this when he hears the narrator's voice describing his nearly every move. This is how the tension starts and then he hears the narrator say something like, "Little did he know, this seemingly inconsequential action would cause his imminent death." Obviously, death is relatively imminent for all of us, but the context implies his would be coming soon. He is an unmarried, middle-aged man; so, this is the problem of the story: he is going to die sooner than he expected, and he does not know how or when.

Being a seminary student, I wanted to know what Harold was thinking came after death. Why was a premature death (according to him) so tragic? Yet, there was no element to the movie at all that included thoughts of life after death. But, like most movies, there was reflection from Harold about life. Oddly, he did not start the reflection on his own. A literary theory professor had to be the one to ask him an apologetic type of question: "What is your life ambition?" Harold's shockingly shallow (and sad) answer was, "I've always wanted to learn the guitar." He was somehow motivated enough to be a successful IRS agent and do things like count the number of brush strokes while he brushed his teeth every morning, but he had not managed to get around to learning the guitar or answering life's biggest questions such as, "Why is there something instead of nothing? Why am I here? What is my

purpose? What must I do to be good? What is my destiny?" I wonder how many other Harolds there are out there. Surely (and hopefully) this is not a good representation of the average American.

Although the thought of death did not lead him to where I thought it should, it did lead him to a lifestyle change and new philosophy. If his old philosophy was, "I need to do well as an IRS agent," his new philosophy was, "I need to enjoy life more and do the things I've always wanted to do before I die." Now you would think this would turn into a hedonistic lifestyle but all he really did was stop counting his brush strokes, stop working, and start learning to play the guitar. However, he did turn his attention to a woman.

Her story was interesting as well, because she dropped out of Harvard Law School to make the world a better place by baking cookies to make people happy. So, I suppose part of her worldview was that if people are happy, the world is a better place. No one in the movie pressed her on the issue. Harold just accepted it and continued indulging himself with her cookies.

Predictably, this relationship turned into a romance and they both fell in love and started sleeping together. Apparently, sex was not something that needed a covenant of marriage for them. Nor much of a commitment of any kind. Not once during the movie did either of them call each other boyfriend or girlfriend or say the words "I love you."

There was no theological thought presented between the characters for most of the movie. Where some theology did occur with the characters (albeit just undertones) was with the professor thinking through Harold's dilemma and giving him advice. At one point, he realized Harold had no control in the story the narrator was telling about his life, and he told him, "You don't control your fate." He meant the narrator controlled it. So, this jumped out at me as though the

narrator were God and Harold, and the professor had a fatalistic theology. This is the point where Harold turned to his new philosophy thanks to the advice of the professor. With this type of theology, I think it is easy to result in the "It does not matter what I do, so I may as well stop thinking about it" mindset, which is where Harold turned.

An odd element to the story was that Harold's wristwatch had thoughts, feelings, and was even able to communicate to Harold. It was as if the narrator was God, and the wristwatch was the Holy Spirit guiding Harold at times. Yet ironically the narrator did not know Harold was a real person, so *she* (there is a rabbit trail waiting to be taken) was unknowingly playing the role of God.

During the tension of Harold's dilemma of soon-imminent death, it was easy to see Harold needed saving, but the mystery was, who was going to be his savior (playing the role of Jesus)? At first, I thought the professor was going to save Harold by telling him how to avoid death. Then I wondered if Harold was Jesus himself because he eventually became willing to face his death to allow the story to end the way they (the narrator, Harold, and the professor) all thought it ought to (they eventually all met). Then the next thing you know Harold saves a boy from being hit by a bus and Harold is hit in his place. I thought that was the ending of the book and Harold was dead. Consequently, I thought Harold was the savior for the boy and Harold played Jesus.

Harold's tremendously heroic act makes no sense based on the worldview he adopted, but it makes a world of sense based on a Christian worldview. It turns out Harold survived anyway, and it was the wristwatch who was the savior (part of it got lodged in his artery and stopped him from bleeding to death) because the author/narrator changed the ending. Thus, in a way, the narrator was God, the wristwatch was both the Holy Spirit and Jesus.

The redeeming moment was Harold getting to live after all his fear of dying and his life changing "for the better" (at least I think that is the movie wanted us to see). It was better in some ways, but in some ways the word "better" is a stretch because of how shallow the changes in his life were (ignoring the deep change of falling in love because the relationship was as shallow as most romantic comedy movies). The narrator even ties a bow on it all at the end by what seemed like (especially with the montage and the dramatic music) it was supposed to be a deeply profound message of the entire movie and what everyone (including the viewers) should walk away with. Here was the long word-for-word message before the closing credits (and the end of the book in the movie):

As Harold took a bite of a Bavarian sugar cookie, he finally felt as if everything was going to be ok. Sometimes, when we lose ourselves in fear and despair, in routine and constancy, in hopelessness and tragedy, we can thank God [*the first time He was mentioned*] for Bavarian sugar cookies. And fortunately, when there aren't any sugar cookies we can still find reassurance in a familiar hand on our skin, or a kind and loving gesture. Or a subtle encouragement. Or a loving embrace. Or an offer of comfort . . . not to mention hospital gurneys and nose plugs . . . an uneaten Danish . . . a soft-spoken secret . . . and Fender Stratocasters . . . and maybe the occasional piece of fiction. And we must remember that all these things: the nuances, the anomalies, the subtleties . . . which are in fact here for a much larger and nobler cause, they are here to save our lives. I know the idea seems strange, but I also know that it just happens to be true. And so, it was: the wristwatch saved Harold Crick.

What a load of nonsense. *That* is the final word and message of the story? Life is all about cookies, honorable deeds, comfort, and random material items. Nuances, anomalies, and subtleties save our lives? It *is* strange. How does it "just

happen to be true?" In that case, how is one's life different from someone else's? What makes up fear, despair, routine, constancy, hopelessness, and tragedy? Is it no sugar cookies? With this philosophy, what is the point of life? Does this not claim we are all saved? Which nuances, anomalies, and subtleties save us? Are they universal or relative? Or am I not saved because I do not wear a wristwatch?

And why are we thanking God for sugar cookies, but claiming our savior is a wristwatch? What is God's role in all of this? Why does He not get more credit? If He gave us the cookies, should He not at the very least get some praise for giving us the wristwatch also? Obviously, this was a secular movie, and it was far from Christian theology. But there was lostness, salvation, and redemption clear in the story. The worldview offered in *Stranger Than Fiction* is not strong enough to support the challenges of this world, but the Christian one is. But, hey, thank God for sugar cookies, right?

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## The Emerging Generation

*Kerby Anderson examines the characteristics of the millennial generation and how pastors, Christian leaders, and the church can reach out to this emerging generation.*

### Millennial Generation and Faith

Awhile back *USA Today* had a front page article on the millennial generation and faith.[\[1\]](#) It demonstrates that even mainstream newspapers are noticing a disturbing trend that many of us in the Christian world have been talking about for some time.

The article started out by saying, "Most young adults today don't pray, don't worship and don't read the Bible." Those are conclusions that come not only from *USA Today* but from research done by the Barna Research Group, the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, and LifeWay Christian Resources. Although the numbers differ slightly between groups, they all come to essentially the same conclusion. This emerging generation is less religious and less committed to the Christian faith than any generation preceding it.

The LifeWay study concluded that two-thirds (65%) rarely or never pray with others. Two thirds (65%) rarely or never attend worship services. And two-thirds (67%) don't read the Bible or other sacred texts. As you might imagine, their theology is not orthodox. For example, when asked if Jesus is the only path to heaven, half say yes and half say no. Not surprisingly, only 17% say they read the Bible daily.

How important is faith or spirituality to the millennial generation? Apparently, it isn't very important. When asked what was "really important in life," two thirds (68%) did not mention faith, religion, or spirituality. And that term "spirituality" is an important one to remember. Almost three-fourths (72%) agree that they're more spiritual than religious. This reflects their world. Lots of books, movies, and Web sites now promote spirituality that is anything but Christian.

Among the two thirds (65%) who call themselves Christians, "many are either mushy Christians or Christians in name only." That is the conclusion of Thom Rainer, president of LifeWay Christian Resources. "Most are just indifferent. The more precisely you try to measure their Christianity, the fewer you find committed to the faith."

This also shows up in behavior and personal morality. This generation is twice as likely as the baby boom generation to have had multiple sex partners by age eighteen. [\[2\]](#) Substance



abuse and cheating are common. There is a tendency toward “short-horizon thinking” with a “live today, for tomorrow we die” ethic. After all, they live in a pop culture with no absolutes that is awash in moral relativism.

Thom Rainer believes the church needs to take responsibility. He says, “We have dumbed down what it means to be part of the church so much that it means almost nothing, even to people who already say they are part of the church.”

It is time for Christian leaders and pastors to get serious about what is happening to this generation. They need to take note and develop creative ways to reach out to a generation that has not connected with church and basic Christian doctrine.

## **Psychological Characteristics**

A special report on the millennial generation describes several aspects of what many are calling the emerging generation in addition to faith.[{3}](#)

One characteristic is narcissism. Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell talk about the “narcissism epidemic” in their book to describe the soaring rates of self-obsession, attention-seeking, and an entitlement mindset among the youth.[{4}](#) They report that narcissistic personality traits have risen as fast as obesity from the 1980s to the present.

The emerging generation is also uninhibited. They are much more likely than previous generations to be open about the intimate details of their lives. They are casual about personal matters and lack understanding of appropriate boundaries and propriety. They also show disrespect for privacy. They will often post details online in an exhibitionist manner not found in previous generations. We will talk about this later when discussing their connectedness through social networks like Facebook and MySpace.

The emerging generation is overly self-confident. Millennials are rarely told no. They have also felt special and have inflated expectations of their own abilities and potential. Part of that optimism comes from the fact that they have rarely been allowed to fail. They have played in organized sports where everyone gets a trophy. They go to school where grade inflation is rampant.

The emerging generation is slow to make decisions. This generation is apt to explore all of the possibilities before making a commitment. This is understandable. If there is anything we have learned over the years in the social sciences, it is this: as choice increases, commitment decreases. The more choices I have, the less committed I will probably be to any one of those choices. In fact, I might even become more confused with those choices.

Some have argued that this difficulty in making decisions does two things. First, it causes members of this generation to doubt their own judgments. They live in the world of uncertainty. Second, it forces them to rely on authority figures to tell them what to do.[{5}](#)

These characteristics of the emerging generation pose a challenge to the church but one that can be met by those who disciple and mentor them. Biblical teaching and interaction with members of this generation about their self-image and self-esteem is a key component. We should also be willing to address the complexity of the world with thoughtful biblical answers.

## **Social Characteristics**

The emerging generation would like to change the world. Six out of ten (60%) say they feel personally responsible for making a difference in the world.[{6}](#) This is encouraging since there are other surveys that also show this generation to be

isolated and self-focused. The church and Christian leaders may be able to focus on this desire to change the world in calling for them to become leaders and make a difference in their communities.

This generation is also driven by pragmatism. They want what works. The positive aspect of this is that they are focused on results and getting something done. But the negative part of this is that pragmatism easily can lead to an “end justifies the means” mentality that can rationalize immoral and unethical actions.

The emerging generation also lives in a world of complexity. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons talk about this in their book, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity*.<sup>[7]</sup> They say those in this generation “relish mystery, uncertainty, ambiguity. They are not bothered by contradictions.” When faced with a paradox or questions, they don’t feel the need to rush to find answers.

Bill Perry, founder of the Recon generational college ministry, explains: “The established generation is more interested in the bottom line (truth, biblical worldview, right answers, etc.) and in getting there as quickly as possible. Not so with the emerging generation. For them, it’s as much the journey as the destination.”

A fourth characteristic of this generation is most disturbing. They have a negative view of the church. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons describe this in some detail in their book *unChristian*. This generation sees themselves as “outsiders.” They view the church as anti-homosexual, judgmental, political, and hypocritical. They see born-again Christians in a negative light.

We should not be surprised. Imagine if you grew up in a world where your perceptions of Christianity were informed by *The Simpsons*, *Comedy Central*, and *Saturday Night Live*. Imagine if

whenever you went to the movies, any character who was a Christian was always portrayed in a negative light. New stories talk about scandals in government, scandals in business, and scandals in the church. It would be very hard to not be cynical about major institutions in society, including the church.

This is certainly a call for us to live a righteous and authentic life. If we do so, I believe we can have a positive impact on this emerging generation.

## **Social Connections**

The emerging generation is extremely well connected. This is easily illustrated by their use of networking sites like Facebook and MySpace. They also value teamwork, even to the point of showing groupthink. They have lots of connections, but one wonders how many of these connections would actually be what most of us would consider to be “friends.” Yes, they are called friends on these networking sites, but they may actually be fairly superficial.

This leads to another characteristic of this generation. Most in this generation are lonely. Sean McDowell, in his book *Apologetics for a New Generation*, calls them the “loneliest generation” because their relationships are mostly on the surface and don’t meet the deepest need of their heart.[{8}](#) Shane Hipps has a different term. He calls them “digital natives.” Those in the millennial generation are so accustomed to mediated interaction that they find face-to-face interaction increasingly intolerable and undesirable. This is especially true when discussing a conflict.[{9}](#)

The emerging generation multitasks. They are the consummate multitaskers. Nearly one-third of 8- to 18-year olds say they multitask “most of the time” by doing homework, watching TV, sending text messages, surfing the Web, or listening to music.

And they do all of this simultaneously.

First, this is dangerous. Researchers have found that talking or texting is much more dangerous than many of us might even imagine. The Center for Auto Safety has released hundreds of pages of research documenting the dangerous impact of cell phone use on America's highways.<sup>{10}</sup> Talking or texting while driving is more dangerous than driving drunk.

Second, it is also relationally damaging. This generation thinks nothing of texting others while in the presence of other people. As we have just mentioned, they would rather send a text or e-mail than talk to a person face-to-face.

The emerging generation is overwhelmingly stressed out. One fourth of millennials feel unfulfilled in life, and nearly half say they are stressed out. This is twice the level of baby boomers. What is even more disturbing is that most parents are unaware of how stressed out their children are and how that is negatively impacting them. One very tragic result of this stress is the suicide rate. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds.

## **Biblical Perspective**

We noted that this is a generation that is narcissistic (2 Timothy 3:1-2) and overly self-confident. This is where the Bible and the church can provide perspective to a generation with great expectations and unwarranted confidence. Messages and Sunday school lessons along with discipleship programs aimed at issues like ego (Philippians 2:1-10), pride (Proverbs 16:18-19), and envy (Galatians 5:21) would be important to address some of these characteristics of the emerging generation.

This is a generation that finds it difficult to make decisions. Here is an opportunity to come alongside members of the emerging generation and provide them with biblical tools

(2 Timothy 2:15) for wise and moral decision-making. Messages (sermons, lessons) on the importance of commitment and how following biblical principles concerning life decisions can develop confidence and responsibility would also be important.

Many in the emerging generation want to change the world. This is an opportunity for pastors, teachers, and mentors to challenge this generation to make an impact for Jesus Christ in our world. We should challenge them with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

The emerging generation has a negative view of the church. When the institutional church has been wrong, we should be willingly to admit it. But we should also be alert to the fact that sometimes the criticisms we hear are unjustified. Skeptics might know someone who professes to be a Christian who they believe is a hypocrite. The person may not really be a Bible-believing Christian. Or he may not be representative of others in the same church.

We should also be willing to challenge the stereotype skeptics have of Christianity. If all they know of Christianity is what they see on television or read in the newspapers, they may not have an accurate view of Christianity.

This generation is also lonely and stressed out. They need to know how to develop deep, lasting relationships (Proverbs 18:24). They live in a world where relationships are disposable. It is a world where a "friend" on Facebook can "delete" them by hitting a key on their computer keyboard. They also need to learn how to develop friendships without becoming codependent.

They also need to know that a relationship with Christ provides a peace "which surpasses all comprehension" (Philippians 4:7). They may also need instruction on practical life issues and learn to develop healthy habits that develop their physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

Pastors, church leaders, and individual Christians have an opportunity to make a positive impact on this emerging generation. Hopefully this has given you a better understanding of this generation and provided practical ideas for ministry.

## Notes

1. Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Young adults less devoted to faith," *USA Today*, 27 April 2010, 1A.

2.

[www.kff.org/youthhivstds/upload/U-S-Teen-Sexual-Activity-Fact-Sheet.pdf](http://www.kff.org/youthhivstds/upload/U-S-Teen-Sexual-Activity-Fact-Sheet.pdf).

3. Jeff Myers and Paige Gutacker, A Special Report: Unraveling the Mysteries of the Millennial Generation, [www.passingthebaton.org](http://www.passingthebaton.org).

4. Jean M. Twenge and W. Keith Campbell, *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (NY: Free Press, 2009).

5. Ron Alsup, *The Trophy Kids Grow Up: How the Millennial Generation is Shaking Up the Workplace* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2008), pp. 12, 115.

6. Survey by Cone Inc., a communications agency, and Amp Insights, a marketing agency, 2006.

7. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons talk about this in their book, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

8. Sean McDowell, *Apologetics for a New Generation* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishing, 2009).

9. Shane Higgs, Lecture entitled "The Spirituality of the Cell Phone," Q conference, Austin, TX, 28 April 2009.

10. Center for Auto Safety, [www.autosafety.org](http://www.autosafety.org).

# unChristian: Is Christianity's Image Hurting Christ's Image?

*Byron Barlowe reviews the book unChristian, based on research on what young people think of evangelicals and born-again Christians: that they're hypocritical, judgmental, too political, exclusive. He calls out Christians to improve the reality behind the image to better reflect Christ.*

**Section Synopsis:** *A recent book entitled unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why It Matters uncovered overwhelmingly negative views of evangelicals and born-again Christians, especially among young generations. In some ways these views are warranted, in some ways they are not, but Christians do well to take them as a wake-up call for the sake of those God wants to save and mature.*

The meaning of *gospel* is literally "good news." The book *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*[\[1\]](#) is a book of bad news—that half of those outside the church have a negative perception of Christianity. And that's even true of many young people inside the church.



Evangelical Christians by definition consider Jesus' charge to present the biblical gospel message to the world a mandate. Yet many of the very people who they reach out to are rejecting the messengers. Researchers with the Barna Group found that a majority today believe that evangelical and born-again Christians are sheltered from the real world, are judgmental, way too political, anti-homosexual (to the point of being gay-hating), and hypocritical.



These are widespread perceptions, especially among sixteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds, even those who go to church. To many people, perception *is* ninety percent of reality. So whatever your opinion of the study, this is the feeling out there.

Barna's survey results and commentary have been making a stir through *unChristian* since its release in 2007. It's not a deep theological or philosophical book. It contains statistical interpretation broken up by commentary from every stripe of evangelical Christian. It *is* a sobering cultural assessment that calls out believers to be more Christlike.

The authors' applications are not always solidly based. They seem a little dismissive of valid objections to their analysis and conclusions. Also, confusion among unchurched respondents about the meaning of the terms "born again" and "evangelical" leads one to ask, How seriously do we take survey-takers' critique of Christians if they don't even know who or what these Christians are? That is, many times the people being surveyed couldn't clearly define what "born-again" means or what an "evangelical" is, so how much stock should we put in their criticisms?

Yet, the stats are stark enough to be alarming: of those outside the church, fully half had a bad impression of evangelicals. Only three percent had a good impression! Are Christians so bent on moral persuasion that we're alienating the lost with a lovelessness that really is *unChristian*? Or is this just a case of the unsaved experiencing the gospel as a stumbling block, as Jesus said would happen? The authors say it's mainly Christians' fault; I agree but suspect there's more to it.

Here's a modest proposal: even if respondents were biased or misled, why don't we in the church humble ourselves, listen, and change where we need to? In the spirit of King David, when Shimei cursed him loudly, we may need to simply say, "Let them critique. The Lord told them to."

Some question whether perceptions of outsiders should shape the church's behavior. Co-authors Kinnaman and Lyons make the case that the church needs to be thoughtful about our responses to homosexuals, less trusting of political action as the way to change culture, and *more humble* and open to people who have not yet experienced grace. If outsiders feel that we are running a club they're not invited to, where is Christ in that? they ask.

According to the authors, "Theologically conservative people are increasingly perceived as aloof and unwilling to talk." But those under 30 "are the ultimate 'conversation generation'." Those outside church want to discuss issues, but see Christians as unwilling. Have you recently had a spiritual dialogue with a young unbeliever? How'd it go?

## **"Christians Are Hypocritical"**

**Section Synopsis:** *unChristian documents a heavy bias against Christians as hypocritical, a charge which is in part true, admit many. But it's also an unavoidable reality of a grace-based religion, which if explained, goes a long way towards mitigating the charge and explaining the gospel message.*

One overwhelming opinion among the survey group is that Christians are *hypocrites* and this keeps people away from church.

In fact, the survey on which the book is based reveals blatant legalism among believers, that the top priority of born-again Christians is, "doing the right thing, being good, and not sinning." This do-your-best value topped biblical values like "relationships, evangelism, service and family faith." In another survey, four out of five churchgoers said that "the Christian life is well described as, 'trying hard to do what God commands'." [\[2\]](#) Such a primary focus on *lifestyle* and sin-management as a measure of spirituality leads to what they

call a “false pretense of holiness,” that is, hypocrisy.<sup>{3}</sup> It’s often like we Christians are living for others’ approval and forgetting about grace.

This isn’t lost on younger generations. “Like it or not, the term ‘hypocritical’ has become fused with young peoples’ experience of Christianity,” say the authors.<sup>{4}</sup> *Eighty-five percent* of “outsiders” and *half of young churchgoers* say so. The book offers story after painful story of sometimes breathtaking hypocrisy based on lengthy interviews. This adds weight to the conclusions drawn by Kinnaman and Lyons. The research was not simply based on surveys (quantitative) but also on in-depth interviews (qualitative).

There may be a silver lining here. The charge of hypocrisy offers a handy starting point for turning around negative perceptions and explaining grace. Pastor and author Tim Keller admits that we Christians actually *are* often hypocritical and need to be humble about it. Unrepentant hypocrites don’t admit mistakes, so we immediately challenge a perception by owning up to it.

But the other unavoidable fact is that non-Christians assume we are *trying* to live like Jesus to *get into* heaven, like the good-works motivation of other religions and cults. So, when they find out we’re not perfect people, they critique us as hypocrites. In contrast, an old saying captures the biblical worldview: “The Church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints.”<sup>{5}</sup> Unbelievers simply cannot understand this; we have to be patient with that, says Keller.

You could respond to the accusation of hypocrisy like this: “I have a relationship with Christ not because I’m good but precisely because I am not good. He rescued me from myself and the ruin I was causing. But He’s changing me. I’m still a mess, but I’m God’s mess.”

In an age of Internet image-making and advertising, young

outsiders are cynical about finding anybody who's genuine. Christians need to genuinely repent of hypocrisy. Meanwhile, we can explain that grace means our imperfections are covered by God during the process of spiritual transformation. Maybe outsiders will opt for grace once they see more of it.

## “Christians Hate Homosexuals”

*Section Synopsis: Evangelical and born-again Christians today have a well-deserved but understandable reputation as anti-gay, but attitudes can go so far as being gay-hating. Balancing conviction about the broader gay agenda and the personal sin of homosexuality with a humble compassion for gay individuals who are made in God's image is key, especially as we model for younger believers.*

The guys in my Bible study group were discussing gay marriage and the upcoming elections. The lively banter stopped when I dropped a bomb. “You know,” I said, “when most non-Christians under thirty-years-old find out we're evangelicals, we may as well be wearing a sandwich board emblazoned with ‘God hates gays.’” I'd been reading *unChristian*, and it was sobering.

According to the authors, if we're raising kids to “shun their peers who are ‘different,’ we are actually limiting their . . . spiritual influence” and may lead them to question their own faith.[{6}](#) Why? Because they'll probably have friends who identify as gay and other sexual identities. As Probe colleague Kerby Anderson says, “One of the biggest challenges for churches and individual Christians who reach out to homosexuals is keeping two principles in proper tension: biblical convictions and biblical compassion.”[{7}](#)

An emerging adult generation accepts homosexuality, often without thinking, even those who grew up in church. Only one-third of churched young people believe homosexuality to be a “major problem.”

And, only a small percentage of young adults “want to resist homosexual initiatives” in society. This is alarming, given America’s softening of sexual morals, mainstreaming of gay culture and the redefinition of marriage. But the issue addressed in *unChristian* is that in our battle against a few agenda-driven radicals, we’ve regularly forgotten that our fight is not with same-sex strugglers, but with unbiblical ideas.[\[8\]](#) We’re called to love, not condemn, the people made in God’s image who are caught up in sin, even while we stand up as Christian citizens.

Barna’s survey shows just how unbiblical self-identified Christians can be. Over half said homosexuality was a problem, but only two out of six hundred people said anything about love or “being sympathetic” as a potential solution. A mere one percent say they pray for homosexuals! “We need to downgrade the importance of being antihomosexual as a ‘credential,’” of our commitment to Christ, say the authors.[\[9\]](#) That is, we need to repent if we believe that it’s a spiritual badge of honor to be anti-gay.

If a certain brand of sin is disgusting to us, why should that get in the way of communicating the love of a forgiving God? We need to keep in mind that *all* sin is disgusting to God, even our pet sins. This is the kind of challenge the book *unChristian* does well. Yet, scant mention is made of the greater consequences of sexual sins, including sickness and the desperate need for repentance and recovery among same-sex practitioners. Perhaps that would have been off-point for this book.

Kinnaman observes that younger generations are “hard-wired for relational connections” and view the church’s lack of spiritual solutions as uncaring and insincere. If we lose our audience due to heartlessness it won’t matter how much truth we proclaim.

## “Christians Are Judgmental”

**Section Synopsis:** *“Christians are judgmental” is an accusation coming from young people inside and outside the Church today. Believers need to learn to retain the biblical mandate to judge the fruits of ideas and behaviors while going out of our way not to condemn people who’ve never (or seldom) experienced God’s grace.*

One of the most troubling perceptions that a watching world has of “born agains” and “evangelicals”, especially among the under-thirty crowd, is that we are judgmental. The book *unChristian* cites findings that ninety percent of “outsiders” believe this. More than half of young churchgoers agree!

It’s not compromise to graciously work with disagreements. Sometimes the need to be right and “stay right” cancels out the truth we’re trying to defend. To use the old saying, “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” This seems to be the main finding the research revealed.

The authors credit young generations with insightfulness into peoples’ *motives* since they’ve been endlessly targeted by marketing, lectures, and sermons. (Most have spent time in church, by the way.) They don’t want unsolicited advice, say the authors. But that makes them resistant, *not* unreachable. Another factor is that younger generations reject black-and-white views. “They esteem context, ambiguity, and tension. . . . *How* we communicate [to them] is just as important as *what* we communicate,” according to the book. [{10}](#) One popular author is seeing fruit among younger people by focusing on God Himself as the original community, the Trinity, and giving credence to our need for community.[{11}](#)

Well, aren’t unbelievers the ones judging believers? Aren’t Christians just standing up to sin? In-depth interviews showed that many respondents “believe Christians are trying . . . to

justify feelings of moral and spiritual superiority.”[{12}](#) My opinion is this: If we think we’re better, we need to revisit Amazing Grace! Arrogance is the charge; are you guilty of it? I know I’ve been.

What does it mean to be judgmental? People are stumbling over stuff like this:

- Judgmentalism doesn’t stop to ask why people do the things they do and why they are the way they are. That is, it just doesn’t care.
- Judgmental minds see everything in terms of rules kept or rules broken.
- A judgmental heart maintains the us-them dichotomy, keeping people at a distance from us. Holding people in contempt is easier when we lump them into categories.
- The core belief of a judgmental spirit is, “I’m right and I’m better.”

It’s true, the worldview of young generations in America has shifted in recent years to include a “do-it-yourself” morality and this is deeply troubling. Youth apologist Josh McDowell notes that seniors have the emotional maturity of freshmen today. Many suffer from broken families.[{13}](#) Still, an entire generation—churched and many formerly-churched—doubts our motives. Yes, they are judging us! But if our attitudes truly are stiff-arming people, shouldn’t we start sympathetically inviting them into God’s fellowship?

Christ-followers have a very hard time distinguishing between judging *people* and judging *what they do*. Scripture teaches us clearly not to condemn people to hell. Paul the Apostle taught that he didn’t even judge himself, much less outsiders. Yet we are told to judge fruits, which consist of what people do. That way, we know if we’re dealing with an unbelieving person, a confused believer or a mature disciple of Christ. If an

unbeliever commits sin, we can see from it how to minister to them.

We church folks say, "Love the sinner, hate the sin." Those studied said they experience hate of the sin *and* the sinner. Much of church peoples' discomfort and judgmentality stems from cultural and generational sources. If something like tattoos gets in the way of a Christlike response, maybe we need to take a fresh look at our attitudes.

## How Can True Christians Constructively Respond?

**Section Synopsis:** *Repairing a damaged image is a worthy goal for Christians so that critics can see Christ instead of negative stereotypes. We can tear down stereotypes by being Christlike and then we have a chance to tear down deeper misconceptions about God, the Bible, and faith.*

The panhandler touched Dave's heart with his honest appeal. "I just want a burger." Throughout the meal, Dave talked with him, finding out about his life and views. He didn't try to cram the gospel in or argue. Dave later overheard the man say to his homeless companion, "Hey that guy's a Christian and we actually had a conversation." Dave wondered what kind of negative interactions with Christians from the past prompted that response!

The authors of *unChristian* uncovered a low public opinion of evangelicals and born-again Christians among outsiders. They may be biased, but it's helpful to know what people think.

One of the most important ministries you can have these days is to tear down negative stereotypes of Christ-followers simply by being Christlike. That may set the stage for tearing down myths and lies about God, the Bible, and Christianity.

We need to seek common ground to begin a dialogue with those



outside the faith. We all respond to agreement better than arguments, so affirming is a good start towards persuading. I recently saw a bumper sticker on the truck of a worker. It said in effect, "Jesus loves you but I think you're a jerk", although in more colorful language! After I chuckled about how God loves "jerks" like me, we spent forty-five minutes discussing his views, mostly on God and religion.

At one point, he proclaimed, "I like to think of God as feminine." I explored his reasons, which included the presence of beauty in the world. I affirmed that observation far as I could and expanded his thinking. I said, "What if God is so big and complete that He embodies perfect femininity *and* masculinity?" The door opened wider. But what if I'd acted offended by the cuss word on the sticker or been put off by his distorted theology? I'm sure he would have been put off and the conversation would have been aborted.

Again, we also need to admit mistakes and problems, say the authors. Youth today emphasize "keepin' it real," being genuine. "Transparency disarms an image-is-everything generation."[{14}](#)

Lastly, the authors urge us to respond with truth *and* love to gays and their friends. Speaking out against homosexual sin and harmful politics may be our role. At the same time, Kerby Anderson points out that Christians "should lovingly welcome those who struggle with homosexual temptations and dedicate [ourselves] to meet the emotional and spiritual needs of" homosexual strugglers.[{15}](#)

Our tone of voice, demeanor and facial expression are much more important than we think. As Tim Keller says, "You actually have to embody a different kind of Christian than the ones that they've known in the past or they're simply not going to listen to what you're saying."[{16}](#)

## Notes

1. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why it Matters* (BakerBooks: Grand Rapids, MI, 2007).
2. David Kinnaman and Lyons, 51
3. Ibid, 49.
4. Ibid, 42. 5. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (Dutton/Penguin Group, New York, New York: 2008), 54.
6. Kinnaman and Lyons, 99.
7. Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality* (Harvest House: Eugene, Oregon, 2008), 82.
8. Ephesians 6:12 (NASB). See: [www.BibleGateway.com](http://www.BibleGateway.com).
9. Kinnaman and Lyons, 105.
10. Ibid, 183.
11. Tim Keller, interviewed by Ed Stetzer, researcher, blogger and host of Inside Lifeway, posted April 24, 2008, [lifeway.edgeboss.net/download/lifeway/corp/IL\\_Evangelism\\_and\\_Keller.mp3](http://lifeway.edgeboss.net/download/lifeway/corp/IL_Evangelism_and_Keller.mp3).
12. Kinnaman and Lyons, 182.
13. Josh McDowell, as quoted by Charlie Mack, staff representative of Faculty Commons (Campus Crusade for Christ) in a PowerPoint® presentation presented to professors at Michigan State University, Spring, 2008.
14. Kinnaman and Lyons, 56.
15. Kerby Anderson, 83-84.
16. Keller, "Inside Lifeway" interview.

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## **Probe Survey 2020 Report 6:**

# Nothing in Particulars and Biblical Views

*Steve Cable analyzes Probe's 2020 Survey, examining beliefs of 'Nothing in Particulars' on salvation, biblical worldview, and sexual issues.*

We want to examine the Unaffiliated and particularly those who selected Nothing in Particular (NIP) as their religious preference. As noted in [the first article of this series{1}](#), some researchers earlier in this century posited that many of the Nothing in Particulars were actually part of the Christian majority in America and would return to the fold as they aged. However, as shown in that article, this idea has not materialized as the young adults aged. Rather, the percentage of NIPs in each age group has grown as the age group has aged.

In this report, we will see how very different the beliefs of the NIPs are from those taught in the New Testament. We will look at this in three separate areas:

1. Salvation through Christ Alone.
2. A Biblical Worldview
3. Attitudes Concerning Sexual Issues

In these three areas, we will discover that most NIPs disagree with biblical teaching on these topics.

## Reasons for Not Believing in Salvation Through Christ Alone

One question asked was "What keeps you from believing that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ alone?" Particularly for the Unaffiliated, we want to know whether it is a lack of knowledge or some other reason. When asked this question, the respondents could select from the following answers:

1. Never gave the question any thought.
2. Don't believe that God would take upon Himself the penalty for my sin.
3. Salvation is not a gift, it must be earned.
4. I am clearly as good as Christians I know so I should be accepted by God if they are.
5. There is no personal, creator God.
6. Another answer not listed here.
7. Not applicable, I do believe.

*Figure 1 What keeps you from believing in salvation through Jesus alone: Ages 18 - 39*



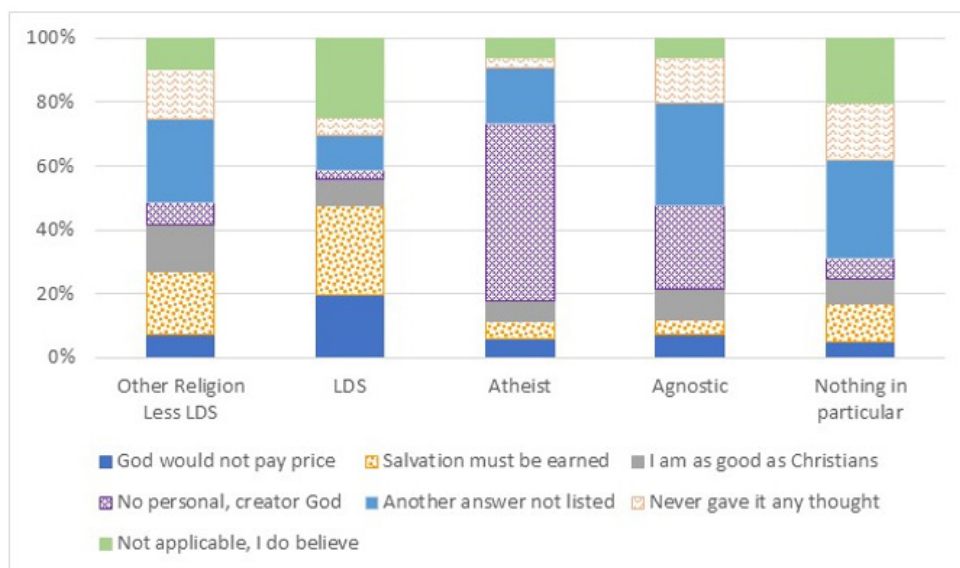
First let's consider how the various religious groups answered this question as shown in Figure 1. This data has already been discussed in [Report #4](#). But in the current

discussion, we want to focus on Other Religion and Unaffiliated. Respondents from Other Religions were most likely to select either "salvation must be earned" or "another answer not listed." A smaller percentage, just over 10%, selected "I am clearly as good as Christians I know. That answer appeared to be irrelevant to them.

On the other hand, the two largest segments selected by the Unaffiliated were "no personal, creator God" and "another answer not listed." Both groups had about 15% of their number select "Not applicable, I do believe."

To get a better understanding of what drives these results, we dove further into the makeup of each of these two groups. The results are shown in Figure 2. [\[2\]](#)

*Figure 2 What keeps you from believing in salvation through Jesus alone: Ages 18 - 39*



We divided Other Religions into the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) and all other non-Christian religions. We divided the Unaffiliated into Atheist, Agnostic and Nothing in Particular. As shown, the LDS respondents are much more likely than other religions to select “salvation must be earned,” “I do believe,” and “God would not pay the price.” Almost one quarter of the LDS selected “I do believe” which explains how the Other Religion category showed about 15% with that answer. So we see that a strong majority of LDS people believe that they must do something more than believing in Christ to achieve salvation. At the same time, a significant minority believe in salvation through faith in Christ alone.

The Atheist subgroup follows our expectations. A majority (> 55%) don’t believe in Jesus as savior because they do not believe in any God at all. When we add in “another answer not given,” about three quarters of the Atheists are covered.

Moving to Agnostics, we see that a strong majority selected either “no God” or “another answer not given.” Adding in “I never gave it any thought,” we cover about three quarters of the Agnostics.

The Nothing in Particular group (NIPs) has a significantly

different range of answers. About one in five say they do believe in salvation through faith in Christ. This number is significantly higher than Atheist and Agnostics, but it still leaves four out of five who say they do not believe. Almost one half of them selected “another answer not given” or “I never gave it any thought.”

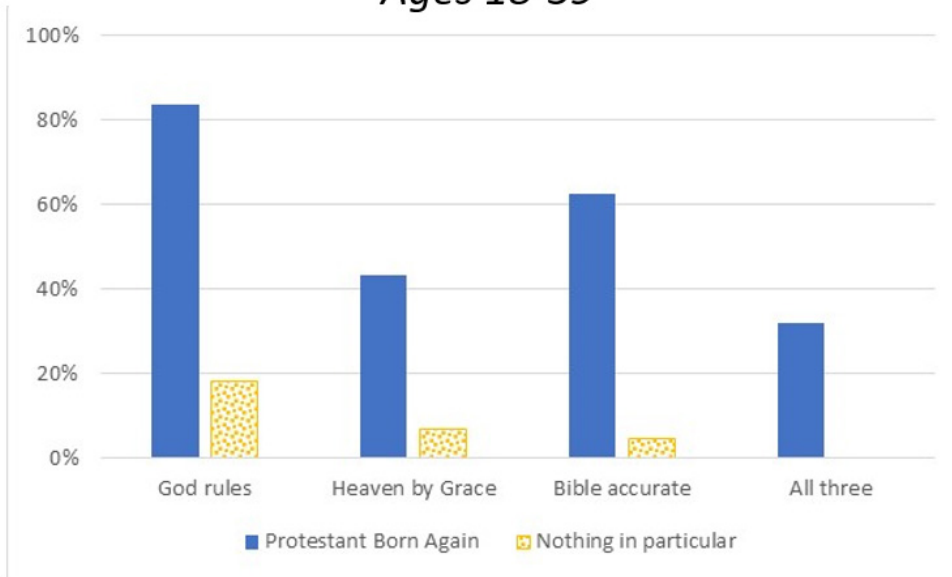
So, there are about one fifth of the NIPs who might have a somewhat Christian view of salvation. However, less than 3% of this group claim to be born-again. And of course, four fifths of this group say they do not believe in salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. So, an overwhelming majority of the NIPs clearly are not born-again or evangelical Christians.

## **NIPS and a Subset of a Biblical Worldview**

How do those who claim their religion is “Nothing in particular” stand in accepting a subset of the Basic Biblical Worldview discussed in earlier articles? The subset consists of the following three questions:

1. Which of the following descriptions comes closest to what you personally believe to be true about God: **God is the all-powerful, all knowing, perfect creator of the universe who rules the world today**<sup>{3}</sup>
2. The Bible is totally accurate in all its teachings: **Strongly Agree**
3. If a person is generally good enough or does enough good things for others during their life, they will earn a place in heaven: **Disagree Strongly**

*Figure 3 Biblical Worldview Comparison  
Ages 18-39*



Let's compare the results for Born-again Protestants and those who claimed to be Nothing in Particular. As shown in Figure 3, for each of the questions those agreeing with a

biblical worldview among the Nothing in Particulars is a small fraction of those among Born-again Protestants. When we combine the three questions together, we see one out of three Born-again Protestants vs. no NIPs. Certainly, some of these NIPs came from an evangelical background, but none of them interviewed in our survey ascribe to a basic evangelical worldview as adults. As noted in our first report, one in three born-again Protestants is a disappointing percentage ascribing to these biblical worldview questions, but it is certainly dramatically better than the Nothing in Particular group.

## **NIPs and Biblical Sexual Morality**

On another front, we compare views on biblical sexual morality held by Born-again Protestants and Nothing in Particulars. To do this, we will consider three of the questions from our survey as listed below.

1. Sex among unmarried people is always a mistake: from **Agree Strongly** to Disagree Strongly
2. Viewing explicit sexual material in a movie, on the internet, or some other source is:

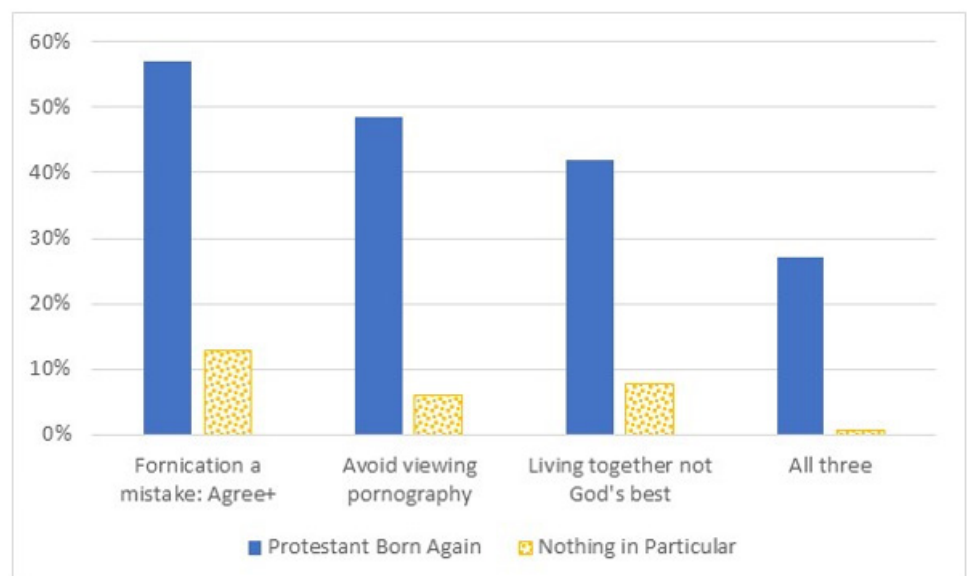
- **a. To be avoided**
  - b. Acceptable if no one is physically or emotionally harmed in them.
  - c. A matter of personal choice
  - d. Not a problem if you enjoy it
  - e. Don't know
3. Living with someone in a sexual relationship before marriage:
- a. Might be helpful but should be entered into with caution.
  - b. Just makes sense in today's cultural environment.
  - c. Will have a negative effect on the relationship.
  - **d. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God.**

For this comparison, we are looking for the following answers:

1. Either Agree Strongly or Agree Somewhat
2. To be avoided
3. Should be avoided as not our best choice as instructed by God

The results from our survey are shown in Figure 4. Once again, we see a large difference between these two groups. Clearly, the NIPs do not ascribe to a biblical view

*Figure 4 Comparison of Sexual Morality  
Ages 18 - 39*





on sexual morality. The majority of Born-again Protestants do not ascribe to those beliefs either, but a significant minority of them do.

## Summary

As discussed above, we find that the Nothing in Particular group have

- less than one in five who say they are trusting in Christ for their salvation,
- none who accept a simple three question take on a biblical worldview and
- almost none who accept a biblical view on sexuality.

In each of the age groups considered in our surveys, the percentage of respondents selecting a NIP affiliation has grown as the age groups have grown older. There is no indication that any significant number of them are returning to or turning to an Evangelical Christian perspective.

Clearly for the upcoming decade a critical question for the Evangelical church is, How do we reach the Unaffiliated and especially the Nones with the good news of the gospel? Since the vast majority of NIPs do not accept the authority of the Bible, we need to be prepared to share with them why we can believe the Bible is an accurate communication from the Creator of this universe. In particular, that the biblical account of the death resurrection of Jesus is an accurate historical account. One source to use in this task is our article "[The Answer is the Resurrection](#)"<sup>{4}</sup> which can be found on the Probe website.

### Notes

1. [Introducing Probe's New Survey: Religious Views and Practices 2020](#)
2. As we dive down into these subgroups remember that the smaller number of respondents of each type reduce the accuracy

as we apply our limited sample to the entire group across the United States. In this case, we surveyed 68 LDS, 178 Other Religions not LDS, 124 Atheist, 167 Agnostic, and 245 Nothing in particular (between 18 and 39 years old).

3. Other answers to select from: God created but is no longer involved with the world today; God refers to the total realization of personal human potential; there are many gods, each with their different power and authority; God represents a state of higher consciousness that a person may reach; there is no such thing as God; and don't know.

4. [The Answer Is the Resurrection: Sharing Your Faith in Christ \(probe.org\)](http://probe.org)

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# Seeing Through News Media Bias: Exposing Deception and Proclaiming Truth in an Age of Misinformation

*Steve Cable examines the role of deception in how we receive much of today's information, providing perspective on how to see through it to the truth.*

## Biblical Perspective on Truth

We live in an age when many of us feel as if we are swimming in a sea of information. From broadcast media to cell phones to ubiquitous internet access, we are assailed with more information than we can possibly assimilate. Just on the internet alone we are asked to deal with social networking,

blogs, news feeds, forwarded emails, spam, not to mention our compulsion to Google any topic that crosses our mind.

Most of the information we encounter is intended to impact our view of truth; what we think about politics, economics, relationships, needs, and wants. Its purpose is to reshape your current view of reality into a different view that someone else is promoting. This reshaping may be good or bad depending upon the validity and implications of the revised view.



One response to this deluge of information is to despair of ever discerning truth. After all, what standard can I use to compare competing truth claims? If one medical doctor promotes eating fish daily and another doctor says it is dangerous due to high mercury levels, how can I discern the truth? I may be tempted to retreat into a postmodern perspective, creating my own personal, relative truth that works for me while affirming that others may need to create a different truth that works better for them.

However, as a Christian, I know that there is absolute truth. I may not have full awareness of truth, but it does exist regardless of my lack of knowledge or understanding. Absolute truth is reality as seen from God's perspective, lived out through the person of Jesus Christ and recorded for us in the Holy Bible. When I consult that Bible, I find that I am not to be tossed about by all of this competing information, but rather I am to be grounded in the truth and to speak the truth in love. If I am responsible for speaking truth then God must have equipped me to discern truth from falsehood.

In this article, we will begin by looking at a biblical perspective of truth and the battle between truth and deceit. Then we will look at some of the ways misinformation is being foisted upon us today and explore some biblical principals to expose it.

# Truth Is Central to the Gospel

Some people suggest that truth is of secondary importance in the work of Christ. According to this view, we should focus on grace and relationship rather than doctrine and not be concerned if people profess faith in a perception of Jesus that is not consistent with the biblical record. On the contrary, the Bible is clear that grace and truth are both indispensable parts of the gospel. Let's consider three passages from Scripture:

- Paul tells us that “God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of *the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4).
- Jesus explains to Pilate, “For this I have been born and for this I have come into the world, to testify to *the truth*” (John 18:37).
- In his gospel, John proclaims, “The law was given through Moses, grace and *truth* were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

From these passages we see that:

- Knowing the truth is what God desires for people.
- Proclaiming the truth is central to the purpose of Jesus' incarnation.
- Jesus is the source of both grace and truth.

When we receive Jesus we are not only accepting God's grace for us, but also enthroning Jesus as our source for truth.

## Challenge of Deception

We are called to walk in the truth and to speak the truth, but we find this to be a challenge. One consistent theme of the Bible is that the war between good and evil is a conflict

between truth and deception. As we strive to walk in the truth, we will find ourselves assailed with deception, misinformation and partial truths. If we look at our world objectively, we will see that deception is at the heart of most problems. The Bible gives us insight into three reasons why exposing deception is at the heart of our Christian walk.

First, deception is at the heart of Satan's plan to destroy us. Jesus tells us that Satan "was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there *is no truth* in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a *liar and the father of lies*" (John 8:44-45). Satan began by deceiving Eve in the garden and his campaign of deception remains the centerpiece of his strategy to attack God

Second, deception is at the heart of man's separation from God. As Paul explained in Romans, "For they exchanged *the truth of God for a lie*, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). When we accept Satan's lies, we begin a life of self deception buying the illusion that we can truly live apart from our Creator.

Third, deception is at the heart of man's efforts to exploit you. Peter warns us "because of false teachers the way of *the truth* will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with *false words*" (2 Peter 2:2-3). By convincing us to buy into a "false truth", exploiters can manipulate us into doing what they want us to do rather than what God has called us to do.

Through Jesus Christ, God has redeemed us from slavery to deception, and there will be no deception in heaven. While we live on this earth, God knows we are going to have to deal with deception everyday. He commands us to be on our guard so that we can walk in the truth. In Ephesians, we are told that

We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by

waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the *trickery of men*, by craftiness in *deceitful scheming*; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ (Ephesians 4:14-15).

The importance of being on our guard is also emphasized in Colossians where Paul writes,

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and *empty deception*, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

God gives us this warning because many Christians live with their minds captive to a world system based on empty deception. Although these believers have an eternal inheritance, they are largely ineffective in bearing fruit for Christ. We are commanded to take positive action to see that this does not happen to us and to tear down the walls of deception that hold others captive.

## **News Media As a Source of Misinformation**

Clearly, the Bible teaches us that Satan and the world system are out to take us captive and make us ineffective in our Christian lives by deceiving us into conforming to a perverted view of truth. Every successful con begins with an attempt to validate the trustworthiness of the conman. A recent example is the complex investment Ponzi scheme run by Bernard Madoff which has purportedly cost investors \$50 billion. His impeccable credentials and complex models convinced not only friends, but also large hedge funds to trust him with their money. This aura of trustworthiness allowed his scheme to continue for years even though a Boston analyst had been reporting him to the SEC consistently for the last nine years.

The most dangerous sources of information are those that occupy positions of trust. Consequently, it should come as no

surprise that the mechanisms we turn to for factual information or truth are oftentimes the biggest sources of misinformation. In our society, we look to the news media, academia, government and the arts to provide information and perspective to understand reality or truth. As Christians, we need to approach these sources of information with a degree of caution to avoid being taken captive by a distorted worldview.

In what follows we will focus on how to approach information we receive from the news media (newspapers, magazines, television, internet news, and blogs). As recognized by the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights, we need the press to be free to provide news and commentary as they see them without fear of retribution. However, the press can also wield a dangerous amount of power when left unbalanced. As Mark Twain quipped, "There are laws to protect the freedom of the press's speech, but none that are worth anything to protect the people from the press."

First let's consider the question, Is the information we receive really biased toward deception? In America, multiple polls have found that the vast majority of the members of the press are secular and liberal. But some argue that their personal views should not keep them from presenting information in an unbiased manner. However, multiple academic studies of this question have shown that news reports are biased. For example, an analysis of news reports done by researchers from UCLA and the University of Missouri concluded:

Our results show a strong liberal bias: all of the news outlets we examine, except *Fox News' Special Report* and the *Washington Times* received scores to the left of the average member of Congress. . . . *CBS Evening News* and the *New York Times* received scores far to the left of center.[\[1\]](#)

Many reporters are trying to provide objective reports, but it is very hard for any of us to completely set aside our biases

and agendas. What we consider balanced is in fact skewed by our own views and thus off center from true objectivity.

The deceptive nature of news reporting is not new. Writing about the period around the First World War, C. S. Lewis stated,

Even in peacetime, I think those are very wrong who say that school-boys should be encouraged to read newspapers. Nearly all that a boy reads there in his teens will be known before he is twenty to have been false in emphasis and interpretation, if not in fact as well, and most of it will have lost all importance. Most of what he remembers he will therefore have to unlearn.[{2}](#)

Part of the reason for biased reporting is the view held by most people in the news media that their calling is to shape society into a better place, not just provide people with the facts. Therefore, news reports are not simply unbiased facts but rather a product created by newspeople to impact society. As Terry Eastland observed in his study on the collapse of mainstream media,

The most influential journalists understood that news is rarely news in the sense of being undisputed facts about people or policy, but news in the sense that it's a product made by reporters, editors, and producers. . . those who define and present the news have a certain power, since news can set a public agenda. And they weren't shy about exercising this power.[{3}](#)

Bias in news reporting shows up in subtle (and not so subtle) ways. Four of those ways are:

1. Setting the agenda
2. Slanting the information
3. Skewing the facts
4. Skewering the truth



By “setting the agenda” we mean that people within the news establishment determine what information makes it into print and onto television newscasts. An event that highlights a favorite cause of the journalist or news organization may receive extensive media coverage while another receives little or no coverage. One area we see this occurring in is so-called hate crimes where coverage may vary greatly depending upon the “disadvantaged group” represented by the victim. This method is the hardest to detect since it is based on the absence of information. However, the recent growth of alternative news sources makes detecting this method of bias easier.

“Slanting the information” uses subtle techniques to influence that way people interpret the information included in a news story. Examples of this are the selection of headlines, the type of words used to describe the topic, the selection of experts, and how the experts are described. Warning signs of this technique include words that seem to overstate the case or emphasize a point which is secondary to the facts. One example of this was an August 2006 *Washington Post* article on economic reports showing record growth and outstanding performance of the economy. One might expect a headline stating something like “Economic News Encouraging in All Areas.” Instead, the actual headline stated, “Economic News Isn’t Helping Bush.”[\[4\]](#)

Other common techniques for slanting information include the use of labels or definitions that communicate an implied value judgment. Examples of this are using the label “anti-choice” instead of “pro-life” and defining Intelligent Design as a form of Creationism formulated to allow it to sneak into public schools.

“Skewing the facts” is a technique of selectively emphasizing the facts that support the journalist’s point of view while either discounting or leaving out facts that run counter to that point of view. It can also include drawing illogical or

unsubstantiated conclusions. Whenever you encounter a journalist using statistics to paint a conclusion as fact, you should view it with skepticism. Mark Twain reported that Disraeli was the first person to warn us that “There are lies, damn lies and statistics!”

One example of skewing the facts prominent in the recent presidential campaign dealt with the potential impact of developing more of the oil reserves of the United States. One of the candidates (and their running mate) made the following statement during multiple televised debates: “But understand, we only have three to four percent of the world’s oil reserves and we use 25 percent of the world’s oil, which means that we can’t drill our way out of the problem.”[\[5\]](#) What they are implying is that because twenty-five is a bigger number than four, it is obvious that our oil reserves cannot help us. Of course, most of us learned in the third grade that percentages are not absolute numbers. For example, would you rather have four percent of Bill Gates’s net worth or twenty-five percent of what he spent for lunch today? In fact, comparing the size of our reserves and our yearly oil consumption, it appears that North America’s known recoverable reserves would last over one hundred years if we used them to meet half of our needs. This would certainly buy us a long period of energy independence while we develop alternative sources.

More complex examples are often found in reporting on public health issues and climate change. Skewed facts are used to promote public policy around conclusions which are not really supported by the raw data. I encourage you to check out articles on our web site on [condoms preventing HPV](#) and [global warming](#) for detailed examples on how statistics can be skewed.[\[6\]](#)

“Skewering the truth” is the most blatant technique for biased reporting where the journalist misrepresents the information and/or presents faulty conclusions as established fact. Oftentimes the first three forms of bias may be unintentional,

but usually skewering the truth requires an overt attempt on the part of the journalist to deceive the recipient. One technique used to mask these misstatements of fact is to put them into the mouths of unidentified experts or couch them as general common knowledge among the well-informed. For example, a recent *Newsweek* article is subtitled "Opponents of gay marriage often cite Scripture. But what the Bible teaches about love argues for the other side."[{7}](#) In this article selective, liberal interpretations of scriptural passages are used to support the following conclusion: "Religious objections to gay marriage are rooted not in the Bible at all, then, but in custom and tradition."[{8}](#) For those of us who are students of the Bible, this statement is clearly false, but it is stated as a clear fact.

In another blatant example, Michael Ennis, in his article entitled "Dissing Darwin," claims that there is a correlation between what a state's education standards say about the teaching of evolution and the performance of its students on standardized science tests.[{9}](#) However, when we examined the data he cited, we found that the actual correlation was exactly the opposite of what Ennis claimed. So, either he did not take the time to actually look at the information to see if it agreed with his claims or he hoped we would not take the time.

## **Uncovering Misinformation**

If we are not to be taken captive by the philosophies of a godless world, it is important for us to be on the lookout for biased, agenda-driven reporting. Too many times Christians have been either unaware of the biased message or unconcerned about its impact. Looking back at the social and spiritual changes in our country over the last fifty years, we can see how this lack of awareness and concern have contributed to the emergence of dominant views on morality and religion that are counter to a biblical worldview.

The Bible instructs us to be on our guard. Let's look at some things we should be doing to proclaim truth in a world filled with misinformation.

The first step we should take is to know what the Bible teaches and allow the Holy Spirit to use the scripture to bring discernment. As the letter to the Hebrews tell us,

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Second, we need to be on the alert for the warning signs of misinformation. When we recognize the need for discernment, begin by asking God for wisdom in looking for and applying the truth:

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him (James 1:5-6).

Then we need to ask ourselves some tough questions about the article or news report:

1. Does it begin with truth?
2. Is it logical?
3. Does it consider all of the evidence?
4. Does the conclusion make sense apart from the argument?
5. Does it stand up to close examination?

Based on the answers to those questions, we have a pretty good idea whether we need to be concerned about being deceived. If so, the next step is to do some digging into the background to see if any of the four techniques for biased reporting have been employed. In today's world, we can often use the internet to get access to source material that has been referenced by the journalist. However, in many cases the best way to check

up on questionable reporting is to consult a trusted resource. Organizations like Probe have often already done the research. If we don't have something on the specific article, we will probably have information on the primary topic of interest.

Once you have done your research, go back to the Bible. God has the only perspective that cannot be deceived by the schemes of the world. Compare your conclusions with Scripture and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in truth. When the facts are not clear, you will not go wrong by being biased in favor of a biblical worldview. Remember how David delighted in God's word, saying, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

Finally, share what you have uncovered with others. Don't let others you know be deceived. Follow the command to speak the truth in love. If you have done some research that other need to know, you may want to look for a venue to share it with a broader audience. One approach would be to contact us at Probe to see if it is a topic we should address on our Web site.

Remember, deception may create detours in our lives, but truth will always be truth and will win out in the end.

## Notes

1. Tim Groseclose and Jeffrey Milyo, "A Measure of Media Bias,"

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