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
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.

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.

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.”

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

Trend Indicates Over Half of Emerging Adults Will Identify as Non-Christian by 2020

More Cultural Research from Steve Cable

One of the dismaying trends I reported on in my book, Cultural Captives, was the significant increase in the percentage of people who indicated that their religion was atheist, agnostic, or nothing at all. I referred to this group collectively as the “nones” (those with “no religious affiliation”). The percentage of emerging adults (i.e., 18- to 29-year-olds) who self-identified as “nones” in 2008 was 25% of the population. This level is a tremendous increase from the 1990 level of 11%.

Now, we have later results from both the General Social Survey (GSS) and the Pew Research Center. Both surveys show another significant increase in the percentage of “nones” among this young adult group. In 2014, the GSS survey showed the percentage of emerging adult “nones” was now up to 33% of the population, an increase of eight percentage points. The Pew survey of over 35,000 Americans (an astounding number) came up with a similar result, tallying 35% of emerging adults identifying as “nones” (an increase of nine percentage points over their 2007 survey).
When we consider the number who do not identify as either Protestant or Catholic (i.e., adding in other religions such as Islam and Hinduism), the percentage of emerging adults who do not identify as Christians increases to 43% of the population in both surveys. If this trend continues at the same rate of growth it has been on since 1990, we will see over half of American emerging adults who do not self-identify as Christians by 2020. We will become, at least numerically, a post-Christian culture if things do not turn around.

Acknowledgments:
The General Social Survey 2014 data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by Tom W. Smith and the National Opinion Research Center.
The Pew Research Center Religious Landscape Study interactive tool, located at http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/ was the source of our data on the Pew survey.

The Importance of Parents in the Faith of Emerging Adults

Steve Cable explores the results of Probe’s survey of 18- to 40-year-old born agains, focusing on the role of parents in their faith.

The State of Born Again Emerging Adults

In previous articles we considered the dramatic changes in the beliefs of American evangelicals particularly among young adults. It certainly appears that we are sliding into an era of cultural captivity where one’s identification with Christ and an evangelical church does not keep one from holding a set of beliefs consistent with the culture and counter to biblical truth. Here we want to consider the role that parents had in establishing these inconsistent belief systems of their children, and think about some ways today’s parents may be able to counter these destructive patterns in the future. Before looking at the roles parents do and should play in establishing these belief systems, let’s consider some of the key belief trends that are driving our concern.

Foremost among our concerns is the dramatic change in the number of young adults who hold to no Christian religious beliefs or espouse a liberal view of Christianity. Looking at data from 1970 to the present, we uncover a disturbing new trend. From 1970 through 1990, the number of 18- to 25-year-old Americans who professed no Christian belief was constant at about twenty percent of the population. In 2000, this non-Christian group had grown to about thirty percent of this young generation, and by 2010 the numbers had exploded to around thirty-six percent. If this trend continues, less than half of young adults will consider themselves Christians by the year 2020.

This concern over the future is heightened by the conflicted beliefs of young born agains. Among young adults, who consider themselves born again believers, only about one-third of them ascribe to
a basic set of biblical beliefs. These beliefs include a creator God, a sinless Jesus, salvation through grace, a real Satan, an accurate Bible and the existence of absolute moral truths. This statistic means that over two-thirds of these born agains do not ascribe to one or more of these beliefs. Overall, this means that less than ten percent of young American adults profess to being born again and hold to a set of biblical beliefs as compared to the sixty-eight percent who hold to no Christian beliefs or a liberal view of Christianity.

When we delve further into young adult beliefs, we find that their beliefs appear to be hodgepodge of cultural concepts and what’s going on in their life, with little or no connection to their religious upbringing. Even though emerging adults looked to religion as a place to learn good morals, in his study Christian Smith discovered a chilling paradox. "It was clear . . . that emerging adults felt entirely comfortable describing various religious beliefs that they affirmed but that appeared to have no connection whatsoever to the living of their lives." {3} One emerging adult observed, “I don’t think it’s the basis of how I live, it’s just, I guess I’m just learning about my religion and my beliefs. But I still kinda retain my own decision or at least a lot of it on situations I’ve had and experiences.”{4} In fact, when we look at how many have a consistent biblical worldview that carries over into their views on sexuality, science, a concern for the poor, and basic religious practices, the survey data indicates that less than two percent of evangelical young adults would qualify. So the overwhelming majority of young evangelicals are not carrying their basic religious beliefs into the realm of everyday decision making.

**The Impact of Parents on Spiritual Beliefs**

So, what role did their parents have in establishing these inconsistent beliefs?

In 2010, we commissioned a survey to help us examine the causes and potential opportunities to change the marked shift in the thinking of young adults over the last decade. We surveyed over 800 born again, young adults across America to get an understanding for what they thought about spiritual and cultural issues and how they felt about their beliefs and actions. One area of questioning was, “When you think about how you developed the religious beliefs you hold today, who do you feel had the greatest influence on you? Did your beliefs come from your family, your friends, your church, your independent studies, your college professors, or others?”

The answers we received to this question were not shocking but still sobering. More than sixty-five percent of the respondents reported that the source that had the greatest influence on their religious beliefs was a family member, with the vast majority of those saying it was parents or grandparents. Over twenty percent of the respondents pointed to another influential individual such as a pastor, youth leader, or college professor. Only about eleven percent stated that something less personal such as a youth group or the Bible was the greatest influencer of their religious beliefs.

As Christian Smith noted, “What the best empirical evidence shows . . . is that . . . when it comes to religion, parents are in fact hugely important.”{5} In fact, “religious commitments, practices, and investments made during childhood and the teenage years, by parents and others in families and religious communities, matter—they make a difference.”{6}

Of those who stated that a family member was the primary influence, over seven out of ten stated it was their mother or grandmother while less than three out of ten said it was their father or grandfather. So clearly among born again young adults, the female side of the family has a greater influence in passing down religious beliefs than do the males. One can postulate that this may be due to a combination of greater spiritual involvement on the female side of the family and a higher level of communication with their children. However, the rate of fatherly influence almost doubles
for young adults with a biblical worldview compared to those without such a worldview. So it appears that fathers who hold a biblical worldview are much more likely to be involved in establishing the spiritual beliefs of their children.

Less than one out of ten of the respondents listed a pastor as the primary source of influence, and only three percent listed a youth group. These church-related functions may have an important role in helping to shape our religious beliefs, but our survey shows that it is at best a secondary role for the vast majority of people. We are mistaken if we are relying on the church to pass on the right type of beliefs to our children. Parents, what you communicate through your lives is picked up by your children. What are you communicating to them concerning religious beliefs?

The Translation of our Beliefs

Since the beliefs of today’s young adults are dramatically different than the dominant beliefs of forty years ago, does this mean that older adults have changed their beliefs as well, or have the beliefs been translated by the younger culture into something different?

An important part of understanding this question is that the survey results on who was the most significant source of our religious beliefs were almost identical regardless of racial background or levels of church attendance. In other areas of consideration such as biblical worldview, views on cultural behavioral issues, and church involvement, we found significant differences based on racial background, education, etc. But it appears clear that no matter our race, economic level, or religious beliefs, our mothers are the primary sources that pass down those beliefs to the next generation. In other words, if born-again believers have degraded views on worldview and cultural issues, it appears that their parents are communicating (or at least not contradicting) similar views.

As we look at the hodgepodge of religious and cultural beliefs held in our society, we can see the results of what Christian Smith referred to as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”\(^7\) The Baby Boomers and their children are captives of our society’s focus on pluralism and tolerance as the only acceptable views. With this view, I can hold to certain religious beliefs that are strictly private in their application. But, when those religious views begin to move into areas which may imply someone else’s belief is wrong, then I need to modify my beliefs to be more accepting. To believe in God as creator and Jesus as his sinless Son is probably okay. But when I say that Jesus is the only way we can be reconciled to God, I am starting to step on other’s toes, making it inherently wrong.

On the one hand, Baby Boomers have bought into the cultural distaste for absolute beliefs which makes them loathe to state their beliefs too strongly. This viewpoint has been interpreted by the younger generation as an indication that those beliefs are not firm but rather culturally determined. So living in a more multi-ethnic, culturally diverse, and sexually liberated generation, these young adults pick and choose among biblical beliefs and distinctly non-biblical beliefs, with no apparent concern for the discontinuity in their belief systems.

The culture is winning the battle on two fronts. First, the older generation is buying into the importance of not being too forthright with their views. Second, the younger generation, given no clear direction from their parents, is buying into a disjointed set of views that avoids any conflict with others. According to Smith’s research, the result is that the vast majority of young adult Americans are holding to some form of mainline Protestant philosophy. This philosophy states that Jesus is a worthwhile model of good behavior but our focus should be on getting along and not making waves rather than promoting faith in Christ.
Countering Parents with a Truth Experience

Have we, the Baby Boomers, the parents and grandparents of our society, so flummoxed up the works that we have started a downward spiral of disconnected beliefs from which we cannot recover? Of course, time will tell, but if we hold to a consistent set of biblical worldview beliefs, we should not sit back and wait patiently for the end of Christianity as we know it. We are called to “proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man so that we might present every man complete in Christ” (Col. 1:28).

Interestingly, of those respondents who graduated from college and have a biblical worldview, a much greater percentage of them pointed to a source other than a family member as the most influential. This factor is probably the result of college students having their faith challenged and looking for answers from pastors, Bibles, and books. In other words, the direct challenge to their faith presented by some professors and many of their peers caused some to fall away but caused others to examine the reasons for their belief in Christ. We do not need to fear this examination. Our Lord’s case is more than capable of standing up to examination. In fact, it is the only religion that has a consistent, viable explanation for the complexities and shortcomings of life as we know it.

If a hostile, or at least a highly skeptical, attack on the basis of their faith caused some to examine their reasons for belief and come out with a stronger, more biblical faith, perhaps a friendly encouragement to examine their faith could produce similar results. If the parents are passing on a watered down, inconsistent set of beliefs, perhaps we can change those beliefs by causing the young adults to run them through a consistency and credibility filter. Probe has been doing this for years through our Mind Games conferences and summer camps for high school students. We have seen that this approach makes a difference.

Is it too late to make a difference in the lives of our young adults? When Viggo Olsen was in his mid-twenties, beginning his residency to become a doctor, his wife’s parents had a change in their belief system, becoming followers of Jesus Christ. Viggo wanted to restore his wife’s parents to sanity so he began an intense study to show the obvious failure of Christianity to address the real world. What he discovered was that a biblical worldview was the only viable answer to understanding our lives and our future. He went from a mission to disprove Christianity to accepting Jesus not only as his Savior but as his purpose in life as a medical missionary to Bangladesh.{8}

In a similar way, we need to encourage, or better yet force our younger church-goers to examine their beliefs and compare them with the teachings of Christ. Ask them not to live an unexamined life conforming to the culture, but rather to examine their beliefs and see if they stand up to close examination.

Consistent Worldview Parents are Best

Unfortunately, many parents have not been passing on a clear view of faith in Christ from generation to generation. Instead our belief system, even among those who believe they are going to heaven when they die because of their faith in Jesus, has been eroding into a mishmash of popular cultural beliefs mixed in with some variation of beliefs taught in the Bible.

Confronting young adults with the disconnects and shortcomings created by their mixture of beliefs as compared to a consistent Christian worldview can get their attention and bring about changes in their thinking. This confrontation with truth has been a major focus of Probe throughout the years.

However, a major take-away from these studies should be for the young adults who are parents of
our future generations. Listen up, young adults! If you do not communicate a clear set of biblical worldview beliefs through your words and through your actions, your children are going to pick up on the worldview you do communicate. Your desire to fit in with the culture and not make too many waves will result in children who believe that the culture is the ultimate authority on truth and right living. Why? Because that is what your life is saying to them loud and clear.

Suzie strongly believed that sex outside of marriage was wrong before God. It had a detrimental effect on the individuals caught up in it and on the society which promoted it. However, she felt that many of her friends did not view it in the same way she did. So, to get along, she never said much about it. What she did not realize was that her children were watching what she said. Even though she had told them she hoped they would remain pure until marriage, they did not hear her standing up for sexual purity among her friends. Without even thinking about it, her children relegated sexual purity to a nice ideal but not an important belief to live by. Suzie was instrumental in establishing their thinking on this topic. Their thinking lined up with what Suzie demonstrated was important to her even though it did not really line up with what she truly believed.

As parents, our beliefs have the greatest impact on our children’s views. Things that you may not believe but grit your teeth and say nothing about will become core beliefs of your children. The society is saying they are true; they don’t see a consistent disagreement from your words or your life. Thus, it must be the right value to hold. This process of gradually turning over our core beliefs to be reset by the culture is at least partially the reason for the tremendous shift in our cultural morality over the last sixty years.

As parents, we can make a difference in future generations. We need to hold fast to the truths of Jesus Christ, speak them with our tongues, and live them through our actions. Our children are still looking to us for truth in this area. Let us commit to not let them down by deferring to the norms of the culture.

Notes

4. Ibid., 154.
5. Ibid., 285.
6. Ibid., 256.

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The Technological Simulacra [no footnotes]

What Saccharine is to Sugar, or
The Technological Simulacra: On the Edge of Reality and Illusion

“Anyone wishing to save humanity today must first of all save the word.” – Jacques Ellul

Simulacra

Aerosmith sings a familiar tune:

“There’s something wrong with the world today,
I don’t know what it is,
there’s something wrong with our eyes,
we’re seeing things in a different way
and God knows it ain’t [isn’t] his;
there’s melt down in the sky. We’re living on the edge.”

What saccharine is to sugar, so the technological simulacra is to nature or reality—a technological replacement, purporting itself to be better than the original, more real than reality, sweeter than sugar: hypersugar.

This article with footnotes Simulacra, (Simulacrum, Latin, pl., likeness, image, to simulate): or simulation, the term, was adapted by French social philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) to express his critical interpretation of the technological transformation of reality into hyperreality. Baudrillard’s social critique provided the premise for the movie The Matrix (1999). However, he was made famous for declaring that the Gulf War never happened; TV wars are not a reflection of reality but projections (recreations) of the TV medium.

Simulacra reduces reality to its lowest point or one-dimension and then recreates reality through attributing the highest qualities to it, like snapshots from family vacation. When primitive people refuse to have their picture taken because they are afraid that the camera steals their souls, they are resisting simulacra. The camera snaps a picture and recreates the image on paper or a digital medium; it then goes to a photo album or a profile page. Video highlights amount to the same thing in moving images; from three dimensions, the camera reduces its object to
soulless one-dimensional fabrication.

Simulacra does not end with the apparent benign pleasures of family vacation and media, although media represents its most recent stage. Simulacra includes the entire technological environment or complex, its infrastructure, which acts as a false “second nature” superimposed over the natural world, replacing it with a hyperreal one, marvelously illustrated in the movie *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). As liquid metal conforms itself to everything it touches, it destroys the original.

Humanity gradually replaces itself through recreation of human nature by technological enhancements, making the human race more adaptable to machine existence, ultimately for the purpose of space exploration. Transhumanists believe that through the advancements in genetic engineering, neuropharmaceuticals (experimental drugs), bionics, and artificial intelligence it will redesign the human condition in order to achieve immortality. “Humanity+,” as Transhumanists say, will usher humanity into a higher state of being, a technological stairway to heaven, “glorification,” “divinization” or “ascendency” in theological terms.

God made man in his own image and now mankind remakes himself in the image of his greatest creation (image), the computer. If God’s perfection is represented by the number seven and man’s imperfection by the number six, then the Cyborg will be a five according to the descending order of being; the creature is never equal or greater than the creator but always a little lower. \(^9\)

Glorious Reduction!


**Hyperreality**

An old tape recording commercial used to say, “Is it real or is it Memorex?" By championing the superiority of recording to live performance the commercial creates hyperreality, a reproduction of an original that appears more real than reality, a replacement for reality with a reconstructed one, purported to be better than the original.

Disneyland serves as an excellent example by creating a copy of reality remade in order to substitute for reality; it confuses reality with an illusion that appears real, “more real than real.” Disney anesthetizes the imagination, numbing it against reality, leaving spectators with a false or fake impression. Main Street plays off an idealized past. The technological reconstruction leads us to believe that the illusion “can give us more reality than nature can.”

Hyperreality reflects a media dominated society where “signs and symbols” no longer reflect reality but are manipulated by their users to mean whatever. Signs recreate reality to achieve the opposite effect (metastasis); for example, in Dallas I must travel west on Mockingbird Lane in order to go to East Mockingbird Lane. Or, Facebook invites social participation when no actual face to face conversation takes place.

Hyperreality creates a false perception of reality, the glorification of reduction that confuses fantasy for reality, a proxy reality
that imitates the lives of movie and TV characters for real life. When reel life in media becomes real
life outside media we have entered the high definition, misty region—the Netherlands of concrete
imagination—hyperreality!

Hyperreality goes beyond escapism or simply “just entertainment.” If that was all there was to it,
there would be no deception or
confusion, at best a trivial waste of time and money. Hyperreality is getting lost in the pleasures of
escapism and confusing the fantasy world for the real one, believing that fantasy is real or even
better than reality. Hyperreality results in the total inversion of society through technological sleight
of hand, a cunning trick, a sorcerer’s illusion transforming the world into a negative of itself, into its
opposite, then calling it progress.

Hyperreality plays a trick on the mind, a self-induced hypnotism on a mass scale, duping us by our
technological recreation into
accepting a false reality as truth. Like Cypher from the movie The Matrix who chose the easy and
pleasant simulated reality over the harsh conditions of the “desert of the real” in humanity’s fictional
war against the computer, he chose to believe a lie instead of the truth.

The Devil is a Liar

A lie plays a trick on the mind, skillfully crafted to deceive through partial omission or concealment
of the truth. The lie is the
devil’s (devil means liar) only weapon, always made from a position of inferiority and weakness
(Revelation 20:3, 8). A lie never stands on its own terms as equal to truth; it does not exist apart
from twisting (recreating) truth. A lie never contradicts the truth by standing in opposition to it.

A lie is not a negative (no) or a positive (yes), but obscures one or the other. It adds by revealing
what is not there—it
subtracts by concealing what is there. A lie appears to be what is not and hides what it really is.
“Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

A lie does not negate (contradict) or affirm truth. Negation (No) establishes affirmation (Yes).
Biblically speaking, the no comes
before the yes—the cross then the resurrection; law first, grace second. The Law is no to sin
(disobedience); the Gospel is yes to faith (obedience). Truth is always a synthesis or combination
between God’s no in judgment on sin and His yes in grace through faith in Jesus Christ. “For the
Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Law
without grace is legalism; grace without law is license.

The devil’s lie adds doubt to the promise of God; “Indeed, has God said, ‘you shall not eat from any
tree of the garden’?”(Genesis 3:1
NASB) It hides the promise of certain death; “You surely will not die” (Genesis 3:4). The serpent
twists knowledge into doubt by turning God’s imperative, “Don’t eat!” into a satanic question “Don’t
eat?”

But it is Eve who recreates the lie in her own imagination. “When the woman saw that the tree was
good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one
wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate” (Genesis
Sight incites desire. We want what we see (temptation). Eve was tempted by “the lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16) after seeing the fruit, then believed the false promise that it would make her wise. “She sees; she no longer hears a word to know what is good, bad or true.” Eve fell victim to her own idolatrous faith in hyperreality that departed from the simple trust in God’s word.

The Void Machine

Media (television, cell phone, internet, telecommunications) is a void machine. In the presence of a traditional social milieu, such as family, church or school, it will destroy its host, and then reconstruct it in its own hyperreal image (Simulacra). Telecommunication technology is a Trojan Horse for all traditional institutions that accept it as pivotal to their “progress,” except prison or jail. The purpose of all institutions is the promotion of values or social norms, impossible through the online medium.

Media at first appears beneficial, but this technology transforms the institution and user into a glorified version of itself. The personal computer, for example, imparts values not consistent with the mission of church or school, which is to bring people together in mutual support around a common goal or belief for learning and spiritual growth (community). This is done primarily through making friends and forming meaningful relationships, quite simply by people talking to each other. Values and social norms are only as good as the people we learn them from. Values must be embodied in order to be transmitted to the next generation.

Talking as the major form of personal communication is disappearing. Professor of Communications John L. Locke noted that “Intimate talking, the social call of humans, is on the endangered species list.” People prefer to text, or phone. Regrettably, educational institutions such as high schools and universities are rapidly losing their relevance as traditional socializing agents where young people would find a potential partner through like interests or learn a worldview from a mentor. What may be gained in convenience, accessibility or data acquisition for the online student is lost in terms of the social bonds necessary for personal ownership of knowledge, discipline and character development.

An electronic community is not a traditional community of persons who meet face to face, in person, in the flesh where they establish personal presence. Modern communication technologies positively destroy human presence. What philosopher Martin Heidegger called Dasein, “being there,” (embodiment or incarnation) is absent. As Woody Allen put it, “90 percent of life is showing up.” The presence of absence marks the use of all electronic communication technology. Ellul argued, “The simple fact that I carry a camera [cell phone] prevents me from grasping everything in an overall perception.” The camera like the cell phone preoccupies its users, creating distance between himself and friends. The cellphone robs the soul from its users, who must exchange personal presence for absence; the body is there tapping away, but not the soul! The cell phone user has become a void!

The Power of Negative Thinking

According to popular American motivational speakers, the key to unlimited worldly wealth, success and happiness is in the power of positive thinking that unleashes our full potential; however, according to obscure French social critics the key to a meaningful life, lived in freedom, hope and individual dignity is in the power of
negative thinking that brings limits, boundaries, direction and purpose.

Negativity gives birth to freedom, expanding our spiritual horizons with possibilities and wise choices, which grounds faith, hope and love in absolute truth, giving us self-definition greater than our circumstances, greater than reality of the senses. To freely choose in love one’s own path, identity and destiny is the essence of individual dignity.

According to French social critics Jacques Ellul and Herbert Marcuse, freedom is only established in negation that provides limits and boundaries, which tells us who we are. Technological hyperreality removes all natural and traditional limits in the recreation of humanity in the image of the cyborg. The transhuman transformation promises limitless potential at the expense of individual freedom, personal identity and ultimately human dignity and survival.

According to French social critics Jacques Ellul and Herbert Marcuse, freedom is only established in negation that provides limits and boundaries, which tells us who we are. Technological hyperreality removes all natural and traditional limits in the recreation of humanity in the image of the cyborg. The transhuman transformation promises limitless potential at the expense of individual freedom, personal identity and ultimately human dignity and survival.

www.probe.org/into-the-void-the-coming-transhuman-transformation/

All limitless behavior ends in self-destruction. Human extinction looms over the technological future, like the Sword of Damocles, threatening humanity’s attempt to refit itself for immortality in a grand explosion (nuclear war), a slow poisoning (ecocide) or suicidal regressive technological replacement. Stephen Hawking noted recently that technological progress threatens humanity’s survival with nuclear war, global warming, artificial intelligence and genetic engineering over the course of the next 100 years. Hawking stated, “We are not going to stop making progress, or reverse it, so we must [recognize] the dangers and control them.”

In asserting “NO!” to unlimited technological advance and establishing personal and communal limits to our use of all technology, especially the cell phone, computer and TV, we free ourselves from the technological necessity darkening our future through paralyzing the will to resist.

After we “JUST SAY NO!” to our technological addictions, for instance, after a sabbatical fast on Sunday when the whole family turns off their electronic devices, and get reacquainted, a new birth of freedom will open before us teeming with possibilities. We will face unmediated reality in ourselves and family with a renewed hope that by changing our personal worlds for one day simply by pushing the off button on media technology we can change the future. Through a weekly media fast (negation) we will grow faith in the power of self-control by proving that we can live more abundant lives without what we once feared absolute necessity, inevitable and irresistible. “All things are possible with God” (Mark 10: 27). When we exchange our fear of idols for faith in the Living God the impossible becomes possible and our unlimited potential is released that will change the world forever!

I see trees of green, red roses, too,  
I see them bloom, for me and you  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue, and clouds of white,  
The bright blessed day, the dark sacred night  
And I think to myself  
What a wonderful world.
The colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky,
Are also on the faces of people going by.
I see friends shaking hands, sayin’, "How do you do?"
They’re really sayin’, "I love you."

I hear babies cryin’. I watch them grow.
They’ll learn much more than I’ll ever know
And I think to myself
What a wonderful world.

"[I]f man does not pull himself together and assert himself . . . then things will go the way I describe [cyborg condition]." – Jacques Ellul

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Machinehead: From 1984 to the Brave New World Order and Beyond

Wherever the survival of humanity is threatened we find the work of Satan. In the previous century that was Fascism, then Mutually Assured Destruction during the Cold War. Today, Satan hides behind the ascendancy of the global Empire of Technology: assimilation of humanity into the machine, creating a new planetary being: the Cyborg. I believe people best understand large conglomerates when personalized, such as, referring to the Federal Government as “Uncle Sam,” so I have chosen to name the Brave New World Order: Machinehead!

Post-Orwellian World

Say good bye to Orwell’s nightmare world of 1984! And welcome to Machinehead: the Brave New World Order and beyond!

Machinehead is what I call the technological idol or the planetary being taking shape in the convergence of human and computer intelligence, a global cyborg. “Machine” is defined as one global system with many subsystems.

Experts already recognize the global system as a superorganism, one life-form made of billions and billions of individual parts or cells like an anthill or beehive, with one mind and one will. Thus, the global machine consists of millions of subsystems interfacing one over-system. Mankind acts as agent for the global machine’s ascendancy, creating a technological god in its own image.

The suffix “head” refers to the divine essence as in “Godhead” (Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device. Acts 17: 29). Machinehead is the replacement of all traditional views of God with the new Living God of the Machine, best illustrated by the recent movie Transcendence (2014), which depicts the computer’s awaking to consciousness in one mind and will, the Singularity!

Two prophets of modernity plead in dire warning for us to reconsider modern faith in expansive
government and escalating technological acceleration. The first and most notable was master political satirist and critic George Orwell (1903-1950), famous for *Animal Farm* and *1984*, and the second, English literatus Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), author of *Brave New World (BNW)*.

Orwell envisioned the end of history in the all-powerful political dictatorship of *Oceania* marked by perpetual war, omnipresent government surveillance, thought control, and the ubiquitous media projection of Big Brother.

Orwell gave us the foundation of the current age in Cold War politics, but does not serve as guide to the future, which belongs, if humanity allows it, to the apparent benign technophilia of *Brave New World* that follows upon Orwell’s cruel political combat boot in the face!

**The Cold War Era and 1984**

Orwell divided his fictional geopolitical borders into three grids: *Oceania, Eurasia* and *Eastasia*, shadowing accurately Cold War divisions between Western and Eastern Bloc countries allied behind NATO (Oceania) and Warsaw pact nations (Eurasia), leaving the Third World (Eastasia) as pawns (proxy wars) for interminable power battles between the two Super Powers (Super States). Perpetual war characterized normative relations between the super states in *1984* with the objective to further consolidate the State’s power over its own citizens. The threat of war inspires fear in the population and offers government the opportunity and justification for further largesse and control. War insures a permanent state of crisis, leaving the population in desperation for strong leadership and centralized command and control.

The wars of *1984* were a side note to the main thrust of the novel, omnipotent government control. The novel introduced the world to the ominous character Big Brother. The central drama takes place in Airstrip One, the capital of *Oceania*, formerly London, England, where Winston Smith the protagonist struggles to maintain his dignity as an individual, under the crushing gears of Fascist government.

Popular criticism asserts that Orwell had Stalinism in the cross hairs in his novel. However, that interpretative ruse acts as an escape clause for the West to disavow any participation in totalitarianism. Most Americans falsely assume that *1984* applied to the Soviet Union and not NATO. Eurasia (the Eastern bloc) was a mere literary foil. Orwell’s social criticism applies to all forms of totalitarianism, especially the subtle power structure of the West hidden behind democratic rhetoric, media bias, and an acute lack of national self-criticism. *Oceania* was Orwell’s analogy and commentary on the future of the West after World War II. The NATO alliance, founded in 1949 the same year Orwell published *1984*, was the target of Orwell’s criticism—not the Soviet Union.

**Brave New World Order in the 21st Century: The Imperial Machine**

Huxley’s novel *Brave New World* foresaw a techno heaven on earth that knows nothing of wars, political parties, religion or democracy, but caters to creature comforts, maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain; total eradication of all emotional and spiritual suffering through the removal of free choice by radical conditioning from conception in the test tube to blissful euthanasia.

Television was the controlling technology in *1984*, so in *BNW* control is asserted through media, education and a steady flow of *soma*—the perfect drug and chemical replacement for Jesus. “Christianity without tears” was how Mustapha Mond the World Controller described soma. “Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality around in a [pill] bottle.” {2}

Spiritual perfection commanded by Jesus, “Be ye perfect, even as your heavenly father is perfect”
(Matthew 5:48), will be given to all through genetic programming, sustained through chemical infusion and mental conditioning (propaganda). If *1984* was about power for the sake of power, *BNW* emphasizes the kinder, gentler technological dictatorship that does not promise happiness, but delivers it to all whether they want it or not!

Brave New World Order amounts to technological totalitarianism, analogous to Huxley's "World State" motto: “Community, Identity, Stability.”{3}

The “imperial machine” as it has been called by political scientists acts outside the traditional political process and in tandem with it when needed with no central geographical location or person or groups with any discernable hierarchical structure that directs it; the United States, Great Britain, United Nations, The People’s Republic of China or The European Union are not the power brokers of 21st century Empire, but its pawns. Technological Empire rules as an all-encompassing, all-pervasive power, shaping human destiny in its own image.

**Transvaluation of Man and Machine**

A titanic transvaluation (reversal in the meaning of values) between superstructure (intangible ideological system: beliefs, convictions, morality, myth, etc.) and infrastructure (tangible urban development: roads, buildings, houses, cars, machines, etc.) begun with the Industrial Revolution will finally be complete some time during the 21st century. Infrastructure replaces superstructure. Technology has become our belief, religion and hope, what was once a means (technology) to an end (human progress) has replaced the end with the means. Technology replaces humanity as the goal of progress; technology for technology’s sake not for the good of mankind or God’s glory.

The reversal of meaning is found everywhere in postmodern society beginning with the death of God and unfolding in lock step to the death of man, progress, democracy and Western Civilization; concomitantly paired with an equal ascendency of all things technological, until the machine ultimately replaces humanity.

Marxist regimes were fond of calling their systems “democratic” or “republic” such as the People’s Republic of China despite the fact that the Dictatorship of the Proletariat bears the opposite meaning. The majestic word Liberal, once meant freedom from government interference and rule by inner light of reason in the seventeenth century, had come to be synonymous with government regulation and planning by the twentieth century.

The cruelest irony in the transvaluation process is that the triumph of mankind over nature and tradition in the modern world has resulted in his replacement by the machine. Humanism of the modern period promoted the Rational as ideal type of Man. This ideal was already adapted to the machine as *1984* and *Brave New World* illustrated through the removal of faith and the attenuation of human nature to mechanical existence. French Intellectual Jacques Ellul argued further that “This type [of man] exists to support technique [technological acceleration] and serve the machine, but eventually he will be eliminated because he has become superfluous . . . the great hope that began with the notion of human dominance over the machine ends with human replacement by the machine.”{4}

**The Devil’s Logic**

What we fear will happen is already here because we fear it; it will overtake us according to our
fears; it will recede according to our love. (1 John 2)

Human Replacement does not necessarily mean total human extinction, a cyborg race that fundamentally alters human nature will cause a pseudo-extinction—meaning part of humanity, the Machine Class, those most fit for technological evolution will ascend to the next stage, leaving the great majority behind. The movie *Elysium* (2011) offers an excellent illustration: the technological elite, who reap all the benefits from technological advance control the earth from an orbiting space station. H. G. Wells in his famous novel *The Time Machine* painted a similar picture of human evolution that branched into two different species: the hideous cannibalistic Morlocks, “the Under-grounders,” their only principle was necessity, feeding off the beautiful, yet docile Eloi, “the Upper-worlders,” whose only emotion was fear.{5}

When fear dominates our thinking, love is absent from our motives. To say, “It is necessary” in defense of technological practice, abdicates choice, giving unlimited reign to technological acceleration, i.e. abortion, government surveillance, or digital conversion. “Fear” and “necessity” are the devil’s logic. Necessity imposes itself through fear of being left behind by “technological progress.”

Necessity is not the Mother of Invention, but the Father of Lies! New technology becomes necessity only after it is invented. There is no conscious need for what does not yet exist. Technological need establishes itself through habitual use creating dependence and finally normalcy in the next generation who cannot relate to a past devoid of modern technological essentials.

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” serves as our mandate, if we wish to create a future of universal love and empathy instead of universal speed and memory.

Knowledge without wisdom leads to disaster. “Where is the wisdom lost in knowledge?”{6} Wisdom is the loving use of knowledge. Love counsels limits to knowledge for the liberation of all. Fear dictates limitless necessity, enslaving all.

A choice faces us. Say “yes!” to God and “no!” to limitless advance. Otherwise mankind faces replacement by the new digital god: Machinehead!

**Notes**

3. Ibid, 1.

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A Christian Worldview Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment

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

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

Some believe that the phrase “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms” creates an individual constitutional right. This view is referred to as the “individual right theory,”{1} that legislative bodies are precluded from prohibiting firearm possession. Others argue that the phrase “a well-regulated Militia” means that it was only intended to restrict Congress from legislating away a state’s right of self-defense. This view is called the “collective rights theory.”{2}

In all likelihood, the authors intentionally combined these two thoughts. The states could not muster a militia of their people unless the people were allowed to keep arms. This view is supported by people involved in crafting and/or approving the Bill of Rights. Samuel Adams wrote, “The said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to . . . prevent the people of the United states, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms.”{3} Similarly, Noah Webster wrote, “Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed; as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in American cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be on any pretense, raised in the United States.”{4}

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

The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?

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

The Federalists, who had the majority of delegates to the convention, were wrong in assuming that most people would agree with their hands-off approach. This situation led to many of the states ratifying the Constitution with the stipulation that a bill of rights be added. The right to bear arms was a common component of these stipulations. As James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, "The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation . . . forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition . . . The several kingdoms of Europe . . . are afraid to trust the people with arms."{5}

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

In Romans, Paul wrote, "But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for (governing authorities) do not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil."{6} However, if government officials hold all power, those who would control us will seek that power by taking over the government. In our constitutional system, the people are the ultimate governing authorities and thus are given the right to bear arms to protect the nation against those who would take over for the practice of evil.

**The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?

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

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

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

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

Swords were used to kill people in Jesus’ day. Did Jesus rail against the presence of swords and demand that no one but soldiers should carry them? No, in fact, he told His disciples that he who had no sword should buy one because of the troubled days ahead. (7) Peter was carrying his sword in the garden when Jesus was arrested. (8) While Jesus kept Peter from interfering with His arrest, Jesus did not use that situation to initiate a “sword control” campaign.

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

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

Notes

1. Second Amendment, Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second_amendment
2. Ibid.
Future Husbands and Cheerleaders: A Review of OMI’s Cheerleader and Meghan Trainor’s “Dear Future Husband”

Meghan Trainor’s song “Dear Future Husband” and OMI’s song “Cheerleader” have striking similarities. Musically they are both fun and upbeat songs. Both songs engage with the idea of marriage and outline what they expect and value in their potential spouse. However, the two songs offer conflicting ideas of what a good husband and wife look like. It is almost comical that “Cheerleader,” from a man’s perspective, describes the potential wife as a mere cheerleader and “Dear Future Husband,” from the woman’s perspective even if only satirically, describes the potential husband as a mere servant. That brings me to the final comparison: both songs expect the spouse to be an aid in providing whatever the artist desires.

However, there are some truths hidden in these songs about the role of husband and wife in marriage that can best be understood and even celebrated through a biblical understanding of marriage.

Marriage as a Deal

Meghan Trainor’s song “Dear Future Husband” is basically a list of criteria that a man must accomplish or agree to before he is allowed to marry her. The song introduces the list by remarking “Here’s a few things you’ll need to know if you wanna be my one and only all my life.” Trainor spells out examples of what she expects from her husband including taking her on dates, telling her she is beautiful, not correcting her, apologizing, buying her a ring, opening doors for her, and even letting her sleep on the left side of the bed. Then of course she adds the catch—all requests such as “be a classy guy,” “treat me like a lady,” and “love me right.”

The song also outlines what he will get in return as a reward if he does everything right. She will only “be the perfect wife,” buy groceries, give “some kisses,” be his “one and only all [her] life,” give “that special loving” if he does exactly what she asks of him. Additionally, he will have to expect that
she will be crazy (at least some of the time), she will correct but not be corrected, she will not cook, and they will favor her extended family over his. What a deal! And unfortunately that is exactly what marriage is conflated into—a deal, an exchange.

Most of these actions are pretty standard ways men show love to their wives. However, men should not and likely do not perform the acts because of a contractual agreement or because of expectations. How can this man show true unconditional and sacrificial love to his wife if he does these actions out of duty or hope of reward?

This marred picture of marriage is so faulty because it offers a picture of marriage that is a one-sided willingness to be served by her husband and then only serve him as a response. Even though the song lists loving actions in marriage, this picture of marriage is ultimately selfish, conditional, manipulative, and loveless.

**Marriage as a Cheerleader**

Looking to “Cheerleader,” the song offers a more hopeful and less distorted picture of marriage—however, we are still left wanting. The future wife in OMI’s song is a woman characterized by her support, affection, strength, physical beauty, readiness to serve, and faithfulness. All these attributes are biblically commendable and should even be sought after. Yet, what does OMI, as the future husband, offer to her? Fidelity and sex. In contrast to Trainor’s song, here the husband remains rightly faithful and offers sex because he values his wife so much, especially her ability to support him.②

However, again the picture seems woefully incomplete. The song portrays a limited picture of women by reducing his future wife to only a handful of attributes that benefit him. His wife should be more than a mere cheerleader. She is simply a tool he can pull out whenever he wants or needs her. The song further reduces—and in some ways even dehumanizes—her by focusing on the services she can offer him. As a result, she is not represented as her own person with her own needs and desires.

**Marriage as a Picture of Unity**

Ultimately marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church—a picture both songs catch a small glimpse of. When Trainor in “Dear Future Husband” desires (albeit via demand) for her husband to show her love by serving her and affirming her, she desires something that is biblical. Husbands are called to nourish, cherish, honor, embrace, protect, and love their wives.③ Having biblical standards in what to expect in a husband is what God wants, but not through demands and deals.

OMI also desires legitimate attributes in his wife. He values a wife who will support and affirm him. In Genesis God created woman with Adam’s need for companionship and assistance in mind.④
Proverbs 31 describes an excellent wife as a woman who is strong, trustworthy and praiseworthy.\(^{(5)}\) However, Proverbs 31 does not just define an excellent wife in those terms; the excellent wife is generous, wise, skilled, dignified, and uses her time buying, selling, trading, and providing for her entire household. So when OMI seeks an excellent wife, he gets a cheerleader—but if he were to look for a biblically defined wife of excellence then the proverb would ring true, that “he who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”\(^{(6)}\)

But neither artist has the full picture. Marriage is not an exchange of services—yes, spouses should serve each other; not out of duty but out of a thankful and loving heart. The element that is missing from both songs is the true and complete needs and desires of the opposite spouse. However, both songs together offer a fuller picture of what each spouse needs and desires. Ephesians 5 commands husbands to love their wives, something Trainor focused on, and for wives to respect their husbands, as OMI touched on through valuing affirmation from his wife.\(^{(7)}\)

Genesis describes marriage as becoming one flesh, and following that theme Paul in Ephesians calls husbands to “love his wife as himself.”\(^{(8)}\) By being one flesh, spouses should see their separate wills as one unified will and their separate body as one body. Paul writes that concerning this idea of unity, “For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.”\(^{(9)}\) This picture of marriage is strikingly different from the deal-making, manipulating, and self-serving marriage according to Trainor and OMI.

The true beauty and blessing in marriage for the Christian, is ultimately that marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Again in Ephesians, Paul refers to marriage by writing, “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”\(^{(10)}\) When a man and a woman marry, they symbolize unity that is fully complete between Christ and His people.\(^{(11)}\)

However, because of our sin we were incapable of being united with Christ. In order for Christ to marry his Church he had to make us clean and even righteous. Christ accomplished this by taking our place and dying on the cross for our sins so we might receive the righteousness of Christ. In that way, when God the Father looks down at His Church He sees a people who are flawless and thus fitting to be united with His son. Christ is the perfect husband, and when we are complete in our glorification, we will be the perfect wife as the Church.

**Marriage as a Broken Picture**

Yet our marriage is only a picture—a flawed and imperfect picture. Husbands abuse wives, wives undermine their husbands, and spouses cheat on each other which can all lead to separation and divorce. God did not intend marriage to be plagued by sin, and divorce and pain was not in his design.\(^{(12)}\) However, we did sin and as a result sin has damaged our relationships, including marriage, in a deeply painful way.

Nevertheless, God still works to better our marriages. He sent the Holy Spirit to help believers in the
process of sanctification—which is making us more like Christ. Both songs lack a place for sanctification. Trainor does not want to be confronted and OMI only wants to be affirmed.

But marriage is made for more than just affirming the good and ignoring the bad. Because men and women are different yet compatible, God uses marriage to aid in the process of making us more Christlike. Women tend to be more relational and emotional and men tend to be more protective and provisional. In marriage, the wife can learn from and value her husband’s strengths and the husband can learn from and value his wife’s strengths, as co-heirs with Christ. And when one spouse has wronged the other they can and should go to each other for confession, repentance and reconciliation that will result in more unity and ultimately aid in their sanctification.

With the power of the Holy Spirit working in us, even in our sinful state, we can still strive to symbolize our unity in Christ in our marriages. Married Christians should continually search the Bible for insight and direction on how to better serve and love their spouse. However, both married and single Christians all wait expectantly for the glorious wedding feast celebrating our unity to Christ.

Notes

1. There has been some debate about whether or not Trainor’s song is supposed to be understood as a satire. I am more inclined to think it may be hyperbolic but I think it might be too generous to call it a satire. However, most conclude that if it is meant to be satirical it does not skillfully convey that message. For more of this conversation simply google “Dear Future Husband sexist satire” and you should have plenty of articles to start on.
2. Fidelity and sex should both be a fundamental part of a biblical marriage. See Hebrews 13:4.
5. Genesis 2:18, Proverbs 31:10-11, 17, 28.
8. Genesis 2:24 and Ephesians 5:33
9. 1 Corinthians 7:4.
10. Ephesians 5:32.
11. Because marriage is a picture of the reality of our unity in Christ that is not yet fully realized, we value and guard the sanctity of it. That is why as Christians we should be mournful at the distortions of marriage such as divorce or homosexuality. Distortions in marriage are so offensive because they distort the truth that marriage is supposed to reflect. Because marriage should be highly regarded and protected the Bible uses harsh language when speaking about sexual immorality and divorce (For example, see Malachi 2:16 for severity of husbands not loving their wives).

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Bad Blood Reconciled: A Review of Taylor
Swift’s “Bad Blood”

Probe intern Sarah Withers contrasts Taylor Swift’s Bad Blood song to the deep spiritual truths of the gospel of Christ.

Naomi, a young Taylor Swift fan fighting leukemia, adopted Swift’s song “Bad Blood” as her theme song during her battle with cancer. In response to her video Naomi uploaded on YouTube, Taylor Swift contributed $50,000 to Naomi’s medical bills. Naomi through her heartwarming story was able to transform the song to make it inspiring and hopeful. However, as most know, the song is not about fighting terrible cancer but instead about a broken relationship. Although Swift did not disclose the antagonist, she no longer sees reconciliation as an option. By contrasting Swift’s “Bad Blood” with Christ’s reconciling blood, Christians are reminded of the transformative power of the gospel to bring healing and hope to broken relationships.

Destructive Power of Bad Blood

“Bad Blood,” through the lyrics and video, paints a picture of the pain that is felt after someone is wronged in a relationship. The antagonist attacking her and “rubbing it in so deep” left Swift with a “a really deep cut.” Many, if not all of us, have felt the pangs of being cut deeply with words and actions in a relationship gone wrong. A quick read through the Psalms reveals victims of broken relationships crying out in pain. The Psalmist laments, “Even my closest friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel before me.”

Not only do broken relationships hurt initially and deeply, but often the pain lingers. Swift captures this experience through the lyrics, “Still got scars in my back from your knives, so don’t think it’s in the past, these kinds of wounds they last and they last.” Again the Psalmist writes, “I am restless in my complaint and I moan, because the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked.”

One thing both the Psalms and Swift can agree on is that broken relationships and betrayal are deeply painful.

For Swift, not only is the relationship broken and painful, it is irreconcilable. She notes the hopelessness of the relationship, “I don’t think we can solve them (problems)” and “in time can heal but this won’t.” This is the most upsetting part of the song.

We all have had broken relationships, yet the ones that hurt the most are the ones that turn from feelings of hurt to feelings of hate. We should hate sin and the pain it brings with it, but we are called to love even our enemies. Ephesians 6 says that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the “spiritual forces of evil.” As difficult as it may be, we should guard our heart from future pain without hating the individual who hurt us. Thus, reconciliation should always be the ideal goal and in cases where reconciliation cannot or does not occur, forgiveness should still reign in our heart.

Healing Power of Christ’s Blood

It seems like an impossible request to forgive someone and even move towards reconciliation with someone who betrayed and hurt us. This would be an unimaginable task if it were not for someone who did this for us first. The gospel is the perfect example of reconciliation.

When we sin, whether or not it affects anyone, we sin against God. Our most fundamental problem
with sin is not that it hurts other people, but that it separates us from the love of God. Those who do not accept Christ as their savior are outside of the effect of Christ’s atoning blood and therefore are not able to experience God’s love. However, Paul in Ephesians says “But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”{4}

Before we can offer true love and reconciliation to others, we must first receive love and be reconciled to God. The only way to turn our bad blood against God into unity with God is through the power of Christ’s redeeming blood on the cross. Colossians states, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.”{5} His blood cleanses us so that we are filled with the selfless love towards others that the Scriptures ask of us.{6}

**Our Fight against Bad Blood**

Even for Christians who have been shown love and forgiveness, we still do not always experience an overflowing of love and forgiveness for those who wrong us. We still struggle with having bad blood towards our enemies. We still feel the pain of the broken relationships even though we are in Christ. As Christians, we look forward to a day when we will not feel pain, but while we still live in a fallen world, pain and hurt are very much part of our everyday lives.

However, the wrong that causes our pain has been or will be paid for. As Christians, if we are wronged by a believer in Christ, remember that Jesus died for those sins as well as for ours.{7} Yes, we should still lament that even believers sin and cause pain, yet justice was important enough to Christ that He died for those sins.{8} For those who sin against us and remain outside of Christ, their wrongs will be righted at the cost of their own life in eternal wrath. The hope of sharing the gospel is to offer others the redemptive power of Christ which indeed makes the gospel good news!

Looking back to the Psalms, there is a life-giving trend even within the darkness and pain. Even in Psalm 88, which is considered to be one of the darkest Psalms, the psalmist still cries out to God. In our broken relationships with others, true reconciliation must start and end with the grace and justice of God.

God knew we had bad blood and provided a Savior to change our hearts. He still continues to hear our cries of pain and sent the Holy Spirit to continue to protect our hearts from holding on to the bad blood in our relationships.

**Notes**

1. Psalm 41:9 All verses are from the English Standard Version.
2. Psalm 55:2-3, see also Psalm 69.
3. Ephesians 6:12
4. Ephesians 2:13
5. Colossians 1:19-20
6. Hebrews 9:14
7. Ephesians 1:7
8. This is why I think St. Anselm was on the right track in *Cur Deus Homo*, when he argued that Jesus Christ had to become incarnate and die for our sins so that God’s justice and grace could be made manifest. If God just ignored our sins, justice would not prevail—thank God He is both just and gracious through Jesus Christ!

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How and Why We Should Biblically Analyze Songs

Probe intern Sarah Withers provides insight about thinking biblically about popular songs.

Numerous scientific studies have revealed that music is linked to relieving pain/stress, releasing endorphins, aiding coordination, increasing concentration, expanding memory, improving language skills, and lowering blood pressure, just to list a few. {1} Unfortunately, not all genres of music offer these benefits, so it would be quite misleading to say that critically analyzing songs can act as a remedy for migraines—however convenient and persuasive that claim might be!

While I may not be able to claim health advantages, powerful benefits can be gleaned for us and others by being aware and graciously critical of songs. I hope that I can provide how and why we should biblically analyze songs and challenge you to be a more thoughtful and gracious critical consumer of all types of music.

How Do We Biblically Analyze a Song?

The most obvious first step to biblically analyzing a song is to actively listen to the lyrics and sometimes even watch the music video. It helps me focus and understand if I pull up the lyrics and read along as I listen. While I listen, I think about how the song makes me feel, what the song got right or wrong in its worldview, what I appreciate about the song, and any questions about possible meanings and interpretations. I also think about if or how I can relate to the song’s message. Have I ever experienced, desired, or seen something similar to the song’s message? If the answer is no, then maybe I could think about how seeing the songwriter’s perspective could help me relate and
communicate with someone with very different desires and experiences than my own.

Ultimately we biblically critique a song by shining the light of the biblical truths on it. No secular song gets everything right for the obvious reason that the gospel is not present. For some songs all that is missing is an explicit reference to the gospel, while other songs directly conflict with the gospel. Yet, for even the more difficult songs, Christians can understand the song’s message for the glory of God.

For example, Lana Del Rey’s song “Born to Die”\(^2\) provides the message that we should enjoy life because when we die there is nothing left for us. For those in Christ, that song is radically wrong about our purpose and destiny.

However, for those who are outside of Christ, that song paints a rather apt picture of their bleak destiny.\(^3\) So yes, the song is very dark and upsetting, yet when I hear that song I can mourn for those outside of Christ and praise God that the lyrics of that song are not true for me. In that way, that song can incite worship and foster resolve to reach out to unbelievers—something Del Rey probably would never consider possible! That is the transformative power of the gospel, the greatest good news.

However, there are songs that Christians should avoid. Songs that are overly sexualized or demonic in nature may be too difficult to redeem.\(^4\) Also some people are more affected by music than others. If you are not able to redeem the song by countering it with life-giving truths from Scripture and the song continues to bring you down, then you should not listen to it. Christians should pray for wisdom and guidance to know when to listen and engage and when to turn it off.\(^5\)

**Why Should We Care?**

Since music is so integrated into our daily lives, many of us are consumers of music whether we are intentional about it or not. The American Academy of Pediatrics in 1996 (AAP) found that 14- to 16-year-olds listened to an average of 40 hours of music per week. For a more conservative number, RAIN (Radio and Internet Newsletter) reported that students “spend an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes a day consuming media, 2 hours 19 minutes of which is spent listening to music.”\(^6\)

While these studies focus on teens and adolescents, it is fair to say that adults also listen to a fair amount of music, whether it is through headphones at work or the radio in the car. When it comes down to it, music is very much part of our everyday life. For some it can be avoided, but by most, it is accepted and greatly enjoyed.

Musical lyrics are also sticky. It never ceases to amaze me how I can still easily sing along to songs from my childhood the second the second it plays. Yet, when discussing my project of biblically analyzing popular music, a common response is that people often do not listen to the lyrics, but rather just enjoy the melody and beat. The AAP (1996) reported that “in one study 30% of teenagers knew the lyrics to their favorite songs,” which would seem to affirm that initial claim.

With those intuitions and findings, it would be easy to undermine this project as interesting but unimportant. However, the same AAP (2009) article cited the Knobloch-Westerwick \textit{et al.} study that “although young listeners might not understand all the details in lyrics, they recognize enough to obtain a general idea of the message they bring.”

Moreover, the fact that we do remember song lyrics well after we have stopped listening to them shows that we are aware of the words even if we are not actively thinking about the message. In
many respects we have become passive consumers of information and entertainment, especially when it comes to music. It is in light of this passivity that we should strive to be active listeners. Every song with words carries a message, although some are more obvious and dangerous than others. For example, current artists such as Macklemore, Hozier, Lana Del Rey, and Lady Gaga proclaim more explicit messages and agendas in their songs—something as Christians we should be aware of and ready to critique. The AAP (1996) claimed that “awareness of, and sensitivity to, the potential impact of music lyrics by consumers, the media, and the music industry is crucial.”

Although the rate and impact of the consumption of songs can be debated, there are still benefits of being aware of and engaging with our culture through songs.

**What Are the Benefits?**

Well, there are three main benefits to biblically analyzing songs. First, we refine our ability to enjoy music. For many this will be very counterintuitive. People I have talked with have feared that if they are too critical of the music’s message, then they will no longer be able to enjoy it. I will agree, there are some songs that might be ruined by listening critically to the lyrics. However, Christians should likely avoid listening to those songs anyway.

Even with songs we don’t like, we can still enjoy them for their musicality and benefit from some insights, however hard to find. The vast majority of songs are redeemable even though they may counter the gospel. Where God provides the songwriter with common grace insights, there is an opportunity to redeem the song. Remember Lana Del Rey’s song; I am still able to enjoy her powerful use of a darker sound and message, but I am also reminded of the hope I have in the gospel.

If we get to a point where we become cynical and antagonistic towards our music culture, we should remember that God gave us music and culture as a gift. The Psalms are examples of a great variety of songs that were written to offer the expression of truth about God, humanity, and our world. The obvious difference is that the Psalms are God-breathed and inspired—yet there are often truths that can be gleaned even from secular and popular songs. After all, we are all made in God’s image and bear His music-loving traits.

Another benefit of analyzing songs is the ability to learn about our culture and the people influenced by it. Regardless of whether the lyrics are true, they are believed to be true by the songwriter and often by people in our culture. Part of the appeal of songs is that they are relatable. Relatability makes the song powerful and influential.

We can gain invaluable insight into the thoughts of our culture and younger generations through the lyrics of songs. Many songs provide commentary on our culture’s view of alcohol consumption, drug use, violence, relationships, sexuality, freedom, and self-worth. By learning what the songs say about such topics, we can be better equipped to understand where people are coming from.

The final benefit which naturally flows from the previous one is being able to relate and engage with our culture. By engaging with themes in songs, we are ultimately practicing how to engage with people. I was talking with a group of high school students about one of Macklemore’s songs called “Starting Over” which is about his relapse as an alcoholic. The song is marked with shame, a deep sense of failure, and loss of identity. Before listening to the song, I encouraged them to listen to the lyrics as if a person was talking with them. With that perspective, students would be less likely to immediately judge him as a failure, and instead would be more likely to empathize and relate as we are all failures and slaves to sin outside of Christ.
By being aware of songs, we can better engage the lies of our culture and counter them with the truths of Scripture. The AAP (1996 & 2009), encourages parents to “become media-literate” which means “watching television with their children and teenagers, discussing the content with them, and initiating the process of selective viewing at an early age.” Later in the article, the authors even suggest that parents should look up the lyrics and become familiar with them. Even if you are not a parent, as Christians one way we can help correct lies of our culture is through conversations about popular music.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:6, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” It is our hope and joy that we have been redeemed and my prayer that Christians will show others the light of Christ.

So, the goal of analyzing songs from a Christian perspective is not merely an academic exercise that challenges critical thought, but to move us to action. Peter claimed that Christians were saved so “that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” Ultimately we should be encouraged to talk, relate, empathize, and love others. Through songs we can help others to “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”

Notes

1. Another article that was particularly helpful was from the eMedExpert. However, if you just search “benefits to music” (or the like) and you will be overwhelmed by how many articles develop all the unique benefits to music.

2. The video includes sexual content, brief drug use, and a violent image at the end.

3. I should note however, that the song seems to hold the message of mere extinction at death. As Christians, we believe that souls are immortal which means even the non-believer persists. For those outside of Christ, they will experience death as eternal wrath and destruction. See John 3:36, Roman 6:23, Matthew 25:46, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, and Revelation 21:8.

4. To address briefly the pushback on the idea that we can or should “redeem culture”: The confusion rests in the nuanced difference in meaning of the word “redeemed.” I use the word “redeemed” in this context to mean something closer to transformed by truth, not redeemed in the sense God has redeemed believers. Yes, Scriptures never call us to “redeem culture” but God does call us to let the light of truth shine. By engaging culture with the truth of Scriptures, Christians can make aspects of culture honoring to God, thus in that sense redeeming them. For example, pornography falls under the category of “unredeemable,” meaning that there is no way someone could make pornography honoring to God. However, with different aspects of culture this task is possible and I think should be encouraged.


6. RAIN cited The Kaiser Family Foundation study for these statistics. The report also broke down how the kids and teens were listening to the music, finding that on average per day they listen to 41 minutes of music on their IPod and similar devices, 32 minutes of music on computers (iTunes and Internet radio), and 32 minutes listening to the radio.


8. 1 Peter 2:9.

9. Colossians 2:8

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Human Enhancement and Christianity

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese says that our obsession with perfection and improvement drives the human enhancement movement. But the key is to rest instead in Christ’s perfection.

Perfection and Human Enhancement

Americans want to be perfect and the science of Human Enhancement promises to deliver that ideal. Perfect looks, athletic ability, intelligence, greater productivity, increased longevity and even moral perfectionism are all within reach or so many think. Human Enhancement is the current fashionable term for all the new ways to alter the body and mind to make people more fit and adaptable to the ever changing pace of progress. Human Enhancement is not an organized school of thought, but a societal-wide trend aimed at achieving perfection. Drugs can be used to enhance an athlete’s physical performance in order to perfect his swing or increase a student’s intelligence by improving memory and attention span, creating a straight A student. Cosmetic surgeries make women more beautiful and appear younger. The right administration of certain drugs will increase empathy in the brain and help prevent spousal infidelity. Growth hormones given to children make them taller and increase their chances of success. Sex selection is now possible so that you can have the perfect boy/girl balance in your family. Eventually embryos will be screened to remove undesired genes that lead to obesity or genetic diseases and even determine hair, skin and eye color. You will be able to custom order the perfect child.

The crux of the Human Enhancement issue surrounds values of perfectionism that desire the technology necessary to make these things possible. Perfection represents a controlling obsession for many Americans. We demand perfect grades from our children. An A- can question an entire academic career. Why not an A? We demand perfection at work. Americans are the hardest workers in history, who have internalized the Protestant Work Ethic like no other people.

And most of all we want perfect bodies that defy age and sickness, epitomizing youth and vitality. Women suffer the hardest under the burden of perfection. Media is saturated with images of young beautiful blonde bodies selling things. Writer Natalia Ilyin asks in her book Blonde Like Me the important questions concerning beauty; “Where does our fetish for measurement come from? How do we decide that one person is more good-looking (and therefore ‘better’) than another? Why do comments made about our fat go to our bone? What happened along the way that made size six beautiful and size twenty a crisis?”

Perfectionism reveals the age old desire of humanity to aspire to divinity. In the past we only had myths to follow, but today enhancement technology brings the realization of perfection ever closer.

Apollo as the Old Greek Ideal

We derive our ideals of perfection from historical precedent and desire to master ourselves and the
world around us. Our Puritan heritage is one major source for our obsession with work, thrift, education and industry. Our moral perfectionism has an ancient history we can trace as far back as the fifth century monk Pelagius who advocated moral perfection and the power of the will and works righteousness. But our obsession with bodily perfection is even older, and like so many things in the modern world it has its roots in the ancient Greeks. Ilyin notes that “Measurement is the apparatus of mankind’s search for perfection. We hear all our lives about the ‘perfect body,’ ‘perfect proportion,’ ‘perfect features.’ But what does perfect mean, really? Where do we get the idea of ‘perfect?’”{2}

The Greek philosopher Plato taught that perfection exists in an ideal world outside the everyday one. The perfect apple exists as an idea and common apples we come into contact with are pale imitations of that ideal. None of the apples we see can compare but they all derive their nature as apples from the ideal.

Greek religion, too, is still present in striving for perfection. Apollo the sun god was believed to embody the perfect human form: young, blond, athletic and male. A beautiful body meant a beautiful mind. “Your blond hair meant that the purity of the sun lived within you. Apollo’s blond symbolized the beauty of the power that could order and control nature. It symbolized the beauty of the rational mind.”{3} The burden of physical perfection was not always the concern of women, but was first located in young men. However, because the Apollo Cult was homoerotic the image of perfection was transposed to women in Christian times. The beautiful blonde images that consume our culture, such as the blonde on the cover of *Shape* magazine, are really “Apollo in drag,” as Ilyin states.{4}

The burden of female perfection reverberates in a recent song by Pink who sings to her daughter,

> Pretty, pretty please  
> don’t you ever ever feel  
> like you’re less than perfect;  
> pretty, pretty please  
> if you ever ever feel  
> like you’re nothing,  
> you are perfect to me.{5}

The ideal of perfection has a way of making us feel like we can never measure up.

Perfection represents an unrealistic goal in any area of life and will always produce the accompanying sense of failure. The desire for divinity as imitation of Apollo or the perfect human form, a striving towards an angelic existence, will always let us down.

**Eugenics and Human Enhancement**

The goal of Human Enhancement is to improve humanity. This sounds like a noble intention, but as we uncover its meaning it appears to be fraught with complications. In the past this was known as *eugenics* or the science of human breeding. Most famously, eugenics is remembered as the basis of Nazi genocide, but it was extremely popular in the United States as well, which served as inspiration and precedent for the Nazi program. Many laws were passed in the 1890’s and early 1900’s preventing the “feeble-minded,” or epileptic, schizophrenic, bi-polar and depressed individuals from marrying and imposing forced sterilization in order to inhibit them from passing on their negative traits.
Eugenics was discredited after the holocaust. Society abandoned it with good cause, yet eugenics is making a comeback. With the advent of biomedical technology it is now possible to continue the goal of trait selection. Prenatal testing for diseases through the procedure of amniocentesis identifies many complications such as Tay-Sachs, Down Syndrome, sickle-cell anemia, hemophilia, and cystic fibrosis, and also tells the sex of the child. Although prenatal testing can result in early treatment, women may also choose to terminate their pregnancy. This practice has already resulted in an imbalance between male over female children in some regions of India. Ethicists fear the practice will eventually lead to the termination of fetuses believed to carry the genes for obesity, homosexuality, alcoholism and like a ghost from the past, low intelligence, even if these genes do not actually exist. (6)

The philosopher Philip Kitcher notes two types of eugenics. The first is known as coercive eugenics and was implemented through state manipulation. Second, he indentifies a new kind of eugenics called “laissez-faire eugenics,” (7) also called “liberal eugenics” because it holds the individual choice of trait determination as sovereign. Through sex selection the perfect boy/girl balance may be achieved along with the elimination of perceived birth defects and genetic flaws, sparing parents the anguish of watching children die slow deaths. However, prenatal testing that leads to trait selection does not resolve the quandary of abortion that is currently necessary to achieve parental goals. Eugenics is grounded in values and preferences for a certain type of person justified under the rubric of “improvement.” The new eugenics offers no opposition to market forces from eventually predetermining any physical characteristic thought most advantageous for success in liberal society, and may return us to the Superman ideal. History teaches the dangers of preoccupation with perfect human form, but people have no ears to hear the lessons of history. We appear destined to repeat the mistakes of the past if we do not change our values that prize strength over weakness or curb our desire for perfection in our children.

Cyborgism

Human Enhancement adopts the cyborg image as its ideal. “Cyborg” was a term coined in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, two research scientists wanting to redesign the human body in order to make it adaptable to the inhospitable environment of outer space. It has since come to be applied to the entire human and technological merger. Cyborg is short for cyber organism. A cyborg is any living thing that has been adapted to a technological apparatus so that the two are now inseparable. The first animal cyborg was a rat in 1960. It had a Rose osmotic pump attached to its tail which injected chemicals into the body in order to regulate its life support system. (8) Cyborgism is the belief that human adaptation to technology represents the natural development of evolution. Humanity has always used some form of technology, whether fire, knife or arrow, to enhance its existence. The current trend towards our complete absorption into a technological world represents the culmination of a long symbiotic relationship between humanity and its machines. People are, as philosopher Andy Clark says, “Natural-Born Cyborgs.” (9) This view argues that we are technological animals, meaning it is human nature to use technology and define ourselves by it.

In her famous essay A Cyborg Manifesto, Donna Haraway argues that the Cyborg is the new metaphor or ideal of human existence because it simultaneously transcends and includes all differences. (10)

Both theories argue that the lines of demarcation between humanity, nature and machine are rapidly disappearing. Like a scene out of the movie Blade Runner we are rapidly approaching a time where the organic and inorganic worlds will completely merge and the words “natural,” “human,” and “machine,” will no longer mean different things.
This position does not view humanity as either special in some way, or distinct from nature, or possessing a rational soul. It springs from materialism [the worldview that says there is no reality beyond the physical, measurable universe]. Clark argues that this ancient prejudice blinds us from our true technological nature. Clark is right in identifying what Christians call the imago dei or image of God as the primary demarcation between humanity and the rest of nature. If this traditional boundary line is lost, the current ideal of “improvement” and “perfection” that leads to a higher evolutionary form can flourish unimpeded.

Perfection in Christ

Human Enhancement has restored sight to the blind, brought hearing to the deaf, enabled the lame to walk, and healed diseases—things once thought only possible by miraculous powers. It promises to extend our life expectancy and further increase communication. The realm of possibilities does appear limitless to what new technology will accomplish. However, the ideal of perfection driving our technology is based on an overestimation of human powers and the failure to recognize that our perfection has already been accomplished.

Christians can agree that human beings are technological animals. This is no different than when Aristotle said people are social animals. This just means it is human nature to be social or technological; but we disagree with the notion that we are nothing more than that. Although we were made in the perfect image of God (Gen. 1:26), that image was lost in part due to Adam’s sin. We can survive in the harsh conditions of the natural world with technology, which is nothing more than extensions ourselves. But we cannot restore that image without a spiritual rebirth that only God can give us through the work of Christ which we appropriate by faith. Technological enhancement will not lead us to perfection. "Man cannot live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4). The Bible calls Jesus Christ the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45) by which it means he was the perfect man sent to restore the human race. “And having been made perfect, He became to all who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:10). Humanity constantly strives to recover that lost image through its own good works and religious striving. The technological fetish of our day is simply another form of that works righteousness or humanity trying to earn its own salvation and perfection. It is the old works righteousness of the Pelagian heresy dressed up in modern garb.

You are called to find your rest in Christ, to accept who you are and not to imitate Apollo (physical form and beauty) or the Cyborg (technology and progress) in reaching for perfection, for they are redeemed in Christ as well. Christ has already accomplished perfection and we are perfected in Him; “you have been made complete [perfect] in Him” (Col. 2:10). And through Christ we can extend his example of perfection to the world. “For I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6). Stop striving for a perfect ideal you can never reach. The Psalmist writes, “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). This is a very difficult task for perfectionists. Our charge is to accept the perfection of Christ, to accept that we have been accepted in Him!

Notes

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 112.
4. Ibid., 113.
5. Pink, “Perfect” in Greatest Hits...So Far!!! La Face Records, 2010.
6. Philip Kitcher, The Lives to Come: The Genetic Revolution and Human Possibilities (New York:
Touchstone, 1997), 188.
7. Ibid., 19.

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