

# Can the Just Succeed?

*Can the just succeed? Can people living by Biblical principles successfully compete in a capitalist economy without compromising? Should we even try? Steve Cable provides a biblical perspective.*

## Corrupting Cultural Climate

At the turn of the twenty-first century, America was hit with a tsunami of corporate corruption. Names like Enron, Tyco and WorldComm became synonymous with greed and failed corporate leadership. Today, even after Congress and the SEC have strengthened their oversight, high profile cases, such as backdated stock options at Apple, continue to plague us. We can't even take comfort in some past golden era of corporate ethics as we look back at a history filled with robber barons, ruthless company towns, and shady land deals.

In the light of this discouraging reality, we are asking the question, Can the just succeed? Can people living by Biblical principles successfully compete in a capitalist economy without compromising? Should we even try?



Let's begin our exploration of this question by considering the overall cultural climate surrounding our free market economic system. A number of recent studies indicate less than honest behavior, and downright dirty dealing are common throughout our culture.

Let's begin at the top. What type of standard is being set by our business leaders? One recent poll showed that less than twenty percent of Americans had confidence that CEOs would consistently make job-related decisions that were morally appropriate.[\[1\]](#) Is this skepticism well-founded? After all, most CEOs have worked their way to the top as a result of

excellent performance in lower positions. Almost fifty percent of corporate executives in a recent Tulane University study were willing to commit fraud in role playing exercises.[{2}](#) What was particularly disturbing was that these same executives had affirmed their unwavering commitment to the highest ethical business standards.

Perhaps, we can rely on our workforce to apply their solid middle class values to curb the effects of corrupt leadership. Sadly, a recent study found that forty-eight percent of workers admitted to acting illegally or unethically in the workplace during the previous year.[{3}](#) Over thirty percent of them said that their coworkers condone questionable ethics by showing respect for those who achieve success using them.[{4}](#) In other words, cheating is not only condoned, it is respected.

We all hope that the upcoming generation will improve upon the sins of the prior generations. Are they bringing a standard of personal values that will clean up the marketplace of the future? Or, are they following in their elders' footsteps? From 1969 to 1989, the number of students who let someone copy their work rose from fifty-eight to ninety-seven percent.[{5}](#) A recent survey published in *Education Week* found that three out of four students admitted to engaging in "serious cheating" within the previous year.[{6}](#)

People emulate the behavior they believe will make them successful. Perhaps, today's Christians should join Habakkuk as he questioned God: "Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?" (Hab. 1:13)[{7}](#)

It appears that we will be dealing with a culture of dishonesty in the marketplace for the foreseeable future.

# The Slippery Slope

Surprisingly, most Americans identify themselves as trustworthy. So, why are all of these good trustworthy people demonstrating by their behavior that they are not worthy of our trust?

Well, Paul gives us a lot of insight in his first letter to Timothy when he writes, "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil" (1 Tim. 6:9,10).

When we want to accumulate money for our own enjoyment beyond what we need to live, we are tempting ourselves to unethical behavior.

In his book *There is No Such Thing as Business Ethics*, John Maxwell identifies three primary reasons "good" people are led astray in business dealings.[\[8\]](#)

First, we do what is convenient. Many times doing the right thing is a lot more trouble than doing the convenient thing. Have you ever discovered that you were given too much change, but you didn't want to go to the trouble of returning to the store? Sometimes a convenient lie can help us avoid the consequences of a mistake.

Second, we do what we must to win. After all, everyone is doing it. I have to compromise my standards in order to compete. During my years in a very competitive industry, one of my co-workers often stated, "If you can't lie on a proposal, when can you lie?" In other words, promise whatever you need to get the job, and try to wiggle out of it later.

Third, we rationalize our unethical choices with relativism. We tell ourselves that our ultimate intentions are good. And, besides, if it is good for me, then it must be good. It is scary to think how easy this will be in a postmodern society

where all truth is relative truth.

All three of these relate to putting our success ahead of our values. John Maxwell put it well when he said, “Ethics is about how we meet the challenge of doing the right thing when that will cost more than we want to pay.”[{9}](#)

I would like to add a fourth reason I call the Sudden Slippery Slope. We are taught that as long as we can justify our actions by the rule book then they are OK. In order to get ahead, we start to push the envelope of how we interpret the rules. One day we wake up to find that we have clearly gone beyond the boundary. We discover that we are on a slippery slope where the more we try to cover up or undo our actions the more we find ourselves breaking the rules. Enron is an excellent example of this effect.[{10}](#) No one at Enron started out with the objective to wipe out \$50 billion in shareholder value overnight through unethical business practices, but a culture of pushing the ethical boundaries will inevitably result in a culture of corruption. Proverbs warns us that when we get in this mode, we have a hard time telling right from wrong: “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble” (Prov. 4:18-19).

## **A Christian Perspective on Capitalism**

Let’s consider a biblical perspective on capitalism.

People are rarely neutral when it comes to capitalism. Some people blame capitalism for the excesses of unethical behavior described earlier in this discussion. But capitalism as the primary cause of corruption is exonerated by comparisons with many communist and socialist economic systems. Historically, these systems have raised corruption and graft to the highest levels.

On the other hand, some commentators seem to equate capitalism with Christianity, implying that one of the tenets of Christianity is a capitalistic free market system. This premise does not hold up to scrutiny either as Christianity has flourished under a variety of economic systems.

Before we go any further, a simple definition of capitalism is needed. Capitalism is an economic system in which the means of production and distribution are privately or corporately owned, and development is proportionate to the accumulation and reinvestment of profits gained in a free market.<sup>[11]</sup> In other words, private individuals own the resources and make decisions on how to use those resources based on an expectation of return. The genius of capitalism is that individuals or corporations who can provide valuable services better or more efficiently are rewarded with more resources. So, resources tend to be allocated to those who are most capable of using them to produce desired goods and services.

However, one can approach capitalism from either a secular or a faith perspective. In secular capitalism:

- the purpose for business is to return a profit,
- the standard of conduct is the rule of law, and
- the measure of success is accumulation of wealth.

Under a Christian view of capitalism:

- the purpose for business is to honor God,
- the standard of conduct is the Golden Rule, and
- the measure of success is the ability to bless others with the resources God has entrusted to us.

A secular capitalist is accountable only to himself and his shareholders. A Christian business person is accountable to God with a responsibility to all of the stakeholders in the business, including customers and employees.

Capitalism is not essentially Christian, but, as Max Weber

pointed out in his classic book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*,[{12}](#) Christianity is good for capitalism in many ways including:

- An excellent work ethic motivated by Paul's admonition in Colossians to "work with sincerity of heart as unto the Lord." Our work results reflect on our Savior, so we are motivated to excellence.
- A willingness to put integrity above profits and to forego investing in businesses which degrade or take advantage of others. As Proverbs 28 says, "Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is crooked though he be rich. . . . He who increases his wealth by interest and usury gathers it for him who is gracious to the poor" (vv. 6,8). Integrity reduces the "greed tax" which is all of the effort wasted on monitoring others to prevent theft.
- A long term perspective that is willing to forgo near term gratification for long term benefits such as investing in hospitals and schools.

Counter to the view of Michael Douglass' character in the movie *Wall Street*, greed is not good. Greed is not what makes capitalism successful. Trusting resources to those who are productive and want to do something of significance is the key to long term economic success!

## **Called to the Marketplace**

What is the role of Christians in the marketplace?

Over the centuries, Christians have had varying responses to the secular marketplace. Some, like the Amish, attempt to isolate themselves from the corrupting influence of the secular world. Others, like the Puritans, believed that excelling in the marketplace was a critical part of the Christian life as evidence of one's election. In recent years

the trend has been for Christians to segregate their spiritual church life from their secular work life. This attitude allows many to believe they can conform to the compromised values of our culture without impacting the spiritual aspects of their life. However, since God's truth is the truth in all aspects of our lives, this attitude could not be truth.

What does the New Testament have to say on this subject? Out of twenty-two letters to churches, not one advised Christians to quit working in or participating in the Roman economic system. None of these letters encouraged all Christians to leave their secular vocation and immediately leave for the mission field. The overall picture is that some people are given as gifts to the church, devoting their energies to equipping the church for ministry. But the majority of us are called to be ministers in our vocation (whether that vocation is as a business leader, a laborer or a stay-at-home mother). As Christians, we are called to be a redeeming influence in the place where non-Christians can be found, the marketplace.

As we enter the business world, we should be clear as to our purpose. I don't think that it is to prove our salvation by getting the most promotions. Four clear biblical purposes for Christians in the work place are:

1. To honor Christ through my attitude, performance and integrity (Col 3:22-25). In my career, whenever I was asked to state my career objectives, I would focus on Colossians 3 for my answer. I would tell them that since I was called to "work heartily as unto the Lord" and to serve with "sincerity of heart", my career objective is to fulfill the role that creates the most value for my employer. That statement was not only true, but was also warmly received by my supervisor.

2. To share Christ in my unique mission field. We interact with more non-Christians in the business world than just about any other venue (Col. 4:5-6).

3. To provide for the physical needs of your family (1 Tim. 5:8).
4. To be able to share with others who need help (2 Cor. 8:12-14).

Jesus summed it up for us when He said, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

## **Compelling Results**

Let's conclude by considering the characteristics of a just business and looking at some measures of success.

Whether for the individual or for a corporation, Christian behavior is going to be characterized by the Golden Rule taught by our Lord: "Treat others the way that you want them to treat you" (Luke 6:31). This means that we are not going to deceive, covet, or steal in our business dealings. We are going to treat others with respect and with grace. We are going to choose integrity over convenience or profit.

Since we all like to win, does the Golden Rule mean that I should always let my competitors win? Should I just turn over the market to them? I don't know about you, but I absolutely hate it when someone lets me win. Everyone loses if we allow inferior or more costly products to claim the market because no one wants to compete with the status quo (think about the fall of the Soviet Union when you consider this topic). Competition promotes better products and greater productivity which creates more resources and opportunities even for your competitors. The problem arises not from having a competitive system, but from greed causing some to hoard wealth. So, a Christian business will compete aggressively but fairly. They will also realize not to compete by destroying the lives of employees through long hours, poor working conditions, or unfair wages.



Won't a company or individual applying these principles put themselves at a disadvantage? After all, when swimming with sharks, a guppy will always get eaten. In his book *Profit at Any Cost*,<sup>{13}</sup> Jerry Fleming analyzed the results of corporations who appeared to place a premium on a high standard of ethical behavior. He discovered that these businesses typically induce others to behave ethically toward them. There is also a strong correlation between a firm's commitment to ethics and a lower employee turnover. Typically, a lower turnover rate results in greater productivity from experienced, content employees. At the bottom line, he found a significant positive correlation between a firm's ethical behavior and its economic performance. Companies promoting unethical practices pay a price in the long run (think Enron). An investment in ethically responsible firms has resulted in a return eight times better than the return on the Dow Jones Industrial Average over a period of thirty years.

What conclusions can we draw from our study of Christian principles in the workplace? Applying Christian principles to business is not:

- a magic shield against failure, or
- a way to always avoid criticism, or
- an assurance that your product will be the best on the market.

But, it is:

- a part of our calling to follow Christ,
- the best way to conduct business, and
- a consistent companion of long term success.

No matter the financial results, we are a success when we follow Christ's example in the work place.

## Notes

1. Barna Update: "Americans Speak: Enron, WorldCom and Others Are Result of Inadequate Moral Training By Families," The

Barna Group, July 22, 2002,

[www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=117](http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=117)

2. 1996 Tulane University study reported in

[workforce.com/archive/feature/22/14/56/index.php](http://workforce.com/archive/feature/22/14/56/index.php)

3. Samuel Greengard, "50% of Your Employees are Lying, Cheating & Stealing", [workforce.com](http://workforce.com).

4. "2003 National Business Ethics Survey", Ethics Resource Center.

5. Urie Bronfenbrenner *et al.*, *The State of Americans: This Generation and the Next* (Free Press, 1996), quoted on Plagiarism.org, [www.plagiarism.org/facts.html](http://www.plagiarism.org/facts.html).

6. Ibid.

7. All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Updated Edition.

8. John Maxwell, *There's No Such Thing as "Business" Ethics*, Warner Books, 2003.

9. Ibid.

10. For an in depth look at what happened at Enron see Kurt Eichenwald, *Conspiracy of Fools* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005).

11. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th ed., s.v. "capitalism."

12. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd; January 27, 1977).

13. Jerry Fleming, *Profit at Any Cost* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003).

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# “Culture in Conflict” Conference MP3s



## Conference Recordings

**Kerby Anderson:**

[Being Christian in a Post-Christian Society](#)  
[Truth Decay](#)  
[Basic Christian Evidences](#)

**Dr. Ray Bohlin:**

[The Privileged Planet and Intelligent Design](#)  
[Evidence for the Existence of God](#)  
[The Reliability of the Bible](#)

**Sue Bohlin:**

[Thinking Clearly About Sexual Confusion](#)  
[Helping Teens Understand Homosexuality](#)  
[Raising Gender-Secure Children](#)

**Ray and Sue:**

[Guys are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus](#)

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# Crimping Consciences: Texas City Railroads Pro-Gay Ordinance

*Byron Barlowe blogs about the his city's Anti-Discrimination ordinance intended to give full recognition to the LGBT community at the expense of those who disagree.*

## **New Anti-Discrimination Policy Approved**

According to the [Dallas Morning News Plano Blog](#), “In a split vote Monday, the Plano City Council passed the controversial Equal Rights Policy [ERP] over the objections of many residents in the standing-room-only crowd.

The amendment to the city's 1989 anti-discrimination policy extends protections from housing, employment and public accommodation discrimination to include sexual orientation, gender identity and other categories” like veterans. While no one objected to the inclusion of veterans, an overwhelming number of surprised and very lately aware (as in, the day of) citizens voiced strong opposition. These objections, while noted, seemed to make little to no difference to the city council and certainly to Mayor Harry LaRosiliere, who was so eager to vote for the statute that he went out of order during proceedings.

As a Plano resident who publicly urged the council to vote “No” on the measure, I offer some reflections on the issue—both local and larger—from a biblically informed worldview.

## **Good Intentions: Trying to Legislate Values *Directly***

Rather than seeking to legislate merely out of a set of values—an unavoidable reality—the Plano City Council clearly tried to impose a set of values directly onto the public by adopting this more expansive anti-discrimination ordinance. Such legislative overreach has become part and parcel of an increasingly politically correct polity known as the United States of America. Plano is now more PC. While this kind of ordinance is not only inadvisable because it cannot hope to work well, it also steps beyond the scope of a proper role of government.

IT CANNOT WORK BECAUSE . . .

We often hear the phrase “You can’t legislate morality.” Well, yes and no. While the very nature of human law at its root is a delineation of and codification of right vis a vis wrong—that is, strictures or incentives administered by the state as a morally informed code of conduct—it is also true that government cannot successfully impose morality, per se, onto the consciences of their citizens.

Yet, that is precisely what such ordinances as Plano’s ERP seeks to do. Plano’s “out” regarding the problem of conscientious objection? City Attorney Paige Mims assures us that if anyone outside of the many exempted statuses has a moral or religious objection, they can go through a waiver process. This is, on its face, an undue imposition on businesspeople who don’t fall under exempted categories like education, non-profit or religious. Recent legal precedent (see Hobby Lobby case) makes clear that religious businesses do not somehow lay down their rights of conscience when they go into business.

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT. . .

When government entities try to arbitrate motives, for example

hate crimes laws that purport to regulate actions based on the attitudinal intent of the actor, it steps into a sphere where it does not, indeed it cannot, belong. In other words, it takes on a godlike sovereignty to righteously discern between this and that intention. Can't be done. Not righteously. Not fairly.

People—including city legal departments and judges—are fallible humans who lack the innate ability to administer justice based primarily or solely on someone's internal motivation. "The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out" (Proverbs 20:5). Drawing out the "purposes" of a man's or woman's heart is certainly not a governmental role. But this is what it takes to know motives, a role only God claims full access to, and a role traditionally reserved for clergy, other spiritual advisers and psychologists.

Here is a pithy bunch of [biblical worldview teaching on the role of government](#).

Biblically, the proper role of government is founded in limits primarily written in Romans 13. As I understand it, a biblical worldview on government's role is limited to: fighting wars, passing and enforcing laws concerning public human interactions and that's about it. Anything else falls under the jurisdiction of religious and social institutions. Government: stay out!

**I'm not arguing for such a state of affairs as an absolute in the real world**, but as a plumb line to measure when government has stepped over its proper boundaries. In the case of Plano's ERP government has overstepped.

## **Progressivism on Parade**

The subtext of public deliberations on Plano's ERP was plainly a progressive agenda. Why else would a city seek to get "ahead

of the curve” on a social issue such as gender bias or sexual identity discrimination or whatever the euphemism is today? (Refer above to the value of limited role of government, which was expressed repeatedly to the council by citizens of Plano.) The council, challenged that there are no known cases of such discrimination, seemed to shrug dismissively and invoke the need to “get ahead of” the issue.

“The issue of equality is a basic human rights issue and the choice for some to focus on a person’s sexuality is conflating the issue,” said the Mayor. Conflating what with what? Either the mayor misunderstands the term “conflating” (making things the same) or he’s basically accusing objectors of the very thing that has been foisted upon them—namely, making one’s sexual choices (not their true sexuality) the determiner of human rights. This is like watching someone start a fight over a piece of land and then accusing the one attacked of starting that same fight over that very piece of land!

Questioning the need for the statute was otherwise met with a not-so-veiled sense of accusation, an implication of inherent bias on the part of the objectors, despite an overall congenial atmosphere. So, if I question the veracity of the claim to need such a policy or ask for reasonable cause, I am automatically anti-gay? That’s patently false and unfair. Yet that was the sense of things in a politically correct undercurrent that is the zeitgeist of our day.

## **Worldview War**

This is the serious game begun back in the 1970s by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen who spelled out the propaganda project of the gay lobby in a book titled [\*After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear & Hatred of Gays in the 90s\*](#). Now that their jamming (name-calling, guilt by association and other tactics) have worked so well, only an implicit inference need be made at such meetings as Monday night’s. It has a chilling—no—a virtual shutdown effect.

Yet, many citizens displayed aplomb when speaking on the Constitution and related matters. Businesspeople appealed to the unfairness of having to seek redress through a voucher system. One person well said in response: "The Constitution is my waiver." First Amendment (or any other) rights do not require special permission. It's government's role merely to ensure them, which Plano may think it's doing by elevating ever more special interests to protected status. That is an upside-down approach that's illegitimate no matter how much case law exists or how many other cities and companies enact similar policies.

## **The "We're Just Following" Fallacy**

An admittedly very arguable point I'd like to add: Mayor LaRosiliere and City Attorney Mims claimed that other major cities in Texas have such statutes on the books. Hence we are not, as implicated, "out front" taking legal risks, but rather are following others' lead. This seems disingenuous.

Are we "out in front" of the issue or are we, as strongly emphasized by the Mayor, simply one in a fairly long line of municipalities trying to codify fair treatment to people of all lifestyles and segments? One could make the case that Plano is in the vanguard overall but not first in implementation. However, that is unsatisfactory to many. You can't ultimately have it both ways: either you're progressive on social issues (which does not truly reflect Plano well) or you're just falling in line with current legal trends.

## **The "Gay Gene" at the Bottom of the Debate**

One thing is sure: *increased expansion of rights and privileges to previously unaddressed parties is the trend in our culture—and lots of it has to do with sexuality in a newly politicized way.* But we thought government was supposed to get



out of our bedrooms?

Any claim to that distinction has been lost with the adoption of the near-universal belief in what amounts to a “[gay gene](#)”—that a person inherently possesses a sexual identity that may indeed be homosexual or of other varieties. This, over and against a mere proclivity or attraction to the same sex, which leaves room for choice, which is an ethical issue. Remove choice regarding homosexuality, you remove any basis of objection. Remove objection, you can run roughshod over any cultural restraints on the free and damaging expression of sexuality outside the bounds of its Inventor, God. Remove those restrictions, celebrate the lifestyle, then codify and impugn those who disagree, and the After the Ball agenda is a complete success.

Monday night’s meeting was an incremental victory toward this end, whether or not players on the city council or either side of the issue realized it. Regarding objectors’ motives, it’s one thing to care for individuals whose sexual identity is in question or those who act out a gay lifestyle and it’s another kind of thing entirely to exercise one’s rights to oppose codification of these choices and lifestyles. I and many of my friends there that night were doing one while we practice the other in private situations, too.

There is no cognitive dissonance or hypocrisy here—one can do both public square advocacy of conservative values and also outreach to individuals who struggle in a certain area of sin—namely other-than-heterosexual-wed sex. True Christlike love does not affirm that which the Bible condemns, but shows grace nonetheless.

## **There is a Precedent for Unintended Consequences and Abuse**

Plano’s ERP sets up the same oppression of religious objectors that has been seen already across the U.S. with cake bakers,

wedding venue owners and others who—for reasons of conscience—refuse to do business with certain parties in select situations like gays getting married. Yes, exemptions were written into Plano's ordinance, but does anyone seriously believe these will stand up under judicial scrutiny in this day and age? The erosion of rights continues—and saying so, again, is not to be confused with [intolerance](#).

This brand of identity politics is rooted in the cultural adoption of the doctrine of a gay gene (“God or nature made me this way!”), which is at a worldview level, where most objectors to the statute were coming from. We object to the underlying presupposition that homosexuality is not utterly tied up with choice, which is so fundamental to opposition to the gay rights issue. (I almost come off as a throwback rube for even bringing it up in today's enlightened culture—which furthers my point!)

## **The Condescension that Falsely Pits Feelings vs. Facts**

Monday night's proceedings—at least from the point of view of the city council—were saturated with what has been called the Sacred / Secular Split. On this view, there are basically two levels of discourse: an area of public life informed largely by science but also by enlightened social values (invariably liberal / progressive / non-traditional ones) balanced unevenly by a lesser valued, private world of emotional / psychological / religious sentiments.

The former—where real knowledge resides—should supposedly be the domain of public policy. The latter—again, a private set of often closely held feelings and values that should have no sway in the public arena yet the existence of which are somewhat guarded by government and other institutions—are to be tolerated as inevitable but will hopefully catch up with social contracts like those being forged by the gay lobby and

societal institutions across the waterfront. The notion is: "You have a right to your private opinion. Just don't bring it into the public square."

This attitude, this taken-for-granted starting place was most evident in closing remarks made by several city council members—all of whom happened to vote for the policy. One council member waxed eloquent on his world travels, noting that the most advanced societies he'd run across made it a point never to discriminate. (I don't know where he's been, but perhaps his hotel's staff might beg to differ—just guessing.)

More poignantly, he and another council member who said that her Christian faith informed her "yes" vote, was only one more who joined a chorus of comments like:

"There were lots of strong feelings on the topic of discussion tonight" and

"This is a very emotional issue for many. . . ."

The plain inference was that objections were raised out of the private, sacred area of life, laden with "emotion" and "feelings" while effective debate occurred on the level of law, fact and agreed-upon societal norms (at least the evolving kind that our "City of Excellence" wants to be known for).

Pronouncements by a clergy woman (Disciples of Christ) who serves as an officer of a Plano Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender association, the mayor and at least one more gay advocate that the passage of the ERP was just "the right thing to do" obviously paints the vast majority of citizens as those who want to do the wrong thing. According to Mayor LaRosiliere, "Providing equal rights to everyone is the right thing to do." Rights to what? Rights in displacement of whose rights? The task in a pluralistic society is to find that fairest middle ground—and that failed Monday night.

Apparently bigotry, at least ignorance, was the only thing standing in the way of Plano's ERP. Thank you for the condescension. Which leads to my final point: the race card was deftly played by none other than Mayor LaRosiliere where it has no place. And the Mayor did precisely what he accused others of doing, that is . . .

## . . . **Conflating Race & Sexual Lifestyle**

Plano's Mayor ended deliberations (or nearly did) with [a speech](#) on the equivalency of historical human rights movements to the current push for special privileges for sexual identities and lifestyles. His well-written story arc was centered on the question, "Why are we doing this now?" In a series of juxtaposed historical references, he posed the question he deemed was being needlessly asked about Plano's Equal Rights Protection ordinance: **Why pass this now if there is no case on record of any discrimination?** In the case of the infamous Dredd-Scott Supreme Court decision that ruled blacks were 3/5 of a person one might ask, he said, "Why are we doing this now?"

"If we spoke in 1919," LaRosiliere continued, "to allow women to vote, the question would be, 'Why are you oppressing me and making me subject to this now.'" He went on to paint discrimination against the Irish in early 19th Century New York and segregation in the South in the 20th Century as morally equivalent instances comparable to the current situation—ostensibly oppression of gay, lesbian and transgender citizens.

Very cleverly devised rhetorical device, that. But it **presupposes a moral equivalency that a black man sitting beside me rejected outright.** This gentlemen from Nigeria was so confused by the proceedings and the Mayor's speech capping them off that he was convinced the entire issue at hand was racism! When I asked him this question, he unequivocally answered "No!": "Do you think that homosexual identity is the

same kind of thing as you being black or being from Nigeria?”

“No!”

And rightly, **my new African friend—who is a Christian—was bothered by the conflation of the two and the use of such rhetoric to elevate a class of people based on their sinful behavior and identity to it as the basis to extend so-called human rights. We all have the right to fair treatment as humans made in God’s image. We do not have a right to socially engineer law to force the compromise of conscience that is being carried out by Plano’s new ordinance.**

As I pleaded with the council not to allow, we will surely read about this case going to court, being found unconstitutional and otherwise unlawful and costing this taxpayer and all others unnecessarily.

Ideas, worldviews, do indeed have consequences.

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## **The Euphemism of ‘Death With Dignity’**

There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death. (Proverbs 14:12)



Brittany Maynard, a young woman with an incurable brain tumor, recently took her own life rather than suffer through a painful, difficult descent into natural death. She had moved from California to Oregon, which is a “right-to-die” state that allows terminally ill people to be assisted in ending their lives on their terms.

How should we think about this? It depends on your starting point.

If you leave God out of the picture, believing that man is autonomous with the right to make all our own choices independent of any outside source of moral truth, then avoiding needless pain and suffering makes sense. If you leave God out of the picture, then there is nothing particularly special about people as opposed to beloved pets, which we put down when their suffering becomes too great for us. If you leave God out of the picture, and you believe that life ends with your last breath on earth, then ending one’s life is really not much different from turning off a movie before its end because you’re tired and want to go to bed. If you leave God out of the picture, then it makes sense to do whatever you want.

But leaving God out of the picture doesn’t make Him go away.

It just means people are in denial about His existence. About His right to determine life and death because He is the creator of life.

If your starting point is God Himself, who creates people for His pleasure and for His glory (Rev. 4:11, Eph. 1:6), then we are accountable to the Author of Life, and ending one’s earthly life is not a choice we have the right to make. If your starting point is God Himself, who made us in His eternal

image to live forever, then ending one's earthly life is the doorway to the next life. Not believing in life after death doesn't make it go away. As one character says in the movie *City of Angels*, "Some things are true whether you believe in them or not."

As far as we can tell from what the media presented, Brittany Maynard left God out of the picture in deciding to end her suffering. If she died as she may have lived her life, separated from the God who is created her, then even on her worst days of tumor-induced pain on earth, that was as close to heaven as she was ever going to get. If she remained separated from God as she drank a sedative mixture that allowed her to fall asleep and then die, she made a horrible choice to enter eternity remaining separated from God forever. That means separated from all that is good, from all that is kind, from all life and light and love and joy. Because all these things are found only in God, and if we remain separated from Him, we cut ourselves off from their source. We are left with evil, cruelty, death and darkness and isolation and despair. An eternity of it. There is no dignity in this kind of unending death.

It's possible that she cast herself on God's mercy in her last minutes; I don't know what the state of her soul was as she drew her last breath. I truly hope so.

But the horrific earthly suffering she opted out of, would be nothing compared to the eternal suffering of being cut off from all that is good. I don't mean to make light of the indescribable suffering of those dying from terminal diseases. But it's essential to not leave God out of the picture, and to remember He does great things in people through suffering. Not just the one with the illness, but the family members and others around them.

Responding to this news about Ms. Maynard, one woman wrote of her husband, "a man who suffered well. It was agony... Watching

him suffer. Knowing there was nothing I could do to heal him and little I could do to lessen his suffering. All I could do was hold his hand during biopsies and chemo. During the pain and nausea. I marveled at his strength, his faith, his refusal to give up. I held his hand when the doctor told us there wasn't anything else they could do. When the morphine caused hallucinations and he forgot we were married. I held his hand and discovered that if you love someone... If you have faith, you can tap unknown reserves of strength, you can endure pain unimaginable. Neither one if us picked the other for the ability to suffer well. But because we truly loved, we were able to put the other person first. That's love. All the feel good stuff is just romance. It's nice. It feels good. But it's small comfort when illness and death come knocking on your door. *I'm so blessed for having had the opportunity to suffer alongside B\_\_\_\_\_.* He was an amazing man!"

I think that is what true "death with dignity" looks like: being faithful to the end, suffering well, trusting God when the storm rages on.

Speaking of suffering well . . .

Hero to many of us, Joni Eareckson Tada wrote an [open letter](#) to Brittany weeks before she died. Joni has lived longer, and suffered more, than the vast majority of quadriplegics. She knows something of suffering, dealing with a severe handicap plus cancer plus chronic pain. Joni's voice deserves to be heard above all others, I believe:

"If I could spend a few moments with Brittany before she swallows that prescription she has already filled, I would tell her how I have felt the love of Jesus strengthen and comfort me through my own cancer, chronic pain and quadriplegia. I would tell her that the saddest thing of all would be for her to wake up on the other side of her tombstone only to face a grim, joyless existence not only without life, but without God."



This is a deeply sobering, difficult discussion. Please don't leave God out of it.

This blog post originally appeared at [blogs.bible.org/engage/sue\\_bohlin/the\\_euphemism\\_of\\_death\\_with\\_dignity](https://blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_euphemism_of_death_with_dignity) on November 4, 2014.

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## On Black Holes and Archangels

*Dr. Terlizzese too often hears from Christian leaders and laymen that film, philosophy, literature, music, mythology, etc. (arts and humanities), are polluted wells that Christians do better to avoid rather than risk contamination. Yet no such warning is ever given about science and technology, always readily accepted under the rubric of natural revelation, except for some strange birds like Jacques Ellul or Neal Postman. "On Black Holes and Archangels" attempts to bridge this hypocritical divide in knowledge through raising art to the status of science as a legitimate source of knowledge concerning God and the human condition. As professor Lewis Sperry Chafer once wrote, theology uses "any and every source."*

### Reversal of Theological Priorities

When theology students talk about general revelation they mean science. God shows himself through the natural world; the movement of the stars, the rhythms of biology, the complexity of chemical synthesis, the beauty of the Grand Canyon and the like. Invariably, they almost always neglect human



nature as a prominent theological source in acute reversal of theological priorities.

Comparatively, the bible says very little about the nature of the cosmos and the animal kingdom; instead it focuses on Adam's Race (humanity), Adam's prominence as divine vice-regent, his fall from innocence, the pain and suffering ensuing from a ruptured relationship with the Maker; the creation of the Hebrew people and the sacrificial offering of his Son (the Second Adam [Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:45]) in the plan of redemption.

The Bible is mostly about Israel's reluctance to serve God. Their obstinate disobedience, their refusal to recognize absolute righteousness of the One God, the pleading of the prophets to return to the Truth; their judgment and horrifying dissolution, but final salvation thanks only to the divine mercy of their heavenly Father, "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). Israel serves as paradigm for all people, as the new creation of humanity in the Second Adam that brings the renewal of God's creation, the natural world; "A shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse . . . the lion shall lay down with the lamb . . . they will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:1-9; 27:6).

The theological reversal of priorities places science and reason over religion and faith, which interprets human nature in light of the cosmos rather than the cosmos in light of human nature and salvific transformation; as Adam goes so goes nature; "Cursed is the ground because of you [Adam];" "the creation will be set free from the slavery of corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Genesis 3:17; Romans 8:19-22).

This reversal is reminiscent of C. P. Snow's critical paradigm called the *Two Cultures*.[\[1\]](#) Snow elucidated the theory that

modern epistemology splits between science and the humanities, or said simply, between religion and science, between subjective and objective knowledge, creating an imbalance that favors one way of knowing over the other. Any juxtaposition in knowledge will result in the denigration of religion or science that fails to recognize their inherent compatibility.

Evangelicals are quick to latch onto the split in knowledge, recognizing science's superiority as source of knowledge and engine for technological acceleration in a theological reversal of priorities that recognizes all things scientific and technological as gifts from God, even offering metaphysical justification for technological acceleration under the theological rubric of general revelation, yet disparaging the humanities as a polluted well. However, science is not general revelation, it is only the philosophical lens used to interpret it—which is not incorrect, just incomplete. A consistent application of general revelation must include the humanities as a valid source of knowledge on human nature as equal to science: philosophy, religion, literature, art, film, etc., all present a valid interpretation of human nature that serves as sources for theology. L. Sperry Chafer's argued decades ago that theology uses "any and every source."[\[2\]](#)

## **What is General Revelation?**

Most evangelical theology divides revelation or God's self-disclosure into two categories called general revelation and special revelation, a division of knowledge going back at least to Saint Thomas Aquinas, receiving its greatest expression in the early modern period with the theory of the *Two Books* by Francis Bacon. The first book of the knowledge of God comes from the natural world, discerned and interpreted by reason, open to all—hence general knowledge; modern science and philosophy grounded in rationalism develops from this theological base. The second book of knowledge of God was

considered Holy Scripture, discerned and interpreted through faith supported by reason—hence it is not open to all, only the faithful.

General revelation refers to the knowledge of God outside of the Bible in nature, history, and personal experience; it is open to all people and anyone can understand it. Special revelation refers to the knowledge of God revealed in the Bible alone, such as the dual nature of Christ as the God/Man, the Trinity, the story of redemption and the knowledge of salvation. It is special because only those who accept the word of God by faith know these truths discerned by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 2). The two forms of revelation always complement each other. However, special revelation has greater authority than general revelation as the exclusive source for knowledge of salvation. We are saved through special revelation and never through general revelation which largely teaches humanity's need for God, but offers no solution because that will only be found in special revelation.

God's presence is revealed in nature but in a very limited way. Humanity actually knows very little about God from general revelation. People talk about "the love of God" but that is not a concept drawn from the natural world. The poet Tennyson said "nature is red in tooth and claw," meaning nature is cruel and unforgiving. The reality of nature as hostile and uncaring does not reflect the character of God. We know God is love, only because the Bible, not nature, tells us He is love (John 3:16; 1 John). Seeing a grizzly bear mother eating her young on a nature documentary convinced me of the truth of Tennyson's statement.

General revelation means God reveals himself through the humanities as well as the sciences. The opening of the evangelical mind begins with a view of revelation that takes the arts and humanities as seriously as the sciences as a valid source of knowledge.

## On Black Holes and Archangels

As the astronomer sees and reflects the divine glory of the cosmos, so the philosopher, musician, novelist and film artist reflects the inner light of soul—as complicated, profound and stunning as the swirl of galaxies, as explosive as a supernova and as deep and forbidding as a black hole! Artists explore remote and inhospitable depths of inner space. They transport the human spirit to destinies Magellan, Columbus and Verrazano never dreamt of; where Voyager will never encounter, where the telescope sees blindly . . . where angels fear to tread!

Art explores inner recesses of human nature and delivers subjective knowledge on topics such as anxiety, alienation, despair, boredom, hate, faith, love, fear, courage, lust, oppression and liberation, not quantifiable or objective, but just as real and valuable to Christian theology as the scientist's observations. Theologian of Culture Paul Tillich insightfully argued that art was the spiritual barometer of culture: "Art is religion."<sup>[3]</sup> In order to understand culture and the ultimate questions it asks in relating the Gospel message, the theologian must turn to philosophy, literature, paintings, music, etc.

Science and art are not in competition. Just as reason and faith complement each other as sources of knowledge, so subjective and objective knowledge act as two halves of the same coin—the union of the left and right sides of the brain. "Historian of Evil" Jeffrey Burton Russell writes,

*This question of how we know seems unfamiliar because we have been brought up to imagine that something is either "real" or "not real," as if there were only one valid world view, only one way to look at things, only one approach to truth. Given the overwhelming prestige of natural science during the past century, we usually go on to assume that the only approach to truth is through natural science . . . it seems to be "common sense" . . . there are multiple truth systems, multiple*

*approaches to reality. Science is one such approach. But . . . science is . . . a construct of the human mind . . . based on undemonstrable assumptions of faith. There is no scientific proof of the bases of science. [There is] no real difference between the subject and objective approach to things . . . science has its limits, and beyond those limits there are, like other galaxies, other truth systems. These other systems are not without resemblances to science, but their modes of thought are quite different: among them are history, myth, poetry, theology, art, and analytical psychology. Other truth systems have existed in the past; still more may exist in future; we can only guess what thought structures exist among other intelligent beings.*[{4}](#)

Only novelists, film makers, poets and theologians can communicate the possible thought structures of angels, demons or ETI's. How does the thought process of an archangel differ from that of seraphim and cherubim? The *Star Trek* franchise may be our best introduction to alien civilizations in the absence of any hard evidence.

## ***Elysium*: The Acceleration of the Status Quo into Outer Space**

The recent (2013) science fiction movie *Elysium* depicts the human condition as it has existed throughout human history and extends it to the space station Elysium. In the year 2154, the class difference between the haves and the have not's appears in bold relief. Elysium is a haven for the wealthy and technologically powerful elite who rule the sub-proletariat peoples of earth living in squalor, misery and deprivation. Los Angeles is reminiscent of the shanty towns of Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo today. The few control the many through the accumulation and withholding of wealth and technological power, especially medical machines "Med-Bays" that reverse cell damage and heals all sickness and disease, granting

virtual immortality. A self-appointed champion of the people Max Da Costa (Matt Damon) with nothing left to lose—since his exposure to a fatal radiation dose has left him with five days to live—mounts an assault on Elysium and accomplishes the impossible, a revolution that gains control of the space station's computer system and the robot guardians, turning them against the establishment and bringing relief to the people of Earth.

*Elysium* serves as a great cinematic example of liberation theology and window into the human condition that never changes despite technological acceleration that empowers the few to control the many. In any late stage of civilization, from Egypt and Rome to modernity, the same conditions prevail: the elite rule the many and technology makes no difference in alleviating social inequalities. Technological advance, as the movie portrays, only accelerates the status quo so that the struggle for freedom and equality of all people simply takes place off the earth on a space station.

The Enlightenment idea of progress envisions a global advance of humanity across all social lines. Any concentration of power and wealth in an elite group to the neglect of the rest of the planet, regardless of how technologically advanced or socially integrated, is not progress but regress. *Elysium* reflects contemporary global conditions—the status quo, the way things actually are, projecting them one generation or forty years into the future.

When technological acceleration grants the world equal social conditions, such as the elimination of poverty, hunger and disease in Africa and Latin America as in the Western world, or the ready accessibility of health care in the United States as in the Netherlands or Canada, then we do justice to the noble word "*Progress*." In the absence of social equality, technological growth renders the same absolute social imbalances and universal disillusionment in the modern world as existed in the late Roman Empire, the concentration of

power in an elite, ruling ruthlessly over the masses without hope of change, except on a global scale that moves rapidly towards dissolution, where robot guardians replace the Praetorian Guard.[{5}](#)

## **“Nein! Nein! Nein!”**

There is no saving knowledge of God in history, science, economics, philosophy, math or whatever. NO! NO! NO! I am in complete agreement with Karl Barth on this point: “Nein! Nein! Nein!” No! Absolutely not! Never! The saving knowledge of Christ comes only through the word of God and centers on the work of Jesus Christ for all mankind. The knowledge of God in general revelation is not saving knowledge of the Gospel. If one could know God through the means of general revelation then it would make special revelation and the coming of Christ superfluous and useless. General revelation only condemns and functions for Gentiles like the Law of Moses for Jews (Romans 1:18-32; Galatians 3).

General revelation prepares humanity for special revelation. Knowledge of God and the human condition in general revelation creates the need for special revelation. General revelation shows humanity its sinfulness and need for a savior; “How majestic is Your name in all the earth. Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens . . . What is man that Thou art mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:1-4). Job gave the only possible answer as a finite being when reminded of wonders of God’s creation: “I know You can do all things . . . I declared that which I did not understand . . . I retract and I repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:1-6). “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). General revelation demonstrates God’s absence from humanity; it reveals the “UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23).

Special revelation meets that need for reconciliation with God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation cannot come from any



other avenue than special revelation, a major theological premise the great theologian Karl Barth staunchly defended. According to Barth, all revelation is special revelation and all revelation imparts the saving knowledge of Christ.

General revelation brings the knowledge of God's absence, consciousness of alienation from the divine, much as the Mosaic Law brings the awareness of sin (Romans 1-3); but only to set us up for the knowledge of the Savior that comes from hearing the gospel of Christ preached (Romans 4-10). "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).[\[6\]](#)

## Notes

1. C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (London, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1959).
2. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology, Vol. One* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), 5. Chafer defined systematic theology as "A science which follows a humanly devised scheme or order of doctrinal development and which purports to incorporate into its system all truth about God and His universe from any and every source."
3. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 7.
4. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press), 18, 19.
5. Carroll Quigley, *The Evolution of Civilizations: An Introduction to Historical Analysis* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1979); Roderick Seidenberg, *Posthistoric Man: An Inquiry* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1950); Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1987, 1949); Lawrence J. Terlizzese, *Hope in the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (Eugene, OR; Cascade,

2005).

6. Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology: Comprising Nature and Grace* by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply *No!* by Dr. Karl Barth (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002, Reprint).

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## Arguments Against Abortion

*Kerby Anderson helps us understand that concerns about abortion are more than just a fundamentalist backlash. He reviews arguments from a Christian, biblical perspective and then introduces arguments from medical, legal and philosophical points of views as well. He concludes, "The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life."*

### Biblical Arguments Against Abortion

In this essay we will be discussing arguments against abortion. The first set of arguments we will consider are biblical arguments.

That being said, we must begin by acknowledging that the Bible doesn't say anything about abortion directly. Why the silence of the Bible on abortion? The answer is simple. Abortion was so unthinkable to an Israelite woman that there was no need to even mention it in the criminal code. Why was abortion an unthinkable act? First, children were viewed as a gift or heritage from the Lord. Second, the Scriptures state—and the Jews concurred—that God opens and closes the womb and is sovereign over conception. Third, childlessness was seen as a curse.

One of the key verses to understand in developing a biblical view of the sanctity of human life is Psalm 139. This psalm is the inspired record of David's praise for God's sovereignty in his life. He begins by acknowledging that God is omniscient and knows what David is doing at any given point in time. He goes on to acknowledge that God is aware of David's thoughts before he expresses them. David adds that wherever he might go, he cannot escape from God, whether he travels to heaven or ventures into Sheol. God is in the remotest part of the sea and even in the darkness. Finally David contemplates the origin of his life and confesses that God was there forming him in the womb:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (vv. 13-16).

Here David speaks of God's relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. Notice that the Bible doesn't speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. The description here is not of a piece of protoplasm that becomes David: this is David already being cared for by God while in the womb.

In verse 13, we see that God is the Master Craftsman fashioning David into a living person. In verses 14 and 15, David reflects on the fact that he is a product of God's creative work within his mother's womb, and he praises God for how wonderfully God has woven him together.

David draws a parallel between his development in the womb and Adam's creation from the earth. Using figurative language in verse 15, he refers to his life before birth when "I was made

in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth.” This poetic allusion harkens back to Genesis 2:7 which says that Adam was made from the dust of the earth.

David also notes that “Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance.” This shows that God knew David even before he was known to others. The term translated *unformed substance* is a noun derivative of a verb meaning “to roll up.” When David was just forming as a fetus, God’s care and compassion already extended to him. The reference to “God’s eyes” is an Old Testament term used to connote divine oversight of God in the life of an individual or group of people.

Next, we will consider additional Old Testament passages that provide a biblical argument against abortion.

## **Additional Old Testament Arguments Against Abortion**

Now that we’ve looked at Psalm 139, the most popular argument against abortion, let’s look at two other Old Testament passages.

Another significant passage is Psalm 51. It was written by David after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and records his repentance. David confesses that his sinful act demonstrated the original sin that was within him, “Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps. 51:5). David concludes that from his time of conception, he had a sin nature. This would imply that he carried the image of God from the moment of conception, including the marred image scarred from sin.

Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1; 9:6). Bearing the image of God is the essence of humanness. And though God’s image in man was marred at the Fall, it was not erased (cf. 1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9). Thus, the unborn baby is made in the image of God and

therefore fully human in God's sight.

This verse also provides support for what is called the traducian view of the origin of the soul. According to this perspective, human beings were potentially in Adam (Rom. 5:12, Heb. 7:9-10) and thus participated in his original sin. The "soulish" part of humans is transferred through conception. Therefore, an unborn baby is morally accountable and thus fully human.

Another argument against abortion can be found in the Old Testament legal code, specifically Exodus 21:22-25.

If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fined whatever the woman's husband demands and the court allows. But if there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.

The verses appear to teach that if a woman gives birth prematurely, but the baby is not injured, then only a fine is appropriate. However, if the child dies then the law of retaliation (*lex talionis*) should be applied. In other words, killing an unborn baby would carry the same penalty as killing a born baby. A baby inside the womb has the same legal status as a baby outside the womb.

Some commentators have come to a different conclusion because they believe the first verses only refer to a case of accidental miscarriage. Since only a fine is levied, they argue that an unborn baby is merely potential life and does not carry the same legal status as a baby that has been born.

There are at least two problems with this interpretation. First, the normal Hebrew word for *miscarry* is not used in this passage (cf. Gen. 31:38; Exod. 23:26; Job 2:10; Hos. 9:14). Most commentators now believe that the action described in

verse 22 is a premature birth, not an accidental miscarriage. Second, even if the verses do describe a miscarriage, the passage cannot be used to justify abortion. The injury was accidental, not intentional (as abortion would be). Also, the action was a criminal offense and punishable by law.

## **Medical Arguments Against Abortion**

Thus far in our discussion we have looked at biblical arguments against abortion. But what if someone doesn't believe in the Bible? Are there other arguments we can use? Yes, there are: medical arguments, for example. Let's look, then, at some of the medical arguments against abortion.

The medical arguments against abortion are compelling. For example, *at conception the embryo is genetically distinct from the mother*. To say that the developing baby is no different from the mother's appendix is scientifically inaccurate. A developing embryo is genetically different from the mother. A developing embryo is also genetically different from the sperm and egg that created it. A human being has 46 chromosomes (sometimes 47 chromosomes). Sperm and egg have 23 chromosomes. A trained geneticist can distinguish between the DNA of an embryo and that of a sperm and egg. But that same geneticist could not distinguish between the DNA of a developing embryo and a full-grown human being.

Another set of medical arguments against abortion surround *the definition of life and death*. If one set of criteria have been used to define death, could they also be used to define life? Death used to be defined by the cessation of heartbeat. A stopped heart was a clear sign of death. If the cessation of heartbeat could define death, could the onset of a heartbeat define life? The heart is formed by the 18th day in the womb. If heartbeat was used to define life, then nearly all abortions would be outlawed.

Physicians now use a more rigorous criterion for death: brain

wave activity. A flat EEG (electroencephalograph) is one of the most important criteria used to determine death. If the cessation of brain wave activity can define death, could the onset of brain wave activity define life? Individual brain waves are detected in the fetus in about 40-43 days. Using brain wave activity to define life would outlaw at least a majority of abortions.

Opponents to abortion also raise the controversial issue of fetal pain. Does the fetus feel pain during abortion? The evidence seems fairly clear and consistent. Consider this statement made in a British medical journal: "Try sticking an infant with a pin and you know what happens. She opens her mouth to cry and also pulls away. Try sticking an 8-week-old human fetus in the palm of his hand. He opens his mouth and pulls his hand away. A more technical description would add that changes in heart rate and fetal movement also suggest that intrauterine manipulations are painful to the fetus."[\[1\]](#)

Obviously, other medical criteria could be used. For example, the developing fetus has a unique set of fingerprints as well as genetic patterns that make it unique. The development of sonography has provided us with a "window to the womb" showing us that a person is growing and developing in the mother's womb. We can discern eyes, ears, fingers, a nose, and a mouth. Our visual senses tell us this is a baby growing and maturing. This is not a piece of protoplasm; this is a baby inside the womb.

The point is simple. *Medical science leads to a pro-life perspective rather than a pro-choice perspective.* If medical science can be used at all to draw a line, the clearest line is at the moment of conception. Medical arguments provide a strong case against abortion and for life.

## **Legal Arguments Against Abortion**

At this point in our discussion, we need to look at legal

arguments against abortion.

The best legal argument against abortion can be seen in the case of *Roe v. Wade*. It violated standard legal reasoning. The Supreme Court decided not to decide when life begins and then turned around and overturned the laws of 50 different states.

Most of the Supreme Court's verdict rested upon two sentences. "We need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins. When those trained in the respective disciplines of medicine, philosophy, and theology are unable to arrive at any consensus, the judiciary, at this point in the development of man's knowledge, is not in a position to speculate as to an answer."

Although the sentences sounded both innocuous and unpretentious, they were neither. The Supreme Court's non-decision was not innocuous. It overturned state laws that protected the unborn and has resulted in over 30 million abortions (roughly the population of Canada) in the United States.

The decision also seems unpretentious by acknowledging that it did not know when life begins. But if the Court did not know, then it should have acted "as if" life was in the womb. A crucial role of government is to protect life. Government cannot remove a segment of the human population from its protection without adequate justification.

The burden of proof should lie with the life-taker, and the benefit of the doubt should be with the life-saver. Put another way: "when in doubt, don't." A hunter who hears rustling in the bushes shouldn't fire until he knows what is in the bushes. Likewise, a Court which doesn't know when life begins, should not declare open season on the unborn.

The burden of proof in law is on the prosecution. The benefit of doubt is with the defense. This is also known as a presumption of innocence. The defendant is assumed to be



innocent unless proven guilty. Again the burden of proof is on the entity that would take away life or liberty. The benefit of the doubt lies with the defense.

The Supreme Court clearly stated that it does not know when life begins and then violated the very spirit of this legal principle by acting as if it just proved that no life existed in the womb. Even more curious was the fact that to do so, it had to ignore the religious community and international community on the subject of the unborn.

Had the religious community really failed to reach a consensus? Although there were some intramural disagreements, certainly the weight of evidence indicated that a Western culture founded on Judeo-Christian values held abortion to be morally wrong. People with widely divergent theological perspectives (Jewish, Catholic, evangelical and fundamental Protestants) shared a common agreement about the humanity of the unborn.

The same could be said about the international legal community. Physicians around the world subscribed to the Hippocratic Oath ("I will not give a woman a pessary to produce abortion"). The unborn were protected by various international documents like the Declaration of Geneva and the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child.

Just as there are solid medical arguments against abortion, so also there are legal arguments against abortion. *Roe vs. Wade* was a bad decision that needs to be overturned.

## **Philosophical Arguments Against Abortion**

Finally, we will conclude our discussion by looking at philosophical arguments against abortion.

A third set of arguments against abortion would be philosophical arguments. A key philosophical question is where do you draw the line? Put another way, when does a human being

become a person?

The Supreme Court's decision of *Roe v. Wade* separated personhood from humanity. In other words, the judges argued that a developing fetus was a human (i.e., a member of the species *Homo sapiens*) but not a person. Since only persons are given 14th Amendment protection under the Constitution, the Court argued that abortion could be legal at certain times. This left to doctors, parents, or even other judges the responsibility of arbitrarily deciding when personhood should be awarded to human beings.

The Supreme Court's cleavage of personhood and humanity made the ethical slide down society's slippery slope inevitable. Once the Court allowed people to start drawing lines, some drew them in unexpected ways and effectively opened the door for infanticide and euthanasia.

The Court, in the tradition of previous line-drawers, opted for biological criteria in their definition of a "person" in *Roe v. Wade*. In the past, such criteria as implantation or quickening had been suggested. The Court chose the idea of viability and allowed for the possibility that states could outlaw abortions performed after a child was viable. But viability was an arbitrary criterion, and there was no biological reason why the line had to be drawn near the early stages of development. The line, for example, could be drawn much later.

Ethicist Paul Ramsey frequently warned that any argument for abortion could logically be also used as an argument for infanticide. As if to illustrate this, Dr. Francis Crick, of DNA fame, demonstrated that he was less concerned about the ethics of such logical extensions and proposed a more radical definition of personhood. He suggested in the British journal *Nature* that if "a child were considered to be legally born when two days old, it could be examined to see whether it was an 'acceptable member of human society.'" Obviously this is

not only an argument for abortion; it's an argument for infanticide.

Other line-drawers have suggested a cultural criterion for personhood. Ashley Montagu, for example, stated, "A newborn baby is not truly human until he or she is molded by cultural influences later." Again, this is more than just an argument for abortion. It is also an argument for infanticide.

More recently some line-drawers have focused on a mental criterion for personhood. Dr. Joseph Fletcher argues in his book *Humanhood* that "Humans without some minimum of intelligence or mental capacity are not persons, no matter how many of these organs are active, no matter how spontaneous their living processes are." This is not only an argument for abortion and infanticide; it's adequate justification for euthanasia and the potential elimination of those who do not possess a certain IQ. In other writings, Joseph Fletcher suggested that an "individual" was not truly a "person" unless he has an IQ of at least 40.

In conclusion, we can see that there are many good arguments against abortion. Obviously there are a number of biblical arguments against abortion. But there are also medical, legal, and philosophical arguments against abortion. The Bible and logic are on the side of the Christian who wants to stand for the sanctity of human life.

## **Endnote**

1. H.P. Valman and J. F. Pearson, What the Fetus Feels, *British Medical Journal* (26 January 1980): 233-234.

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*Note from Kerby Anderson:*

*So many people ask for more information on abortion; I suggest you check out the Abortion Facts Web site at [www.abortionfacts.com](http://www.abortionfacts.com).*

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# One Christian Perspective on the Immigration Reform Debate

*Steve Cable takes a look at the immigration issue from a biblical point of view. Setting aside all the political rhetoric, what does the Bible really have to say about this topic and how should the church respond with an authentic Christian perspective.*

## Introduction

Immigration issues have garnered a lot of headlines in recent weeks. Is there a clear biblical position on immigration laws and on how Christians should respond to immigrants?

A January 2006 Gallup poll indicated that “immigration reform” ranked at the bottom of seven national issues behind the war in Iraq, healthcare, and the economy.<sup>{1}</sup> However, after the large rallies in April, it had moved up into the number two spot behind the war in Iraq. While more Americans are concerned about improving control of our borders than developing a comprehensive strategy for illegal immigrants, over seventy-five percent of those polled consider such a comprehensive strategy “extremely important” or “very important.” In part, this is due to a heightened awareness of the approximately twelve million illegal aliens in our country and to the intense interest in the Hispanic community. The concern also feeds on the conflicting desires for low cost labor on the one hand and protection from terrorist infiltration on the other.

At a time when the American public is becoming sensitized to the illegal immigrant issue, the evangelical community has not presented a unified front. As reported in the April 28 (2006)

edition of the *Dallas Morning News*, "At a forum . . . , conservative and liberal religious leaders lobbed Bible verses, unable to agree on what Jesus would do about the nation's nearly 12 million illegal immigrants." [\[2\]](#) Three general positions have emerged among the evangelical community.

One position promotes honoring God through obeying the law, focusing on the responsibility of the government to provide for the security of its people.

A second position focuses on our responsibility to care for the needy, particularly the alien and the stranger.

The third position assumes this is an amoral political and economic issue that the church is wise to stay clear of.

The conundrum was aptly summarized by Dr. Richard Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission:

*"We have a right to expect the government to fulfill its divinely ordained mandate to punish those who break the laws and reward those who do not. Romans 13. We also have a divine mandate to act redemptively and compassionately toward those who are in need."* [\[3\]](#)

Since we are all created in the image of God, should nations place any restrictions upon our ability to move about and take up residence where we will? Certainly, if we were all Christians, Colossians 3:11 might apply, stating, "there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." From this verse and others like it, we might argue that we should not make any distinctions between citizens and non-citizens. Yet, the Bible clearly indicates that there will be distinct nations until Jesus returns.

# Reasons for Restricted Immigration Policy

As noted above, a simple Christian perspective would welcome everyone to settle in our nation at any time. However, the Bible clearly supports the concept of national sovereignty as a means through which God works in this fallen world. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, we are called to pray for government officials, not that they would cease to exist, but that they would facilitate a society where we can follow God and share Christ in a secure, peaceful environment. Three common reasons a government may choose to control traffic across its borders and limit citizenship opportunities are as follows:

*1. **National security**—A nation with enemies has a need to know that those enemies are not dwelling within their land. In Deut. 31:12-13, the foreigners dwelling among the people of Israel were required to enter into the covenant to obey God. Those that did not support God's leadership were not allowed to enter the land. Today, like never before, America must be concerned about enemies attacking from inside her border. The government has a responsibility to protect the security of her people by taking reasonable means to keep threats outside of our borders.*

*2. **Economic prosperity**—A perception of limited resources may cause a nation to curtail immigration in order to reserve a greater share of those resources for the existing citizens. They may say, "We have the sturdiest and most well stocked lifeboat, but if everyone abandons their inferior lifeboats and flocks to this one, we will go from prosperity and security to sinking and perishing." Under the same motivation, it is common for nations to import foreign workers to perform low paid, menial tasks. There is biblical support for property ownership and rewards for ones labor. It is balanced by the clear teaching to proactively minister to the needy and to beware of being motivated by greed. [\[4\]](#)*

*3. **Cultural integrity**—A people group may want restrictions on*

*immigration to protect the integrity of their historic traditions and society. Certainly, God directed the nation of Israel to ensure that all members of society worshiped the God of Abraham and did not introduce other forms of worship into society. In Exodus 12:43-49, foreigners are prohibited from participating in the Passover unless their entire household is circumcised and they covenant to obey God. America has thrived with a cultural and religious diversity, while enforcing a uniform acceptance of the Constitution and the principles of democracy, freedom, and equality.*

Although the Bible does not mandate that nations should have laws to control their borders and manage immigration, it is clear that there are biblically acceptable reasons for a national policy in this area. The two that are the clearest are national security from known enemies and protecting common cultural ideals. Greed often plays a role in establishing immigration policies, an attitude clearly prohibited by our Lord.

## **The Case for Law and Order**

Conflicting positions on immigration policy stake their claim on respect for authority at one end and on compassion for the needy at the other. Let's consider the matter of law and order.

Romans 13 states:

*Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God. . . . But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath,*

*but also for conscience' sake (vv. 1,2,4,5).{5}*

Christians are to be in subjection to governing authorities not only to avoid punishment, but also to be able to minister with a clear conscience. Peter expands on the motivation in 1 Peter 2:13-15 where he writes, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men."

Thus, for Christians, obeying the law is one way honor God. God ordains authority with the responsibility to punish "the one who practices evil." For those who take the law-and-order position, these verses are a clear biblical mandate for dealing with illegal immigration. Not only should we personally obey the law, we should support our governing authorities in enforcing it.

However, those who take a different position argue our imperative to follow Christ's example takes precedence over any laws. Certainly, Jesus and the apostles did not always obey the strict direction of the ruling authorities. One notable example is found in Acts 4:19-20. When commanded not "to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus," Peter replied, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." Not only did they refuse to submit to the command, they encouraged others to follow their example. However, one should be careful about using these examples as a trump card to justify ignoring any laws that one believes are contrary to the teaching of Christ. Both Jesus and Paul direct us to pay our taxes, knowing full well that some of those tax dollars may be spent in ways that do not honor Christ.



As believers, we are called to obey laws that do not require us to directly disobey God.

## The Case for Compassion

Another important consideration is whether Christ's directive to show compassion to the needy should be our primary concern in establishing and enforcing immigration policy. Those who promote this case point to two primary principles in the Scriptures:

- 1. Treat the alien in our midst with fairness, remembering that we too are aliens.*
- 2. Minister to the least of these as unto Jesus Himself.*

Deuteronomy 10:18-19 states, "He . . . shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt." Remembering their history as aliens dwelling in Egypt, the children of Israel were to show love for the aliens in their midst. We, too, should remember that most of us did nothing to deserve being born in America. We could just as easily be the person seeking a better life by becoming an alien in America.

Does this passage mean that we have a responsibility to care for any person who is able to cross our borders?

The Hebrew word most often translated as "alien" is *ger*. According to Vines, a *ger* "was not simply a foreigner or a stranger. He was a permanent resident, once a citizen of another land, who had moved into his new residence."<sup>[6]</sup> The Jewish law was clear that these aliens should be afforded equitable treatment under the law (e.g., Num. 15:16, Deut. 1:16). However, special provisions were also in place for the alien. Not being a member of one of the twelve tribes, the alien could not own land. Consequently, the alien was grouped

together with widows and orphans to receive a portion of the tithe (Deut. 14:28-29), access to the gleanings in the field (Deut. 24:19-22) and justice (Deut. 24:17-18). However, these provisions did not apply to the foreigner temporarily in the country for work or other purposes. These temporary visitors did not receive a food allotment and were not allowed to fully participate in society.

We know that God wants us to treat aliens fairly, but the biblical example shows a greater responsibility to those who meet the requirements to become residents.

Compassion is emphasized in Jesus' command to "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," in the parable of the Good Samaritan, and in our observation in Matt 25:40, "to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me." We are called to demonstrate sacrificial love in meeting the needs of both friends and strangers. Each person we meet is created in the image of God, worthy of our love and our concern for their spiritual and physical needs. Whatever our position on immigration policy and enforcement, Christians should be at the forefront of ministering to people far from home.

## **Responding to Our Current Situation**

Is it possible within our current immigration laws to be compassionate *and* to be subject to ruling authorities at the same time? One way to answer that question is to apply the biblical guidelines reviewed earlier to the different roles in the immigration debate.

First, let's consider a *potential immigrant*. Barring a direct threat upon your life, abide by the laws of your current country and America. If you have a desire to work in America, apply through appropriate channels and use all legal means to expedite the process. Desiring more opportunity for your

family is commendable. However, choosing to break the law to achieve that goal is telling God that He cannot be trusted to provide.

Now assume you were an *illegal immigrant*. Report yourself to the appropriate authorities to obtain a hearing and abide by the results. Some argue that it is cruel to separate families. Current laws do not normally force families to be separated. Separation is the result of family members choosing to stay in the U.S. when a person is required to leave the country.

What attitude should be taken by an *employer*? Obey the employment laws. Do not knowingly hire illegal aliens *and* take steps to prevent accidentally hiring illegal aliens.

Finally, consider a *Christian citizen*. Reach out in love to all people regardless of their immigration status. Help them find help in dealing with the process and caring for their family. Counsel those in your flock to come into compliance with any laws they are breaking. Ask your representatives to support legislation which balances security with generosity and compassion. Most Americans desire to protect or improve their standard of living. Doing this at the expense of others is clearly contrary to biblical teaching. At the same time, lowering our standard of living by being less productive is not good stewardship either. We should promote policies that reflect a willingness to reduce our consumption to benefit others while promoting improvements across the board. What might this look like?

- Increased legal immigration for a variety of skill and educational levels, believing that we have the ingenuity to utilize these additional resources productively.
- Fair pay for all jobs with strong penalties for employers who break the laws.
- Requiring immigrants to maintain a record of gainful employment.
- Rapid deportation for those who enter illegally.

- While there is a real terrorist threat, making it difficult to enter our country surreptitiously.
- Pressuring other countries not to exploit their labor force.

Although there is no simple scriptural prescription to “fix” the immigration issue, Christians can model how to reach out in compassion and submit to authority at the same time. Prayerfully consider how God wants you to respond in this area.

### Notes

1. “Halting the Flow is American’s Illegal Immigration Priority”, Lydia Saad, *Gallup News Service*, April 13, 2006
2. Todd J. Gillman, “Christians ask: Can you love thy neighbor but deport him, too?” *Dallas Morning News*, April 28, 2006.
3. Ibid.
4. Luke 12:15
5. All Scripture references from the New American Standard Bible, 1995.
6. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers

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# Globalization and the Internet – A Christian Considers the Impact

*Kerby Anderson looks at the growth and role of the Internet through a Christian worldview perspective. It is important that we continue to understand its capabilities and its*

*dangers.*

## **Introduction**

More than one billion people use the Internet and benefit from the vast amount of information that is available to anyone who connects. But any assessment of the Internet will show that it has provided both surprising virtues and unavoidable vices.

Contrary to the oft-repeated joke, Al Gore did not invent the Internet. It was the creation of the Department of Defense that built it in case of a nuclear attack, but its primary use has been during peace. The Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency created a primitive version of the Internet known as ARPAnet. It allowed researchers at various universities to collaborate on projects and conduct research without having to be in the same place.

The first area network was operational in the 1980s, and the Internet gained great popularity in the 1990s because of the availability of web browsers. Today, due to web browsers and search engines, Internet users in every country in the world have access to vast amounts of online information.

The Internet has certainly changed our lives. Thomas Friedman, in his book *The World is Flat*, talks about some of these changes.[\[1\]](#) For example, we used to go to the post office to send mail; now most of us also send digitized mail over the Internet known as e-mail. We used to go to bookstores to browse and buy books; now we also browse digitally. We used to buy a CD to listen to music; now many of us obtain our digitized music off the Internet and download it to an MP3 player.

Friedman also talks about how the Internet has been the great equalizer. A good example of that is Google. Whether you are a university professor with a high speed Internet connection or a poor kid in Asia with access to an Internet café, you have

the same basic access to research information. The Internet puts an enormous amount of information at our fingertips. Essentially, all of the information on the Internet is available to anyone, anywhere, at anytime.

The Internet (and the accompanying digital tools developed to use it) has even changed our language. In the past, if you left a message asking when your friend was going to arrive at the airport, usually you would receive a complete sentence. Today the message would be something like: AA 635 @ 7:42 PM DFW. Tell a joke in a chat room, and you will receive responses like LOL (“laughing out loud”) or ROFL (“rolling on the floor laughing”). As people leave the chat room, they may type BBL (“be back later”). Such abbreviations and computer language are a relatively new phenomenon and were spawned by the growth of the Internet.

I want to take a look at some of the challenges of the Internet as well as the attempt by government to control aspects of it. While the Internet has certainly provided information to anyone, anywhere, at any time, there are still limits to what the Internet can do in the global world.

## **The Challenge of the Internet**

The Internet has provided an opportunity to build a global information infrastructure that would link together the world’s telecommunications and computer networks. But futurists and governmental leaders also believed that this interconnectedness would also bring friendship and cooperation, and that goal seems elusive.

In a speech given over a decade ago, Vice-President Al Gore said, “Let us build a global community in which the people of neighboring countries view each other not as potential enemies, but as potential partners, as members of the same family in the vast, increasingly interconnected human

family.”{2}

Maybe peace and harmony are just over the horizon because of the Internet, but I have my doubts. The information superhighway certainly has connected the world together into one large global network, but highways don't bring peace. Highways connected the various countries in Europe for centuries, yet war was common and peace was not. An information superhighway connects us with countries all over the world, but global cooperation hasn't been the result, at least not yet.

The information superhighway also has some dark back alleys. At the top of the list is pornography. The Internet has made the distribution of pornography much easier. It used to be that someone wanting to view this material had to leave their home and go to the other side of town. The Internet has become the ultimate brown wrapper. Hard core images that used to be difficult to obtain are now only a mouse click away.

Children see pornography at a much younger age than just a decade ago. The average age of first Internet exposure to pornography is eleven years old.{3} Sometimes this exposure is intentional, usually it is accidental. Schools, libraries, and homes using filters often are one step behind those trying to expose more and more people to pornography.

But the influence of the Internet on pornography is only one part of a larger story. In my writing on personal and social ethics, I have found that the Internet has made existing social problems worse. When I wrote my book *Moral Dilemmas* back in 1998, I dealt with such problems as drugs, gambling, and pornography. Seven years later when I was writing my new book, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I noticed that every moral issue I discussed was made worse by the Internet. Now my chapter on pornography had a section on cyberporn. My chapter on gambling had a section dealing with online gambling. My chapter on adultery also dealt with online affairs.

# Internet Regulation

All of these concerns lead to the obvious question: Who will regulate the Internet? In the early day of the Internet, proponents saw it as the cyber-frontier that would be self-regulating. The Internet was to liberate us forever from government, borders, and even our physical selves. One writer said we should “look without illusion upon the present possibilities for building, in the on-line spaces of this world, societies more decent and free than those mapped onto dirt and concrete and capital.”[{4}](#)

And for a time, the self-government of the Internet worked fairly well. Internet pioneers were even successful in fighting off the Communications Decency Act which punished the transmission of “indecent” sexual communications or images on the Internet.[{5}](#) But soon national governments began to exercise their authority.

Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu, in their book, *Who Controls the Internet?*, describe the various ways foreign governments have exercised their authority.[{6}](#)

- France requires Yahoo to block Internet surfers from France so they cannot purchase Nazi memorabilia.[{7}](#)
- The People’s Republic of China requires Yahoo to filter materials that might be harmful or threatening to Party rule. Yahoo is essentially an Internet censor for the Communist party.[{8}](#)
- The Chinese version of Google is much slower than the American version because the company cooperates with the Chinese government by blocking search words the Party finds offensive (words like Tibet or democracy).

Even more disturbing is the revelation that Yahoo provided information to the Chinese government that led to the imprisonment of Chinese journalists and pro-democracy leaders.



Reporters Without Borders found that Yahoo has been implicated in the cases of most of the people they were defending.[{9}](#)

Columnist Clarence Page points out that “Microsoft cooperates in censoring or deleting blogs that offend the Chinese government’s sensibilities. Cisco provides the hardware that gives China the best Internet-blocking and user-tracking technology on the planet.”[{10}](#)

All of this censorship and cooperation with foreign governments is disturbing, but it also underscores an important point. For years, proponents of the Internet have argued that we can’t (or shouldn’t) block Internet pornography or that we can’t regulate what pedophiles do on the Internet. These recent revelations about Yahoo, Google, and Microsoft show that they can and do block information.

The book *Who Controls the Internet?* argues that the last decade has led to the quiet rediscovery of the functions and justification for territorial government. The Internet has not replaced the legitimate structure of government with a self-regulated cyber-frontier. The Internet may change the way some of these territorial states govern, but it will not diminish their important role in regulating free societies.

## **Government and Intermediaries**

Governments have been able to exercise control over the Internet in various ways. This should not be too surprising. The book *Who Controls the Internet?* points out that while some stores in New York’s Chinatown sell counterfeit Gucci bags and Rolex watches, you don’t find these same products in local stores. That is because the “most important targets of the laws against counterfeits—trademark laws—are local retailers.”[{11}](#)

The U.S. government might not be able to go after manufacturers in China or Thailand that produce these

counterfeits, but they certainly can go after retail stores. That's why you won't find these counterfeit goods in a Wal-Mart store. And while it is true that by controlling Wal-Mart or Sears doesn't eliminate counterfeit goods, government still can adequately control the flow of these goods by focusing on these intermediaries.

Governments often control behavior through intermediaries. "Pharmacists and doctors are made into gatekeepers charged with preventing certain forms of drug abuse. Bartenders are responsible for preventing their customers from driving drunk."[{12}](#)

As the Internet has grown, there has also been an increase in new intermediaries. These would include Internet Service Providers (ISPs), search engines, browsers, etc. In a sense, the Internet has made the network itself the intermediary. And this has made it possible for governments to exert their control over the Internet. "Sometimes the government-controlled intermediary is Wal-Mart preventing consumer access to counterfeit products, sometimes it is the bartender enforcing drinking age laws, and sometimes it is an ISP blocking access to illegal information."[{13}](#)

More than a decade ago, the German government raided the Bavarian offices of Compuserve because they failed to prevent the distribution of child pornography even though it originated outside of Germany.[{14}](#) In 2001, the British government threatened certain sites with criminal prosecution for distributing illegal adoption sites. The British ISPs agreed to block the sites so that British citizens could not access them.[{15}](#)

Internet Service Providers, therefore, are the obvious target for governmental control. In a sense, they are the most important gatekeepers to the Internet.[{16}](#)

Governmental control over the Internet is not perfect nor is

it complete. But the control over intermediaries has allowed territorial governments to exercise much greater control and regulation of the Internet than many of the pioneers of cyberspace would have imagined.

## Globalization and Government

In [previous articles](#) we have addressed the issue of globalization and have recognized that technology (including the Internet) has made it much easier to move information around the world. There is no doubt that the Internet has accelerated the speed of transmission and thus made the world smaller. It is much easier for people around the world to access information and share it with others in this global information infrastructure.

Those who address the issue of globalization also believe that it diminishes the relevance of borders, territorial governments, and geography. Thomas Friedman believes that the Internet and other technologies are [flattening the world](#) “without regard to geography, distance, or, in the near future, even language.”[\[17\]](#)

In one sense, this is true. The lower costs of moving information and the sheer amount of information exchanged on the Internet have made it more difficult for governments to suppress information they do not like. The explosive growth of blogs and web pages have provided a necessary outlet for opinion and information.

It is also true that there has been some self-governing behavior on the Internet. Friedman, for example, describes eBay as a “self-governing nation-state—the V.R.e., the Virtual Republic of eBay.” The CEO of eBay even says, “People will say that eBay restored my faith in humanity—contrary to a world where people are cheating and don’t give people the benefit of the doubt.”[\[18\]](#)

But it also true that territorial governments work with eBay to arrest and prosecute those who are cheaters or who use the website in illegal ways. And it also relies on a banking system and the potential of governmental prosecution of fraud.

We have also seen in this article that governments have also been able to exert their influence and authority over the Internet. They have been able to use the political process to alter or block information coming into their country and have been able to shape the Internet in ways that the early pioneers of the Internet did not foresee.

Goldsmith and Wu believe that those talking about the force of globalization often naively believe that countries will be powerless in the face of globalization and the Internet. "When globalization enthusiasts miss these points, it is usually because they are in the grips of a strange technological determinism that views the Internet as an unstoppable juggernaut that will overrun the old and outdated determinants of human organization."[\[19\]](#)

There is still a legitimate function for government (Romans 13:1-7) even in this new world of cyberspace. Contrary to the perceived assumption that the Internet will shape governments and move us quickly toward globalization, there is good evidence to suggest that governments will in many ways shape the Internet.

## Notes

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16. Jonathan Zittrain, "Internet Points of Control," 44 *B.C.L. Rev.* 653, 664-69 (2003).
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# Gambling – Is It Good for Society? A Christian Perspective

*Kerby Anderson looks at the harmful effects of both legal and illegal gambling. He considers the negative impacts on society, government policy, and the economy when gambling is prevalent in a culture. From a Christian worldview perspective, he considers how gambling introduces problems such as covetousness, poor work ethics, and destroyed family units.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

Gambling used to be what a few unscrupulous people did with the aid of organized crime. But gambling fever now seems to affect nearly everyone as more and more states are legalizing various forms of it.

Thirty years ago, gambling was a relatively rare phenomenon with casinos operating only in the distant Nevada desert and a few states with lotteries or pari-mutuel betting. Today, legalized gambling is permitted in forty-seven states and the District of Columbia. More Americans are gambling than ever before, and they are also gambling more money.[\[1\]](#)

The momentum seems to be on the side of those who want legalized gambling as a way to supplement state revenues. But these states and their citizens often ignore the costs that are associated with legalized gambling.

## **Types of Gambling**

Gambling comes in many forms. Perhaps the most popular type of gambling is state-sponsored lotteries. This would include the weekly lottery games, as well as the daily lottery numbers and scratch-off ticket games.

A second type of gambling would be casinos. Gambling in this venue would include jackpot slot machines, video card game machines, various casino card games such as poker and blackjack, and other casino games such as roulette.

Sports betting is a third type of gambling. Someone can bet on the outcome of a sporting event or a particular part of a sporting event. Usually, bets are placed on a bookmaker's odds so that the actual bet is against the point spread. Sports betting would also include illegal office pools and even weekend golfers who bet dollars or cokes for each hole.

Pari-mutuel betting (horse racing, dog racing, and jai alai) is another form of sports gambling. Horse racing is legal in 43 states with over 150 racetracks in the United States.

Convenience gambling (also called retail gambling) includes stand-alone slot machines, video poker, video keno, and other games. These are usually found in bars, truck stops, and convenience stores.

Online gambling represents a new frontier in the spread of gambling. The availability and accessibility of Internet gambling appears to have greatly increased the number of people gambling on a regular basis.

## **Bad Social Policy**

Legalized gambling is bad social policy. At a time when Gamblers Anonymous estimates that there are at least 12 million compulsive gamblers, it does not make a lot of sense

to have the state promoting gambling. State sponsorship of gambling makes it harder, not easier, for the compulsive gambler to reform. Since about 96 percent of those gamblers began gambling before the age of fourteen,[{2}](#) we should be especially concerned about the message such a policy sends to young people.

The economic costs that gamblers themselves incur are significant. The average compulsive gambler has debts exceeding \$80,000.[{3}](#) And this figure pales in comparison with other social costs that surface because of family neglect, embezzlement, theft, and involvement in organized crime. Compulsive gamblers affect the lives of family, friends, and business associates. Some of the consequences of gambling are marital disharmony, divorce, child abuse, substance abuse, and suicide attempts.

Proponents argue that state lotteries are an effective way to raise taxes painlessly. But the evidence shows that legalized gambling often hurts those who are poor and disadvantaged. A national task force on gambling found that those in the lowest income bracket lost more than three times as much money to gambling (as a percentage of income) as those at the wealthiest end of the spectrum.[{4}](#) One New York lottery agent reports that “seventy percent of those who buy my tickets are poor, black, or Hispanic.”[{5}](#) And a National Bureau of Economic Research “shows that the poor bet a much larger share of their income.”[{6}](#) The study also found that “the less education a person has, the more likely he is to play the lottery.”[{7}](#)

A major study on the effect of the California lottery came to the same conclusions. The Field Institute’s California poll found that 18 percent of the state’s adults bought 71 percent of the tickets. These heavy lottery players (who bought more than twenty tickets in the contest’s first forty-five days) are “more likely than others to be black, poorer and less educated than the average Californian.”[{8}](#)



Studies also indicate that gambling increases when economic times are uncertain and people are concerned about their future. Joseph Dunn, director of the National Council on Compulsive Gambling, says, "People who are worried about the factory closing take a chance on making it big. Once they win anything, they're hooked." {9}

The social impact of gambling is often hidden from the citizens who decide to legalize gambling. But later these costs show up in the shattered lives of individuals and their families. One study in *The Journal of Social Issues* found that as gambling increases, there is an increase in "(a) proportion of divorce and separation; (b) disagreement about money matters with one's spouse; (c) lack of understanding between marital partners; and (d) more reported problems among children of gamblers." {10}

Psychologist Julian Taber warns, "No one knows the social costs of gambling or how many players will become addicted . . . the states are experimenting with the minds of the people on a massive scale." {11} Families are torn apart by strife, divorce, and bankruptcy. Boydon Cole and Sidney Margolius in their book, *When You Gamble—You Risk More Than Your Money*, conclude, "There is no doubt of the destructive effect of gambling on the family life. The corrosive effects of gambling attack both the white-collar and blue-collar families with equal vigor." {12}

The impact on crime is also significant. The crime rate in gambling communities is nearly double the national average. {13} Researchers calculate that for every dollar the state received in gambling revenues, it costs the state at least three dollars in increased social costs (for criminal justice and social welfare). {14}

## Bad Governmental Policy

Legalized gambling is also bad governmental policy. Government should promote public virtue, not seduce its citizens to gamble in state-sponsored vice. Government is supposed to be servant of God according to Romans 13, but its moral stance is compromised when it enters into a gambling enterprise.

Citizens would be outraged if their state government began enticing its citizens to engage in potentially destructive behavior (such as taking drugs). But those same citizens see no contradiction when government legalizes and even promotes gambling. Instead of being a positive moral force in society, government contributes to the corruption of society.

Ross Wilhelm, professor of business economics at the University of Michigan, says,

*State lotteries and gambling games are essentially a “rip-off” and widespread legalization of gambling is one of the worst changes in public policy to have occurred in recent years. . . . The viciousness of the state-run games is compounded beyond belief by the fact that state governments actively advertise and promote the games and winners.* [{15}](#)

The corrosive effect legalized gambling has on government itself is also a cause for concern. As one editorial in *New York Times* noted, “Gambling is a business so rich, so fast, so powerful and perhaps inevitably so unsavory that it cannot help but undermine government.” [{16}](#)

## Legal and Illegal Gambling

One of the standard clichés used by proponents of legalized gambling is that by instituting legal gambling, illegal gambling will be driven out. This argument makes a number of faulty assumptions. First, it assumes that people are going to gamble anyway; and so the state might as well get a piece of

the action. Second, it assumes that given the choice, people would rather gamble in a state-sponsored program because it will be regulated. The state will make sure that the program is fair and that each participant has an equal chance of winning. Third, it assumes that if the state enters the gambling arena, it will drive out illegal gambling because it will be a more efficient competitor for gamblers' dollars.

While the arguments seem sound, they are not. Although some people do gamble illegally, most citizens do not. Legalized gambling entices people to gamble who normally would not gamble at all. Duke University researchers have found that the lottery is a "powerful recruiting device" because one-fourth of those who otherwise would not gamble at all do bet on lotteries. [{17}](#)

Second, legal gambling does not drive out illegal gambling. If anything, just the opposite is true. As legalized gambling comes into a state, it provides additional momentum for illegal gambling. The Organized Crime Section of the Department of Justice found that "the rate of illegal gambling in those states which have some legalized form of gambling was three times as high as those states where there was not a legalized form of gambling." [{18}](#) And one national review found that

*In states with different numbers of games, participation rates increase steadily and sharply as the number of legal types of gambling increases. Social betting more than doubles from 35 percent in states with no legal games to 72 percent in states with three legal types; the illegal gambling rate more than doubles from nine percent to 22 percent; and commercial gambling increases by 43 percent, from 24 to 67 percent.* [{19}](#)

Legalized gambling in various states has been a stimulator of illegal gambling, not a competitor to it.

The reasons for the growth of illegal gambling in areas where legalized gambling exists are simple. First, organized crime syndicates often use the free publicity of state lotteries and pari-mutuel betting to run their own numbers games. The state actually saves them money by providing publicity for events involving gambling. Second, many gamblers would rather bet illegally than legally. When they work with a bookie, they can bet on credit and do not have to report their winnings to the government, two things they cannot do if they bet on state-sponsored games. This explains why illegal gambling thrives in states with legalized gambling.

Another important issue is the corrupting influence legalized gambling can have on society. First, legalized gambling can have a very corrupting influence on state government. In the last few years there have been numerous news reports of corruption and fraud in state lotteries. Second, there is the corrupting influence on the citizens themselves. Gambling breeds greed. Research has shown that the number of compulsive gamblers increases between 100 and 550 percent when legalized gambling is brought into an area.<sup>{20}</sup> Every day, otherwise sane people bet large amounts of money in state lotteries because they hope they will win the jackpot. Moreover, states and various gambling establishments produce glitzy ads that appeal to people's greed in order to entice them to risk even more than they can afford.

Government should be promoting positive social values such as thrift and integrity rather than negative ones such as greed and avarice. They should be promoting the public welfare rather than seducing citizens to engage in state-sponsored vice.

## **Economic Costs**

Legalized forms of gambling (state lotteries, pari-mutuel betting, and casinos) are often promoted as good economic

policy. Proponents say they are painless ways of increasing billions of dollars in state revenue. But there is another economic side to legalized gambling.

First, the gross income statistics for legalized gambling are much higher than the net income. State lotteries are one example. Although about half the states have lotteries and the figures vary from state to state, we can work with some average figures. Generally, the cost of management, advertising, and promotion is approximately sixty cents of each dollar. In other words, for every dollar raised in a lottery, only forty cents goes to the state budget. By contrast, direct taxation of the citizens costs only about one cent on the dollar, so that for every dollar raised by taxes, ninety-nine cents goes to the state.

Second, gambling adversely affects a state economy. Legalized gambling depresses businesses because it diverts money that could have been spent in the capital economy into gambling that does not stimulate the economy. Boarded-up businesses surrounding casinos are a visible reminder of this, but the effect on the entire economy is even more devastating than may be at first apparent. Money that could be invested, loaned, and recycled through the economy is instead risked in a legalized gambling scheme.

Legalized gambling siphons off a lot of money from the economy. More money is wagered on gambling than is spent on elementary and secondary education (\$286 billion versus \$213 billion in 1990).[{21}](#) Historian John Ezel concludes in his book, *Fortune's Merry Wheel*, "If history teaches us anything, a study of over 1,300 legal lotteries held in the United States proves . . . they cost more than they brought in if their total impact on society is reckoned."[{22}](#)

## Biblical Perspective

Even though the Bible does not directly address gambling, a number of principles can be derived from Scripture. First, the Bible emphasizes a number of truths that conflict with gambling. The Bible, for example, emphasizes the sovereignty of God (Matt. 10:29–30). Gambling, however, is based on chance. The Bible admonishes people to work creatively and for the benefit of others (Eph. 4:28), while gambling fosters a something-for-nothing attitude. The Bible condemns materialism (Matt. 6:24–25) while gambling promotes it.

Gambling breeds a form of covetousness, whereas the tenth commandment (Exod. 20:17) admonishes people not to covet. Coveting, greed, and selfishness are the base emotions that entice individuals to gamble. Christians should be concerned about gambling if for no other reason than the effect it has on the “weaker brother” and how it will affect the compulsive gambler. State-sponsored gambling makes it more difficult for compulsive gamblers to reform. Legalized gambling becomes an institutionalized form of greed.

Second, gambling destroys the work ethic. Two key biblical passages deal with the work ethic. In Colossians 3:23–24 the apostle Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” And in 2 Thessalonians 3:7,10, he stated, “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. . . . For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

The Twentieth Century Fund research group commented, “Gambling’s get-rich-quick appeal appears to mock capitalism’s core values: disciplined work habits, thrift, prudence, adherence to routine, and the relationship between effort and reward.”[\[23\]](#) These core values of the work ethic are all part

of the free enterprise system and are part of the Christian life. Gambling corrupts these values, and replaces them with greed and selfishness. Rather than depending on hard work, gamblers depend on luck and chance.

Third, gambling destroys families. Gambling is a major cause of family neglect. Many of the social costs associated with gambling come from a get-rich-quick mindset. As people get caught up in a gambling frenzy, they begin to neglect their families. Money spent on lottery tickets or at racetracks is frequently not risk capital but is income that should be spent on family needs. According to 1 Timothy 5:8, a person who refuses to care for his family is worse than an unbeliever. Parents must provide for their children (2 Cor. 12:14) and eat the bread of their labors (2 Thess. 3:12). When gambling is legalized, it causes people to neglect their God-mandated responsibility to care for their families, and many of those families then often end up on welfare.

Fourth, gambling is a form of state-sponsored greed. Romans 13:4 teaches that government is to be a servant of God, providing order in society and promoting public virtue. Legalized gambling undercuts government's role and subverts the moral fabric of society through greed and selfishness promoted by a state-sponsored vice.

Since gambling undermines the moral foundations of society and invites corruption in government, Christians must stand against attempts to legalize gambling.

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# **Emerging Adults Part 2: Distinctly Different Faiths – Evangelical Views Declining**

## **National Study of Youth and Religion**

The National Study of Youth and Religion (Wave 3) contains the detailed data from which Christian Smith presented a summary of the results in his book, *Souls in Transition: The Religious & Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. My prior article, ["Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America,"](#) summarized some of the important results reported in his book. One of his results showed that the number of young adults who identify themselves as not religious or as a religious liberal has grown from one in three young adults in 1976 to almost two out of three young adults in 2008. This huge difference in beliefs reflects that the dominant culture has changed from supporting Christian beliefs to now being basically counter to them. Today's emerging adults are immersed in a postmodern culture that "stressed difference over unity, relativity over universals, subjective experience over rational authorities, feeling over reason." [\[1\]](#)

This culture has produced a set of young Americans who may still claim to be associated with Protestant or Catholic beliefs but in reality have accepted the view that God and Christ are potentially helpful upon death, but are of little value until then. As these young adults moved from teenagers into emerging adults, Smith found that over four out of ten of them became less religious over a five year span. However, he did find that about one in three would identify themselves as evangelical and probably continue to identify themselves that way for the foreseeable future.

However, to look at the data more closely, we can access this study of 18- to 23-year-olds online at the Association of Religious Data Archives.[{2}](#) Using this data, we can look at the association between questions in ways that we could not see in Christian Smith's book. As we studied this data, we found an even bleaker view of the future of the evangelical church than that presented by his book.

Along with general demographic information, the questions asked by the survey can be generally divided into four segments: Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, Cultural Beliefs, and Cultural Practices. When we analyze the data in these four segments, we find a significant disconnect between each of these four segments. One might expect that we would find a small but significant subset that shared an *evangelical* belief and practice *and* that applied those beliefs consistently to their *cultural* beliefs and practices. Instead, what we find is that of 881 evangelicals, a grand total of zero (that is zilch, nada, none) share a common set of beliefs across all four categories. In other words, there is no set of common beliefs amongst these 18- to 23-year-olds who belong to an evangelical church.

It is worth noting here that the 881 evangelicals discussed here are down from the 1064 evangelicals in the study of this same group as teenagers. The 881 includes 728 who were among the 1064 plus 155 new evangelicals. The new evangelicals were

about one-third from mainline protestant, one-third from catholic, and one-third from not religious or non-Christian religions. Of the 336 who left evangelical Christianity about half went to other Christian religions and the other half went to nonreligious or indeterminate religious beliefs. Almost undoubtedly, if we were to include these original evangelicals in our evangelical statistics we would get even worse data. We should also note here that this group was 18 to 23 in 2008 so now they are 20 to 25. However, we will refer to them as 18 to 23 in this article.

## **Religious Beliefs**

Let us begin by first considering the data on religious beliefs. By itself, this is very interesting. First, we find that four out of five of those associated with an evangelical church believe in God as a personal being and Jesus as His Son who was raised from the dead. Unfortunately, it also means we are starting with one-fifth of those still associated with an evangelical church who either don't believe in God or in Jesus as His Son. It is interesting to note that one-third of mainline Protestants and nearly half of Catholics have this same attitude of unbelief. However, the number of evangelicals who believe in God and Christ is still a significant number and is 28% of the total population of 18- to 23-year-olds in America. When we add in the mainline and Catholic believers, we find approximately half of all young adults have a correct view of God and Jesus at this very basic level. Although half is not what we would like, it is probably more than we would expect to find with active Christians.

But when we add in the concepts that only people whose sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ go to heaven and that there is only one true religion, the number of evangelicals in this age group who agree drops to 38%. Thus, only one in three ascribe to the most basic beliefs of evangelical Christianity. When we add in mainline Protestants

and Catholics, the percentage of young Americans who believe in salvation only through Jesus Christ drops to less than one in five.

When one adds in the concepts that faith is important, that demons are real beings, and that there are some actions that are always right or wrong, and combine those with attending a worship service at least two times a month, the number among evangelicals drops to less than one in five. That is, four out of five young evangelicals do not agree with these basic concepts. For mainline Protestants and Catholics, the percentages are 9% and 2%, indicating that almost none of them have a basic set of Christian beliefs. Combining these together shows that only 7% of all young adults hold to these basic beliefs.

Clearly, we have a major disconnect of belief for this age group, even among those who are associated with an evangelical church. As we probe beyond God and Jesus, we find that most of them do not have a set of beliefs consistent with the basic truths of the Bible.

In his book, Smith points out that for emerging adults “evidence and proof trump blind faith.”<sup>{3}</sup> By this he means that most emerging adults view scientific views as based on evidence and truth while religious beliefs are simply blind faith. As one young person put it, “I mean there is proven fact and then there is what’s written in the Bible—and they don’t match up.”<sup>{4}</sup> Or as another young person put it, “You have to take the Bible as symbolic sometimes. If you take it as literal there’s definitely a problem. There’s scientific proof [that contradicts it]. So you have to take it piece by piece and choose what you want to believe.”<sup>{5}</sup>

The interesting result of this belief is that it does not primarily apply to the extremely small segment of the Bible which some might consider at odds with scientific theories (e.g., creation of the universe). Rather, they apply it to

things like teachings on sexuality, the uniqueness of Jesus, and the beginning of life. So they use the excuse of science to modify any beliefs taught by the Bible that are inconsistent with current cultural beliefs.

## Religious Practices

Perhaps we have now found the truly religious 18- to 23-year-olds among the one-out-of-four evangelicals that express a set of core religious beliefs. Even if we add another seven questions on belief in things like life after death, heaven, judgment day, and miracles, we still have almost 15% of evangelical young adults who answer correctly. However, if this 15% is the core group of believers, then their religious behaviors will match their beliefs.

If this group of young adults is the core group, we would expect them to pray on a daily basis and to read the Bible at least once per week. When asked those questions, less than one in ten evangelical emerging adults hold the religious beliefs and engage in the religious practices. In fact, nearly half of those with the core beliefs do not read their Bibles or pray. When we add on questions about whether they are interested in learning more about their faith and have shared their faith with someone else, the number drops to less than one in twenty of the evangelical young adults. So, over 95 out of 100 young people affiliated with evangelical churches do not believe and practice their belief. Sadly, if we look at those who do these things and attend Sunday School or some weekday group and have read a devotional book in the last year, the number drops to 3% of evangelicals.

This data clearly shows that, for 18- to 23-year-old evangelicals, beyond a belief in God and Jesus there is no common set of beliefs and practices. Virtually every evangelical young adult will depart from the faith on one or more basic core beliefs and practices. It appears that there is *no common core group* of dedicated faithful believers among

this age group.

As Christian Smith points out, emerging adults view religious ideas as a cafeteria line where you take the ones you like and leave the rest behind. As he says, "People should take and use what is helpful in it, . . . and they can leave the rest. . . . At least some parts of religions are 'outdated.' Emerging adults are the authorities for themselves on what in religion is good or useful or relevant for them." [\[6\]](#) As one of the emerging adults put it, "Instead of fighting various religions, I just kinda combined religious ideas that were similar or sounded good." [\[7\]](#) So, since the emerging adult is the authority on what religious beliefs to accept rather than the Scriptures, their culture determines their religious beliefs rather than the other way around.

## Cultural Beliefs

The data from this survey indicates that there is not a set of doctrinally pure religious believers in the 18 to 23 age range. But perhaps they are clearer on cultural beliefs that should be informed by their faith. To make the analysis easier we will consider two different sets of beliefs. The first set looks at their beliefs about creation, waiting on sex until marriage, and respect for religion in America. The second set considers living meaningful but not guilty lives, caring about the poor, and being against unmarried sex and divorce.

When asked about the creation of the world, approximately half of the evangelical emerging adults said that God created the world without using evolution over a long period of time to create new species. Only one in four young evangelicals believe they should wait to have sex and don't need to try out sex with their partner before they get married. Interestingly, only 16% of mainline Protestants and less than one in ten Catholic young adults believe the same way. As Smith points out, this belief is odd given the numerous studies which show that couples who do not live together before marriage have a

significantly greater chance of success than those who do. Forty-eight percent of evangelicals have respect for organized religion in this country and believe it is ok for religious people to try to convert other people to their faith. However when we combine these three beliefs together, i.e. about creation, sex, and evangelism, we find that only one in ten evangelicals, one in twenty mainline Protestants, and only one in a hundred Catholics agree with all three of these areas. Then when we look to see how many have the religious beliefs and practices *and* believe these cultural topics, we find that only 8 evangelicals (< 1%) and no mainline Protestants or Catholics qualify. Thus, we have only 8 people out of over 2500 who have a consistent set of evangelical religious beliefs, religious practices, and cultural beliefs.

Of course that is only a small subset of the cultural beliefs that should be impacted by our religious beliefs. Let's look at few more. Let's consider those who have not felt guilty about things in their life over the last year, who believe their life is meaningful and that they can change important things in their life as needed. We find that approximately one-third of each of the major groups agree with these statements. If we look at how many don't need to buy more and who care about the needs of the poor, we find that about one in four of all young adults agree with these objectives. However, when we combine these two areas, we find that only about one in ten young adults agree. Now add in the idea that unmarried sex and divorce are not okay, a statement with which 28% of evangelicals and 14% of all emerging adults agree. When we combine all three of these belief areas, we discover that only 2% of evangelicals agree with all three areas. If we combine these areas with religious beliefs and practices, we find that only four evangelicals (or less than one in two hundred) agreed.

When we combine both sets of cultural beliefs with the religious beliefs and practices, we find that there is one

emerging adult out of over 2500 who agrees with those beliefs.

In both sets of data above, we considered questions dealing with sexual activity. In the first, we saw that the idea of waiting to have sex until marriage was rejected by three out of four of the evangelical, emerging adults. In the second set of data, we saw that a similar number believe that unmarried sex and divorce are okay. These beliefs are clearly counter to the teaching of Christianity, but they are dominant beliefs among evangelical, emerging adults. As Christian Smith put it, “[M]ost emerging adults reduce a certain cognitive dissonance they feel—arising from the conflict of religious teachings against partying and sex before marriage versus their wanting to engage in those behaviors—by mentally discounting the religious teachings and socially distancing themselves from the source of those teachings.” In other words, they discount any religious teachings that would discourage them from doing what the culture promotes as acceptable, contrasted with the Bible which says, “Love not the world neither the things of the world. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, are not of the Father but are of the world.”[\[8\]](#)

## Cultural Practices

Perhaps the disturbing cultural beliefs are belied by the cultural practices. Let’s look at some of the relevant cultural practices addressed in the National Study on Youth and Religion. Let’s begin with the number of people who have not smoked pot or engaged in binge drinking in the two weeks before the survey. Among evangelical, emerging adults over half (54%) have not engaged in these two activities. Of course this also means that almost half of them have engaged in one of both of these activities. Amongst Catholic emerging adults, two out of three have engaged in these behaviors.

How many have not engaged in viewing X-rated videos in the last year or unmarried sex (including oral sex)? This number



begins at approximately one third of evangelicals not engaging in unmarried sex but drops to only one fifth when X-rated videos are added. So, 4 out of 5 evangelical, emerging adults are engaged in sexual sin, most of them on a regular basis.

On another venue of behavior, how many emerging adults have given money for charitable purposes, volunteered, and don't admire people based on how much money they have? We find that approximately 15% of evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Catholics have done so. So, over 8 out of 10 have not given of themselves to help others.

Certainly Christians are called to "give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thess. 5:18) and to "set their minds on heavenly things" (Col. 3:2). So let's consider those who are grateful for the present and sometimes think about the future. This includes about half of all emerging adults. Thus, over half of emerging adults seldom give thanks and rarely think about the future.

Now let's combine these thoughts and actions together and we find that only about 2% of all emerging adults hold to a biblical set of practices. So even though over half hold to a belief in abstaining from drugs and binge drinking, one-fifth affirm abstaining from illicit sexual activity, half hold to an attitude of gratitude for the present and the future, and 15% have given in some way of their time or money, when you combine them together only 2% have done all four items.

If we combine the four categories, Religious Beliefs, Religious Practices, Cultural Beliefs, and Cultural Practices, we find that no one holds to the set of beliefs which are most consistent with Scripture.

## **Conclusions**

There are many conclusions that could be drawn from the data above. Two of the most important conclusions are as follows.

First, the basic religious beliefs of emerging adults largely depart from the Bible, and when you add in religious practices and cultural beliefs and practices we find that no one maintains a distinctly biblical worldview. Second, there does not appear to be uniformity in the beliefs of emerging adults. Rather than having a subset of evangelicals, say 15%, holding to a distinctly biblical worldview, you end up with none because they trip up in different areas.

As Christian Smith pointed out, “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.”<sup>{9}</sup> This is because religious teachings are not the authority on this world. Rather, it is what you choose to believe that is your authority for the “truth” in your life. As one emerging adult put it, “I think that what you believe depends on you. I don’t think I could say that Hinduism is wrong or Catholicism is wrong . . . I think it just depends on what you believe.”<sup>{10}</sup> This concept results in a set of evangelical, emerging adults who don’t hold to a set of common beliefs about God, Jesus, religion, and cultural practices, but instead hold to a wide variety of beliefs which are counter to the Bible. We must not say because they go to church that they believe the truth of the Bible. This survey shows that almost certainly they do not.

At Probe, we are committed to making a difference in this emerging generation. Over the next decade, we are committed to freeing the minds of 50 million Christians and converting them into confident ambassadors for Christ. If we and others like us are not successful, the children of these emerging adults may have no Christian example to follow.

## Notes

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**See Also:**

[Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America](#)

[Emerging Adults A Closer Look](#)

[The Importance of Parents in the Faith of Emerging Adults](#)

[Cultural Captives – a book on the faith of emerging adults](#)