

Technological Challenges of the 21st Century

We live in historic times. And we will face new challenges as we enter the 21st century, especially in the area of technology. The fields of biotechnology and information technology have the capacity to change the social landscape and even alter the way we make ethical decisions. These are not challenges for the faint-hearted. We must bring a tough-minded Christianity into the 21st century.

We are reminded in 1 Chronicles 12:32 (NIV) that the men of Issachar “understood the times and knew what Israel should do.” Likewise, we must understand our times and know what we should do. New ethical challenges await us as we consider the moral issues of our day and begin to analyze them from a biblical perspective.

We should also enter into the task with humility. Over a hundred years ago, Charles Duell, Director of the U.S. Patent Office, was ready to close his office down because he believed that “Everything that can be invented has been invented.”^{1} We should not make the mistake of thinking that we can accurately see into the future. However, we can analyze trends and look at new inventions and begin to see the implications of these remarkable changes. Our challenge will always be to apply the timeless truths of Scripture to the quickly changing world around us.

How should Christians analyze the technological changes taking place? First we must begin by developing a theology of technology.

Theology of Technology

Technology is really nothing more than the systematic

modification of the environment for human ends. This might be a process or activity that extends or enhances a human function. A telescope extends man's visual perception. A tractor extends one's physical ability. A computer extends a person's ability to calculate.

The biblical mandate for developing and using technology is stated in Genesis 1:28. God gave mankind dominion over the land, and we are obliged to use and manage these resources wisely in serving the Lord. God's ideal was not to have a world composed exclusively of primitive areas. Before the Fall (Gen. 2:15) Adam was to cultivate and keep the Garden of Eden. After the Fall the same command pertains to the application of technology to this fallen world, a world that "groans" in travail (Rom. 8:22). Technology can benefit mankind in exercising proper dominion, and thus remove some of the effects of the Fall (such as curing disease, breeding livestock, or growing better crops).

Technology is neither good or evil. The worldview behind the particular technology determines its value. In the Old Testament, technology was used both for good (e.g., the building of the ark, Gen. 6) and for evil (e.g., the building of the Tower of Babel, Gen. 11). Therefore, the focus should not be so much on the technology itself as on the philosophical motivation behind its use. Here are three important principles that should be considered.

First, technology should be seen as a tool, not as an end in itself. There is nothing sacred about technology. Unfortunately, Western culture tends to rely on it more than is appropriate. If a computer, for example, proves a particular point, people have a greater tendency to believe it than if the answer was a well-reasoned conclusion given by a person. If a machine can do the job, employers are prone to mechanize, even if human labor does a better or more creative job. Often our society unconsciously places machines over man. Humans become servants to machines rather than the other way

around.

There is a tendency to look to science and engineering to solve problems that really may be due to human sinfulness (wars, prejudice, greed), the fallenness of the world (death, disease), or God's curse on Adam (finite resources). In Western culture especially, we tend to believe that technology will save us from our problems and thus we use technology as a substitute for God. Christians must not fall into this trap, but instead must exhibit their ultimate dependence on God. Christians must also differentiate between problems that demand a technological solution and ones that can be remedied by a social or spiritual one.

Second, technology should be applied in different ways, according to specific instructions. For example, there are distinctions between man and animal that, because we are created in God's image (Gen. 1:26-27), call for different applications of medical science. Using artificial insemination to improve the genetic fitness of livestock does not justify using it on human beings. Christians should resist the idea that just because we *can* do something, we *should* do it. Technological ability does not grant moral permission.

Third, ethics, rather than technology, must determine the direction of our society. Jacques Ellul has expressed the concern that technology moves society instead of vice versa.^{2} Our society today seems all too motivated by a technological imperative in our culture. The technological ability to do something is not the same as a moral imperative to do it. Technology should not determine ethics.

Though scientists may possess the technological ability to be gods, they nevertheless lack the capacity to act like gods. Too often, man has tried to use technology to become God. He uses it to work out his own physical salvation, to enhance his own development, or even to attempt to create life. Christians who take seriously human fallenness will humbly admit that we

often do not know enough about God's creation to use technology wisely. The reality of human sinfulness means that society should be careful to prevent the use of technology for greed and exploitation.

Technology's fruits can be both sweet and bitter. C. S. Lewis writes in the *Abolition of Man*, "From this point of view, what we call Man's power over Nature turns out to be power exercised by some men over men with Nature as its instrument. . . . There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man's side. Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car."[\[3\]](#)

Christians must bring strong biblical critique to each technological advance and analyze its impact. The goal should be to liberate the positive effects of technology while restraining negative effects by setting up appropriate constraints against abuse.

The Challenge of Biotechnology

The age of biotechnology has arrived. For the first time in human history it is possible to completely redesign existing organisms, including man, and to direct the genetic and reproductive constitution of every living thing. Scientists are no longer limited to breeding and cross-pollination. Powerful genetic tools allow us to change genetic structure at the microscopic level and bypass the normal processes of reproduction.

For the first time in human history it is also possible to make multiple copies of any existing organism or of certain sections of its genetic structure. This ability to clone existing organisms or their genes gives scientists a powerful tool to reproduce helpful and useful genetic material within a population.

Scientists are also developing techniques to treat and cure genetic diseases through genetic surgery and genetic therapy. They can already identify genetic sequences that are defective, and soon scientists will be able to replace these defects with properly functioning genes.

Gene splicing (known as recombinant DNA technology) is fundamentally different from other forms of genetic breeding used in the past. Breeding programs work on existing arrays of genetic variability in a species, isolating specific genetic traits through selective breeding. Scientists using gene splicing can essentially “stack” the deck or even produce an entirely new deck of genetic “cards.”

But this powerful ability to change the genetic deck of cards also raises substantial scientific concerns that some “sleight-of-hand” would produce dangerous consequences. Ethan Singer said, “Those who are powerful in society will do the shuffling; their genes will be shuffled in one direction, while the genes of the rest of us will get shuffled in another.”^{4} Also there is the concern that a reshuffled deck of genes might create an Andromeda strain similar to the one envisioned by Michael Crichton in his book by the same title.^{5} A microorganism might inadvertently be given the genetic structure for some pathogen for which there is no antidote or vaccine.

The potential benefits of gene splicing are significant. First, the technology can be used to produce medically important substances. The list of these substances is quite large and would include insulin, interferon, and human growth hormone. The technology also has great application in the field of immunology. In order to protect organisms from viral disease, doctors must inject a killed or attenuated virus. Scientists can use the technology to disable a toxin gene, thus producing a viral substance that triggers production of antibodies without the possibility of producing the disease.

A second benefit is in the field of agriculture. This technology can improve the genetic fitness of various plant species. Basic research using this technology could increase the efficiency of photosynthesis, increase plant resistance (to salinity, to drought, to viruses), and reduce a plant's demand for nitrogen fertilizer.

Third, gene splicing can aid industrial and environmental processes. Industries that manufacture drugs, plastics, industrial chemicals, vitamins, and cheese will benefit from this technology. Also scientists have begun to develop organisms that can clean up oil spills or toxic wastes.

This last benefit, however, also raises one of the greatest scientific concerns over the use of biotechnology. The escape (or even intentional release) of a genetically engineered organism might wreak havoc on the environment. Scientists have created microorganisms that dissolve oil spills or reduce frost on plants. Critics of gene splicing fear that radically altered organisms could occupy new ecological niches, destroy existing ecosystems, or drive certain species to extinction.

A significant question is whether life should be patented at all. Most religious leaders say no. A 1995 gathering of religious leaders representing virtually every major religious tradition spoke out against the patenting of genetically engineered substances. They argued that life is the creation of God, not humans, and should not be patented as human inventions. [\[6\]](#)

The broader theological question is *whether* genetic engineering should be used and, if permitted, *how* it should be used. The natural reaction for many in society is to reject new forms of technology because they are dangerous. Christians, however, should take into account God's command to humankind in the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28). Christians should avoid the reflex reaction that scientists should not tinker with life; instead Christians should consider how this

technology should be used responsibly.

One key issue is the worldview behind most scientific research. Modern science rests on an evolutionary assumption. Many scientists assume that life on this planet is the result of millions of years of a chance evolutionary process. Therefore they conclude that intelligent scientists can do a better job of directing the evolutionary process than nature can do by chance. Even evolutionary scientists warn of this potential danger. Ethan Singer believes that scientists will “verify a few predictions, and then gradually forget that knowing something isn’t the same as knowing everything. . . . At each stage we will get a little cockier, a little surer we know all the possibilities.”[\[7\]](#)

In essence biotechnology gives scientists the tools they have always wanted to drive the evolutionary spiral higher and higher. Julian Huxley looked forward to the day in which scientists could fill the “position of business manager for the cosmic process of evolution.”[\[8\]](#) Certainly this technology enables scientists to create new forms of life and alter existing forms in ways that have been impossible until now.

How should Christians respond? They should humbly acknowledge that God is the sovereign Creator and that man has finite knowledge. Genetic engineering gives scientists the technological ability to be gods, but they lack the wisdom, knowledge, and moral capacity to act like God.

Even evolutionary scientists who deny the existence of God and believe that all life is the result of an impersonal evolutionary process express concern about the potential dangers of this technology. Erwin Chargaff asked, “Have we the right to counteract, irreversibly, the evolutionary wisdom of millions of years, in order to satisfy the ambition and curiosity of a few scientists?”[\[9\]](#) His answer is no. The Christian’s answer should also be the same when we realize that God is the Creator of life. We do not have the right to

“rewrite the fifth day of creation.”[{10}](#)

What is the place for genetic engineering within a biblical framework? The answer to that question can be found by distinguishing between two types of research. The first could be called genetic repair. This research attempts to remove genetic defects and develop techniques that will provide treatments for existing diseases. Applications would include various forms of genetic therapy and genetic surgery as well as modifications of existing microorganisms to produce beneficial results.

The Human Genome Project has been able to pinpoint the location and sequence of the approximately 100,000 human genes.[{11}](#) Further advances in biotechnology will allow scientists to repair these defective sequences and eventually remove these genetic diseases from our population.

Genetic disease is not part of God’s plan for the world. It is the result of the Fall (Gen. 3). Christians can apply technology to fight these evils without being accused of fighting against God’s will.[{12}](#) Genetic engineering can and should be used to treat and cure genetic diseases.

A second type of research is the creation of new forms of life. While minor modifications of existing organisms may be permissible, Christians should be concerned about the large-scale production of novel life forms. That potential impact on the environment and on mankind could be considerable. Science is replete with examples of what can happen when an existing organism is introduced into a new environment (e.g., the rabbit into Australia, the rat to Hawaii, or the gypsy moth in the United States). One can only imagine the potential devastation that could occur when a newly created organism is introduced into a new environment.

God created plants and animals as “kinds” (Gen. 1:24). While there is minor variability within these created kinds, there

are built-in barriers between these created kinds. Redesigning creatures of any kind cannot be predicted the same way new elements on the periodic chart can be predicted for properties even before they are discovered. Recombinant DNA technology offers great promise in treating genetic disease, but Christians should also be vigilant. While this technology should be used to repair genetic defects, it should not be used to confer the role of creator on scientists.

A related issue in the field of biotechnology is human cloning. It appears that the cloning of a human being will no doubt take place some time in the future since many other mammals have been cloned. Proponents of human cloning argue that it would be a worthwhile scientific endeavor for at least three reasons. First, cloning could be used to produce spare parts. The clone would be genetically identical to the original person, so that a donated organ would not be rejected by the immune system. Second, they argue that cloning might be a way to replace a lost child. A dying infant or child could be cloned so that a couple would replace the child with a genetically identical child. Third, cloning could produce biological immortality. One woman approached scientists in order to clone her deceased father and offered to carry the cloned baby to term herself. [\[13\]](#)

While cloning of various organisms may be permissible, cloning a human being raises significant questions beginning with the issue of the sanctity of life. Human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27-28) and therefore differ from animals. Human cloning would certainly threaten the sanctity of human life at a number of levels. First, cloning is an inefficient process of procreation as shown in cloning of a sheep. Second, cloning would no doubt produce genetic accidents. Previous experiments with frogs produced numerous embryos that did not survive, and many of those that did survive developed into grotesque monsters. Third, researchers often clone human embryos for various experiments. Although the National

Bioethics Advisory Commission did ban cloning of human beings, it permitted the cloning of human embryos for research. Since these embryos are ultimately destroyed, this research raises the same pro-life concerns discussed in the chapter on abortion.

Cloning represents a tampering with the reproductive process at the most basic level. Cloning a human being certainly strays substantially from God's intended procedure of a man and woman producing children within the bounds of matrimony (Gen. 2:24). All sorts of bizarre scenarios can be envisioned. Some homosexual advocates argue that cloning would be an ideal way for homosexual men to reproduce themselves.

Although this would be an alternative form of reproduction, it is reasonable to believe that human clones would still be fully human. For example, some people wonder if a clone would have a soul since this would be such a diversion from God's intended process of procreation. A traducian view of the origin of the soul, where a person receives both body and soul from his parents rather than an act of special creation by God, would imply that a cloned human being would have a soul. In a sense a clone would be no different from an identical twin.

Human cloning, like other forms of genetic engineering, could be used to usher in a "brave new world." James Bonner says "there is nothing to prevent us from taking a thousand [cells]. We could grow any desired number of genetically identical people from individuals who have desirable characteristics."[\[14\]](#) Such a vision conjures up images of Alphas, Betas, Gammas, and Deltas from Aldous Huxley's book *Brave New World* and provides a dismal contrast to God's creation of each individual as unique.

Each person contributes to both the unity and diversity of humanity. This is perhaps best expressed by the Jewish Midrash: "For a man stamps many coins in one mold and they are

all alike; but the King who is king over all kings, the Holy One blessed be he, stamped every man in the mold of the first man, yet not one of them resembles his fellow.”[{15}](#) Christians should reject future research plans to clone a human being and should reject using cloning as an alternative means of reproduction.

The Challenge of Information Technology

The information revolution is the latest technological advance Christians must consider. The shift to computers and an information-based society has been swift as well as spectacular. The first electronic digital computer, ENIAC, weighed thirty tons, had 18,000 vacuum tubes, and occupied a space as large as a boxcar.[{16}](#) Less than forty years later, many hand-held calculators had comparable computing power for a few dollars. Today most people have a computer on their desk with more computing power than engineers could imagine just a few years ago.

The impact of computers on our society was probably best seen when in 1982 *Time* magazine picked the computer as its “Man of the Year”—actually listing it as “Machine of the Year.”[{17}](#) It is hard to imagine a picture of the Spirit of St. Louis or an Apollo lander on the magazine cover under a banner “Machine of the Year.” This perhaps shows how influential the computer has become in our society.

The computer has become helpful in managing knowledge at a time when the amount of information is expanding exponentially. The information stored in the world’s libraries and computers doubles every eight years.[{18}](#) In a sense the computer age and the information age seem to go hand in hand.

The rapid development and deployment of computing power however has also raised some significant social and moral questions. People in this society need to think clearly about these issues, but often ignore them or become confused.

One key issue is computer crime. In a sense computer fraud is merely a new field with old problems. Computer crimes are often nothing more than fraud, larceny, and embezzlement carried out by more sophisticated means. The crimes usually involve changing address, records, or files. In short, they are old-fashioned crimes using high technology.

Another concern arises from the centralization of information. Governmental agencies, banks, and businesses use computers to collect information on its citizens and customers. For example, it is estimated that the federal government has on average about fifteen files on each American.[{19}](#) Nothing is inherently wrong with collecting information if the information can be kept confidential and is not used for immoral actions. Unfortunately this is often difficult to guarantee.

In an information-based society, the centralization of information can be as dangerous as the centralization of power. Given sinful man in a fallen world, we should be concerned about the collection and manipulation of vast amounts of personal information.

In the past, centralized information processing was used for persecution. When Adolf Hitler's Gestapo began rounding up millions of Jews, information about their religious affiliation was stored in shoe boxes. U.S. Census Bureau punch cards were used to round up Japanese Americans living on the West Coast at the beginning of World War II.[{20}](#) Modern technology makes this task much easier. Governmental agencies routinely collect information about citizens' ethnic origin, race, religion, gross income, and even political preference.

Moreover, the problem is not limited to governmental agencies. Many banking systems, for example, utilize electronic funds-transfer systems. Plans to link these systems together into a national system could also provide a means of tracking the actions of citizens. A centralized banking network could

fulfill nearly every information need a malevolent dictator might have. This is not to say that such a thing will happen. It does mean, however, that societies that want to monitor their citizens will be able to do so more efficiently with computer technology.

A related problem arises from the confidentiality of computer records. Computer records can be abused like any other system. Reputations built up over a lifetime can be ruined by computer errors and often there is little recourse for the victim. Congress passed the 1974 Privacy Act which allows citizens to find out what records federal bureaucracies have on them and to correct any errors.[\[21\]](#) But more legislation is needed than this particular act.

The proliferation of computers has presented another set of social and moral concerns. In the recent past most of that information was centralized and required the expertise of the "high priests of FORTRAN" to utilize it. Now most people have access to information because of increasing numbers of personal computers and increased access to information through the Internet. This access to information will have many interesting sociological ramifications, and it is also creating a set of troubling ethical questions. The proliferation of computers that can tie into other computers provides more opportunities for computerized crime.

The news media frequently carry reports about computer "hackers" who have been able to gain access to confidential computer systems and obtain or interfere with the data banks. Although these were supposed to be secure systems, enterprising computer hackers broke in anyway. In many cases this merely involved curious teenagers. Nevertheless computer hacking has become a developing area of crime. Criminals might use computer access to forge documents, change records, and draft checks. They can even use computers for blackmail by holding files for ransom and threatening to destroy them if their demands are not met. Unless better methods of security

are found, professional criminals will begin to crack computer security codes and gain quick access into sensitive files.

As with most technological breakthroughs, engineers have outrun lawmakers. Computer deployment has created a number of legal questions. First, there is the problem of establishing penalties of computer crime. Typically, intellectual property has a different status in our criminal justice system. Legal scholars should evaluate the notion that ideas and information need not be protected in the same way as property. Legislators need to enact computer information protection laws that will deter criminals, or even curious computer hackers, from breaking into confidential records.

A second legal problem arises from the question of jurisdiction. Telecommunications allows information to be shared across state and even national borders. Few federal statutes govern this area and less than half the states have laws dealing with information abuse.

Enforcement will also be a problem for several reasons. One reason is the previously stated problem of jurisdiction. Another is that police departments rarely train their personnel in computer abuse and fraud. A third reason is lack of personnel. Computers are nearly as ubiquitous as telephones or photocopiers.

Computer fraud also raises questions about the role of insurance companies. How do companies insure an electronic asset? What value does computer information have? These questions also need to be addressed in the future.

Technology and Human Nature

These new technologies will also challenge our views of human nature. Already medical technology is challenging our views of what it means to be human. A key question in the abortion debate is, When does human life begin? Is an embryo human?

What about a developing fetus? Although the Bible provides answers to these questions, society often takes its cue from pronouncements that do not square with biblical truth.

Biotechnology raises yet another set of questions. Is a frozen embryo human and deserving of a right to life? Is a clone human? Would a clone have a soul? These and many more questions will have to be answered. Although the Bible doesn't directly address such issues as genetically engineered humans or clones, key biblical passages (Ps. 139, Ps. 51:5) certainly seem to teach that an embryo is a human created in the image of God.

Information technology also raises questions about human nature in an unexpected way. Researchers believe that as computer technology advances, we will begin to analyze the human mind in physical terms. In *The Society of Mind*, Marvin Minsky, professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, says that "the mind, the soul, the self, are not a singly ghostly entity but a society of agents, deeply integrated, yet each one rather mindless on its own." [\[22\]](#) He dreams of being able ultimately to reduce mind (and therefore human nature) to natural mechanism. Obviously this is not an empirical statement, but a metaphysical one that attempts to reduce everything (including mind) to matter.

Will we some day elevate computers to the level of humanity? One article asked the question, Would an Intelligent Computer Have a "Right to Life?" [\[23\]](#) Granting computer rights might be something society might consider since many are already willing to grant certain rights to animals.

In a sense the question is whether an intelligent computer would have a soul and therefore access to fundamental human rights. As bizarre as the question may sound, it was no doubt inevitable. When 17th century philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz first described a thinking machine, he was careful to point out that this machine would not have a soul—fearful

perhaps of reaction from the church. Already scientists predict that computer intelligence will create “an intelligence beyond man’s” and provide wonderful new capabilities.[\[25\]](#) One of the great challenges in the future will be how to manage new computing power that will outstrip human intelligence.

Once again this is a challenge for Christians in the 21 st century. Human beings are more than just proteins and nucleic acids. Human being are more than bits and bytes. We are created in the image of God and therefore have a spiritual dimension. Perhaps this must be our central message to a world enamored with technology: human beings are created in the image of God and must be treated with dignity and respect.

Notes

1. Memo from Charles H. Duell, Director of the U.S. Patent Office, 1899.
2. Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Vintage, 1964).
3. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 6869, 71 (*italics his*).
4. Ethan Singer, cited in Nicholas Wade, “Gene Splicing: Congress Starts Framing Law for Research,” *Science*, 1 April 1977, 39.
5. Michael Crichton, *The Andromeda Strain* (New York: Dell, 1969).
6. Kenneth Woodward, “Thou Shalt Not Patent!” *Newsweek*, 29 May 1995, 68.
7. Testimony by Ethan Singer before the Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Hearings*, 15 March 1977, 79.

8. Julian Huxley, cited in Joseph Fletcher, *The Ethics of Genetic Control* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1974), 8.
9. Erwin Chargaff, cited in George Wald, "The Case against Genetic Engineering," *The Sciences*, May 1976, 10.
10. Nancy McCann, "The DNA Maelstrom: Science and Industry Rewrite the Fifth Day of Creation," *Sojourners*, May 1977, 2326.
11. Philip Elmer-Dewitt, "The Genetic Revolution," *Time*, 17 January 1994, 49.
12. Skeptics sometimes argue that fighting disease is the same as fighting against God's will. Albert Camus poses this dilemma for Dr. Reux in *The Plague*. Christians should follow the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28) and use genetic technology to treat and cure genetic disease.
13. Sharon Begley, "Little Lamb, Who Made Thee?" *Newsweek*, 10 March 1997, 55.
14. James Bonner, quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, 17 May 1971, 1.
15. N. N. Glazer, *Hammer on the Rock: A Short Midrash Reader* (New York: Schocken, 1962), 15.
16. Philip Elmer-De-Witt, "A Birthday Party for ENIAC," *Time*, 24 February 1986, 63.
17. "Machine of the Year," *Time*, 3 January 1983, 1324.
18. "Harper's Index," *Harper's*, October 1984, 9.
19. Ted Gest, "Who Is Watching You?" *U.S. News and World Report*, 12 July 1982, 35.
20. David Burnham, *The Rise of the Computer State* (New York: Random House, 1983).
21. Martha Farnsworth Riche, "The Rising Tide of Privacy

Laws," *American Demographics*, March 1990, 24.

22. Richard Lipkin, "Making Machines in Mind's Image," *Insight*, 15 February 1988, 812.

23. Robert Mueller and Erik Mueller, "Would an Intelligent Computer Have a 'Right to Life?'" *Creative Computing*, August 1983, 14961.

24. Danny Hillis, "Can They Feel Your Pain?" *Newsweek*, 5 May 1997, 57.

25. Robert Jastrow, "Toward an Intelligence beyond Man's," *Time*, 20 February 1978, 59.

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Partial Birth Abortion – From a Biblical Perspective

A Commitment to Gruesomeness

This year is the twenty-seventh year of legal abortion, and the only thing that appears to have changed in the debate is the addition of newer and more gruesome abortion procedures. At the top of the list is partial birth abortion.

The first legislative debate on partial birth abortion took place back in 1995 when Representative Charles Canady introduced a bill to ban this unknown procedure. Congressional testimony revealed that a fetus was delivered feet first, up to the head, so that the skull could be pierced and the brain suctioned out.

Canady's bill was a response to a paper delivered by Martin Haskell, a doctor from Dayton, Ohio, at the National Abortion Federation. At the time, reaction to Haskell's practice ran high in Ohio and eventually nationwide. The state of Ohio became the first state to prohibit the procedure and Canady's bill began to focus the issue on a national level.

Who would have predicted that such a long and protracted battle would take place over the last five years? And perhaps that shows how extreme the abortion lobby has become by its willingness to defend any abortion procedure no matter how far advanced the pregnancy might be. It also demonstrates the judiciary's willingness to defend abortion at every turn.

Although Charles Canady's bill was passed by both the House (288 to 139) and Senate (54 to 44), it was vetoed by President Clinton in April of 1996. Meanwhile, pro-life advocates were turning their energies to state legislatures. Partial birth abortion bans spread like wildfire through the legislatures. Today nearly three out of every five state legislatures have passed a ban, and some of these bans have been passed over gubernatorial vetoes. Unfortunately, liberal judges in various judicial jurisdictions have overturned many of these bans, alleging that they are vague or could threaten the life of the mother.

Congress has also reconsidered the issue again. Senator Rick Santorum reintroduced the ban in January 1997. A month later the newspaper *American Medical News* published an interview with Ron Fitzsimmons, executive director of the National Coalition of Abortion Providers. He admitted that he lied on national television regarding the number of partial birth abortions performed and the reasons for them. This was a stunning revelation that thousands of such abortions had been performed and usually for no medical indications. The momentum for a ban on partial birth abortions seemed to be growing. And the bill again passed both houses of Congress with a larger margin. But the Senate vote (64 to 36) was still not quite

large enough to ensure an override of the expected veto by President Clinton.

Currently Congress is considering the issue again. And there are many political commentators who wonder if the margin may grow again since this is an election year. Also, as we will discuss in more detail, the Supreme Court seemed poised to act on the issue as well. While that does not insure that a federal ban on partial birth abortion will pass this year, it does raise the stakes over this controversial and gruesome procedure. Will Congress or the courts eventually ban this procedure? That seems more likely now than at any time in the past. Certainly the next few months will tell. But how will that take place?

The Current Climate

Publicity over the partial birth abortion procedure has helped build momentum. During the debate in October of 1999, Senator Rick Santorum and Senator Barbara Boxer engaged in the following exchange.

Santorum: But, again, what you are suggesting is if the baby's toe is inside the mother, you can, in fact, kill that baby.

Boxer: Absolutely not.

Santorum: Okay. So if the baby's toe is in, you can't kill the baby. How about if the baby's foot is in?

Boxer: You are the one who is making these statements.

Santorum: We are trying to draw a line here.

Boxer: I am not answering these questions.

Santorum: If the head is inside the mother, you can kill the baby.

Discussion and dialogue like this has helped solidify and bolster public opposition to partial birth abortion. Democratic Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan has called this procedure "near-infanticide." Opinion polls show that he is not alone in his assessment. Even citizens and politicians who are sympathetic to abortion rights are repulsed by partial birth abortion.

Throughout this year the battle against partial birth abortion will be fought on two fronts: Congress and the courts. Pro-life advocates point out that vote counts in the Senate show they are getting very close to a veto-proof margin. Key senators forced to vote on this measure during an election year might make the difference.

Meanwhile, federal courts have forced the Supreme Court to deliberate on the issue. This fall federal judges in Wisconsin and Illinois found the partial birth abortion bans in their states to be constitutional. Before the laws could be implemented, Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens issued a stay that holds the two state laws in limbo until the high court disposes of the appeals.

Legal experts say that the order is written in such a way as to force the court to directly consider the constitutionality of partial birth abortions, or else the court must leave these state laws in place. In either case, this appears to be a pro-life victory.

Last summer in Arizona, an abortionist was performing a partial birth abortion on what he thought was a twenty-three week old. Suddenly he realized the baby was actually thirty-seven weeks old. He stopped the abortion and delivered the baby. The police said that, "At this point it doesn't appear that anybody will be charged with anything." The reason? Nothing illegal was done.

President Clinton continues to veto congressional bans on this

procedure, and judges continue to overturn state bans on this procedure. But it appears that in the year 2000 that is about to change.

The Biblical Perspective

Before we continue this discussion I wanted to focus on the biblical perspective of abortion. A key passage in this discussion is Psalm 139, where David reflected on God's sovereignty in his life.

The psalm opens with the acknowledgment that God is omniscient; He knows what the psalmist, David, is doing. God is aware of David's thoughts before he expresses them. Wherever David might go, he could not escape from God, whether he traveled to heaven or ventured into Sheol. God is in the remotest part of the sea and even in the darkness. David then contemplated the origin of his life and confessed 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.

Here David wrote of God's relationship with him while he was growing and developing before birth. The Bible does not speak of fetal life as mere biochemistry. This is not a piece of protoplasm that became David. This was David already being cared for by God while in the womb.

Verse 13 speaks of God as the Master Craftsman, weaving and fashioning David into a living person. In verses 14-15 David reflected on the fact that he was a product of God's creative

work within his mother's womb, and he praised God for how wonderfully God had woven him together.

David drew a parallel between his development in the womb and Adam's creation from the earth. Using figurative language in verse 15, he referred 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 noted 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" derives from the verb "to roll up." When David was forming as a fetus, God's care and compassion were already extended to him. The reference to "God's eyes" is an Old Testament term connoting divine oversight of God in the life of an individual or a group of people.

While there are certainly other passages in the Old and New Testament that speak to the sanctity of human life, I believe that Psalm 139 is sufficient to show why Christians must oppose abortion, especially partial birth abortion. The unborn baby is a human being that God cares for. It should not be sacrificed in the womb for convenience or even for fetal parts that might improve the medical condition of another person. The unborn must be protected at every stage of development.

Partial birth abortion is a controversial and gruesome procedure. It is also against the will of God. Christians must speak out against the horror of this procedure and do whatever they can to make the procedure illegal.

Fetal Tissue Trafficking

I would like to turn our focus to a related issue: the traffic of fetal tissue parts. In the fall of 1999, a pro-life group by the name of Life Dynamics published their two-year

investigation of the traffic of fetal body parts. They produced copies of brochures, protocols, and price lists that document the interstate commerce of fetal body parts. One brochure touts "the freshest tissue available." A price list provides a grim picture of the trafficking in cannibalized body parts: eyes are \$50 to \$75 depending on the age of the fetus, skin is \$100, a spinal cord is \$325.

The investigation provided new insight into why the fight against partial birth abortion has been so tough. Partial birth abortion, after all, is a difficult procedure that involves turning the fetus in the womb and removing it feet first. This complicates the abortion and therefore poses more risk to the mother. So why do abortionists do it? Fetal tissue parts. Quite simply, if you want an intact brain, spinal cord, or limbs, partial birth abortion will provide that in ways that other abortion techniques will not.

Essentially scientists who need human body parts for research have found a loophole in the federal law that prohibits the sale of body parts. Abortion clinics provide these companies with whole or dismembered aborted fetuses for a service fee. This is listed as a "site fee" which is "rental on the space" that a body parts company employee occupies within the clinic. The company can, therefore, argue that they are donating the parts, but charging reasonable costs for retrieval which the federal law does allow. As long as the retrieval fees are higher than the site fee, they can make a profit.

Just one look at the "Fees for Services Schedule" can be chilling. Prices for every conceivable body part are listed. But it's important to notice that an intact embryonic cadaver costs \$600. Why should there be a retrieval fee for that? Why not just list the cost of shipping? This discrepancy illustrates how the body parts companies are trying to circumvent the law.

Gene Rudd, an obstetrician and member of the Christian Medical

and Dental Society's Bioethics Commission, said: "It's the inevitable logical progression of a society that, like Darwin, believes we came from nothing. . . . This is the inevitable slide down the slippery slope." He is appalled by this "death for profit" scheme that takes the weakest of the species to satisfy our desires.

Apparently women who come into an abortion clinic are asked to sign a document allowing the clinic to donate their aborted baby to research. No fetus may be used without permission. Then the clinic receives orders (usually from their fax machine) for parts that will be retrieved and shipped. Many of the protocols require that the specimens be obtained within minutes after the abortion and frozen or preserved.

Life Dynamics' two year investigation clearly documents what many of us suspected all along. The fight against partial birth abortion was so tough because a lot of money and fetal tissue was a stake. This procedure has little to do with providing women with choice and everything to do with the interstate trafficking of fetal body parts.

A technician identified as "Kelly" came to Life Dynamics with this story of the traffic of fetal body parts.

The doctor walked into the lab and set a steel pan on the table. "Got you some good specimens," he said. "Twins." The technician looked down at a pair of perfectly formed 24-week-old fetuses moving and gasping for air. Except for a few nicks from the surgical tongs that had pulled them out, they seemed uninjured. "There's something wrong here," the technician stammered. "They are moving. I don't do this."

She watched the doctor take a bottle of sterile water and fill the pan until the water ran over the babies' mouths and noses. Then she left the room. "I would not watch those fetuses moving," she recalls. "That's when I decided it was wrong."

Back in the fall of 1999, Life Dynamics published its two-year

investigation of the traffic of fetal body parts. They produced copies of brochures, protocols, and price lists that document the interstate commerce of fetal body parts.

I believe their investigation provided new insight into why the fight against partial birth abortion has been so tough. This procedure provides fetal tissue parts that are intact and thus available to research labs for a profit. And these are respected, tax-funded laboratories pursuing laudable goals like treating diabetes and Parkinson's disease.

"Kelly" says that it was her job to go to abortion clinics to procure tissue "donations." She would get a generated list each day of what tissue researchers needed and then look at the particular patient charts to determine where the specimens would be obtained. She would look for the most perfect specimens to give the researchers "the best value that we could sell for."

Fetuses ranged in age from seven weeks to 30 weeks and beyond. Typically, "Kelly" harvested tissue from 30 to 40 "late" fetuses each week. These are delivered using the partial birth abortion procedure.

"Kelly" and others like her would harvest eyes, livers, brains, thymuses, and especially cardiac blood. Then they would pack and freeze the tissue and send them out by standard couriers (UPS, FedEx) to the research laboratories requesting the material. Life Dynamics has produced copies of forms for fetal parts from researchers. They contain the names of researchers, universities, pharmaceutical companies, and more.

Proponents of the research argue that the goal justifies the means. After all, these babies would have been aborted anyway. Why not use the discarded parts to further science and improve the quality of living of others? Christopher Hook, a fellow with the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity calls this exploitation of the unborn "too high a price regardless of the

supposed benefit. We can never feel comfortable with identifying a group of our brothers and sisters who can be exploited for the good of the whole.” He believes that, “Once we have crossed that line, we have betrayed our covenant with one another as a society and certainly the covenant of medicine.”

This is the sad legacy of partial birth abortion and the international traffic of fetal body parts. Christians must stand up against this gruesome practice and reassert the sanctity of human life and work for the banning of these procedures.

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West Africans to African-Americans: “We Apologize for Slavery”

Rusty Wright presents a contemporary example of a new Christian offering repentance for past sins committed by his people and reconciliation through Christ in moving forward in the forgiveness of God. This is an excellent example of how those with a Christian worldview can work to bring healing to those wounded by past, grievous sins.

The president of the West African nation of Benin has a message for African-Americans: His compatriots are sorry for their ancestors’ complicity in the slave trade. During December, he’s going to tell them that at a special Leadership Reconciliation Conference on his soil.

An often-overlooked facet of slavery's ugly historical stain is that black Africans sold other black Africans into slavery. When rival tribes made war, the victors took prisoners and made them indentured servants, often selling them to white slave merchants. Tribal animosity seethed.

Benin president Matthieu Kerekou says intertribal hostility over the slave trade still exists. Many of his people have never seen descendants of their forebears who were shipped off to the Americas.

Kerekou attended the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington last February and sought African-American church leaders to whom he could apologize. The pastors offered forgiveness. As a result, 125 Western leaders will gather with tribal chiefs from across Benin for the reconciliation event. U.S. Senator James Inhofe (R, Oklahoma) and Congressman Tony Hall (D, Ohio) will participate along with pastors, athletes, celebrities and representatives of European (former) slave-trading nations.

Brian Johnson, an African-American living in Virginia, heads a U.S. sponsoring group COMINAD (Cooperative Missions Network of the African Dispersion) and works with many black churches. Johnson says the infamous "Gate of No Return" that stands on the Benin beach where slaves embarked will be renamed the "Gate of Return" and/or destroyed. African-Americans will be granted Benin citizenship.

Plans exist for a larger reconciliation event in 2000. A ship will sail the old slave route from the Canary Islands to Benin and business leaders will host an international business exposition to help stimulate trade.

Johnson says President Kerekou's mission has a spiritual flavor motivated by the president's own recent commitment to Christ. "In the same way that God offered forgiveness by presenting His Son, who was offended first," Johnson notes, African-American church leaders want to offer forgiveness to

the descendants of their ancestors' captors. Both the president and the pastors hope to effect reconciliation and to provide an example to help ease global racial tensions.

Johnson says the realization that blacks sold other blacks into slavery has been hard for many African-Americans to handle. "This made it difficult to just hold the white man responsible," he notes. "This creates some problems in our own psyche. We have to deal with another angle to this and it makes it difficult. It's not [merely] a black/white thing."

He says the problem is in human hearts. " 'All have sinned,' " he claims, quoting the New Testament. "All of us need to confess our wrong and appeal to [God] for forgiveness."

Former Senator George Aiken of Vermont once said that if we awoke one morning to find everyone were the same race, color and creed, we'd find a new cause for prejudice by noon. Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy lamented that "Everybody thinks of changing humanity, but nobody thinks of changing himself." Perhaps Johnson's and President Kerekou's prescription is worth considering.

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Privacy Issues

The Need to Discuss Privacy Issues

Privacy is something I believe we all take for granted until we lose it. Then we begin to think about how someone invaded our privacy, often by incremental steps. In this article we are going to talk about ways in which we have lost our privacy. Most of the intrusion into our lives comes from

government, but not all. Businesses also buy and sell information about us every day. Most of us would be shocked to find out how much personal information is in databases around the country.

As I address this important issue, I will focus on several specific threats to our privacy. I want to begin, though, by discussing how quickly our privacy is being lost and how often it takes place without any debate.

Let's look at the last session in Congress. It's amazing to me that there never was an extended debate on the issue of privacy. Granted there wasn't much debate on a number of issues, but the lack of debate on this fundamental issue shows how far down the road we have gone.

For example, we saw absolutely no debate on issues such as the national ID card, the medical ID number, the Clinton administration encryption policy, the expansion of the FBI's wiretap capability, along with the Clinton administration's Executive Order authority and federal databases.

Some of the proposals were defeated, at least for now. The national ID card was defeated, for example, not because Congress debated the issue, but because thousands of Americans wrote letters and made phone calls. Meanwhile, plans by the Clinton administration to develop a medical ID number are on hold, but could surface at any time.

Most other issues, however, are moving ahead. Congress gave the FBI permission to use "roving wiretap surveillance." That means that the next time you use a pay phone at your local grocery store, it may be tapped merely because there's a criminal suspect within the area. And if you think I am overreacting, look at what has already happened in California. One wiretap order there authorized surveillance on 350 phones for over two years. In another case, five pay phones were tapped, intercepting 131,000 conversations.

Recently, the Federal Communications Commission mandated that cell phones and other wireless telephone companies track the location of the customers from the time the call was initiated until the time it was terminated. By locating the cell site the person was using, the government can pinpoint the location of every citizen who uses a cell phone since the telephone companies must track and log the locations.

Those are just a few of the examples we will discuss on the subject of privacy. Unfortunately, whenever someone cries for privacy, another is sure to ask, "What do you have to hide?" The question confuses privacy and secrecy. I don't really have anything I want to keep secret, but I'm not terribly excited about the government listening to every one of my phone conversations. You may not want your future boss to know that you have a genetic predisposition to breast cancer. You may not want a telemarketer to know what you just recently purchased so that he can call your home number and try to sell you more.

The point is that each day we are losing a bit of our privacy. And we will continue to do so unless we work to establish some limits to these invasions of our privacy.

National ID Card

Issuing internal passports has been one of the methods used by communist leaders to control their people. Citizens had to carry these passports at all times and had to present them to authorities if they wanted to travel within the country, live in another part of the country, or apply for a job.

The Department of Transportation has recently called for the establishment of a national ID system by the first of October, in the year 2000. Although presented as merely a move toward standardization, this seemed to many as a move toward a national passport to allow the government to "check up" on its citizens.

A little history is in order. Back in 1996, Congress passed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. This charged the federal Department of Transportation with establishing national requirements for birth certificates and drivers' licenses. Add to this the 1996 Kennedy-Kassebaum health care law that implies that Americans may be required in the future to produce a state-issued ID that conforms to federal specifications.

If all of this sounds to you like Big Brother or even the mark of the beast, then you have company. Congressman Ron Paul believes that the Department of Transportation regulations would adversely affect Americans. He says, "Under the current state of the law, the citizens of states which have drivers' licenses that do not conform to the federal standards by October 1, 2000, will find themselves essentially stripped of their ability to participate in life as we know it."

Congressman Paul adds that, "On that date, Americans will not be able to get a job, open a bank account, apply for Social Security or Medicare, exercise their Second Amendment rights, or even take an airplane flight, unless they can produce a state-issued ID that conforms to the federal specifications."

The law orders the Attorney General to conduct pilot programs where the state driver's license includes a "machine-readable" Social Security number. It also orders the development of a Social Security card that uses magnetic strips, holograms, and integrated circuits. The law also requires that states collect Social Security numbers from all applicants for various licenses. It requires states to transmit the name, address, and Social Security number of every new worker to a Directory of New Hires.

The good news is that the work by Congressmen Ron Paul and Bob Barr paid off and the attempt to create a national ID card was stopped, for now. But it is likely to surface again.

After all, there has been a push to establish a federal database for Americans and having each person carry an ID card would allow that information to be linked to a federal database. And while it would help the government catch illegal aliens, it could also be used to track law-abiding American citizens.

Tracking down illegal aliens and standardizing licenses are worthy goals. But the ends do not justify the means. That is why so many people wrote Congress to stop this push for a national ID card. Sometimes in the midst of this political debate, citizens must determine how much they value their freedom and privacy.

Congressman Bob Barr says, "Novelists Aldous Huxley and George Orwell have given us countless reasons why we shouldn't trade our privacy for any benefit, no matter how worthwhile it sounds." In the end, we must ask, At what cost? Is it worth trading our privacy for the benefits government promises?

Medical ID Number

While the Department of Transportation is moving ahead with plans for a national ID card, the Department of Health and Human Services is working to assign everyone a lifetime medical ID number.

The purpose of the ID number is to make it easier to keep accurate records of patients as they change doctors and health plans. The identification was required in a 1996 law that guarantees workers continued access to health coverage even if they change jobs.

One solution proposed is to merely use Social Security numbers. But doing that could give credit card companies and other organizations access to medical records. This would raise a greater concern over privacy of medical records. And that's the point. Even a secure number still could pose a

privacy nightmare by potentially giving everyone from insurance companies to computer hackers access to medical histories.

One doctor expressed his concern that a "unique patient identifier could lead to a central database." He fears that "someone without permission could break into those records." But even if the record is secure, doctors fear that patients will withhold embarrassing information if there is a chance someone else might get access to the records.

Robert Gellman, an information policy consultant said at a recent hearing, "Once everyone's required to use a government-issued health identification card, it may become impossible for any American citizen to walk down the street without being forced to produce that card on demand by a policeman."

Why are so many people concerned? Perhaps past history is an indication. One of the features of Hillary Clinton's national health care plan was a federal database of every American's medical records. During one of his State of the Union addresses, President Clinton waved a card with a "unique identifier number" that would give government bureaucrats and health care providers easy computer access to everyone's medical history.

Although the American people rejected that plan back in 1993 and 1994, the government is still moving ahead with a plan to give every American an "unique identifier number" and to compile medical records into a federal database. Five years ago the argument for a medical card and number linked to a federal database was to aid in health care planning and to eliminate fraud by health care providers. The American people, however, feared it would end medical privacy and increase federal control over health care.

The fear is justified. Just listen to what has already happened in a system without a medical ID number. For example,

there is the banker on a county health care board who called due the mortgages of people suffering with cancer. There was a congresswoman whose medical records, revealing a bout of depression, were leaked before primary day. And there are a number of drug store chains that sell the name, address, and ailments of their customers to marketing firms.

The Hippocratic Oath says, "That whatsoever I shall see or hear of the lives of men, which is not fitting to be spoken . . . I shall keep inviolably secret." Current attempts by the federal bureaucracy to standardize and centralize medical information are presented as a way to make health care delivery more effective and efficient, but they also have the potential to invade our privacy and threaten doctor-patient confidentiality. Frankly, I think the administration needs to rethink their current proposal. Or, to put it in medical terms, I think they need a second opinion.

Encryption

As we have been looking at the issue of privacy, we've considered attempts to establish a national ID card and a medical ID number. I want to turn to computers and talk about another important issue: encryption. Now I know that's probably an unfamiliar word. But stay with me. Encryption is big word for a big issue that I think you need to know about.

Encryption is a relatively new technology that enables you to have private phone conversations and send e-mail messages that are secure. Encryption codes your words so that they cannot be deciphered by people listening in on your conversation or reading your mail.

As you may know, nosy people already can listen in on your wireless phone calls (cellular or cordless phones). And they can intercept and read your e-mail. Sending e-mail without encryption is like mailing a postcard – everyone can read it along the way. And we all know that people will do exactly

that. If you have ever had a phone on a party line, you know that people listen in.

What you may not know is that various members of the Clinton administration (like Attorney General Janet Reno and FBI Director Louis Freeh) are demanding the authority to read encrypted messages. Now remember that the Fourth Amendment guarantees citizens be free of unreasonable searches and seizures. Nevertheless, these and other law enforcement officers believe they have the right to open your mail.

What they are asking for is the key to the code. When you send a message in code, you need a key to enable you to send the code and the recipients need the same key to read the code. The Clinton administration is demanding access to all encryption keys. This is like giving the government the power to steam open all the letters we send in the mail. Frankly, you only see this level of surveillance in totalitarian countries. If the government has the key, then it could call up information on you, your family, your medical records, your bank records, your credit card purchases, and your e-mail messages to all of your friends and relatives.

What is even more disturbing is the current attempt by the government to limit an American citizen's access to strong and powerful encryption software. A new study from the Cato Institute says that "People living outside the United States find it amusing and perplexing that U.S. law regulates the distribution of strong encryption." Critics of the administration's policy point out that true criminals (terrorists, drug dealers, the mafia) are unlikely to use anything less than the strongest encryption for their communication and data storage. The government will unlikely have a key to that level of encryption. Meanwhile, the average citizen must use weak encryption to protect private data and run the risk that the government will have a key to access it.

Everyone wants encryption in the computer age. Citizens want

private communication. Businesses want to prevent billing records and personnel records from falling into the wrong hands. Consumers don't want their credit card numbers widely distributed. That is why we need strong encryption software, and that is why government should not be given a key to the messages we send. Most Americans would not like to turn over so much of their privacy to the government, but unfortunately most Americans don't realize that they already have.

Privacy and Your Life

Dave Ballert thought he was being a savvy consumer when he attempted to download a copy of his credit report from a web site. He hadn't checked it recently and thought it was worth paying the eight bucks. But when the report arrived a few minutes later, it wasn't his. It was a report for someone in California. The next thing he knew he received a call from the *Washington Post*, who said they received his report. The web site halted access later, but the damage was already done. How would you like a major newspaper to have a copy of your credit report?

Consider the case of the Social Security Administration. They provided earnings information to individuals via the Internet. After more than a month of virtually unfettered access for disgruntled employees, ex-spouses, and their attorneys, the Social Security Administration pulled the plug.

Such is life in the cyberspace. More and more people are seeing their privacy violated and wonder what to do in a time of financial and personal indecent exposure. What used to be called public records weren't all that public. Now they are all too public. And what used to be considered private records are being made public at an alarming rate. What should we do?

First, don't give out personal information. You should assume that any information that you do give out will end up on a database somewhere. Phone solicitors, application forms,

warranty cards all ask for information you may not want to give out. Be careful how much information you disclose.

Second, live your life above reproach. As it is written in Philippians 2:14-15, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." 1 Timothy 3:2 says that an elder must be "above reproach," which is an attribute that should describe all believers. If you live a life of integrity, you don't have to be so concerned about what may be made public.

Third, exercise discretion, especially when you use e-mail. Too many people assume they have a one-on-one relationship with someone through the Internet. The message you send might be forwarded on to other people, and the message may even be read by other nosy people. One web site provider advises, "A good rule of thumb: Don't send any e-mail that you wouldn't want your mother to read."

Finally, get involved. When you feel your privacy has been violated, take the time to complain. Let the person or organization know your concerns. Many people fail to apply the same rules of privacy and confidentiality on a computer that they do in real life. Your complaint might have a positive effect.

Track congressional legislation and write letters. Many of the threats to privacy I've talked about started in Congress. Citizens need to understand that many governmental policies pose a threat to our privacy. Bureaucrats and legislators are in the business of collecting information and will continue to do so unless we set appropriate limits.

Sadly, most Americans are unaware of the growing threats to their privacy posed by government and private industry. Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom. We must continue to

monitor the threats to our privacy both in the public and private sector.

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Points of Contact

Making Contact

In 1988 at the Republican National Convention, George Bush called for “a thousand points of light” as a part of his campaign for president. His intention was to encourage the involvement of a small but committed number of people who could make a difference. If only a few would answer the call, a thousand points of light emanating from communities large and small would touch the country. The implications of President Bush’s phrase remind me of a phrase designed to instill the same concept in the members of a branch of our military: “The few, the proud, the Marines.”

These ideas are not far removed from a concept that should be descriptive of Christian communities. We should be “points of light” to the surrounding world, even if we are “the few.” After all, Jesus said His disciples are “...the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). (Of course He did not say we are to be “the proud,” and most of us are not Marines. But I think you get the idea.) Jesus continues with this exhortation: “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). How can we shine the light of Christ in the surrounding world? I submit that one response to this question

is this: We can be points of light by establishing points of contact.

You may be thinking, “Just what is meant by a point of contact?” Good question! Let me attempt to explain. For our purposes in this series a “point of contact” contains several points (pardon the pun).

1. Its purpose is to activate conversation that leads to evangelism.

2. It stimulates dialogue.

3. It enables you to make a transition from a non-Christian worldview to a Christian worldview.

4. It serves as a “bridge” to someone who might not otherwise respond to the gospel.

5. It encourages you to meet a person where “he lives” mentally and spiritually.

6. It provides a positive challenge to use your God-given creativity, instead of relying on a “canned” approach.

7. It stretches you to converse with non-believers in ways that can be understood by them. As C. S. Lewis wrote, “I have come to the conviction that if you cannot translate your thoughts into uneducated language, then your thoughts were confused. Power to translate is the test of having really understood one’s own meaning.”[{1}](#) Christians tend to have their own “educated language.” We may understand one another. But the non-Christian probably has no idea what we are saying; he is uneducated in our language.[{2}](#)

All of these points assume that you are sharing what we will call a “common life” with those around you. What are some of the elements of this common life? You probably share time and space each day with friends, business colleagues, neighbors, sports opponents, people on the train or plane, and a host of

other possibilities. But these refer only to the physical portion of your common life. What about such things as the news media, television programming, movies, magazines, sporting events, and many others that are shared, paradoxically, when we may be alone? They too are part of the common life we share, whether Christian or non-Christian. Such things provide points of contact. They can be bridges to the gospel.

Pertinent Points

Have you ever traveled over the Golden Gate Bridge, or maybe the bridge over the Royal Gorge? If so, why were you on such bridges? Usually we assume they have been constructed to transport us from one side of a gap to another. There is a significant gap between you and your destination on the other side. A bridge provides at least one way to get there.

How large is the gap between Christians and non-Christians? Most Christians would reply that the gap is enormous, and in a theological sense they are correct. The Christian worldview is on one side of a chasm, and non-Christian worldviews are on the other. Such a predicament could be left as it is, which is the case for too many Christians. But part of the Christian's responsibility is to "bridge" that gap with the amazing truth of the gospel. Points of contact can provide the raw materials for the building of such a bridge.

Alister McGrath, a great theologian and apologist of our time, has suggested several such points of contact that are shared by all people. These can be useful as you begin to erect a bridge.^{3} As we consider such points, use your imagination and think of ways in which you might engage someone in conversation.

First, most people have *a sense of unsatisfied longing*. We are made in the image of God. We have an inbuilt capacity—indeed, an inbuilt *need*—to relate to God. Nothing that is transitory

can ever fill this need. Created things are substituted for God, and they do not satisfy.

A major portion of my life includes involvement in the musical world. I have performed a wide assortment of music styles. But in particular, I have developed a great appreciation for what most people call “classical music.”

One of the more intriguing aspects of classical music history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is a “sense of unsatisfied longing.” For example, Gustav Mahler continually composed in order to come to grips with that longing. One of his close friends, the great conductor Bruno Walter, put it like this: “Fundamentally, there never was relief for him from the sorrowful struggle to fathom the meaning of human existence.”^{4} When I hear Mahler’s music, I hear that “sorrowful struggle” and think of how I may have talked with the great composer himself.

Second, most people have a sense of *human rationality*. This resonance of reason with God is a harmony of rationality, hinting that human nature is still marked with the *imago Dei* [image of God]. Given the Christian understanding of who God is and what He is like, our knowledge of both our rational selves and the rational world ties in with belief in His rational and creative existence.

C. S. Lewis expressed this point by focusing on the probability of a mind. He wrote, “What is behind the universe is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know. That is to say, it is conscious, and has purposes, and prefers one thing to another. It made the universe, partly for purposes we do not know, but partly, at any rate, in order to produce creatures like itself . . . to the extent of having minds.”^{5}

Third, most people have a sense of *the ordering of the world*. Modern science has demonstrated that the world is ordered. But

its disclosure of an intelligible and delicately balanced structure raises questions that transcend the scientific and provide an intellectual restlessness that seeks adequate explanation. Perhaps the most fundamental of these questions can be summarized in a single word: Why?

Think of the newspapers, books, and magazines you read. They consist of ordered arrangements of ink on paper. "Neither the chemistry of the ink nor the shapes of the letters determines the meaning of the text. In short, the message transcends the properties of the medium."[{6}](#) The message requires a messenger.

Fourth, most people have a sense of *human morality*. Most humans realize the importance of moral obligation or at least they have an awareness of the need for some kind of agreement on morality.[{7}](#)

Perhaps this is noticed most easily when sensational crimes are committed, as when Charles Manson murdered Sharon Tate and her friends. Even though the public may not agree on how justice should be carried out, seldom do we hear that the crime was a good thing. Invariably there is a sense of moral outrage and a cry for justice.

Fifth, many people struggle with a sense of *existential anxiety and alienation*. This reflects a deeply rooted fear of meaninglessness and pointlessness, a sense of the utter futility of life, even sheer despair at the bewildering things that threaten to reduce us to nothing more than a statistic—ultimately a mortality statistic. While it seems trite to talk about "the meaning of life," it is a question that lingers at the edges (and sometimes squarely in the center) of reflective human existence.[{8}](#)

The twentieth century is replete with famous examples of this point. From the philosophical intricacies of people such as Jean-Paul Sartre, to the expletives of punk-rocker Johnny

Rotten, many have struggled with anxiety and alienation. Even a German word, *angst*, has entered our vocabulary as a statement of such states of mind. "Man has a sense of dread (*Angst*); he is a being thrust into the world and headed for death (nothingness) with no explanation [that] 'there is something rather than nothing at all.'" [{9}](#) Contrary to the openness of those such as Sartre and Rotten, this point of contact is one of the more "quiet" ones, in that it is not openly stated. Anxiety and alienation generally are not easily seen and heard; one has to be sensitive to what lies below the surface.

Sixth, most people have an *awareness of finitude and mortality*. The fear of death, often voiced in terms of a radical inability to cope with the brute fact of human existence, runs deep in human nature. As the writer/director/actor Woody Allen said, "I'm not frightened of dying. I just don't want to be there when it happens."

Physical death, perhaps the most universally realized truth, may be the least discussed. It is inevitable, but its mystery so often stirs terror or resignation. Listen to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

*To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.
Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.* [{10}](#)

If you could talk with people like Charles Manson, Johnny

Rotten, Woody Allen, or the fictional Macbeth, how would you respond? Would you consider how these points of contact could be used to engage them in conversation? Would you think carefully about how God may use you to get their attention?

Biblical Points of Contact

Mustard seeds, hidden treasure, vineyards, debtors, fig trees, sheep, money. What do such things have in common? You probably recognize such terms from the parables that Jesus used to teach spiritual principles. We could add many more phrases, because the Gospels contain many instances when Jesus used His favorite teaching device as a point of contact with His listeners.

Just what is a parable? Literally, the word means, “to throw alongside.” Parables “...were used by Jesus to teach a truth, illustrate a doctrine, or move His audience to a moral attitude or act.”[{11}](#) Apparently they were used spontaneously in light of an immediate situation or conflict, and they focused on what was familiar to the audience.[{12}](#) These characteristics are indicative of how Jesus was able to get the kind of attention that opened doors to important truths. When we attempt to find a point of contact, we are following Jesus’ example. We may not use a parable, but we are responding to an immediate situation spontaneously in a way that is familiar to our audience.

So a parable is one device found in the Bible that can be used as a point of contact. When we read the Gospels they are hard to miss. But Jesus used other devices as well.

One example of this is found in the story of His encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well. Both Jesus and the woman initially were at the well for water, but Jesus quickly engaged her in conversation concerning something beyond physical water. His point of contact was the water, but He quickly used that as a “springboard” that drew her focused

attention. He said, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water" (John 4:10). Imagine if you had heard such a response! Don't you think your interest would have been piqued? This encounter provides an example very different from a parable. Let's call it a "curiosity contact." That is, Jesus raised the woman's curiosity about whom He was and what He had to say. Her life was forever changed as a result.

At this point you may be thinking, "Yes, I see what Jesus did through points of contact. But obviously, I'm not Jesus. I can't do what He did." To a point, you are correct. You certainly are not Jesus, but you can follow His example. The book of Acts contains instances of this. Let's consider two of those.

The eighth chapter of Acts includes Philip's famous dialogue with an Ethiopian eunuch. The Holy Spirit had led Philip to the eunuch, but it appears that Philip creatively and spontaneously addressed the man. He saw that he was reading, so he asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30). What a wonderful point of contact! Philip then was given an opportunity to direct their conversation towards the gospel. Such an encounter reminds me of a question most of us have asked: "What are you reading?" In addition to asking that question, today we may ask, "What are you watching?"

Paul's defense of the faith at Mars Hill in Athens provides another illustration of selecting a point of contact. The city was filled with thousands of idols. Paul had noticed one such idol that was inscribed, "to an unknown god" (Acts 17:23). An idol became his point of contact! Thus he began to proclaim the truth in response to their admitted ignorance.

What are some of the points of contact in your daily life?

Contemporary Contacts

You are taking a walk around your neighborhood. As you turn a corner a few blocks from your house, you see an old friend whom you have not seen in a couple of years. She is riding a bicycle in your direction. As she gets closer she recognizes you and stops. The two of you strike up a conversation that revolves around the kinds of things that usually are discussed on such occasions: Have you seen Sally lately? Did you hear about Jim's divorce? How are your children? Then you realize that God's Spirit is encouraging you to guide the conversation toward Christ. You are thinking of a way to do this when you suddenly notice that she is wearing an especially beautiful necklace with a cross. You comment on her jewelry, then you ask, "What does the cross represent?" She responds by saying it's just a nice piece of jewelry that was given to her by her daughter. But it has no "religious significance." You respond to her statement by sharing the true meaning and significance of the cross.

This fictitious story demonstrates how a point of contact can lead to an opportunity to share the gospel. In order to bring this discussion to a conclusion, we will give attention to six ways points of contact can give you an open door for God's truth.

First, be attentive to your God-given imagination. Of all people, Christians should creatively interact with the world around them for the glory of God. This may mean you will need to practice the habit of "sharpening your focus" on the world around you. Maybe you can begin to see with new eyes and hear with new ears.

Second, be attentive to the things most people have in common. A piece of jewelry was the common element in the illustration that was used to begin this program. Jewelry is something most people have in common. But whether it's jewelry, clothes, houses, cars, children, sports, or a long list of other

things, you can find a point of contact among them.

Third, be attentive to those things that are most important to the person with whom you are sharing. For example, most people think of their immediate family as the most important part of their lives. Points of contact abound when you are sensitive to what is most important in a person's life.

Fourth, be attentive to the subjects that occupy someone's conversations. If the person with whom you are conversing talks a great deal about movies, find a point of contact there. If another person is fanatical about sports, find a point of contact there. If a hobby is the center of conversation, find a point of contact there. Such a list virtually is endless.

Fifth, be attentive to areas of greatest immediate need. Some people may dwell on their poor health. Others may concentrate on failures in their lives. Or maybe you will find yourself in conversation with someone who is bitter about something that happened in the past. Again, such a list of possibilities virtually is endless. All of them supply points of contact.

Sixth, and most important, be attentive to what the Spirit of God is telling you. He is not silent; He will bring appropriate things to your attention. Any point of contact will only be effective as the Spirit guides you to respond.

The world around us is starving for contact. People need to hear what God has to say through us. He will guide us to make contact for His glory. We are God's messengers of hope. I hope we get the point.

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 98.

2. See my article [Christian Cliches](#).
3. Alister McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God & Other Modern Myths* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 30-47.
4. Bruno Walter, *Gustav Mahler* (New York: Vienna House, 1941), 129.
5. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 31-32. Quoted in McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God*, 35.
6. Stephen C. Meyer, "The Explanatory Power of Design: DNA and the Origin of Information." In *Mere Creation: Science, Faith & Intelligent Design*, ed. William A. Dembski (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 135.
7. I recommend that you read the opening portion of C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1943) for a brilliant exposition of this point. Actually, you should read the entire book; you will benefit from it. It has become a classic.
8. See my article [The Meaning of Life](#).
9. Norman L. Geisler and Paul D. Feinberg, *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), 48.
10. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V. In *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Vol. 2, W. G. Clark and W. Aldis Wright, eds. (Garden City: Nelson Doubleday, n.d.), 813.
11. Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 302.

12. Ibid.

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Kids Killing Kids

Not so long ago the biggest problem kids faced was getting a flat tire on their bikes or having a mean teacher assign homework over the weekend. How times have changed. Who would have guessed that one of the perennial stories would be kids killing kids?

In this essay we're going to talk about the issue of school shootings and the broader issue of kids killing kids. Why is this happening? What can be done to stem the tide of violence on campus and society? We'll look at such topics as video games, teenage rebellion, and tolerance. And we'll also look at the spiritual aspects as well.

Each time we hear about gunshots on a high school campus we are once again reminded that we are living in a different world. The body count of students and teachers causes us to shake our heads and wonder what is going on. In some cases the shooters are teenagers with elaborate plans and evil desires. But sometimes the hail of bullets comes from impulsive kids as young as eleven years old.

In the past, when we did talk about kids killing kids, it was in an urban setting. Gangland battles between the Bloods and the Crips reminded us that life in the inner city was hard and ruthless. But the latest battlegrounds have not been Watts, the Bronx, or Cabrini-Green. These violent confrontations have taken place in rural, idyllic towns with names like Pearl, Mississippi and Paducah, Kentucky and Jonesboro, Arkansas and Littleton, Colorado.

We are shocked and surprised. We open our newspapers to see the faces of kids caught up in the occult and we wonder how they were attracted to such evil. We open those newspapers again and we see the faces of Opie and Beaver look-alikes charged with five counts of murder and we wonder if they even understood what they were doing.

The answers from pundits have been many. Young people are desensitized to violence, and they learn to kill by using point- and-shoot video games. Teenagers are rebellious, and they are looking for a way to defy authority. In the past, that was easier to accomplish by merely violating the dress code. Today, in a society that values tolerance, trying to come up with a behavior that is shocking is getting harder and harder to do. And the social and spiritual climate that our kids live in is hardly conducive to moral living.

Kids killing kids, I believe, is the best evidence yet of a culture in chaos that has turned its back on God's moral law. Do we really believe that children can see thousands of TV murders or play violent computer games and not be tempted to act out that violence in real life? Do we think we can lower societal standards and not have kids act out in very bizarre ways? Do we think we can pull God from the schools and prayer from the classroom and see no difference in the behavior of children? We shouldn't be surprised. Kids killing kids is evidence of a nation in moral free fall.

The Media and Video Games

I would like to begin with a look at the influence of the media and video games. In the past, we have talked about the impact of violent media on our society. We shouldn't be surprised that it is having an effect on our kids.

One of the people who knows this only so well is Lt. Col. Dave Grossman. He is a retired West Point psychology professor, Army Ranger, and an expert in the study of violence in war and killing. He is also an instructor at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, and was one of the first on the scene of the Jonesboro, Arkansas shootings. He has a lot to say.

He saw the devastation wrought by the shootings—not just the five dead and ten wounded. He saw what happens when violence intrudes into everyday life. And, where he's been, he sees where the violence comes from. He says, "Anywhere television appears, fifteen years later, the murder rate doubles." [\[1\]](#)

He says, "In the video games, in the movies, on the television, the one behavior that is consistently depicted in glamorous terms and consistently rewarded is killing." He believes that media violence was a significant factor in the killings in Pearl, Mississippi, in West Paducah, Kentucky, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in Springfield, Oregon, and in Littleton, Colorado.

He also says that the combination of a sense of inferiority and the exposure to violence can provoke violence in young boys who are "wannabes." Sometimes they see violence as a route to fame, and one has to wonder whether all the media exposure of these school shootings will spawn even more.

Consider the 1995 movie, *The Basketball Diaries*. In the film, Leonardo DiCaprio (also of *Titanic* fame) goes into a schoolroom and shoots numerous children and teachers. In doing so, he became a role model for young boys who are "wannabes."

The parents of three students killed in Paducah, Kentucky have brought a lawsuit against the company that distributed the film *The Basketball Diaries*. The parents' lawyer points out that Michael Carneal, who opened fire on a group of students in Kentucky, viewed the film and honed his shooting skills by playing computer games such as *Doom* and *Redneck Rampage*.

Dave Grossman goes into some detail in showing how violence in films, videos, and television can affect us. The parallels in his book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*[\[2\]](#) and what is happening in the media today are chilling. Two factors are desensitization and operant conditioning. Show soldiers (or children) enough visual images of violence and they will become desensitized to it. Practice shooting targets of people and conditioning will eventually take over. In some ways it doesn't matter whether it's soldiers doing target practice at a range or kids using point-and-shoot video games. The chilling result is the same: the creation of a killing machine.

But you don't need to read Grossman's book to see the parallels. Young people today are exposed to violent images that desensitize them and make it possible for some to act out these violent images in real life. And video games help them hone their shooting skills and overcome their hesitation to kill. Dave Grossman has seen it in war, and now he is seeing it in everyday life.

Violence and Teenage Rebellion

So many words have been spoken in the last few months about school shootings that it's often difficult to hear sound commentary in the midst of the cacophony. But one voice that deserves a hearing is Jonathan Cohen who wrote a commentary in the *New York Post* entitled "Defining Rebellion Up."[\[3\]](#)

Years ago Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a seminal piece in an academic journal entitled "Defining Deviancy

Down.”{4} It was his contention that in the midst of cultural chaos we tend to redefine what is normal. When the crime rate goes through the roof, we say that crime is inevitable in a free society. When the illegitimate birth rate quadruples, we say that maybe two parents in a home aren’t really necessary after all. In essence, what society has done is follow the pattern in Isaiah 5:20 of calling evil good and good evil.

Jonathan Cohen picks up on that theme and extends it to our current crisis. He says that when America became willing to define deviancy down, it simultaneously defined rebellion up. He says, “Anti-social teens are nothing new, but as deviancy has been made normal, we have made it increasingly difficult for teenagers to rebel.”

Adults are no longer offended or outraged by behavior that would have sent our parents through the roof. Unfortunately, we have learned the lessons of tolerance well. We tolerate just about everything from tattoos to black nail polish to metal pierced eyebrows.

Jonathan Cohen says, “We have raised the threshold of rebellion so high that it is practically beyond reach. To be recognized, to get attention, to stir anyone in authority to lift a finger, whether it is a parent, a teacher, a principal, or a sheriff, a rebel has to go to very great lengths these days. One must send letter bombs, blow up office buildings or gun down children.”

If a young person is trying to defy authority, it does take quite a bit to be recognized. Just a few decades ago, when dress codes were still in effect a student could be somewhat rebellious without getting into too much trouble or hurting other people. Today, it apparently takes quite a bit to run afoul of those in authority.

Jonathan Cohen asks, “And what of the teachers at Columbine High? It seemed they were not disturbed at all by the boys’

odd conduct. In fact, one instructor actually helped them make a video dramatizing their death-and-destruction fantasy. For all we know, he may well have commended himself for being so nonjudgmental.”

This surfaces an important issue. The highest value in our society today has become tolerance. We are not to judge others. When you put this trend of rising rebellion with increased tolerance together, you end up with a lethal mixture.

Jonathan Cohen concludes by wondering if all of this might have been different. He says, “If teachers had forbidden their students from coming to class wearing black trenchcoats, fingernail polish and makeup, Littleton likely would not be a name on everyone’s lips. If the principal had had the common sense to ban a group of boys from coming to school sporting Nazi regalia, marching through the corridors in military fashion and calling themselves the Trench Coat Mafia, Columbine High School might not be behind a police line.”

Tolerance

Tolerance has become the highest value in our society today, and I believe that it may explain why we miss the signals that something is wrong with our kids.

After the school shooting in Colorado, an editorial appeared in the *New York Post*.^{5} The editorial writers said, “The Littleton massacre could prove a turning point in American society—one of those moments when the entire culture changes course.” Who knows if that will be the case. Only time will tell. The editorial writers believe that one of the things that must change is our contemporary view of tolerance.

The editorial was entitled “Too Much Tolerance?” While other pundits focused on guns, video games, and other cultural phenomena, these editorial writers said the real cause was

“inattention.”

After all, the killers in Colorado were sending out signals of an impending calamity. It's just that no one was paying attention. For example, one Littleton parent went to the police twice about threats made on his son's life by Eric Harris. His pleas were to no avail. The cops didn't pay attention.

These kids in the Trench Coat Mafia gave each other Hitler salutes at a local bowling alley. But the community didn't pay attention.

These same kids marched down the hallways and got into fights with jocks and other kids after school. But the school didn't pay attention.

One kid's mother works with disabled kids, but seemed unaware that her own son had a fascination with Adolf Hitler and spent a year planning the destruction of the high school. Again parents didn't pay attention.

Throughout the article the editorial writers recount all the things these kids did. They conclude that while they “were doing everything they could to offend the community they lived in, the community chose to pay them no heed.”

Why? I believe that this tragic lack of attention is the sorry harvest of tolerance and diversity preached in the nation's classrooms every day. We are not to judge others. The only sin in society is the sin of judgmentalism. We cannot judge hairstyles or lifestyles, manners or morals. We may think another person's dress, actions, or lifestyles are a bit different, but we are told not to judge. Everything must be tolerated. And so we decide to ignore in the name of tolerance. In essence, inattention is the fruit of a message of tolerance and diversity.

In decades past, boundaries existed, school dress codes were

enforced, and certain behavior was not allowed. As the boundaries were dropped and the lines blurred, teachers and parents learned to cope by paying less attention.

The editorial writers therefore conclude (and please excuse the bluntness of their statement) that, "The only way Americans can live like this is to tune out, to ignore, to refuse to pay attention. In the name of broad-mindedness, Littleton allowed Harris and Klebold to fall through the cracks straight to Hell."

So why do we have kids killing kids? There are lots of reasons: the moral breakdown of society, video games, rebellion. But another reason is tolerance. We have been taught for decades not to judge, and this has given adults a license to be inattentive.

Spiritual Issues

I would like to conclude this essay by looking at some spiritual issues associated with so many of these school shootings.

Perhaps the best way to begin is to quote former Education Secretary Bill Bennett. He was on one of the talking-head shows discussing the tragedy in Littleton, Colorado. All of a sudden he turned directly to the television camera and said, "Hello?"

That was the attention-getter. But what he said afterward should also get our attention. He pointed out that these kids were walking the halls in trench coats, and apparently that didn't really get the attention of the teachers and administrators. But, he said, if a kid walked the halls with a Bible, that would probably get their attention. Something is very wrong with a society and a school system that would admonish a school kid for carrying a Bible and spreading the good news while ignoring a group of kids wearing trench coats

and spreading hate.

In her *Wall Street Journal* column^{6}, former presidential speech writer Peggy Noonan talked about “The Culture of Death” our children live in. She quoted headlines from news stories and frankly I can’t even repeat what she quoted. Our kids are up to their necks in really awful stuff, and it comes to them day after day on television, in the movies, and in the newspapers.

She then asked, Who counters this culture of death? Well, parents do and churches do. But they aren’t really given much of a place in our society today. In fact, Peggy Noonan told a story to illustrate her point.

She said, “A man called into Christian radio this morning and said a true thing. He said, and I am paraphrasing: Those kids were sick and sad, and if a teacher had talked to one of them and said, ‘Listen, there’s a way out, there really is love out there that will never stop loving you, there’s a real God and I want to be able to talk to you about him’—if that teacher had intervened that way, he would have been hauled into court.”

You know that man who called that radio station is right. A few years ago, a very famous case made its way through the Colorado courts. A high school teacher in Colorado was taken to court merely because he had a Bible on his desk. If you haven’t heard the story, I guess the conclusion wouldn’t surprise you. The teacher lost the case and lost it again on appeal.

As we’ve talked about the disturbing phenomenon of kids killing kids, we have discussed the breakdown of society, video games, rebellion, and tolerance. But we shouldn’t forget the spiritual dimension. We are reaping the harvest of a secular society.

Kids kill other kids and so we wonder why. We throw God out of

the classroom, we throw the Bible out of the classroom, we throw prayer out of the classroom, and we even throw the Ten Commandments out of the classroom.

Maybe we shouldn't wonder why any longer. Maybe we should be surprised the society isn't more barbaric given the fact that so many positive, spiritual influences have been thrown out. The ultimate solution to the problem of kids killing kids is for the nation to return to God.

Notes

1. Andrea Billups and Jerry Seper, "Experts Hit Permissiveness in Schools, Violence on TV," *The Washington Times*, 22 April, 1999.
2. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little, Brown, 1996).
3. Jonathan Cohen, "Defining Rebellion Up," *New York Post*, 27 April 1999.
4. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Defining Deviancy Down," *The American Spectator*, Winter 1993.
5. "Too Much Tolerance?" *New York Post*, 27 April 1999.
6. Peggy Noonan, "The Culture of Death," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 April 1999.

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Millennial Cautions

Over twenty years ago, as a new Christian, I found myself mesmerized by Christian speakers and books that predicted future social and political events with newspaper-like details. I relished sharing those details with less biblically informed friends. They were amazed and sometimes frightened by what I thought the Bible was predicting about tomorrow's events. But as the years have progressed, I now wonder if that was an appropriate way to introduce my friends to Christianity. Many of the predictions that I shared have not come true. Did I make the claims of Christ more believable by focusing on prophecy or did I place roadblocks in the path of some, actually making their understanding of the gospel more difficult?

People seem to have an innate desire to know the future. Perhaps it is part of our need to be in control, see what's coming, and have time to prepare for it. As Charles Kettering once wrote, "My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there." Some people's lives are changed forever by those who claim to know the future. Hitler claimed that he and his followers were establishing a reign that would last a thousand years. A few short years after first making those claims, his nation, and much of the world, lay in ruins as a result of his violent vision. Recent examples of the dangers of unbalanced fascination with prophecy include the odd Heaven's Gate cult, with their predictions of UFOs, death, and resurrection, and the Waco, Texas, sect led by David Koresh. Both groups, led by self-appointed "visionaries," influenced people in dramatically harmful ways.

On the other hand, a single person with vision can be a powerful force for positive change. William Wilberforce, after converting to evangelical Christianity in 1784, had a life-long desire to see an end to the international slave trade and

of slavery itself in England and its colonies. His tenacity and vision had the remarkable impact of rallying both the British people and the powerful British navy toward achieving his goals. Another example of the positive impact that one person with vision can have is seen in the life of Dr. Martin Luther King. His prophetic "I have a Dream" speech on the steps to the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 has had, and continues to have, a profound effect on many people in America and the world regarding racial prejudice. It seems clear that an individual with an exceptionally strong vision for the future can have a great impact on it.

Sharing the truth of Christ's return can no doubt have a positive impact on people. Our Lord's return is a reality that all Christians claim as part of the hope mentioned in 1 Peter 3:15. Unfortunately, I have encountered Christians who spend too much time trying to determine when Christ will return. In fact, some prophecy experts have fallen into the trap of the early heretic Montanus who claimed prophetic powers and claimed to know the time of our Lord's return even though Jesus himself said that no one knows when He will return but the Father (Matt. 24:36).[\(1\)](#)

As we approach the year 2000, prophets and prophecies are expected to multiply in both the secular world and the Church. In this discussion, I will look at examples of prophecy experts who claimed to know more than they could deliver. My purpose is not to endorse one end-times system over another. However, my hope is that Christians will be discouraged from claiming knowledge they do not possess and encouraged to keep their focus on the gospel message rather than on highly questionable prophetic schemes.

Christ's Return and the Church

A quick scan of the Internet reveals the popularity of prophetic claims. Along with sites on biblical prophecy, there are pages detailing the predictions of Edgar Cayce, the famous

“sleeping prophet,” and the fairly well-known Nostradamus. But there are many lesser-known prophetic sources as well, like one site called *Millennium Matters*. It has 583 pages of information on something called the “Deoxyribonucleic Hyperdimension,” which predicts the awakening of a planetary entity on the earth in the near future. We might make fun of these prophecies, but imagine how Christians appear to others when we make false predictions about the return of Christ.

Attempting to predict the future is condemned in both the Old and New Testaments (Deut. 18; Acts 16) with warnings against divination and interpreting omens. Yet history has recorded the tendency of Christians to predict Christ’s coming in every generation. Tertullian, a follower of Montanus in the second century, supported the idea of a near return when he wrote, “What terrible wars, both foreign and domestic! What pestilences, famines . . . and quakings of the earth has history recorded!”[\(2\)](#) He felt that these evidences alone were enough to indicate Christ’s return. Novation in the third century and Donatus in the fourth, were both branded as heretics, but gathered a large number of followers by proclaiming the immanent return of Christ. Later, in the sixth century, Pope Gregory was sure that the end of the world was near. He wrote,

Of all the signs described by our Lord as presaging the end of the world, some we see already accomplished... For we now see that nation arises against nation and that they press and weigh upon the land in our own times as never before in the annals of the past. Earthquakes overwhelm countless cities, as we often hear from other parts of the world. Pestilence we endure without interruption. It is true that we do not behold signs in the sun and moon and stars but that these are not far off we may infer from the changes of the atmosphere.[\(4\)](#)

Pope Gregory’s words sound quite contemporary, and remarkably similar to some current thinking on prophecy.

What I am warning against is not the preaching of Christ's return. Virtually all Christians believe that He will return physically and that a final judgment will follow. How then, do we respond to this truth? Christ uses the parables of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) and the talents (Matt. 25:14-30) to teach His followers to be constantly ready for His return. We are to be ambassadors for Christ and the Kingdom of God, sharing the message of reconciliation that is found only in Him (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

One potentially damaging aspect of some prophecy teaching is the tendency to look for and find conspiracies that foretell Christ's return. Whether it be a renewed Roman Empire or a one-world government, Christians seem to relish a world of secret connections and commitments. We already know that the world system is hostile to the gospel, Jesus told us as much and warned of persecution. When we tend to see people through the lens of grand conspiracies, the natural response is to fight the conspiracy rather than share the gospel with the individual. The New Testament calls us to build God's Kingdom one heart at a time. We accomplish this not with legal or political power, but by sharing the good news revealed by God in a culturally relevant way.

The First Millennium

Predictions for the end of the world were prolific at the close of the first millennium after Christ. Now we will look at some of these predictions and consider their impact on the Church.

In A.D. 950 Adso of Montier-en-Der wrote a "Treatise on the Antichrist" which was a response to a number of mid-century crises that had provoked widespread alarm and fear of an end-time apocalypse. [\(5\)](#) Five years later, Abbo of Fleury heard a preacher in Paris who announced that the Antichrist would be unleashed in the year 1000 and that the Last Judgment would soon follow. [\(6\)](#) At about the same time a panic occurred in the

German army of Emperor Otto I because of a solar eclipse that the soldiers mistook as a sign of the end of the world.[\(7\)](#) And when the last Carolingian dynasty fell with the death of King Louis V in 987, many saw this event as a precursor to the arrival of the Antichrist. King Otto II of Germany had Charlemagne's body exhumed on Pentecost in the year 1000 supposedly in order to forestall the apocalypse. Both Halley's comet in A.D. 989 and a super nova in A.D. 1006 were interpreted as signs of the end. About the same time, the Moslem caliph, Al Hakim, destroyed the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem prompting apocalyptic fear in the west as well as violent anti-Jewish outbursts.[\(8\)](#)

The Calabrian monk, Joachim of Fiore (ca. A.D. 1135 1202) stands out as a key figure in medieval apocalypticism. On Easter Sunday in 1183 he was inspired to write his massive Exposition on Revelation. Later near the end of his life, he summarized his prophetic knowledge in the Book of Figures. His writings influenced a wide range of medieval events. The Franciscan order was founded on the basis that they would be the spiritual elite described in Joachim's "Age of the Spirit," a future time when God would send revelation directly to believers. Using Joachim's hints, writers concluded that the "Age of Grace" would end and the "Age of the Spirit" would begin in A.D. 1260. This prophecy, mixed with German social unrest, created a myth surrounding Frederick II. Having ruled from 1220 to 1250, many believed that Frederick was the "Emperor of the Last Days" who would usher in the new Millennium.[\(9\)](#) The myth gained force when Frederick seized Jerusalem in 1229. When he died in 1250, a new myth started that Frederick would return from the dead. Two pseudo-Fredericks were burned at the stake by his successor to the throne. The Book of a Hundred Chapters stated that the returned Frederick would lead a fight against corruption in the state and the church, and that he will instruct his followers to "Go on hitting them" (referring to the Pope and his students) and to "Kill every one of them!"[\(10\)](#)

The Taborites, founded in A.D. 1415, also looked back to Joachim for their prophetic beliefs. They believed that once their persecutors were defeated, Christ would return and rule the world from Mount Tabor, a mountain they had renamed south of Prague. Their communal activities eventually turned bloody, prompted by tracts with lines like, "Accursed be the man who withholds his sword from shedding the blood of the enemies of Christ." [\(11\)](#) After a crushing defeat at the hands of the German army, the group quickly disbanded.

Although all of these prophecies were misguided, it would be a mistake to doubt the sincerity of the individuals. However, the events surrounding the end of the first millennium should temper our desire to make predictions about the coming new millennium. Next, we will look at more recent predictions that have been just as wrong.

Recent Predictions

People want to know the future and are eager to follow those who claim to predict it. When a Jehovah's Witness knocks on your door, prophecy is used as a hook to gain entrance. A recent best-selling book *The Bible Code* claims to have uncovered a hidden code in the Old Testament that predicts many modern-day events as well as a nuclear holocaust in the year 2000 or 2006. Many New Age books are sold on the claim that channelers have access to future events when connected to those on another spiritual plane. Because of the emotional power of prophecy, the temptation for Christians to make dramatic claims about future events is great. Discernment and care must be used so that the integrity of the gospel message is not compromised. There is no doubt that Scripture teaches a Second Coming of Christ and that a final judgment will follow. However, there is considerable disagreement among Bible-believing Christians regarding the signs that foretell these events and our ability to predict when Christ will return.

One of the favorite past-times of date setters is to attempt

to identify the Antichrist, a powerful figure who will appear immediately prior to Christ's return. This guessing game has a long tradition, going back to the time right after Jesus' death. The early church fathers Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Cyprian, and Augustine all believed that this person would be present immediately prior to Christ's return. During the Middle Ages, some churchmen identified the Antichrist as a Moslem, such as Saladin, but others pointed to a Jew, and some even pointed to the Pope. During the American Revolution it was popular to cast King George III in the role of Antichrist, but the Earl of Bute and British general John Burgoyne also got nominations.

Other familiar names to be included in this long list of suspected Antichrists are Napoleon, the British Parliament, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, and Joseph Stalin. Since World War II, the Pope still makes the list as does Jewish leader Moshe Dayan, the assassinated Egyptian leader Anwar el-Sadat, Spain's King Juan Carlos, and Korean cult leader Sun Myung Moon. For some, Mikhail Gorbachev and Saddam Hussein are naturals for the job.

The mark of the Beast, the number 666, has been used in very creative ways to support many different Antichrist theories. Although many conservative theologians have seen the number 666 from Revelation 13 as symbolic of all that is evil and a blasphemous parody of the perfection that the Bible attributes to the number 7, others attempt to use the number to identify an individual. [\(12\)](#) The advent of the computer has caused some to see it as the Beast. One writer noted that if the letter "A"=6 and "B"=12 and "C"=18, and so on, the word computer adds up to 666. The same writer also observed that the words "New York" added up to 666. [\(13\)](#) Some pointed to John Kennedy because he had received 666 votes for the vice-presidency in 1956. [\(14\)](#) Others pointed to Henry Kissinger because his name in Hebrew added up to 111 or 666 divided by 6. [\(15\)](#) Even Ronald Reagan was considered because his first, middle, and last

names all had six letters.[\(16\)](#)

The striking number of attempts to identify the Antichrist and the significance of the number 666 should at least give us a sense of humility before adding another name to the list. Perhaps we should follow the example of Irenaus in the second century. Seeing the many efforts to identify the Antichrist in his day, he cautioned against the practice and believed that the name was deliberately concealed until it would be obvious in the day of the Antichrist's arrival.

The U.S. in Prophecy

As the year 2000 gets closer, prophets and their prophecies will explode in number. A popular topic for prophecy experts is the future of the United States. Although prophecy expert John Walvoord has written, "No specific mention of the United States or any other country in North America or South America can be found in the Bible,"[\(17\)](#) this has not, and probably will not, stop others from seeing detailed references to the U.S. and its future in Scripture.

The depiction of the United States in end-times scenarios has varied over the years. There is a long tradition of seeing the U.S. as the New Israel. Near the end of his life, Christopher Columbus wrote, "God made me the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth of which He spoke in the Apocalypse of St. John . . . and he showed me the spot where to find it."[\(18\)](#) In 1653 the New England historian Edward Johnson wrote that the U.S. "is the place where the Lord will create a new heaven and a new earth," a theme that Jonathan Edwards picked up nearly a hundred years later.[\(19\)](#)

This notion that the colonies held a special place in God's redemption plan continued to spread as the colonies grew. By the time of the War for Independence, this conception changed from a primarily religious or spiritual role to a civic one as well. In 1808 Elias Smith, a New England evangelist, argued

that the Great Awakening in America, as well as the American and French revolutions, had set the foundation for the end-time age described in the Bible. [\(20\)](#) In his book *White Jacket* in 1850, Herman Melville writes, "We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people—the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world. . . God has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls." [\(20\)](#)

This ardent belief in America's millennial role reached its peak during the Civil War. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and Lincoln's "Second Inaugural Address" all contained allusions to Scripture and apocalyptic themes. Although this trend did not disappear, the twentieth century found Christian thinkers beginning to see the U.S. in another light. In 1937 Arno Gaebelein wrote that the U.S. had been overrun by the powers of darkness [\(21\)](#) and in 1949 Wilbur Smith saw American society described in the list of end time evils of 2 Timothy. [\(22\)](#) More and more, America was being identified with Babylon rather than with the New Israel.

Since the 1960s, prophecy writers have pointed out America's long list of moral failures as evidence that God will soon focus His wrath on us. Many of them hold that the increase in abortion, homosexuality, godless education, divorce, crime, and pornography in our nation will soon seal our fate and lead to our downfall as a nation.

This may be the case, but the many different interpretations of America's future role in God's end-times plan should cause a great deal of humility and prudence concerning our own ability to know what God has in mind for this nation. Once one goes beyond the general principal that God blesses those who conform to His moral guidelines, we are on shaky ground. Perhaps we would be far better off seeking a pure heart rather than trying to discern what role America will play in the millennium or who the Antichrist might be. Jesus is coming

again. Worrying about the details or the exact time of His return is pointless if it does not turn us toward a holy life. As Jesus said, "Which of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matt. 6:27).

Notes

1. Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press, Harvard University, 1992), p. 46.
2. Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), p. 7.
3. Ibid., p. 11.
4. Ibid., p. 7.
5. <http://www.mille.org/1000-dos.htm>, p.1.
6. Ibid., p. 2.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 6.
9. *When Time Shall Be No More*, p. 53.
10. Ibid., p. 54.
11. Ibid., p. 55.
12. Alan F. Johnson, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1981), p. 535.
13. *When Time Shall Be No More*, p. 283.
14. Ibid., p. 275.
15. Ibid., p. 276.
16. Ibid.
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18. Ibid., p. 225.
19. Ibid., p. 226.
20. Ibid., p. 227.
21. Ibid., p. 228.
22. Ibid., p. 231.

The Games We Play

Game-playing and competition can and should be seen as a healthy part of a life that seeks to glorify God in all things.

Games and a Christian Worldview

Ten seconds are left in the game. The Wolves lead by two points. The Bobcats cross midcourt, knowing they must score or they will miss the playoffs. Smith stumbles! Jones grabs the ball and races toward the Wolves' basket for a lay-up. Smith tackles him like a linebacker! Both of them slide across the floor and run into the wall behind the basket. It looks as if Jones may be injured! Players from both teams are shouting at each other. The referee has thrown Smith out of the game!

Does this sound like something you may have seen during a high school, college, or professional basketball game? Or perhaps you have read about a similar incident. Actually, such an event took place in my experience. (The names have been changed to protect the guilty.) I was playing for my church team in a church league. I was the one who was tackled.

Does such an incident represent a Christian worldview of games? Surely most of us would answer with an emphatic, "No!" Unfortunately, though, too many Christians approach games with attitudes that appear to leave their Christian convictions out of the picture. Too many of us can tell stories involving Christians and games that don't align with a Christian worldview. Many times I was the one who allowed athletic intensity to overcome moral conviction in the midst of competition, and I have seen many friends do the same. Why? What is it about games that can encourage some of our more

ungodly characteristics?

On the other hand, can sports bring out some of our more godly characteristics? Can God be glorified through games? There have been times in my life when the exhilaration and concentration that can accompany games have included thankfulness to God. He gives me joy when I express my thankfulness to Him as I hit or throw a baseball, catch a football, shoot a basketball, volley a tennis ball, or hit a golf ball.

Arthur Holmes has written that “play is all-pervasive. It does not lie just on the fringes of life, as if games were spare parts we don’t really need in the main business of the day.”[\(1\)](#) If true, such a statement indicates the importance of our subject. It is worthy of our attention. Some even believe play is the defining characteristic of humans. “Nietzsche went so far as to reduce all of life and thought to masks in a play, taking nothing seriously except the will to power—in effect, the will to win—that all of life is a biologically driven power play.”[\(2\)](#) A Christian, of course, does not agree with this perspective, but the Christian does live in a world that tends to agree with Nietzsche’s dictum. The “will to power” definitely is translated into “the will to win” for many. Indeed, the phrase is often elaborated to mean “the will to win at all costs.” Vince Lombardi, the coach of the Green Bay Packers during their period of NFL domination, is famous for the statement: “Winning isn’t the main thing, it’s the only thing.” But, can the Christian play, win or lose, and not agree that winning is the only thing? If the answer is, “Yes!,” the believer must realize that he has accepted a challenge to be Christ’s ambassador even on the field of play.

A Brief History of Games

“That was an Olympian effort!” “Those mountains have an Olympic grandeur.” Such expressions indicate some of the ways in which ancient games and their impact are part of our

consciousness. Games were part of all ancient cultures. For some, games were more sedentary than for others, but a sense of play permeates man's history. The Greeks, who first held the Olympic Games and others that were similar, organized these events approximately 3,500 years ago. All of them were dedicated to certain gods and were integrated with religious ceremonies. The competitors were originally amateurs whose only reward was a wreath or garland. Eventually, though, the rigorous training that was required led to their professional status. They received adulation in their cities, as well as substantial prizes and monetary rewards.(3) As we will see, the New Testament contains metaphors relating to these games and competitors.

When the Romans became the dominant world power, they rejected the Greek emphasis on athletic skill because of the public nakedness of the competitors.(4) Such a response is ironic in light of the brutal games that soon came into vogue in the empire. Gladiatorial combat to the death, fights with beasts, even naval battles were staged in the arenas. The circus Maximus in Rome, where important chariot races were held, probably held up to 250,000 people. "By A.D. 354 the games claimed 175 days out of the year."(5) Such popularity is indicative of a significant difference between the Greek and Roman attitudes about games. "The Greeks originally organized their games for the competitors, the Romans for the public. One was primarily competition, the other entertainment."(6) The Roman thirst for barbaric spectacle and entertainment ultimately prompted the outrage of early church leaders. They "denounced the games and similar amusements because of idolatry, immodesty, and brutality. It was, in fact, the opposition of Christianity that brought them to an end."(7) Such a response may prove to be appropriate in our time. But for the moment I propose we simply consider what Scripture contains to guide us in an appraisal of the games played by both Christians and non-Christians.

The Old Testament contains few references to games, even though evidence of them can be found in all areas of the ancient Near East. "Simple and natural amusements and exercises, and trials of wit and wisdom, were more to the Hebrew taste."[\(8\)](#) The biblical text does mention children's games, sports such as running, archery, stone-lifting, high leaping, games of chance and skill, story-telling, dancing, the telling of proverbs, and riddles. In addition, wrestling probably was part of Hebrew life.[\(10\)](#)

It is of special interest to note the joyous prophetic picture of Zechariah 8:5: "And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets" (NASB). "The promise of the kingdom, as Lewis Smedes observes, is of restored playfulness." Evidently play and games have a place in God's plan for His people:

Scripture begins with life in a garden and ends with a city at play; so play—art and celebration and fun and games, and a playful spirit—is part of our calling, part of the creation mandate. It is not the play of self-indulgence, nor of shed responsibility, but of gladness and celebration in responsible relationship to God."[\(11\)](#)

Games and the New Testament

Can you picture the Apostle Paul as a sportswriter? Imagine him sitting in a stadium pressbox observing the athletes compete. Then imagine him writing his observations and opinions of what transpired. The next morning you purchase a newspaper and turn to the sports section. There you find an account of the previous day's game under Paul's byline. Does this sound farfetched, out of character, ludicrous? Actually such a scenario is not far removed from Paul's knowledge of the games of his day. In several portions of his letters, one can find metaphors relating to athletic preparation and competition. The same is true for the writer of Hebrews. These

New Testament writers evidently were aware of Greek and Roman games and realized they could be used to teach valuable lessons to their readers. Their awareness is evidence that they were enmeshed in the surrounding culture, which was filled with indicators of the importance of games and competition in the ancient world.

These games “were so well known in Palestine and throughout the Roman Empire in the time of Christ and the apostles that they cannot be passed over in silence.” [\(13\)](#) Archaeological remains indicate stadiums of various types in many cities including Jerusalem, Jericho, Caesarea, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, and Tarsus, the city of Paul’s early life. “The early Christians, therefore, whether of Jewish or gentile origin, were able to understand, and the latter at any rate to appreciate, references either to the games in general, or to details of their celebration.” [\(14\)](#) A brief survey of particular New Testament passages will provide us with a foundation for an analysis of games in contemporary life.

Some of the most intriguing athletic metaphors in all of Paul’s writings are found in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. He uses Greek terminology and images that stem directly from the athletic contests of his day, especially the triennial Isthmian Games held in Corinth. These terms and images include running a race to win, receiving a prize, competition, discipline in preparation for competition, concentration, abiding by the rules, and even boxing. Variations on these themes can be found in Galatians 2:2 and 5:7; Philippians 2:16 and 3:14; 2 Timothy 2:5 and 4:7. In Hebrews 12:1 the author of Hebrews echoes Paul’s metaphors by encouraging Christians to “run with endurance the race that is set before us.” In verse 2 he even refers to Jesus as the one who set the pace and has already covered the course.

These passages are worthy of many sermons and extensive commentary. Since that is not possible in this short essay, let’s consider a few insights from these biblical metaphors

that are most germane to our subject.

First, there is no blanket condemnation of games. The metaphors carry the positive weight of someone who respected athletic endeavors. Second, there is much to learn about the Christian life when we compare it with games. Games can be seen and experienced in ways that correlate with Christian principles such as discipline, concentration, and perseverance. Third, these passages should not be gleaned in an uncritical manner. Surely Paul rejected many aspects of the games, such as the pagan religious emphases. Fourth, the physical body was not rejected as unimportant. Gnosticism, which was a prominent heresy of New Testament times, taught that the body was unimportant or even sinful. In contrast, these verses take the importance of the body for granted. It is God's creation.

Contemporary Views of Games

The Super Bowl. The Final Four. College Bowl Games. The Olympics. The NBA Finals. The World Series. Little League Baseball. The Masters. The World Cup. The list of such sports-related titles could fill several pages of this essay because our culture is saturated with games. This infatuation takes a great deal of our time, attention, and money. An objective observer, in my opinion, would conclude that humans are obsessed with games. Current predictions and opinions of this infatuation vary from the skeptical to the optimistic. Alvin Toffler, writing in 1970, predicted that, "Leisure-time pursuits will become an increasingly important basis for differences between people, as the society shifts from a work orientation toward greater involvement in leisure. We shall advance into an era of breathtaking fun specialism." [\(15\)](#) Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the great basketball player of the recent past, stated, "Modern sports is getting to be like professional wrestling; something is going awry." [\(16\)](#) According to Robert Higgs, author of *God in the Stadium*,

“Professional sports is getting warped, and they carry a somber message to society in our contemporary times.” (17) He continued along this theme by suggesting that “the idea of play and fun and enjoyment of the natural gifts of games is being warped by this incredible drive for money.” (18) In comparing the games with a prize, such as the Super Bowl, Higgs concluded: “The more emphasis you put on the cultural prize, the bigger you make those prizes, the less regard and appreciation of the gift of the game itself, it seems to me.” (19)

Do any of these opinions concur with your estimation of games? Are you one of the skeptics? If so, that probably is a sign that you have at least begun to ask if games are occupying the proper place in your life, your family’s life, and the life of the culture at large. Before we become too cynical, though, let’s consider more optimistic analyses.

In his book, *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch draws a fascinating parallel between sports and our need for traditions and order. He believes that an intelligent sports spectator is one of the keys to a retention of the positive nature of games. He writes: “One of the virtues of contemporary sports lies in their resistance to the erosion of standards and their capacity to appeal to a knowledgeable audience.” (20) Michael Novak, who has written a thought-provoking book entitled *The Joy of Sports*, juxtaposes European and American traditions around the place of sports in America’s history. He believes that the “streets of America, unlike the streets of Europe, do not involve us in stories and anecdotes rich with a thousand years of human struggle. Sports are our chief civilizing agent. Sports are our most universal art form. Sports tutor us in the basic lived experiences of the humanist tradition.” (21) Novak continues his praise with a statement that echoes the Apostle Paul: “Play provides the fundamental metaphors and the paradigmatic experiences for understanding the other elements of life.” (22) Is there a

“happy medium” between the skeptical and optimistic views of games? Or should we bring the two views together in order to find a wise perspective? Perhaps a coupling of the two views provides creative positive tension that enables us to better evaluate the place of games in the Christian life.

Christians in a Competitive World

“I believe that God made me for a purpose. For China. But He also made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure. To give it up would be to hold Him in contempt. . . . To win is to honor Him.” [\(23\)](#)

These poignant phrases are from *Chariots of Fire*, one of the truly great films. They were spoken by the actor who portrayed Eric Liddell, a great athlete and a great Christian. He is talking with his sister, who is pleading with him to fulfill his commitment to their mission in China. He was to fulfill that commitment, but first he considered it his duty to run in the 1924 Paris Olympics for the glory of God. When I first saw the film I wept with joy and gratitude because of the film’s portrayal of a man who understood and appreciated God’s gift to him. In my estimation the film, and this scene in particular, contains a clear and eloquent statement of a Christian worldview as it applies to games, play, sports, or athletics. With Eric Liddell’s words in mind, we will offer principles that can help us establish a foundation for a Christian’s involvement in games. First, “play is best seen as an attitude, a state of mind rather than as a distinguishable set of activities.” [\(24\)](#) One doesn’t have to be involved in play to play; work can include an attitude of play as well.

Second, “play is not the key to being human, but being human is the key to play.” [\(25\)](#) And being human includes a free spirit that is “celebrative and imaginative because of the possibilities God has for us in this world.” [\(26\)](#)

Third, play should instill “an attitude that carries over into all of life, finding joyful expression in whatever we do, productive or not.” [\(27\)](#)

Fourth, play should be seen as an act of worship. “It is the religious meaning of life that gives purpose and meaning to both work and play. A responsible relationship to God includes play.” [\(28\)](#)

Some of you may be saying, “OK, I can think on these things in solitude or in group discussion, but what about principles that will help me when I’m actually involved in games? How should I play?” Application on the field is a challenge for many of us. Even Albert Camus, the existentialist writer, said that sports provided him with his “only lessons in ethics.” [\(29\)](#) Thomas Aquinas “expressed three cautions that we would do well to observe nowadays. First, do not take pleasure in indecent or injurious play.” Think of a sold-out football stadium of people screaming their approval as an opponent lies immobile on the field. Such a reaction surely does not align with a Christian attitude toward games. “Second, do not lose your mental or emotional balance and self-control.” This may be one of the most challenging cautions. When we lose self-control during games, we are damaging what we say outside of games about our relationship with Christ. “Third, do not play in ways ill-fitting either the hour or the person.” [\(30\)](#) When we play and how we honor God in the process speak loudly about the place of games in our lives. So when we hear “Play ball!” or “Let the games begin!” or “Take your mark!,” let us remember, whether as participants or spectators, that God can honor our games, but He requires a playful attitude that honors Him.

Notes

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4. Ibid.
5. *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Games."
6. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
7. *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopaedia*.
8. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, s.v. "Games."
9. Ibid.
10. *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Games."
11. Lewis Smedes, quoted in Holmes, *Contours of a worldview*, 230.
12. Ibid., 231.
13. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*.
14. Ibid.
15. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam, 1970), 289.
16. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, quoted by Robert Higgs, on *Mars Hill Tapes*: May/June 1996, vol. 21, Ken Myers, ed. (Charlottesville, Va.: Mars Hill Tapes, 1996).
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Warner, 1979), 190.

21. Michael Novak, *The Joy of Sports* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 27.
22. Ibid., 34.
23. David Puttnam, producer, *Chariots of Fire* (Burbank, Calif.: Warner Home Video, 1991).
24. Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a World View*, 224.
25. Ibid., 228.
26. Ibid., 231.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 228.
29. Albert Camus, quoted in Michael Novak, *The Joy of Sports*, 172.
30. Thomas Aquinas, quoted in Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a World View*, 231.

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Ten Lies of Feminism: A Christian Perspective

Sue Bohlin examines how this prevalent view of women measures up from a biblical perspective.

This essay examines the ten lies of feminism that Dr. Toni Grant suggests in her book *Being a Woman*.[\[1\]](#)

At its inception, the feminist movement, accompanied by the

sexual revolution, made a series of enticing, exciting promises to women. These promises sounded good, so good that many women deserted their men and their children or rejected the entire notion of marriage and family, in pursuit of “themselves” and a career. These pursuits, which emphasized self-sufficiency and individualism, were supposed to enhance a woman’s quality of life and improve her options, as well as her relations with men. Now, a decade or so later, women have had to face the fact that, in many ways, feminism and liberation made promises that could not be delivered. {2}

Lie #1: Women Can Have It All

The first lie is that women can have it all. We were fed an illusion that women, being the superior sex, have an inexhaustible supply of physical and emotional energy that enable us to juggle a career, family, friendships and volunteer service. Proponents of feminism declared that not only *can* women do what men do, but we *ought* to do what men do. Since men can’t do what women can do—have babies—this put a double burden on women. It wasn’t enough that women were already exhausted from the never-ending tasks of child-rearing and homemaking; we were told that women needed to be in the work force as well, contributing to the family financially.

Scripture presents a different picture for men and women. The Bible appears to make a distinction between each gender’s primary energies. The commands to women are generally in the realm of our relationships, which is consistent with the way God made women to be primarily relational, being naturally sensitive to others and usually valuing people above things. Scripture never forbids women to be gainfully employed; in fact, the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is engaged in several part-time business ventures, in real estate and manufacturing. Nonetheless, it is the excellent care of her husband, her children, her home and her community that inspires the praise she is due. Titus 2 instructs older women to mentor younger

women, and teach them to care for their husbands and children and homemaking responsibilities. The God-given strengths of a woman were given to bring glory to God through her womanly differences

Lie #2: Men and Women are Fundamentally the Same

Apart from some minor biological differences, feminism strongly suggested that males and females are fundamentally the same. Culture, it announced, was responsible for turning human blank slates into truck-wielding boys and doll-toting girls. This lie has been very effective at changing the culture. My husband Ray and I offer a seminar at Probe's *Mind Games* conferences called "Guys Are From Mars, Girls Are From Venus," where we go over the major differences between the sexes. Men, for instance, tend to be more goal-oriented and competitive, where women are more relational and cooperative. Men are active; women are verbal. This is intuitively obvious to the adults in our audience, but it is often new news to high school and college students. We find adults nodding with smiles of recognition, some of them nudging each other in the ribs. In the younger members of the audience, though, we see "the lights come on" in their eyes as they are exposed to something that is obvious and they probably already knew was true, but feminism's worldview had been feeding them a lie. They have been so immersed in this cultural myth that they had accepted it without question. One young man came up to me after a session and said he totally disagreed with me, that there are no real differences between males and females. I asked him if he treated his guy friends the same way he treated his girl friends, and he said, "Of course!" I asked, "And this doesn't cause you any problems?" He said no. With a smile, I suggested he come talk to me in ten years after he'd had a chance to experience real life!

The truth is that God created significant differences between

males and females. We can see evidence of this in the fact that Scripture gives different commands for husbands and wives, which are rooted in the differing needs and divinely-appointed roles of men and women.

Lie #3: Desirability is Enhanced by Achievement

The third lie of feminism is that the more a woman achieves, the more attractive and desirable she becomes to men. The importance of achievement to a man's sense of self—an element of masculinity that is, we believe, God-given—was projected onto women. Feminism declared that achieving something, making a mark in the world, was the only measure of success that merited the respect of others. Women who believed this myth found themselves competing with men. Now, competition is appropriate in the business and professional world, but it's disastrous in relationships.

Men do respect and admire accomplished women, just as they do men, but personal relationships operate under a different set of standards. Men most appreciate a woman's unique feminine attributes: love, sensitivity, her abilities to relate. Women have been shocked to discover that their hard-won accomplishments haven't resulted in great relationships with men. Sometimes, being overeducated hampers a woman's ability to relate to men. Men's egos are notoriously fragile, and they are by nature competitive. It's threatening to many men when a woman achieves more, or accomplishes more, or knows more than they do. Feminism didn't warn women of the double standard in relationships: that achievement can and does reap benefits in our careers, but be a stumbling block in our relationships.

The question naturally arises, then, Is it bad for a woman to have a higher degree of education than the man in a relationship? Is it troublesome when a woman is smarter than the man? Should a woman "dumb down" in order to get or keep

her man? In the words of the apostle Paul, “May it never be!” A woman living up to the potential of her God-given gifts brings glory to God; it would be an insult to our gracious God to pretend those gifts aren’t there. The answer is for women to understand that many men feel threatened and insecure about this area of potential competition, and maintain an attitude of humility and sensitivity about one’s strengths; as Romans exhorts us, “Honor[ing] one another above yourselves” (12:10).

Not surprisingly, God already knew about the disparity between the sexes on the issue of achievement. Throughout the Bible, men are called to trust God as they achieve whatever God has called them to do. It’s important for men to experience personal significance by making a mark on the world. But God calls women to trust Him in a different area: in our relationships. A woman’s value is usually not in providing history-changing leadership and making great, bold moves, but in loving and supporting those around us, changing the world by touching hearts. Once in a while, a woman does make her mark on a national or global scale: consider the biblical judge Deborah, Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, and Indira Gandhi. But women like these are the exception, not the rule. And we don’t have to feel guilty for not being “exceptional.”

Lie #4: The Myth of One’s “Unrealized Potential”

Lie number four says that all of us—but especially women—have tremendous potential that simply *must* be realized. To feminism’s way of thinking, just being average isn’t acceptable: you must be *great*.

This causes two problems. First, women are deceived into thinking they are one of the elite, the few, the special. Reality, though, is that most women are ordinary, one of the many. All of us are uniquely gifted by God, but few women are given visible, high-profile leadership roles, which tend to

be the only ones that feminism deems valuable. We run into trouble when we're operating under a set of beliefs that don't coincide with reality!

Consequently, many women are operating under unrealistically high expectations of themselves. When life doesn't deliver on their hopes, whether they be making class valedictorian, beauty pageant winner, company president, or neurosurgeon, women are set up for major disappointment. Just being a cog in the wheel of your own small world isn't enough.

This brings us to the second problem. A lot of women beat themselves up for not accomplishing greatness. Instead of investing their life's energies in doing well those things they *can* do, they grieve what and who they are *not*. Just being good, or being good at what they do, isn't enough if they're not the *best*.

Romans 12:3 tells us, "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought." Rather than worrying about our unrealized potential for some sort of nebulous greatness, we ought to be concerned about being faithful and obedient in the things God has given us to do, trusting Him for the ultimate results. And we ought to not worry about being ordinary as if there were some stigma to it. Scripture says that God is pleased to use ordinary people, because that's how He gets the most glory. (See 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.) There is honor in being an ordinary person in the hand of an extraordinary God.

Lie #5: Sexual Sameness

The fifth lie of feminism is that men and women are the same sexually. This lie comes to us courtesy of the same evil source that brought us the lies of the sexual revolution.

The truth is that women can't separate sex from love as easily as men can. For women, sex needs to be an expression of love and commitment. Without these qualities, sex is demeaning,

nothing more than hormones going crazy.

The cost of sex is far greater for women than for men. Sex outside of a committed, loving relationship—I'm talking about marriage here—often results in unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and profound heartbreak. Every time a woman gives her body away to a man, she gives a part of her heart as well. Sexual “freedom” has brought new degrees of heartache to millions of women. The lie of sexual equality has produced widespread promiscuity and epidemic disease. No wonder so many women are struggling with self-esteem!

God's commands concerning sex take into account the fact that men and women are not the same sexually or any other way. He tells us to exercise self-control before marriage, saving all sexual expression for the constraints of a marriage relationship, and then to keep the marriage bed pure once we are married. When we follow these guidelines, we discover that God's laws provide protection for women: the security of a committed relationship, freedom from sexual health worries, and a stable environment for any children produced in the union. This high standard also protects men by providing a safe channel for their sexual energies. Both chaste single men, and faithful husbands, are kept safe from sexual diseases, unwanted pregnancies with women other than their wives, and the guilt of sexual sin.

Lie #6: The Denial of Maternity

Many women postponed marriage and childbearing to pursue their own personal development and career goals. This perspective denies the reality of a woman's reproductive system and the limitations of time. Childbearing is easier in a woman's 20s and 30s than in her 40s. Plus, there is a physical cost; science has borne out the liabilities that older women incur for themselves and their babies. Midlife women are more prone to have problems getting pregnant, staying pregnant, and then experiencing difficult deliveries. The risk of conceiving a

child with Down's Syndrome is considerably higher in older mothers.^{3} Fertility treatment doesn't work as well for women over 40.^{4}

There is also a spiritual dimension to denying maternity. When women refuse their God-ordained roles and responsibilities, they open themselves to spiritual deception and temptations. 1 Timothy 2:15 is an intriguing verse: "But women will be saved through childbearing." One compelling translation for this verse is, "Women will be *kept safe* through childbearing," where Paul uses the word for *childbearing* as a sort of shorthand for the woman's involvement in the domestic sphere—having her "focus on the family," so to speak.⁽⁵⁾ When a married woman's priorities are marriage, family and the home, she is kept safe—protected—from the consequences of delaying motherhood and the temptations that beleaguer a woman trying to fill a man's role. For example, I know one married woman who chose to pursue a full-time career in commercial real estate, to the detriment of her family. She confessed that she found herself constantly battling the temptation to lust on two fronts: sexual lust for the men in her office and her clients, and lust for the recognition and material things that marked success in that field. Another friend chose her career over having any children at all, and discovered that like the men in her field, she could not separate her sense of self from her job, and it ultimately cost her her marriage and her life as she knew it. The problem isn't having a career: the problem is when a woman gets her priorities out of balance.

Lie #7: To Be Feminine Is To Be Weak

In the attempt to blur gender distinctions, feminists declared war on the concept of gender-related characteristics. The qualities that marked feminine women—softness, sweetness, kindness, the ability to relate well—were judged as silly, stupid and weak. Only what characterized men—characteristics

like firmness, aggressiveness, competitiveness—were deemed valuable.

But when women try to take on male qualities, the end result is a distortion that is neither feminine nor masculine. A woman is perceived as shrill, not spirited. What is expected and acceptable aggression in a man is perceived as unwelcome brashness in a woman. When women try to be tough, it is often taken as unpleasantness. Unfortunately, there really is a strong stereotype about “what women should be like” that merits being torn down. A lot of men are threatened by strong women with opinions and agendas of their own, and treat them with undeserved disrespect. But it is not true that traditionally masculine characteristics are the only ones that count.

There really is a double standard operating, because the characteristics that constitute masculinity and femininity are separate and different, and they are not interchangeable. To be feminine is a special kind of strength. It’s a different, appealing kind of power that allows a woman to influence her world in a way quite distinct from the way a man influences the world. It pleased the Lord to create woman to complement man, not to compete with him or be a more rounded copy of him. 1 Corinthians 11:7 says that man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. Femininity isn’t weakness; it’s the glorious, splendid crown on humanity.

Lie #8: Doing is Better Than Being

In his book *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*^[6], John Gray pointed out that men get their sense of self from achievement, and women get their sense of self from relationships. Feminism declared that the male orientation of *what you do* was the only one that mattered; *who you are*, and how important you are to the people in your world, didn’t count for as much.

This lie said that active is good, passive is bad. Traditional feminine behaviors of being passive and receptive were denounced as demeaning to women and ineffective in the world. Only being the initiator counted, not being the responder. “To listen, to be there, to receive the other with an open heart and mind—this has always been one of the most vital roles of woman. Most women do this quite naturally, but many have come to feel uneasy in this role. Instead, they work frantically on assertiveness, aggression, personal expression, and power, madly suppressing their feminine instincts of love and relatedness.”[\[7\]](#)

Women’s roles in the family, the church, and the world are a combination of being a responder and an initiator. As a responder, a wife honors her husband through loving submission, and a woman serves the church through the exercise of her spiritual gifts. As an initiator and leader, a woman teaches her children and uses her abilities in the world, such as the woman of Proverbs 31. God’s plan is for us to live a balanced life—sometimes active, sometimes passive; sometimes the initiator, sometimes the responder; at all times, submitting both who we are and what we do to the Lordship of Christ.

Lie #9: The Myth of Self-Sufficiency

The ninth lie is the myth of self-sufficiency. Remember the famous feminist slogan that appeared on everything from bumper stickers to t-shirts to notepads? “A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.” The message was clear: women don’t need men, who are inferior anyway. The world would be a better place if women ran it: no wars, no greed, no power plays, just glorious cooperation and peace.

The next step after “women don’t need men” was logical: women don’t need anybody. We can take care of ourselves. Helen Reddy’s hit song “I Am Woman” became feminism’s theme song, with the memorable chorus, “If I have to, I can do anything /

I am strong / I am invincible / I am woman!"

Of course, if women don't need anybody except themselves, they certainly don't need God. Particularly a masculine, patriarchal God who makes rules they don't like and insists that He alone is God. But the need to worship is deeply ingrained in us, so feminist thought gave rise to goddess worship. The goddess was just a female image to focus on; in actuality, goddess worship is worship of oneself.[\[8\]](#)

The lie of self-sufficiency is the same lie that Satan has been deceiving us with since the Garden of Eden: What do you need God for? We grieve the Lord's heart when we believe this lie. Jeremiah 2:13 says, "My people have committed two sins: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." God made us for Himself; believing the lie of self-sufficiency isn't only futile, it's a slap in God's face.

Lie #10: Women Would Enjoy the Feminization of Men

The tenth lie of feminism is that women would enjoy the feminization of men. Feminists believed that the only way to achieve equality of the sexes was to do away with *role* distinctions. Then they decided that that wasn't enough: society had to do away with *gender* distinctions, or at the very least blur the lines. Women embraced more masculine values, and men were encouraged to embrace more feminine characteristics. That was supposed to fix the problem. It didn't.

As men tried to be "good guys" and accommodate feminists' demands, the culture saw a new type of man emerge: sensitive, nurturing, warmly compassionate, yielding. The only problem was that this "soft man" wasn't what women wanted. Women pushed men to be like women, and when they complied, nobody respected them. Women, it turns out, want to be the soft

ones—and we want men to be strong and firm and courageous; we want a manly man. When men start taking on feminine characteristics, they're just wimpy and unmasculine, not pleasing themselves or the women who demanded the change. There is a good reason that books and movies with strong, masculine heroes continue to appeal to such a large audience. Both men and women respond to men who fulfill God's design for male leadership, protection, and strength.

Underlying the women's liberation movement is an angry, unsubmitive attitude that is fueled by the lies of deception. It's good to know what the lies are, but it's also important to know what God's word says, so we can combat the lies with the power of His truth.

Notes

1. Toni Grant, *Being a Woman: Fulfilling Your Femininity and Finding Love*. New York: Random House, 1988.
2. Ibid, 3.
3. March of Dimes, "Pregnancy After 35," www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/14332_1155.asp.
4. Jodi Panayotov, "IVF & Older Women – How Successful is IVF After 40?" ezinearticles.com/?IVF-and-Older-Women-How-Successful-is-IVF-After-40?&id=636335.
5. Andreas Kostenberger, "Saved Through Childbearing?" (*CBMW [The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood] News*, Sept. 1997), p. 3.
6. John Gray, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
7. Grant, 9.
8. Mary Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1992), p. 159.

Business and Ethics

This essay grapples with some of the problems Christians face trying to operate ethically in today's business world.



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

Can “business” and “ethics” be used in the same sentence?

A while back, a member of the Probe lecture team was invited to speak on the topic of “Business Ethics” in a class at Colorado State University. When the Probe speaker arrived at the classroom, the professor explained that the reason the class chose to have him speak on this topic was their overwhelming sense of curiosity. They could not comprehend how the words business and ethics could be used in the same title.

Business enterprise has received a very diverse review from the ethicists of this generation. In the “Me First” era of the 80s, there was very little concern for ethics in the world of business, and you would have been hard pressed to find a university that dealt seriously with the need for ethics in its business school curriculum. A case in point concerns John Shad, former chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. He donated \$35 million dollars to the Harvard Business School to establish an ethics department. Yet two years later, Harvard had only come up with one rather flimsy-sounding course, and they had been unable to find an ethicist to head up the department. [\(1\)](#)

The 90s saw an awakening to the need for ethics because of the many scandals that were beginning to erupt within the world of

business and finance, moral failures such as the disgraceful actions that brought down Michael Milken and Ivan Boesky. The problem is that in the 90s, the concern for ethics has not returned us to any absolute standard of ethics, but rather to a search for relative balance between ethics and the bottom line or personal values. The following statement by a state representative from Tennessee demonstrates this tendency all too well. While explaining why he was for fair trade price controls on milk, but against it for liquors, he said, "I've got 423 dairy farmers in my district, and I've got to rise above principle."

Often, today, the highest ethic is "tolerance." By that, I don't mean the traditional view of tolerance in which one tries to recognize and respect other people's values without necessarily accepting those values as being correct. I'm talking about a whole new meaning to the word tolerance. Today the word is used in a way to imply that all values, beliefs, and claims to truth and life-styles are equal. It becomes extremely difficult to run a business when (1) you have to walk the tightrope of balancing everyone's values and (2) you are expected to treat all these values as equally valid. Our society today has lost its ability to determine what is right from what is wrong. Business enterprise requires a level of trust among the participants. Where is that trust going to come from if we have no common platform upon which to base our ethics and must rely, instead, on the assorted and conflicting individual values of whatever group we're a part of? This essay will grapple with some of the problems we must face as Christians in trying to operate in the business world, while surrounded with people who believe their personal values are not subject to any higher standard than their own reasoning.

Who Makes the Rules?

The fundamental question we need to address is, Who makes the rules, God or man? That is what the issue of ethics is all

about. Either there is a source for what is morally right that is beyond ourselves, i.e., God, and that standard is absolute and universal, or we are left to ourselves to figure out what is right and what is wrong, if we can even agree among ourselves that there is a right and a wrong. If we were, in fact, left to ourselves, how could we say one person's values were any better than another's? In the age of the industrial and scientific revolution, people believed they could reason themselves toward better behavior, but today, having seen the horrors of what the industrial and scientific revolution has brought upon us, many have given up any hope of finding a unified answer for right and wrong. In fact, many now actually fear anyone who thinks that he or she has a handle on any absolute standard by which we might live.

Society has moved from a Christian base, which held that there is a source of ultimate truth, through modernism, which saw truth as relative to circumstances, duty, consequences, situations, etc., to post-modernism, which asserts that there is no truth, only the power to put forth one's values.

King Solomon, who was hailed as the wisest leader ever to govern any nation, said, "Be wise and give serious thought to the way you live." In all endeavors, including our work, we must realize that morality is the single most important guiding principle behind all that we do and say. Our morality molds our ultimate being, who we really are.

Today most professional organizations have a code of ethics. The problem is that their codes are often ignored or not made known. For example, a few years ago Probe was speaking in the engineering department at Southern Methodist University. One of the students, after hearing the lecture on engineering ethics, came up to the speaker afterwards and said, "I have been an engineering student for four years, and this is the first time I ever heard that there was an engineering code of ethics."

There are some companies working hard to communicate to their employees a corporate goal and standard that puts forth biblical values. One company like this is the Servicemaster Company. Their corporate goals are: (1) Honor God in all we do, (2) Help people to develop, (3) Pursue excellence, and (4) Grow profitably. Notice that the profitability goal, although one of their four key goals, is listed last. Making a profit is a necessary goal, but there are things more important than surviving in this world. In fact, there are a lot of businesses that should shut down, for their only legitimate goal is that they do make a profit. In this regard, the vast pornography business comes to mind, not to mention state lotteries and all the other forms of gambling.

So, as an individual or a business, do our personal or corporate goals demonstrate a commitment to a standard beyond ourselves? Do we have a set of guidelines that helps us to steer a course that is straight and narrow in a world that is adrift—floating all over the ethical map? What we need are some guidelines that will help us to steer that straight and narrow course.

Ethical Guidelines for the Real World

In his book, *Honesty, Morality & Conscience*, published by NavPress, [\(2\)](#) Jerry White gives us five excellent guidelines for conducting our business activities.

First, there is the guideline of a **just weight** as found in Deuteronomy 25:13-15. The principle of a just weight is to give a full amount in exchange for a fair payment. Another way to look at it is to give full quality for what is paid for and according to what is advertised. We must accept responsibility for both the quality and the amount of our product or service. As a business owner, do I fairly represent my product or service? As an employee, do I give a full day's work for a full day's pay? Remember, as it says in Colossians 3:23, we are working for the Lord and not for men.

Second, the Lord demands our **total honesty**. Ephesians 4:25 calls upon us to speak the truth. Jerry White reminds us that, "Although we will frequently fail, our intent must be total honesty with our employer, our co-worker, our employees, and our customers." (3) This is a difficult principle to adhere to. James 3:2 says this is where we often fail, but if we can control our tongue we will be able to control the rest of our body as well. The Living Bible best sums it up in Romans 12:17 which says, "Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear through." We must ask ourselves, are we totally honest in reporting our use of time, money, and accomplishments?

The third principle is **being a servant**. Someone has said Christians like to be *called* servants, but don't appreciate being *treated* like servants. To serve God sounds glorious, but to serve others is another matter. As usual, Jesus Christ is our example. Matthew 20:28 says that Christ did not come to be served, but to serve others, in fact, to give up his life for others. The value of a business is its service. How well it serves the needs of its customers will determine its success. The business, in turn, is made up of people who must do the serving. The value of the employees is in how well they serve the customer's needs. This is putting the needs of others before our own and then trusting God to meet our needs in the process.

The fourth guideline is **personal responsibility**. We must take full responsibility for our own actions and decisions. We should not try to excuse our actions based on pressure within our business or organization to do what we know is not right. We all fail at times to do what we know we should do. We must then accept the responsibility for what we have said or done and not try to pass that responsibility on to someone else or try to blame it on some set of circumstances. Romans 12:2 warns us about the danger of allowing the world to shape us into its mold.

Finally, there is the issue of **reasonable profits**. This principle is quite a bit harder to get a handle on, but it is still vital to have guidelines to follow. What is a reasonable profit? This is something each person has to deal with on his own. Luke 6:31 is a great help on this. It says that we should treat others the same way we would want to be treated. Put yourself in the other person's shoes and ask yourself how you would want to be treated in a particular situation. To the business person this is the price of our service or product above our cost. To the employee it is the amount of our wages for our service to the organization. Luke 3:14 says to be content with our wages, but the Bible also reminds the employer in 1 Timothy 5:18 that the laborer is worthy of his wages.

It is all too easy to rationalize our way around many of these principles, but God will hold us accountable in the end. Ultimately it is God whom we serve and to whom we must give account.

The Cost of Living Ethically

The media is awash with reports of faulty business ethics: frauds, manipulations, thefts, industrial espionage, corruption, kickbacks, conspiracy, thefts, tax evasion, embezzling, and unfair competition proliferate. Either a lot more unethical acts are taking place today or those behaviors that have always existed are being exploited more in contemporary society. A Gallup report concluded that "you can't trust Americans as much as you used to." The *Wall Street Journal* reported that churched persons appear only slightly more likely to walk the straight and narrow than their less-pious compatriots.

Why is it so hard to walk the straight and narrow in our business dealings? We are continually under the stress of performance on the job and in the competitive work environment. Often our very livelihood is threatened under

pressure of the job. Usually we know what we should do, but we count the cost of doing the right thing and then back down due to pressure from people or circumstances. If we feel that we must do whatever is necessary to keep our jobs, we may end up serving the wrong master.

Steven Covey, in his book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, [\(4\)](#) addresses the issue of the need to become principle-centered individuals. Are we living principle-centered lives? This means that there are some principles that are more important than the success or even the continuance of our business. Are there some ethical standards for which we are prepared to die if necessary? Those who let their business die rather than set aside their ethical standards can return to do business again someday, since they were able to maintain their integrity and their reputation. Those who cave in to the pressures to keep the business alive may be caught and end up losing their reputation and thus deprive themselves of a platform from which to rebuild their lives and businesses.

Ten Global Principles for Success

We are going to close this essay on business ethics with *Ten Global Principles for Business and Professional Success* from the booklet *Mega Values* by Colonel Nimrod McNair. [\(5\)](#) These principles are modeled after the Ten Commandments.

The first principle is, "Show proper respect for authority." This is the invisible superstructure of productive enterprise. God clearly commands us to respect those in authority over us. God uses this command to bring order out of chaos. Authority is a necessary prerequisite to order.

The second rule is, "Have a singleness of purpose." Divided purposes dilute effectiveness when interests conflict. We cannot serve two masters effectively. We must evaluate our time, talent, and resources and make sure we are using these God-given elements in a way that ultimately brings Him the

glory.

Precept number three is, "Use effective communication in word and deed." Complete communications and predictable follow-through are the basic expressions of personal integrity. It means doing what you say you'll do, even if it is uncomfortable or inconvenient. This commandment is honored when promises are kept and accurate recounting of transactions is given.

A fourth truth is, "Provide proper rest, recreation, and reflection." This ensures a quality of life that will be reflected in creativity, productivity, and motivation. Rest is a necessity for effectiveness. Recreation guards the mind against mental and emotional fatigue. Reflection promotes self-monitoring, allows for mid-course corrections, and ensures single-mindedness. The fifth tenet is, "Show respect for the older and more experienced." Our parents, teachers, coaches, employers, pastors, and other elders in our lives have an investment in us. It is to our benefit to honor that investment and to draw fully from the wisdom and expertise of those more experienced than ourselves.

The sixth axiom is, "Show respect for human life, dignity, and rights." This encompasses product quality and service, the work environment, health and safety, personnel policies and responsibilities, and competitive practices. It is simply the Golden Rule—treating others as you would want to be treated.

The seventh principle is, "Maintain a stability of sexes and the family." Wisdom and good business practice dictate equal regard for men and women as persons irrespective of gender or marital status. Respect for the family structure as the crucial foundation of our cultural system must be reflected in our decisions regarding the conflicts between business demands and the value of the family and personal life.

Precept number eight is, "Demonstrate the proper allocation of

resources.” Two fundamental responsibilities and privileges of business are optimal use of material resources and wise leadership of people. We must treat all our business assets, whether they be people, funds, or materials, as a gift from the Lord.

The ninth truth is, “Demonstrate honesty and integrity.” Integrity is the cornerstone of any good relationship. Without demonstrating the willingness to give and the worthiness to receive trust, no business can survive or prosper. A reputation for honesty is a comprehensive statement of both a person’s character and how he or she treats others. It is a fundamental mindset against stealing, lying, or deceiving.

The tenth and final business commandment is, “Maintain the right of ownership of property.” Those who are disciplined, creative, prudent, and industrious are entitled to the fruits of their labor. We must not covet that which belongs to another.

Business ethics is more than a list of do’s and don’ts, but these principles can help us get off to a good start.

Notes

1. Chuck Colson, Jubilee (October 1989).
2. Jerry White, Honesty, Morality & Conscience (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1978).
3. Ibid.
4. Stephen R. Covey, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).
5. Colonel Nimrod McNair, *Mega Values: 10 Global Principles for Business and Professional Success Written in Stone* (Executive Leadership Foundation, Inc., 2179 Northlake Pkwy. Suite 119, Tucker, GA 30084-9885).