

# Sex and Violence on Television – A Christian Worldview Perspective

*Kerby Anderson takes a reasoned look at the amount of sex and violence portrayed on television and comes away with a sobering understanding of the intensity of the problem. From a biblical perspective, this level of consumption of disturbing images will result in a deadening of even Christian hearts to the clear call of Scripture to a life of purity in mind and action.*

## The Extent of the Problem

Is there too much sex and violence on television? Most Americans seem to think so. One survey found that seventy-five percent of Americans felt that television had “too much sexually explicit material.” Moreover, eighty-six percent believed that television had contributed to “a decline in values.”[\[1\]](#) And no wonder. Channel surfing through the television reveals plots celebrating premarital sex, adultery, and even homosexuality. Sexual promiscuity in the media appears to be at an all-time high. A study of adolescents (ages twelve to seventeen) showed that watching sex on TV influences teens to have sex. Youths were more likely to initiate intercourse as well as other sexual activities.[\[2\]](#)

A study by the Parents Television Council found that prime time network television is more violent than ever before. In addition, they found that this increasing violence is also of a sexual nature. They found that portrayals of violence are up seventy-five percent since 1998.[\[3\]](#)

The study also provided expert commentary by Deborah Fisher, Ph.D. She states that children, on average, will be exposed to

a thousand murders, rapes, and assaults per year through television. She goes on to warn that early exposure to television violence has “consistently emerged as a significant predictor of later aggression.”[{4}](#)

A previous study by the Parents Television Council compared the changes in sex, language, and violence between decades. The special report entitled *What a Difference a Decade Makes* found many shocking things.[{5}](#)

First, on a per-hour basis, sexual material more than tripled in the last decade. For example, while references to homosexuality were once rare, now they are mainstream. Second, the study found that foul language increased five-fold in just a decade. They also found that the intensity of violent incidents significantly increased.

These studies provide the best quantifiable measure of what has been taking place on television. No longer can defenders of television say that TV is “not that bad.” The evidence is in, and television is more offensive than ever.

Christians should not be surprised by these findings. Sex and violence have always been part of the human condition because of our sin nature (Romans 3:23), but modern families are exposed to a level of sex and violence that is unprecedented. Obviously, this will have a detrimental effect. The Bible teaches that “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7, KJV). What we see and hear affects our actions. And while this is true for adults, it is especially true for children.

## **Television’s Impact on Behavior**

What is the impact of watching television on subsequent behavior? There are abundant studies which document that what you see, hear, and read does affect your perception of the world and your behavior.

The American Academy of Pediatrics in 2000 issued a "Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children." They cited over one thousand studies, including reports from the Surgeon General's office and the National Institute of Mental Health. They say that these studies "point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children."[\[6\]](#)

In 1992, the American Psychological Association concluded that forty years of research on the link between TV violence and real-life violence has been ignored, stating that "the 'scientific debate is over' and calling for federal policy to protect society."[\[7\]](#)

A 1995 poll of children ten to sixteen years of age showed that children recognize that "what they see on television encourages them to take part in sexual activity too soon, to show disrespect for their parents, [and] to lie and to engage in aggressive behavior." More than two-thirds said they are influenced by television; seventy-seven percent said TV shows too much sex before marriage, and sixty-two percent said sex on television and in movies influences their peers to have sexual relations when they are too young. Two-thirds also cited certain programs featuring dysfunctional families as encouraging disrespect toward parents.

The report reminds us that television sets the baseline standard for the entire entertainment industry. Most homes (ninety-eight percent) have a television set. And according to recent statistics, that TV in the average household is on more than eight hours each day.[\[8\]](#)

By contrast, other forms of entertainment (such as movies, DVDs, CDs) must be sought out and purchased. Television is universally available, and thus has the most profound effect on our culture.

As Christians we need to be aware of the impact television has

on us and our families. The studies show us that sex and violence on TV can affect us in subtle yet profound ways. We can no longer ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perceptions and behaviors. So we should be concerned about the impact television (as well as other forms of media) has on our neighbors and our society as a whole.

## Sex on Television

Most Americans believe there is too much sex on television. A survey conducted in 1994 found that seventy-five percent of Americans felt that television had “too much sexually explicit material.” Moreover, eighty-six percent believed that television had contributed to “a decline in values.”<sup>{9}</sup> As we documented earlier, sexual promiscuity on television is at an all-time high.

I have previously written about the subject of pornography and talked about the dangerous effects of sex, especially when linked with violence.<sup>{10}</sup> Neil Malamuth and Edward Donnerstein document the volatile impact of sex and violence in the media. They say, “There can be relatively long-term, anti-social effects of movies that portray sexual violence as having positive consequences.”<sup>{11}</sup>

In a message given by Donnerstein, he concluded with this warning and observation: “If you take normal males and expose them to graphic violence against women in R-rated films, the research doesn’t show that they’ll commit acts of violence against women. It doesn’t say they will go out and commit rape. But it does demonstrate that they become less sensitized to violence against women, they have less sympathy for rape victims, and their perceptions and attitudes and values about violence change.”<sup>{12}</sup>

It is important to remember that these studies are applicable

not just to hard-core pornography. Many of the studies used films that are readily shown on television (especially cable television) any night of the week. And many of the movies shown today in theaters are much more explicit than those shown just a few years ago.

Social commentator Irving Kristol asked this question in a *Wall Street Journal* column: "Can anyone really believe that soft porn in our Hollywood movies, hard porn in our cable movies and violent porn in our 'rap' music is without effect? Here the average, overall impact is quite discernible to the naked eye. And at the margin, the effects, in terms most notably of illegitimacy and rape, are shockingly visible."[\[13\]](#)

Christians must be careful that sexual images on television don't conform us to the world (Rom. 12:2). Instead we should use discernment. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

Sex on television is at an all-time high, so we should be even more careful to screen what we and our families see. Christians should be concerned about the images we see on television.

## **Violence on Television**

Children's greatest exposure to violence comes from television. TV shows, movies edited for television, and video games expose young children to a level of violence unimaginable just a few years ago. The American Psychological Association says the average child watches eight thousand televised murders and one hundred thousand acts of violence before finishing elementary school.[\[14\]](#) That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age eighteen.

At a very young age, children are seeing a level of violence and mayhem that in the past may have been seen only by a few police officers and military personnel. TV brings hitting, kicking, stabbings, shootings, and dismemberment right into homes on a daily basis.

The impact on behavior is predictable. Two prominent Surgeon General reports in the last two decades link violence on television and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a ninety-four page report, *Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties*. They found "overwhelming" scientific evidence that "excessive" violence on television spills over into the playground and the streets.[{15}](#) In one five-year study of 732 children, "several kinds of aggression, conflicts with parents, fighting and delinquency, were all positively correlated with the total amount of television viewing."[{16}](#)

Long-term studies are even more disturbing. University of Illinois psychologist Leonard Eron studied children at age eight and then again at eighteen. He found that television habits established at the age of eight influenced aggressive behavior throughout childhood and adolescent years. The more violent the programs preferred by boys in the third grade, the more aggressive their behavior, both at that time and ten years later. He therefore concluded that "the effect of television violence on aggression is cumulative."[{17}](#)

Twenty years later Eron and Rowell Huesmann found the pattern continued. He and his researchers found that children who watched significant amounts of TV violence at the age of eight were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child or spouse abuse at thirty.[{18}](#) They concluded that "heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime and violence in society. Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of

intelligence.”[{19}](#)

Violent images on television affect children in adverse ways and Christians should be concerned about the impact.

## **Biblical Perspective**

Television is such a part of our lives that we often are unaware of its subtle and insidious influence. Nearly every home has a television set, so we tend to take it for granted and are often oblivious to its influence.

I’ve had many people tell me that they watch television, and that it has no impact at all on their worldview or behavior. However the Bible teaches that “as a man thinks in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). What we view and what we think about affects our actions. And there is abundant psychological evidence that television viewing affects our worldview.

George Gerbner and Larry Gross, working at the Annenberg School of Communications in the 1970s, found that heavy television viewers live in a scary world. “We have found that people who watch a lot of TV see the real world as more dangerous and frightening than those who watch very little. Heavy viewers are less trustful of their fellow citizens, and more fearful of the real world.”[{20}](#) Heavy viewers also tended to overestimate their likelihood of being involved in a violent crime. They defined heavy viewers as those adults who watch an average of four or more hours of television a day. Approximately one-third of all American adults fit that category.

And if this is true of adults, imagine how television violence affects children’s perceptions of the world. Gerbner and Gross say, “Imagine spending six hours a day at the local movie house when you were twelve years old. No parent would have permitted it. Yet, in our sample of children, nearly half of the twelve-year-olds watch an average of six or more hours of

television per day." This would mean that a large portion of young people fit into the category of heavy viewers. Their view of the world must be profoundly shaped by TV. Gerbner and Gross therefore conclude, "If adults can be so accepting of the reality of television, imagine its effect on children. By the time the average American child reaches public school, he has already spent several years in an electronic nursery school."[\[21\]](#)

Television viewing affects both adults and children in subtle ways. We must not ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perceptions and behaviors. Our worldview and our subsequent actions are affected by what we see on television. Christians, therefore, must be careful not to let television conform us to the world (Romans 12:2), but instead should develop a Christian worldview.

## Notes

1. National Family Values: A Survey of Adults conducted by Voter/Consumer Research (Bethesda, MD, 1994).
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3. Kristen Fyfe, "More Violence, More Sex, More Troubled Kids," *Culture and Media Institute*, 11 January 2007, [www.cultureandmediainstitute.org](http://www.cultureandmediainstitute.org).
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# Crusader Terrorists? – How Should Christians Respond

In this day of multiculturalism and political correctness, Christians should have been prepared to learn that a New Jersey school district recently chose Christian Crusaders as an imaginary terrorist group for its first live action hostage response drill. To portray the terrorists, the school district organizers made up a right-wing fundamentalist group that denies the separation of church and state. Then, they created a fake hostage situation instigated by the supposedly angry parent of a student expelled for praying.

The stated goal of the event was summarized nicely by the district superintendent. He claimed that “You perform as you practice. We need to practice under conditions as real as possible in order to evaluate our procedures and plans so that they’re as effective as possible.” While many comments could be made about the phrase as real as possible, the most critical aspect of this issue is a deeper consideration.

Sadly, just as the impact of the aforementioned PC dogma on our schools is predictable, so is the vehement response of the local Christian community to this perceived offense. One Christian demanded that a public apology be given by school officials, along with their resignations. Other critics pointed out the obvious bigotry against Christians and the absurdity of the scenario itself. Christians have the legal right to pray in schools, and they are far more likely to bring their lawyers than their guns.

Still others mentioned that this is not the first time a school district had deliberately steered clear of the obvious terrorist groups, deciding instead to pick on Christians. For example, three years ago a Michigan school district substituted a group of crazed Christian homeschoolers called

Wackos Against Schools and Education for their mock terrorism drill to avoid offending any Muslims.

Unfair scenarios such as these have a lot of Christians upset, and in a perfect world, they have a right to be. But is this the best response to events such as these? How should an ambassador for Christ handle them? May I suggest an alternative?

Instead of the immediate declaration of how persecuted and indignant we Christians are, perhaps we should ask ourselves why school officials see the followers of Jesus in this light in the first place. Are we doing anything that prompts this kind of stereotyping? Unfortunately, many school administrators only hear from outraged believers when there is a problem. Rarely are Christians viewed as beneficial to the school and surrounding community.

I know of a small evangelical church in New Zealand that was marginalized as an almost cultish group until they decided to pick a school to bless each spring. Church members take one week each year to clean, paint, and repair at the church's expense whatever needs fixing at the selected school. Their Christ-like service has completely changed the surrounding community's attitude regarding the church, and school officials have even attended services as a result of their gratitude. A similar scenario played out recently in a small village in China. An underground church went from being persecuted to being appreciated when they decided to restore a bridge vital to that city.

It is relatively easy and natural to respond to negative stereotyping, even persecution, with a demand for political rights and privileges. It is far more difficult and supernatural to bless those who curse you and pray for those who mistreat you.

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# Civil Discourse?

## Conservative Bridgebuilder

Think about the last time you channel-surfed the television news talk shows. Chances are, you encountered at least a few talking heads yelling at each other. Often, controversy reigns. Politics, religion, sex, or sports can ignite passion that can spill into incivility—on radio and TV, in workplaces, universities, neighborhoods, and families.

Are you exhausted or disgusted with debates and discussions that become food fights? This article considers some inspiring stories of risk-takers who build bridges of understanding across philosophical, political, and religious lines. They're helping put the "civil" back into "civil discourse" and have good lessons for us all.

First up is conservative commentator Cal Thomas. As vice president of Jerry Falwell's "Moral Majority," Thomas saw his share of partisan political debate. But he tells a humorous story about civility.[\[1\]](#)

The Moral Majority often mentioned Senator Ted Kennedy in its fund appeals. The senator and his liberal friends often mentioned Falwell in their own letters, each side alerting their constituents to concerns about the other.

Once, by mistake, Falwell's group sent Kennedy a "Moral Majority membership card." When *The Washington Post* asked Thomas if his organization would request the card back, Cal replied, "No, we don't believe any man is beyond redemption. In fact, we'd like to invite the senator to visit Lynchburg [Virginia] and visit Jerry Falwell's school." The *Post* ran the

quote.

A couple of weeks later, a Kennedy aide phoned to say, "The senator has decided to accept your invitation." "What invitation?" replied Thomas. "The one for the senator to visit Lynchburg," came the response.

Kennedy made the trip, dined with Falwell and gave a warmly-received speech on tolerance and diversity at Liberty Baptist College (now Liberty University). Thomas says that began his own "treasured friendship" with Kennedy, who met with Falwell "on several subsequent occasions." Cal notes, "More of eternal value was accomplished that night and in the subsequent relationship than years of political bashing and one-upmanship had produced."

Thomas and his friend Bob Beckel, a liberal Democratic strategist who was Walter Mondale's presidential campaign manager, have co-written lively *USA Today* columns called "Common Ground." The two examine important issues—agreeing and disagreeing—but remain good friends. Disagreement needn't torpedo friendship.

## **A Jew Among the Evangelicals**

What do you get when you assign a leftist Jewish journalist to the evangelical Christian beat for major newspapers on both US coasts?

Maybe you'd expect mutual animosity: "Those wacko God-squaders are at it again," or "The biased secular humanist liberal media is ruining America."

But this leftist Jewish journalist made a significant discovery, one he feels can instruct his colleagues and us all. He says to effectively cover the strange tribe to which he was assigned, it helps to know its members as neighbors and friends.

[Mark Pinsky](#)'s book, *A Jew Among the Evangelicals: A Guide for the Perplexed*,[{2}](#) tells how this "nice Jewish boy from Jersey"[{3}](#) ended up attending church "more often than many Christians" and sometimes more often than he attends his own synagogue.[{4}](#) During his ten years covering religion for the *Los Angeles Times*, he focused on major evangelical leaders and had little connection with grassroots evangelicals.

When he moved to Florida in 1995 to write for the *Orlando Sentinel*, they were everywhere: in the neighborhood, at kids sporting events, birthday parties, PTA meetings, Scouts. Still a committed Jew, Pinsky found they were neither monolithic nor, as *The Washington Post* once claimed, "poor, uneducated and easy to command."[{5}](#)

Disclosure: Pinsky, whom I've known since our university days, is a personal friend. His *Duke Chronicle* column was titled "The Readable Radical." He was at the vanguard of late-1960s campus leftist causes. I didn't always agree with his politics, but I admired his concerns about justice, hypocrisy, and the disenfranchised.

He still votes with the Democratic left, but he also understands the Christian subculture he covers better than many of its members. Mutual respect characterizes his relations with its leaders.

Mark's personal stories of "how people just like you wrestle with feelings, values, and beliefs that touch the core of their beings" provide "a glimpse of someone learning to understand and get along with folks whose convictions differ from his own."[{6}](#)

Get to know your intellectual and philosophical adversaries, he recommends. Take them to lunch. Ratchet down the rhetoric. Maybe connection can produce understanding and civility can grow into bridgebuilding.[{7}](#)

Not bad advice in a world too-often filled with brickbats and

name calling.

## Confronting Our Liberal Bias

Religious and political conservatives often complain about bias in secular universities. Here's how two university professors faced that issue in their own teaching

Elizabeth Kiss is president of Agnes Scott College in Atlanta. Before that, she was a Duke political science professor and director of Duke's Kenan Institute for Ethics.<sup>{8}</sup> With public policy lecturer Alma Blount, she wrote an intriguing 2005 article, "Confronting Our Liberal Bias."<sup>{9}</sup> They note:

*In the wake of the 2004 presidential election, we've witnessed the deep divide in this country around themes of religion and politics, the war in Iraq, and U.S. foreign policy. As faculty members at a leading university, we've also been struck by an uncomfortable realization: we need to confront liberal bias in the academy.*

They cite two seminal experiences. In one, "colleagues tried to block an invitation to a conservative faculty member to speak in a class." In another, comments about "how liberal bias threatens open inquiry" met anger and disbelief.

Kiss and Blount considered how their own liberal assumptions subtly influenced their teaching. "Creating a culture of open inquiry on campus," they write, "means we first must face our everyday temptation toward political bias." They continue:

*Political bias, from either the left or the right, is corrosive of open inquiry. It is the "in" joke or flippant comment suggesting that all rational people are on your side. It portrays opponents in the worst possible light, suggesting they are ignorant, self-righteous, or evil. Bias breeds an enclave mentality that encourages smug and lazy thinking. It*

*blinds us to the complexity of public issues.*

Blount and Kiss are arguing not for academic neutrality, but rather for conviction with disclosure, appreciating dissent as part of the learning process. They advocate political diversity in assigned readings, welcoming differing student viewpoints in class, inviting guest speakers of various perspectives, plus modeling dialogue and debate. “Confronting liberal bias won’t be easy,” they conclude. “But it’s the right thing to do.”

Their refreshing candor is all too rare. An excellent example for all sides in making civil discourse more “civil.”

## **“Gotcha” Politics**

President Bill Clinton’s Special Counsel and scandal spokesperson was Lanny Davis, a prominent attorney and now-ubiquitous television figure.

Now, some of my readers may consider Bill and Hillary Clinton to be Mr. and Mrs. Antichrist. But I ask you to please segment your emotions about the Clintons momentarily to consider their former coworker’s passionate appeal for civility in public discourse.

Davis, a liberal Democrat, has authored an important book, *Scandal: How “Gotcha” Politics is Destroying America*.<sup>{10}</sup> He says, “The politics of healthy debate have been replaced by the politics of personal destruction, and the media, politicians, lawyers, and the Internet revolution are all complicit,” as are the American people who reward the politicians and consume the media.<sup>{11}</sup> With admirable transparency, he admits concerning parts of his past, “I am ashamed to say all this today—but I was just as much caught up in the gotcha culture as partisans on the Republican right.”<sup>{12}</sup> He regrets having jumped into “food fight” TV on

occasion, [{13}](#) and admits to some past blindness to “politically expedient hypocrisy.” [{14}](#)

Davis often seeks to build bridges. During the 1992 Democratic National Convention, Pennsylvania Governor Robert Casey “had been barred from delivering an anti-abortion, ‘pro-life’ speech to the convention.” Davis, who is pro-choice, asked some of his fellow liberal delegates to join him in a resolution to allow Casey to speak, in the name of freedom of expression and tolerance of dissent. Alas, he was shouted down. [{15}](#)

In 2000, his longtime friend Senator Joseph Lieberman—Democratic vice presidential candidate and an orthodox Jew—garnered liberal criticism for “bringing up God too much.” Reflecting on a famous Abraham Lincoln speech invoking divine assistance and encouraging prayer, Lanny wondered, “Would my liberal friends have regarded Abraham Lincoln as ‘bringing up God too much?’” [{16}](#) He decries intolerance and “contempt or disrespect for the deeply religious and those who believe in the power of prayer.” [{17}](#)

At the 2006 National Prayer Breakfast, rock star Bono, advocating bipartisan cooperation to fight poverty, cited Jesus’ statement, “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” [{18}](#) “You cannot believe in Bono’s words,” comments Davis, “without being tolerant of those whose religious faith leads them to political views vastly different from that of a pro-choice Democrat.” [{19}](#)

May his tribe increase.

## **Bridgebuilding: From Food Fights to Finding Common Ground**

How can we cultivate respect and learn to disagree without being disagreeable? Maybe you’ll enjoy this story.

I entered university in the turbulent late 1960s. The Vietnam War, Civil rights, sexual revolution, and campus upheaval permeated our lives. The fraternity I joined was quite diverse. We had political liberals and conservatives; athletes and scholars; atheists, agnostics, Christians, and Jews. Late night bull sessions kept us engaged and learning from each other.

When I was a freshman and a new believer in Jesus, our fraternity agreed to allow a Campus Crusade for Christ meeting in the chapter room. I posted a sign inside the front door for all the guys to see, announcing the date and time. As a gag, at the bottom I wrote "Attendance Mandatory." Needless to say, the sign quickly filled with graffiti. My favorite said, "Jesus and His Lambda Chi Alpha disciples will be autographing Bibles in the hallway during intermission."

The night of the meeting, one fraternity brother welcomed visitors from the head of the stairway, literally tied to a cross. Some members heckled the speaker, who gracefully engaged them in dialogue. He demonstrated how to disagree but remain friendly.

Our diversity taught me lots about tolerance and civility. We lived, worked, studied, and played together and forged friendships that have endured despite time and distance. Many of us still gather for reunions and still enjoy each others' company. That environment was a crucible that helped me develop communication and relationship skills.

How can you cultivate civility? Consider three suggestions:

*1. Learn about views different from your own. Read what others believe and ascertain why they feel and think as they do. Ask yourself how you might feel in their situation.*

*2. Discover Common Ground. Starting where you agree can help overcome many emotional barriers.*

3. *Befriend people with differing views. Friendly conversation or shared meals can help open hearts. Conservatives, take a liberal to lunch, and vice versa.*

Paul, an early follower of Jesus, had good advice on how to deal with those who differ. It applies in many contexts. He wrote:

*Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.* [{20}](#)

## Notes

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2. Mark I. Pinsky, *A Jew Among the Evangelicals: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006).
3. *Ibid.*, vii.
4. *Ibid.*, 18.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, vii.
7. *Ibid.*, 148.
8. <http://kenan.ethics.duke.edu>
9. Alma Blount and Elizabeth Kiss, "Confronting Our Liberal Bias," *Duke University News & Communications*, May 19, 2005; [http://www.dukenews.duke.edu/2005/05/politicalbias.\\_print.ht](http://www.dukenews.duke.edu/2005/05/politicalbias._print.ht), accessed March 4, 2007. Article first appeared in the Spring 2005 issue of the *KIE Connection* newsletter, produced by the Kenan Institute for Ethics; <http://kenan.ethics.duke.edu/newsletter/KIE.pdf>, accessed March 4, 2007.
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11. *Ibid.*, 199.

12. Ibid., 188.
13. Ibid., 88.
14. Ibid., 125-126.
15. Ibid., 211-212.
16. Ibid., 212.
17. Ibid., 214.
18. Luke 6:31 NIV.
19. Davis, op. cit., 213.
20. Colossians 4:5-6 NIV.

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# **Responding to Poverty – As a Christian**

## **Poverty's Devastating Effects**

I can still remember the feelings of curiosity, confusion and discomfort I felt as I watched the young boys. "What did those kids want?" I wondered.

As a child visiting Cuba with my parents, I was startled when some boys at a city park opened our taxi doors, then held out their hands. Later I asked my mother, "Did they work there? Did they want a tip?" She gently told me they were begging. My young upper-middle-class North American sensibilities were jolted by the harsh reality of poverty I had never seen.

One summer during university, while visiting Tijuana, Mexico, I was stunned to see people living in the city dump. Later that summer, I spent time with a friend in one of Miami's ghettos. One day, as I drove away, I noticed an ambulance

headed toward the apartment building near where my friend hung out. The next day, my friend told me a woman had shot the man who was trying to seduce her, then she shot herself. Shocking as that news was for me, almost as much so was my friend's nonchalance. He seemed accustomed to events like this.

Those experiences kindled my personal interest in this theme. What is poverty? Why does it exist? How does it destroy minds and souls as well as bodies? What is a biblical perspective on poverty? And what should we do about it?

Income level and standard of living are often-used but insufficient measures of poverty. Some townships in South Africa and shanty towns in the Philippines make some North American housing projects seem like the Ritz.

Localized "relative deprivation" (i.e., large socioeconomic disparity between the poor and middle class) can multiply feelings of low self-esteem. Many social scientists emphasize psychological manifestations of poverty. Yale psychologist Ira Goldenberg defined poverty as "a psychological process which destroys the young before they can live and the aged before they can die. . . . [It] is a condition of being in which one's past and future meet in the present—and go no further."[\[1\]](#)

The precise economic line may be difficult to draw, but poverty's effects can be devastating. Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs says, "More than 8 million people around the world die each year because they are too poor to stay alive. Every morning our newspapers could report, 'More than 20,000 people perished yesterday of extreme poverty.'"[\[2\]](#) They die from disease, lack of medicine, unsafe drinking water.

# Homeless Assistance

The little girl was sleeping so peacefully on a cot in the nursery playroom. As I watched her, I imagined how she might have felt only a few days earlier, maybe trying to sleep in the tropical heat under a noisy highway overpass. Now she was inside a lovely, air conditioned room with nice toys. She and families just like hers could feel safe, clean and protected at Miami's Homeless Assistance Center, a facility organized and run through a coalition of community leaders, government agencies, churches, and faith-based organizations.

By its twelfth year, Miami's Community Partnership for Homeless had helped over twenty-seven thousand men, women and children leave the streets for a better life. Their Homeless Assistance Centers are a community success story in which private and public sectors teamed to create a national model for eliminating homelessness. Would you believe all this started from a church Bible class?

My friend Alvah Chapman served Knight Ridder Publishers as president and chairman for fourteen years. (Knight Ridder owned, for example, the *Miami Herald*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* and *San Jose Mercury News*.) At retirement, he and his wife Betty participated in a thirty-nine-week church Bible study class that required personal application.

Alvah had become distressed observing the plight of Miami's homeless and the lack of community leadership. He recalls, "The county said it was a city problem. The city said it was a county problem. And the Chamber of Commerce was not sure it was their problem."[{3}](#) The Chapmans decided to tackle homelessness. "The commitment to 'do something' was very strong" in their hearts, he explains: "We made a commitment to our [Bible] class and to our God that we would together provide leadership to the homeless problem in Miami."[{4}](#)

Today the Homeless Assistance Centers[{5}](#) they founded provide

meals, showers, clothing, temporary housing, laundry facilities, health care, transportation, and job training—helping residents get back on their feet with dignity. The success rate for departed residents has been as high as sixty percent, considered remarkable in this field. Churches and synagogues have provided evening meals, companionship, and encouragement.

Often the poor feel trapped in poverty with no way out. Vicious circles breed feelings of worthlessness and despair. Drunkenness, violence, teen pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases are just some of the physical manifestations of coping with life out of control. Efforts like the Homeless Assistance Centers can help break the cycle of poverty.

## Helping the Total Person

Poverty brings multiple problems: physical, psychological, and spiritual. Which should we emphasize in seeking solutions? Consider three approaches.

1. The *Outside-In Approach* changes circumstances to alleviate stress factors. Education and job training can enhance employment and living standards, thus decreasing psychological problems. Right? Not necessarily. Anthropologist Oscar Lewis argued that an elimination of physical poverty may not by itself eliminate the culture of poverty.[\[6\]](#) Perhaps you know some wealthy but unhappy people.

2. The *Inside-Out Approach* emphasizes counseling to encourage self-help. Attitude change is important, but if the economic system blocks options, what then?

3. The *Total-Person Approach* blends the other two, treating humans as physical, psychological, and spiritual creatures. The often-overlooked spiritual area, properly tapped, can influence both poor and rich.

John Perkins, an African-American, left his poor rural hometown of Mendenhall, Mississippi, vowing never to return. His brother had been shot by a policeman in that racially oppressed town. Later, Perkins placed his faith in Christ and returned to Mendenhall to help.

The organization he founded facilitated an inexpensive health care center, cooperative farms, a cooperative food store, house construction, tutoring, and raising college scholarships. Perkins' emphasis has been on helping local people help themselves. At the same time he's said, "I believe that the only commitment able to bring [interpersonal and community] healing is a commitment to Jesus."[\[7\]](#)

Jesus of Nazareth emphasized the total person. He healed the sick and fed the hungry. He also told people how they could find meaning and fulfillment through faith in Him. Many Christian development programs have a similar focus, operating on the time-honored philosophy that if you give someone a fish you can feed them for a day; if you also teach them how to fish you can feed them for a lifetime.

World Relief, a Christian organization, provides worldwide disaster relief as well as self-help efforts like well-digging and agricultural training. Their microenterprise development programs establish community banking, savings and lending programs to help the poor become self sufficient. For example, a \$75 loan to a Cambodian grandmother allowed her to expand her small home-front stand. She repaid the loan in full, entitling her to another, slightly larger loan. Eventually, she could support her sixteen grandchildren and serve as a role model for women in her village.[\[8\]](#)

World Vision, the Salvation Army, and most major Christian denominations have programs to help the poor.

## Money and Poverty

We've been examining physical, psychological, and spiritual factors related to poverty and its possible remedies. Consider a common question.

Will money given to developing nations solve their poverty problems? Maybe it will help, but the extent depends largely on how the funds are managed. Sadly, Africa, for instance, is replete with examples of crooked officials diverting financial aid and national wealth into their own pockets. For instance, Nigeria's President Obasanjo estimates that corrupt African leaders have stolen at least \$140 billion from their people in the decades since independence.[{9}](#)

Obasanjo is a follower of Jesus who has tried to root out corruption in his own nation. The *New York Times* gives a glimpse into the task he still faces. Nigeria export billions of dollars of oil each year and returns thirteen percent of revenues from its states back to the states. The *Times* notes that "Much of that is siphoned off by corrupt regional officials who often pocket the money or waste it on lavish projects that do little, if anything, for ordinary people. For instance, one state produces a third of Nigeria's oil and has an annual budget of more than half a billion dollars to spend on its three million people. But most of [that money] goes to white elephants like a mansion for the governor and his deputy."[{10}](#)

On one of my speaking tours to Nigeria, a local doctor told me how businesses had adapted to the common custom of using bribes. Seems they started budgeting bribe money for their traveling representatives to use. The budget item was called public relations. But a problem arose when employees began to pocket the public relations money instead of using it for bribes.

Financial aid givers—nations, businesses and individuals—would

be wise to focus on strict accountability measures and perhaps character education programs for government and business leaders and students in such situations.

In fairness, I should note that this corruption caveat has its critics. Columbia economist Jeffrey Sachs, who also heads an ambitious United Nations anti-poverty effort, feels the corruption charge is too often a simplistic explanation for poverty's root problems. While I feel that corruption is indeed a major concern, I agree with Sachs that poverty is complex and situations differ. Disease plays a significant role. If people are sick with malaria or AIDS, its hard for them to help themselves. Sachs also advocates international commitments to economic assistance, scientific advancement, and justice.[{11}](#)

## **What Can You Do?**

Would you believe that by losing weight, you could help the poor overseas? Consider how some upscale U.S. secondary school students made a difference in Zambia.[{12}](#)

Student leaders at Wheaton Academy in suburban Chicago had a burden to raise \$53,000 from their fellow students for a schoolhouse in Zambia. They found little enthusiasm at first, but then they began to pray regularly. Things took off and they exceeded their goal. Over a three-year stretch, the Christian students raised nearly a quarter of a million dollars for HIV/AIDS relief in Africa. Students encourage each other to forgo movies, Starbucks runs, and even Christmas presents and prom dresses.[{13}](#) The campus chaplain estimates that ninety percent of students have participated financially to build the schoolhouse and a medical clinic and to feed a villages children for a year. Students feel a personal connection with their Zambian peers. Some have visited the village they support.

Even adults joined the effort. Now, what they did is great. I

bet you're going to like this! It was a weight-loss fundraising campaign, the Zambia Meltdown. Fourteen teachers and administrators lost 460 pounds over 100 days. That brought in \$19,000 in pledges for lost weight. And get this: The headmaster and principal each lost 70 pounds. [{14}](#)

What can you do to help alleviate poverty? Consider some suggestions:

*First, pray. God's concern for the poor far exceeds our own. Those Wheaton Academy students saw answers to their prayers. (Probably some faculty spouses did, too!)*

*Second, give. An ancient Jewish proverb says, If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord—and he will repay you! [{15}](#) Many fine organizations can use your donations to effectively fight poverty. New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof says, "Nobody gets more bang for the buck than missionary schools and clinics, and Christian aid groups like [World Vision](#) and [Samaritan's Purse](#) save lives at bargain-basement prices." [{16}](#) I would add [World Relief](#), the [Salvation Army](#) and your local church to the list.*

*Third, go. Maybe you can volunteer with [Habitat for Humanity](#) or an international mission group. CNN highlighted Campus Crusade for Christ college students spending Spring Break helping to rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. You even may want to devote your life or career to relief and development. It is a worthy cause. I like what Jesus' mother Mary advised: "Whatever He [Jesus] says to you, do it." [{17}](#) And another of those ancient Jewish proverbs says, "Blessed are those who help the poor." [{18}](#)*

## Notes

1. "A Nation Within a Nation," *TIME*, May 17, 1968, 30.
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# 9/11 and You

My sister had a 9:00 a.m. appointment at the World Trade Center.

On September 12.

Since September 11, 2001, I've often wondered what might have happened had her appointment been a day earlier or the terrorist attacks a day later. I could have been walking the streets of New York City with her picture.

What were your feelings that tragic day? Shock? Fear? Anger? Confusion? Sadness? How do you process those feelings now, as reminders of the attacks come in anniversary commemorations and media coverage? Nearly two-thirds of American Red Cross 9/11 adult counselees still grieve, according to a study of those directly affected by the attacks<sup>{1}</sup>.

## “I Hate You!”

In the immediate aftermath, my feelings of sadness blended with intense hostility. Once when Osama Bin Laden's face appeared on television, I spontaneously shouted, “I hate you!”

I was and am a follower of Jesus. He taught his followers to “love your enemies.”<sup>{2}</sup> Why was I yelling “I hate you!” to a picture on a TV screen?

I wondered why this guy hated my sister. If Deborah Wright had been among the victims, her death would have been included among those he applauded. If I had been a victim, he would have applauded mine. I wrote a radio series on “[Why Radical Muslims Hate You](#)” to discover historical, socio-cultural, political, religious, and psychological roots of such anger. It helped me to connect with Muslims who shared similar concerns but disavowed the radical methods.

## Dust of Death

Deborah's experience as a corporate chaplain took her back to New York to help WTC-based companies and their employees who suffered loss on 9/11 cope with the emotional and spiritual whirlwinds their worlds had become. Many suffered from survivor guilt. Failure to process grief could lead to serious consequences. Some firemen, for instance, were assigned to look after widows of fallen comrades. "There can be enormous intimacy and bonding in shared grief," Deborah notes. "Some of the firemen and widows ended up in bed together."

Some competitive, driven businesspersons re-examined their rat race—making big bucks and accumulating the most toys—and asked, "Is that all there is?". Long looks at corporate culture prompted many to consider spiritual realities.

Part of helping survivors process their experiences involved taking them to Ground Zero. Deborah comments, "As I stood at Ground Zero and picked up the dust, I could not help but think that we were standing in a giant crematorium. The ground seemed hallowed to me."

## Personal Lessons from 9/11

What personal 9/11 lessons persist? Perhaps you can relate to these that seem poignant to me:

*We live in a contingent universe.* Human decisions and actions have consequences, often for good or evil.

*Life is temporary.* One early spiritual leader wrote of our lives' fleeting nature, "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."[\[3\]](#)

*Link with the eternal.* Jesus of Nazareth, whom people of diverse spiritual persuasions respect as a great teacher, told a friend grieving her brother's death, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die

like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish.”[\[4\]](#)

*Cherish your friends.* In the aftermath of 9/11, many friendships were deepened as people linked with each other for encouragement, solace and support.

*Understand and love your enemies and intellectual adversaries.* Support national defense, but learning about state enemies can help communication with moderates who share some of their convictions. Getting to know neighbors or associates with whom you differ politically, philosophically or spiritually can help build bridges that foster civility in public discourse.

## Notes

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2. Matthew 5:44 NASB.
3. James 4:14 NASB.
4. John 11:25 NLT.

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# Globalization and the Wal-Mart Effect – How Wal-Mart

# Changes the Way Products are Sourced and Sold

*Kerby Anderson helps us understand the foundational principles and some the current factors which make Wal-Mart the dominant force in consumer sales in the world. Wal-Mart has fundamentally changed the way products are sourced and sold as shown in the examples presented in this article. Kerby does not take a position for or against those changes but encourages us to consume in ways that consider the impact of our consumption.*

## Introduction

In this article, we revisit the issue of global trade and the process of globalization. In [an earlier article](#) I asked, Is the world flat?[{1}](#) I talked about the various things that have made our world flat and used Wal-Mart as one of the examples.

I would like to further develop our discussion by using Wal-Mart as an example of what is happening in our world. Thomas Friedman, in his book *The World is Flat*, says that if Wal-Mart were an individual economy, it would rank as China's eighth-biggest trading partner, ahead of Russia, Australia, and Canada.[{2}](#)

Often I will be referring to many of the facts and figures from Charles Fishman's book *The Wal-Mart Effect*.[{3}](#) For example, he points out that more than half of all Americans live within five miles of a Wal-Mart store. For most people, that's about a ten- to fifteen-minute drive. Ninety percent of Americans live within fifteen miles of a Wal-Mart. In fact, when you drive down the interstate, it is rare for you to go more than a few minutes without seeing a Wal-Mart truck.

Wal-Mart has over 3800 stores in the United States. That is

more than one Wal-Mart store for every single county in the country.[{4}](#) And they don't exactly fade into the landscape. They sit on vast aprons of asphalt parking and stand out because of their sheer size.

Wal-Mart has also become the national commons. Every seven days more than one hundred million Americans shop at Wal-Mart (that's one third of the country). Each year, ninety-three percent of American households shop at least once at Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart's sales in the United States are a bit more than \$2000 per household. And Wal-Mart's profit on that amount was just \$75.00.[{5}](#)

The size of this company is hard to grasp. Wal-Mart isn't just the largest retailer in the nation and the world. For most of this decade, it has been both the largest company in the world as well as the largest company in the history of the world.

In 2006, Wal-Mart will be bumped from the number-one spot on the Fortune 500 list of the largest companies by ExxonMobil, whose sales will surge past Wal-Mart's because the world price of oil rose so much in the last year.

But if you consider payrolls, there is no comparison. ExxonMobil employs about 90,000 people worldwide. Wal-Mart employs 1.6 million.[{6}](#) And there's another difference. ExxonMobil is growing by raising prices. Wal-Mart is growing despite lowering prices.

Put another way, Wal-Mart is as big as Home Depot, Kroger, Target, Costco, Sears, and Kmart combined. Target might be considered Wal-Mart's biggest rival and closest competitor, but it is small in comparison. Wal-Mart sells more by St. Patrick's Day (March 17) than Target sells all year.[{7}](#)

# The Wal-Mart Effect

Ask people to give you their opinion about Wal-Mart and you are likely to get lots of different responses. They may talk with enthusiasm about the “always low prices.” Or they might talk about the impact Wal-Mart had on small businesses in their community when the first store arrived. They may even talk about the loss of American jobs overseas. Believe me, most will have an opinion about Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart had its creation in the mind of Sam Walton who promoted a single idea: sell merchandise at the lowest price possible. It began with Wal-Mart working hard to keep the costs of their company as low as possible. This idea moved from their company to their suppliers as they asked them to be as frugal as possible. As the company grew in size, they began looking for every way to wring out the last penny of savings from materials, packaging, labor, transportation, and display. The result was “the Wal-Mart effect.”

Consumers have embraced “the Wal-Mart effect.” As a store moves into a community bringing lower prices, it drives down prices in other stores. And either they compete or close their doors. And it also reshapes the shopping habits of those in the community.

But with “the Wal-Mart effect” comes fears of “the Wal-Mart economy.” This is the nagging feeling that there are social and economic costs to be paid for “always low prices.” Critics talk about low wages, minimal benefits, and little chance for career advancement.

The company has found itself under attack from many quarters. There is a lawsuit on behalf of 1.6 million women who have worked at Wal-Mart that alleges systematic sex discrimination. Add to this the allegations that managers have required employees to work off the clock and even have locked employees in stores overnight.

There is also the constant complaint that Wal-Mart does not provide adequate health care benefits. Last year, for example, the Maryland legislature passed a bill that forces companies with more than 10,000 employees to spend at least eight percent of their payroll on health care or pay the state the difference. Since Wal-Mart is the only employer with over 10,000 employees in the state, it is easy to see that the legislation was only targeting Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart recently settled a federal investigation of its use of illegal aliens to clean its stores. The company made a record-setting payment to the federal government.

Sam Walton's goal from the beginning was an unrelenting focus on controlling costs in order to provide "always low prices." He instilled in his employees core values like hard work, frugality, discipline, and loyalty.[{8}](#)

In his book *The Wal-Mart Effect*, Charles Fishman says these values have become inverted. He points out how the company has changed. When Sam Walton died in 1992, Wal-Mart was a \$44 billion-a-year company with 370,000 employees. The number of employees has now grown by 1.2 million, and sales have grown by \$240 billion. "Wal-Mart is not only not the company Sam Walton founded, it is no longer the company he left behind."[{9}](#)

## **Out of the Box**

You probably never thought about the packaging around deodorant, but Wal-Mart did. Until the early 1990s, nearly every brand of deodorant came in a paperboard box. Most consumers opened the box, pulled out the deodorant container, and tossed the box into the garbage. Some of us recycled them, but we were a very small minority.

In the early 1990s, Wal-Mart (along with a few other retailers) decided the paperboard box was a waste. The product

came in a can or plastic container. These were at least as tough as the box. The box took up wasted space, and it wasted cardboard. Shipping the weight of the cardboard added weight to trucks and wasted fuel. And the box itself cost money to design and produce. It even cost money to put the deodorant into the box.

Wal-Mart began to apply pressure on the suppliers to eliminate the box. Deodorant manufacturers calculated that the box cost about a nickel for every consumer. Wal-Mart split the savings. Deodorant makers keep a few pennies, and Wal-Mart passed a couple of pennies savings on to the consumers.

Walk into Wal-Mart today and look at the deodorant aisle. You will probably find eight shelves of deodorant, sixty containers across. In this sea of nearly five hundred containers of deodorant, not one box.

Consider the impact of this one decision. First, there is the environmental impact. Whole forests were not cut down to provide a box that consumers did not use. A few recycled them, but the vast majority threw them away seconds after they removed their deodorant. Was Wal-Mart's pressure to unbox deodorant a good thing? It certainly was, if you are concerned about environmental issues. And Christians should be concerned about our stewardship of the environment.

The economic impact was also considerable. A savings of one nickel might seem trivial until you multiply it by the two hundred million adults in the United States. If you just account for the container of deodorant in every American bathroom, you have a savings of \$10 million, of which consumers got to keep half. But don't forget that the savings is recurrent. Americans are saving \$5 million in nickels about five to six times a year.

But there is also a third impact. The impact this decision had on jobs. So far the decision looks like a win-win. But you

might not feel so excited about the decision if you work in the forestry industry or are in the paperboard box business.

This story illustrates only so well the problem with providing a clear, unambiguous analysis of consumer behavior in American markets and, even more so, the ethics of corporations in a global market. And this story is probably easier to analyze if your first priority is the environment. But the ethics of other situations that arise from globalization aren't quite so easy to evaluate.

Wal-Mart illustrates the world in which corporate entities significantly influence our decisions and even transform an economy. While we might like the outcome of saving paperboard boxes, we certainly don't like other aspects of "the Wal-Mart effect." The company has grown so large and evolved in unexpected ways that it is difficult to predict what the future holds. And when we begin to ask moral questions, it isn't so easy to always determine whether the outcomes are good for us or the country.

## Salmon

Americans love to eat salmon. In fact, we eat more than 1.75 million pounds of salmon a day.[{10}](#) We eat it at home and when we go out to a restaurant.

And Americans buy lots of cheap salmon from Wal-Mart. But they are probably unaware of the impact their purchase has on the environment. Most of the salmon served in the United States is Atlantic salmon (which is a species that is not only found wild but is also the species of choice for salmon farmers).

The salmon that you buy in Wal-Mart is "a factory product." In other words, they are hatched from eggs, raised in freshwater hatcheries, and then grown to maturity in open-topped ocean cages in cold coastal waters.[{11}](#)

Wal-Mart sells more salmon than any other store in the country. Wal-Mart also buys all its salmon from Chile. In fact, they purchase about one-third of the annual harvest of salmon that Chile sells. Wal-Mart sells the salmon for \$4.84 a pound. It seems incredible that they can sell it for so little, but there are hidden costs.

Atlantic salmon are not native to Chile (its coastline runs along the Pacific). It's an exotic species that is literally farmed and processed by thousands of Chileans. The labor conditions are certainly a concern (long hours, low pay, processing of salmon with razor-sharp filleting instruments).

Another concern is the environment. Salmon farming is already transforming the ecology of southern Chile "with tens of millions of salmon living in vast ocean corrals, their excess food and feces settling to the ocean floor beneath the pens, and dozens of salmon processing plants dumping untreated salmon entrails directly into the ocean."[\[12\]](#)

When we buy salmon from Chile are we contributing to this environmental damage? Charles Fishman asks, "Does it matter that salmon for \$4.84 a pound leaves a layer of toxic sludge on the ocean bottoms of the Pacific fjords of southern Chile?"[\[13\]](#) After all, these salmon are raised in pens (with as many as one million per farm). They are fed antibiotics to prevent disease. As a result, you have quite a mess. One million salmon produce about the same amount of waste as 65,000 people. And add to that additional waste from unconsumed food and antibiotic residue. In essence, the current method of salmon farming creates a toxic seabed.

So how do we change this? The answer is simple: by changing consumer behavior. If shoppers won't buy salmon until Wal-Mart insists on higher standards, Wal-Mart will insist on them. The same company that created this huge market for salmon can also change it. But this will only happen if consumers voice their concerns and back it up with their behavior.

# Consumer Behavior

As I said earlier, mention the name Wal-Mart and you are likely to get lots of varied reactions. While shoppers love the “always low prices,” critics point to the impact that the company has had on the economy and the environment.

In fact, it is a bit misleading to think of Wal-Mart as merely a company. In reality it’s a global market force. Without a doubt it is one of the most efficient entities at improving its supply chain not only in this country but around the world. Most of us just shop at the store and don’t think of the implications of what we buy and where we buy it.

The size of Wal-Mart gives it the power to do many positive things. It recently announced fuel-savings plans for its stores and trucks. This could provide a model for the nation.

Wal-Mart also provided a model of how to deal with a disaster like Hurricane Katrina. Even though they had 171 facilities in the path of the storm, they were able to recover and reopen eighty-three percent of their facilities in the Gulf area within six days.[\[14\]](#)

One key to Wal-Mart’s success was associates who were dedicated to their communities. The local connection helped it deliver goods when the government failed. Wal-Mart sprang into action even before the hurricane hit. Whenever there is a possibility of a hurricane, its supply chain automatically adjusts and sends in plenty of non-perishable food and generators.

What is Wal-Mart’s effect on the local economy? One famous study found that the arrival of a Wal-Mart store had a dramatic impact. “Grocery stores lost 5 percent of their business, specialty stores lost 14 percent of their business, and clothing stores lost 18 percent of their business—all while total sales were rising 6 percent, mostly due to Wal-

Mart.”{15}

Critics of Wal-Mart say that it forces small businesses into bankruptcy. But if you think about it, it is the consumers who put people out of business. We vote with our wallets. Shoppers are the ones who have made it possible for Wal-Mart’s phenomenal growth. And we are the ones who need to pay attention to what we buy and where we buy it.

In this article, we have identified a few economic and environmental issues that result from “the Wal-Mart effect.” Previously, we have produced articles discussing the Christian’s responsibility towards [economics{16}](#) and [the environment.{17}](#)

Our consumer behavior can have a positive impact on our world. As individuals, we have a minimal impact, but collectively we have an impact on our lives and our economy every day when we spend money. For too long, Christians have been willing to separate ethics from economics. Yet in earlier centuries theologians asked important questions about the relationship of morality to money.

It is time to return to that moral reflection, especially in this age of globalization. Christians should be alert consumers in this global economy.

## Notes

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# **Christianity: The Best Thing That Ever Happened to Women**

*Sue Bohlin examines the facts to show us that a Christian, biblical worldview of women lifted them from a status equivalent to dogs to a position a fellow heirs of the grace*

*of God through Jesus Christ. Christianity, accurately applied, fundamentally changed the value and status of women.*

## **The Low Status of Women in Jesus' Day**

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

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



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

In ancient Greece, a respectable woman was not allowed to

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

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

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

## **Jesus and Women**

Jesus' treatment of women was very different:

*The extremely low status that the Greek, Roman, and Jewish woman had for centuries was radically affected by the appearance of Jesus Christ. His actions and teachings raised the status of women to new heights, often to the consternation and dismay of his friends and enemies. By word and deed, he went against the ancient, taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that defined woman as socially, intellectually, and spiritually inferior.*

*The humane and respectful way Jesus treated and responded to*

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

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

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

When Lazarus died, Jesus comforted Martha with this promise containing the heart of the Christian gospel: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26) These remarkable words were spoken to a woman! “To teach a woman was bad enough, but Jesus did more than that. He called for a verbal response from Martha. Once more, he went against the socioreligious custom by teaching a woman and by having her

publicly respond to him, a man.”{10}

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

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

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

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

In a culture that feared the power of a woman’s external beauty and feminine influence, Peter encouraged women to see themselves as valuable because God saw them as valuable. His call to aspire to the inner beauty of a trusting and tranquil spirit is staggeringly counter-cultural. He writes, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful.”

Equally staggering is his call to men to elevate their wives

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

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

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

## **Misogyny in the Church**

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

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

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

In the second century Clement of Alexandria believed and taught that every woman should blush because she is a woman. Tertullian, who lived about the same time, said, “You [Eve] are the devil’s gateway. . . . You destroyed so easily God’s image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die.” Augustine, in the fourth century, believed that a woman’s image of God was inferior to that of the man’s.[{13}](#) And unfortunately it gets even nastier than that.

Some people mistakenly believe these contemptuous beliefs of the church fathers are rooted in an anti-female Bible, but that couldn’t be farther from the truth. People held these misogynistic beliefs *in spite of*, not because of, the biblical

teachings. Those who dishonor God by dishonoring His good creation of woman allow themselves to be shaped by the beliefs of the surrounding pagan, anti-female culture instead of following Paul's exhortation to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). The church in North America does the same thing today by allowing the secular culture to shape our thinking more than the Bible. Only nine percent of Americans claiming to be born-again have a biblical worldview.[\[14\]](#) The church in Africa and Asia does the same thing today by allowing animism, the traditional folk religion, to shape their thinking more than the Bible.

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

## **Effects of Christianity on Culture**

As Christianity spread throughout the world, its redemptive effects elevated women and set them free in many ways. The Christian ethic declared equal worth and value for both men and women. Husbands were commanded to love their wives and not exasperate their children. These principles were in direct conflict with the Roman institution of *patria potestas*, which gave absolute power of life and death over a man's family, including his wife. When *patria potestas* was finally repealed by an emperor who was moved by high biblical standards, what a tremendous effect that had on the culture! Women were also granted basically the same control over their property as men, and, for the first time, mothers were allowed to be guardians of their children.[\[15\]](#)

The biblical view of husbands and wives as equal partners caused a sea change in marriage as well. Christian women started marrying later, and they married men of their own

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

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

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

As a result of Jesus Christ and His teachings, women in much of the world today, especially in the West, enjoy more privileges and rights than at any other time in history. It takes only a cursory trip to an Arab nation or to a Third World country to see how little freedom women have in countries where Christianity has had little or no presence.[{19}](#) It's the best thing that ever happened to women.

## Notes

1. Schmidt, Alvin. *How Christianity Changed the World*. Originally published under the title *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids:

Zondervan, 2001), which is the copy I reference in these notes.

2. "Men stand superior to women... But those whose perverseness ye fear, admonish them and remove them into bedchambers and beat them; but if they submit to you then do not seek a way against them" Sura 4:34, as quoted in Schmidt, p. 97.

3. Schmidt, p. 97-98.

4. Ibid., p. 98-99.

5. Ibid., p. 101.

6. Ibid., p. 102-03.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 103-104.

10. Ibid., p. 104.

11. Ibid., p. 104-105.

12. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 47.

13. Schmidt, p. 109.

14. "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," The Barna Research Group, Ltd. <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=154>.

15. Ibid., p. 111.

16. Ibid., pp. 111-112.

17. Ibid., p. 115.

18. Ibid., pp. 118-119.

19. Ibid., p. 115.

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

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

## Introduction

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

In fourteen hundred and ninety-two when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, he used rudimentary navigational equipment to prove that the earth was *round*. More than 500 years later, Friedman discovered in a conversation with one of the smartest engineers in India that essentially the world was *flat*. Friedman argues that we have entered into a third era of globalization, which he calls Globalization 3.0 that has

flattened the world.

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

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

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

The players in this new world of commerce will also be different. "Globalization 1.0 and 2.0 were driven primarily by European and American individuals and businesses. . . . Because it is flattening and shrinking the world, Globalization 3.0 is going to be more and more driven not only by individuals but also by a much more diverse—non-Western, non-white—group of individuals. Individuals from every corner of the flat world are being empowered."[{4}](#)

# The Flatteners

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

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

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

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

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

We used to go to the post office to send mail; now most of us send digitized mail over the Internet known as *e-mail*. We used to go to bookstores to browse and buy books, now we browse digitally. We used to buy a CD to listen to music, now many of us obtain our digitized music off the Internet and download it

to a MP3 player.

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

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

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

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

One example of open-source software is Apache which currently powers about two-thirds of the websites in the world. Another example of open-sourcing is blogging. Bloggers are often one-person online commentators linked to others by their common commitments. They have created essentially an open-source newsroom.

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

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

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

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

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

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

When China joined the World Trade Organization, it took Beijing and the rest of the world to a new level of offshoring. Companies began to shift production offshore and

integrate their products and services into their global supply chains.

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

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

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

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

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

For example, if you own a Toshiba laptop computer under warranty that you need fixed, you call Toshiba. What you

probably don't know is that UPS will pick up your laptop and repair it at their own UPS-run workshop dedicated to computer and printer repair. They fix it and return it in much less time than it would take to send it all the way to Toshiba.

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

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

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

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

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

The wireless revolution allows anyone portable access to everything that has been digitized anywhere in the world. When I was at graduate school at Yale University, all of us were tied to a single mainframe computer. In order to use the computer, I had to hand computer cards to someone in the computer lab in order to input data or extract information. Now thanks to digitization, miniaturization, and wireless I

can do all of that and much more from my home, office, coffee shop, airport—you name it.

## **Biblical Perspective**

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

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

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

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

For now, let's look at some important implications of a flat world. First, we should prepare our children and grandchild for global competition. Thomas Friedman says that when he was growing up his parents would tell him “Finish your dinner. People in China and India are starving.” Today he tells his

daughters, “Girls, finish your homework—people in China and India are starving for your jobs.”[\[13\]](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Notes

1. Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and

Giroux, 2005), 9.

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., 10.
4. Ibid., 11.
5. Ibid., 49.
6. Ibid., 52.
7. Ibid., 55.
8. Ibid., 73.
9. Ibid., 105.
10. Ibid., 123.
11. Ibid., 129.
12. Ibid., 153.
13. Ibid, 237.

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## **Dungeons and Dragons and FRPGs**

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

In this way, D&D or any other FRPG can be compared to rock music: the genre itself is not inherently evil or dangerous, but the content (lyrics, in the case of rock music) is what

makes the difference. (For more on that concept, see Jerry Solomon's article ["Rock Music"](#) on our website.)

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

## Worldview

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

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

"Though the creators of Dungeons and Dragons may have borrowed many aspects from Tolkien's 'middle earth,' one part they did not consider was the overall setting in which everything took place and from which everything derived its ultimate meaning Tolkien's Christian world view. As a result, the game's world view does not represent the moral universe God created. In

place of the creator God, its universe is governed by a multiplicity of gods and demigods. Moreover, its universe is not infused with an absolute, inherent morality. The more thoroughly one investigates the writings of Tolkien, Lewis, and others and compares them to FRP games, the more one will see that there are not only crucial differences in the theological and moral perspectives but also in the context and motives of their respective inventors. Furthermore, there are important differences in the kind and extent of participation required in each (e.g., the cultivation of fantasy in the participatory amoral milieu of Dungeons and Dragons versus the passive moral universe of Tolkien).”[\[3\]](#)

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

## **Morality**

Because most FRPGs pit good against evil, some of their proponents point to the games as moral. But their overall morality is pragmatic (what works to get what you want) at best and amoral at worst.[\[4\]](#) “[T]he universes created in fantasy role-playing games generally tend to be confused on the issue of morality. Though they have borrowed many aspects of Tolkien’s ‘Middle Earth,’ the makers of Dungeons and Dragons and other FRP games have not created theistic ‘universes.’ Rather, their universes are generally governed by a multiplicity of gods and demigods. While in a theistic universe, good is determined by the attributes of God Himself, in FRP worlds good and evil are presented as equal and opposite impersonal poles, and the gods as well as the creatures may align themselves with either. Since there is no supreme God, and since good does not ultimately triumph over evil, many players eventually find themselves preferring to play evil roles; fewer demands are placed on them that way.

“Cornerstone [magazine] quotes Rett Kipp, a college student who plays FRP games forty hours a week: “‘In D&D it’s better to be evil. You get more advantages being evil, and it’s easier to go on and not have to think of what to do and what not to do. If for some reason you had the idea in your head that you no longer trust someone, if you chop him down from behind as an evil character there’s no penalty for it...’”[{5}](#)

## **Time-eating Monster**

You can find any number of family members who have watched FRPGs gobble up their loved ones as they spend hours every day, or each week, engrossed in “their game,” either online or in real life. Students have flunked out of school because they didn’t go to class or do their homework. People have lost their jobs because they were more committed to playing their game than keeping their commitments at work. And nobody knows how many relationships have collapsed because people were consumed by their games to the exclusion of all else. The popular online game “EverQuest” has been aptly nicknamed “EverCrack” by many players.[{6}](#)

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

“As advocates of the game get more involved it has a tendency to become a sort of time eating monster in and of itself. After playing the game with her family, a New West magazine researcher noted that, ‘Good or evil, it becomes a compulsive force in the lives of those who play.’[{8}](#) “What is the problem here? Well, we are exhorted to ‘walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are

evil' (Eph. 5:15, 16). In the light of such words, a fantasy game with a ferocious appetite for time is hardly the wise way to walk. To play one will require a tremendous amount of time, and since no one wants to play badly, perhaps such time consumption would best be exchanged for more profitable pursuits."[{9}](#)

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

## **Blurred Reality**

While many people have no trouble distinguishing between reality and fantasy, some FRPG players are sucked into what could be called "reality distortion." Players sometimes begin to think of their characters as real people with separate existences. (This is not limited to FRPG, however. I know of one person so caught up in the Left Behind series that she fell asleep thinking about the characters and action in the book she was reading, and upon waking, found herself praying for a character in crisis! And many fans of TV shows don't really "get it" that the actor who plays a character has a real-life, different existence from the one he or she plays on TV. Not to mention the many letters the author of the Harry Potter books has received from children begging for acceptance into the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!)

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

## Magic and the Occult

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

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

Others experienced in spiritual warfare have observed that the very real demonic realm are quite legalistic and literal: when anyone opens a door to them, they will come through it! Most people are completely oblivious to the reality of their choices opening a door to the demonic, but the consequences catch up with them. This is one reason God has said that all forms of magic are an abomination to Him (Deut. 18) out of His loving desire to protect us.

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

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

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

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

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

## **Lust for Power**

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

through FRP, conquer a kingdom or obtain immense treasure simply by casting a spell.

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

Bill Schnoebelen makes an excellent point about the lust for power: “Make no mistake about it, magic and sorcery ARE spiritual. It does not matter if they are ‘make believe’ magic or not. It is the mind that is the battleground. I just recently had a D&D player who professed Christ tell me that everything he did had Christ in it, because Christ lived in him, even as he was playing D&D. While that may be true of a Christian, the question needs to be asked: is Christ pleased with what His servant is doing? “I used the metaphor of a porn role-playing game, where the participants play acted in various forms of sexual sin such as fornication, adultery or homosexuality. There was no actual sexual touching involved among the players, nor any nudity required. It was all in the mind. Would Jesus be pleased with that? “See, most of us can understand that concept better because most of us are more familiar with the power human sexuality can have over our minds. It is one of the most powerful forces God created within us. Yet, what most Christian gamers do not understand that magic is a kind of spiritual lust. Allowing the concepts of magic and sorcery into our minds awakens within us a kind of sexual itch that has no definable source or cause. It is,

however subtle, an itch for power. Magic, at its root, is about power and about rebellion. It is about not liking how God runs the universe and thinking you can do a better job yourself.

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

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

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

## **Heart Issue**

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

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

“Discerning the difference between a wholesome use and misuse

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

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

## Notes

1. "Fantasy Games People Play," Christian Resource Institute, <http://www.equip.org/free/DD401.pdf>
2. Ibid, p. 2.
3. Ibid., p. 2-3.
4. "Should a Christian Play Dungeons and Dragons?", William Schnoebelen, [www.chick.com/articles/frpg.asp](http://www.chick.com/articles/frpg.asp).
5. "Fantasy Games People Play," p. 7.
6. "When Games Stop Being Fun," April 12, 2002, [http://news.com.com/2100-1040\\_3-881673.html](http://news.com.com/2100-1040_3-881673.html)
7. Gary Gygax, Dungeons and Dragons, basic manual. TSR Hobbies, Inc., 1979, 3. Quoted in "Fantasy Games People Play,"

p. 4.

8. Moira Johnston, "It's Only a Game Or Is It?", New West, (August 25, 1980), 34. Quoted in "Fantasy Games People Play,"

p. 4.

9. Fantasy Games People Play, p. 4.

10. Should a Christian Play Dungeons and Dragons?, op.cit.

11. John Eric Holmes, "Confessions of a Dungeon Master," *Psychology Today* (November 1980), 89. Cited in "Fantasy Games People Play," p. 4.

12. Fantasy Games People Play, p. 5.

13. Ibid.

14. Should Christians Play Dungeons and Dragons? Op cit.

15. Fantasy Games People Play, p. 5-6.

16. Should Christians Play Dungeons and Dragons? Op cit.

17. Ibid., p. 3.

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# Terrorist Attack in London

July 7, 2005

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

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

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

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

In other words, criminals threaten the state from within, while foreign armies threaten the state from outside. In the case of seeking domestic peace, Paul outlines how governments will approve of good works, but that governments should bring fear to those who are wrongdoers.

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

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

combatants willing to die for their perverted religious views.

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

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

To prevent future attacks, we must pay attention to our surroundings and those around us. That doesn't mean we need to be paranoid of everything and suspicious of everyone. But it does mean that we need to be alert.

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

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