

Coddling of the American Mind

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

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



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

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

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

That book used the same title: *The Coddling of the American Mind*. Jonathan was on [Point of View](#) last year to talk about the book. The authors believe that these significant

psychological changes that have taken place in the minds of students explain much of the campus insanity we see on campus today.

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

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

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

Three Untruths (Part 1)

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

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

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

Part of the problem in these untruths is what they call “concept creep.” Safety used to mean to be safe from physical threats. But that has expanded to the idea that safety must also include emotional comfort. In order to provide that comfort, professors and students a few years ago introduced the idea of creating “safe spaces” for students. And in order to keep those students emotionally safe in the classroom, professors must issue “trigger warnings” so these students don’t experience trauma during a classroom lecture or discussion.

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

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

Three Untruths (Part 2)

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

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

Here is how it develops. First, you prevent certain topics from being discussed in class. Next, you prevent certain speakers from coming to campus because they might present a perspective that aggrieved students believe should not be discussed. In the book is a chart illustrating how many speakers have been disinvited from universities. Five years ago, the line jumps up significantly.

The third untruth follows from that assumption. It is the “Untruth of Us Versus Them: Life is a Battle Between Good People and Evil People.” The authors argue that “the human mind is prepared for tribalism.” They even provide psychological research demonstrating that. But that doesn’t mean we have to live that way. In fact, conditions in society can turn tribalism up, down, or off. Certain conflicts can

turn tribalism up and make them more attentive to signs about which team a person may be on. Peace and prosperity usually turn tribalism down.

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

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

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

An Example: Evergreen State College

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

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

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

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

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

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

And the whole episode illustrates the Untruth of Us Versus Them (Life is a battle between good people and evil people).

The students and faculty engaged in common-enemy identity politics by labeling a politically progressive college and liberal professors as examples of white supremacy. One student (who refused to join the protest) later testified to the college trustees, "If you offer any kind of alternative viewpoint, you're the enemy."

What Can We Do?

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

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

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

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

Second, professors must get control of their classrooms. Students cannot be allowed to determine what subjects cannot be taught and what topics cannot be discussed. The authors of this book are concerned about the tendency to encourage students to develop extra-thin skins just before they enter

into the real world. Employers aren't going to care too much about their feelings. Students don't have the right not to be offended.

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

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

The authors have identified certain concerns that colleges and universities need to address. They remind us how hostile the academic world has become, not only to traditional Christian values, but also to mere common sense. We need to pray for what is taking place in the college environment.

Notes

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

2.

www.thecollegefix.com/heres-the-9-best-takeaways-from-heather-mac-donalds-new-diversity-delusion-book/

Stop Worrying About the 2024 Election!

It is Election Season, the great American pastime second only in importance to the Super Bowl, where we all gather as one people to decide how the government will exploit us this time! Get ready to break up friendships, argue with family members, and dehumanize anyone who does not vote for your candidate! All jokes aside, the presidential election is a stressful event, especially in 2024, since our political climate is extremely polarized. How are we as Christians and Americans to approach our own electoral process?

While not all of the founding fathers were Christians, “Jefferson and other secular minded Americans subscribed to certain propositions about law and authority that had the roots in the Protestant reformation,”[\[1\]](#) so they all held Christian values. The fundamental Christian teaching our government is founded upon is that humans are made in the image of God. The Declaration of Independence asserts, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights. . . .”

The limitation of powers was also influenced by Christian teachings on human nature, that we are a fallen creation. Humans, while made in the image of God, are inherently corrupted by sin. All systems of government can and will be used for the ruler’s benefit at the expense of their subjects. The U.S. government was set up to keep too much power from falling into anybody’s hands, including the masses.

As citizens, Christians have been given a number of responsibilities. We are commanded to obey and render service

to our government. "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." (Matthew 22:21) Because it is a God-ordained institution, we are to submit to civil authority (1 Peter 2:13-17).[\[2\]](#) One service you may render as an American citizen is participating in the law-making process and executive processes by voting.

The campaigners seek to present themselves as God's gift to the United States, while portraying their opponents and any who vote for them as the devil himself. It is your responsibility to discern truth from lies. We have no right to treat those who vote differently than us as less than human. All are made in the image of God, so all deserve to be respected as such. Do not throw around labels meant to dehumanize the other side like "anti-life" or "Nazi," as these achieve nothing but further enmity between our countrymen. Instead, do everything you can to debate with respect by attacking their position rather than the person.

Finally, in Luke 12 Jesus tells us that God can and will provide for our needs, so we should not worry about things outside of our control. Too often, I have seen people worrying over how other people in their city vote, or respond with anger when their electoral vote overturned the popular vote. This is unfortunate.

"But this is injustice!" some might say. On the contrary, letting the popular vote decide our elections is unjust, because it gives all of the power to big cities. People living in rural areas will have no say in elections, because the city always out-votes them. We have no control over how other people vote. Our electors are meant to take power away from the popular vote.[\[3\]](#) Why should you be mad? Once you have voted, it's out of your hands. God is in control of the rest.

Notes

1. Anderson, Kerby. *Christians and Government: A Biblical Point of View* (Cambridge Ohio: Christian Publishing House,

2016), 20.

2. Ibid., 7.

3. National Archives and Records Administration. (n.d.). Electoral College History. National Archives and Records Administration. www.archives.gov/electoral-college/history

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The Importance of Voting

Kerby Anderson provides reasons why it's so important for people of faith to exercise our stewardship of voting in what is probably the most consequential election in our lifetime.

This election season is like no other in recent memory. This was the first time in more than a century that two presidential candidates, who have served in that office, were running against each other. Now we have a previous president and vice-president running. This is similar to 1984 when President Reagan ran against the previous Vice-President in Jimmy Carter's administration (Walter Mondale).

Voters can compare four years of a Trump administration with three-and-half years of a Biden/ Harris administration. Of course, they can also compare a Republican-controlled Senate with a Democratic-controlled Senate. And they can do the same for the House of Representatives.

You can also compare the National Democratic Platform with the National Republican Platform. Here are links to both:

[Democratic](#)

[Republican](#)

The differences are stark and illustrate why so many people say this is the most consequential election in our lifetimes.

Who we elect to office will determine our laws and our taxes. Judges that are appointed and confirmed will affect life, liberty, and property.

As Christians we need to consider what role we will play in the next election. We have a civic responsibility because we are both citizens of heaven and citizens of earth. To assess our involvement, let's look at a few issues.

Close Elections

We have had many close elections for federal office. For example, we have had close presidential elections in 1960, 1976, 2000, 2004, 2016, and 2020. The last two presidential elections illustrate this when we examine the vote totals in the six swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin).

In 2016, Donald Trump won three of those swing states (Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) by a mere 77,744 votes. In 2020, Joe Biden won three swing states (Arizona, Georgia, and Michigan) by 42,844 votes.

While we can have a debate about whether Joe Biden really won those states fairly, my point is to illustrate how close even the presidential elections have been. Change 42,844 votes in three states and we would have had a 269-269 electoral college tie.

We can also point to very close elections for federal, state, and local offices. The key point is we have close elections, and that's why all Christians should be registered to vote and then go out and cast their ballot.

Importance of the Christian Vote

Various polls suggest that religious voters could sway the race between Vice President Harris and former President Donald Trump. One CBN report documented that "President Biden is

trailing Donald Trump among voters who regularly attend religious services, a phenomenon extending beyond the traditional support base of evangelical Christians.” Senator Josh Hawley put it this way: “There’s no majority for the Republican party without voters of faith. And they’re going to decide this election. So we need to them to turn out.”

Former member of Congress and former presidential candidate, Tulsi Gabbard explains that the Democratic Party “is trying to erase God from every facet of our public life.” She also added that “Now more than ever, people of faith, people of spirituality, need to stand up, to defend this fundamental, God-given right and stop those who are trying to take it away from us.”

Stewardship of the Vote

Have Christians been a good steward of the vote? Over the years, I have provided statistics about how born-again Christians have done in previous elections. The percentages are relatively consistent. Approximately 85 percent of Christians of voting age are registered to vote. That means about 15 percent are not even registered to vote. Of those Christians registered to vote, about 65 percent actually vote.

In the New Testament, Jesus says that believers are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). We have a stewardship responsibility when it comes to using our gifts, talents, and opportunities. Jesus also described the importance of this stewardship in His parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). He was critical of the one servant who buried his talent (Matthew 25:26). We as voters should not “bury our talent” but use the opportunity God has given us to vote responsibly.

Educating Voters

Having accurate information is vital and can change an

election. Unfortunately, [media bias](#) often prevents voters from knowing important information. A month after the 2020 election, the Media Research Center asked The Polling Company to survey 1,750 Biden voters in seven swing states (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin). They tested the voters' knowledge of eight news stories that liberal news media failed to report properly.

They concluded that this lack of information proved crucial. They discovered that one in every six Biden voters surveyed (17%) said they would have abandoned the Democratic candidate if they had known the facts in one or more of these news stories.

The eight news stories surveyed included three stories that reflected poorly on Joe Biden or Kamala Harris and five stories about Trump administration successes. For example, they found that more than a third (35.4%) didn't know of the Biden sex assault allegations. Nearly half (45.1%) did not know about the scandals involving Hunter Biden. And a quarter (25.3%) of them did not know that Senator Kamala Harris had the most left-wing record of any Senator in 2019.

When they surveyed the Trump successes, they found that anywhere from four in ten to five in ten did not know about economic growth, the creation of 11 million jobs, the Middle East peace deals, energy independence, and Operation Warp Speed.

A total of 17 percent said they would have changed their vote if they had been aware of these issues. This would have moved every one of the swing states into Trump's column and given him 311 electoral votes. This study is illustrative of the impact the mainstream media had on the 2020 election.

Churches and Pastors

Another place where voters can be educated is in church. But

pastors often want to know how IRS regulations affect what churches might want to do to educate the congregation. Fortunately, Kelly Shackelford and First Liberty Institute have put together a legal summary of what pastors can and cannot do during an election.

Because the church is a 501(c) (3) organization, there are two actions pastors cannot take during an election. First, a pastor or a church may not use the organization to endorse one candidate over another. Second, a pastor or a church may not give its money to one candidate over another.

On the other side, pastors are free to do many things during an election. First, pastors can speak about political issues. “It is a misconception that pastors cannot address political issues—even ‘hot button’ issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, and gun control—from the pulpit.”

Second, pastors can educate their congregation about politics. “Pastors are fully protected when it comes to issues like educating members of their church about the political process, handing out non-partisan voter guides and flyers so members can read about each candidate’s platform, and even providing the opportunity for members to register to vote.”

Third, pastors can invite political candidates to speak at their church. “Contrary to popular belief, pastors and churches can invite political candidates to address their congregation from the pulpit, as long as all the candidates in a race are included in the invitation.”

This is a crucial election. It is time for Christians to get involved.

Nuclear War

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of nuclear war from Annie Jacobsen's book Nuclear War: A Scenario with a biblical response.

Hell on Earth

Annie Jacobsen begins her book with a scenario: [{1}](#) a one-megaton thermonuclear bomb strikes the Pentagon and vaporizes the building and the 27,000 employees within it. A mile away the marble columns of the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials burst apart and disintegrate. Two and a half miles west at National Park, the clothes of a majority of the 35,000 people watching the ballgame catch on fire.

Her book, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, takes you through, in a minute-by-minute description, what would happen if a “bolt out of the blue” nuclear attack took place on U.S. soil. This 370-page book isn't for the faint-hearted, but it is an in-depth investigation in how we got to this place in world history and what would happen if the unthinkable became reality. And the book provides a sequel to the 2023 biographical film, *Oppenheimer*.



Why are we discussing this difficult topic of nuclear war now? First, there is a need to educate a new generation. Although Americans talked about the danger of nuclear war during the Cold War years, much less has been said in recent years. Second, the threat of nuclear war is even greater today because of countries like North Korea that have nuclear weapons and other countries like Iran that are attempting to develop nuclear weapons. Third, this discussion is relevant because so many documents about nuclear war have been declassified. We know so much more about nuclear war than we knew just a few years ago.

It is impossible for our minds to comprehend what happens in a nuclear blast. The air heats to one hundred and eighty million degrees Fahrenheit. This is nearly five times hotter than the temperature in the center of the sun. The blast levels any structure within miles, but also creates winds travelling at several hundred miles per hour.

The nuclear fireball then rises like a hot-air balloon forming the iconic mushroom cloud with cap and stem. Then the inferno begins. Gas lines explode and look like giant blowtorches. Washington, D.C. has now become a mega-inferno. Asphalt streets turn to liquid from the intense heat. More than a million people are dead or dying within two minutes after the detonation.

Outside of the blast area, the electromagnetic pulse obliterates all radio, television, and the Internet. Cars with electric ignition systems cannot start. Water stations cannot pump water. And deadly radiation spreads to those who survived the initial blast.

Nuclear war may be unthinkable, but that is why we are thinking and talking about it.

Happens Too Fast

Nuclear war could develop unthinkably fast and devastate our world.

An intercontinental ballistic missile is a long-range missile that delivers nuclear weapons to political and military targets on the other side of the world. These ICBMs exist to do one thing: kill millions of people in another country.

Back when the ICBM was invented, Herb York, the Pentagon's chief scientist, wanted to calculate how many minutes it would take for it to reach the Soviet Union.[\[2\]](#) A group of defense scientists estimated that it would take 26 minutes and 40

seconds. From launch to annihilation takes just 1,600 seconds. Nuclear war happens too fast.

Today that estimate varies because we have nine countries that possess nuclear weapons: Russia, France, China, Pakistan, India, Israel, North Korea, the UK, and the US. Given North Korea's geographical location, the launch-to-target time frame from the Korean peninsula to the East Coast of the US would be about 33 minutes.

But a nuclear blast can come even sooner from nuclear-armed, nuclear-powered submarines. These submarines are called "boomers" or even have been called the "handmaidens of the apocalypse." They are undetectable under the sea and can sneak up very close to a nation's coast and launch a first-strike attack. This is why the president actually has only a six-minute window to decide on a nuclear counterattack.

Launch on Warning

America has a policy known as "launch on warning."^[3] What that means is that America will launch its nuclear weapons once its early-warning electronic sensor system warns of an impending nuclear attack. Put another way, the US won't wait to check if a warning is accurate, it will not wait and physically absorb a nuclear blow before launching its own nuclear weapons at whoever sent a missile to them.

This policy has been in place since the height of the cold war and represented an incredibly high risk. As one advisor explains, launch on warning during at time of intense crisis is a recipe for catastrophe.

Presidential candidates have promised to change this policy, but nothing has happened so far. George W. Bush in 2000 vowed to address this policy: "Keeping so many weapons on high alert may create an unacceptable risk for accidental or unauthorized launch." Barack Obama argued that "keeping nuclear weapons ready to launch on a moment's notice is a dangerous relic of

the Cold War.” President Biden has also encouraged to eliminate this perilous policy. No change has been made.

President’s Football

The decision to launch a nuclear strike comes from the president. How did the government decide to give the president the nuclear football? The story begins with Harold Agnew back in 1959.^[4] He visited a NATO base and noticed there were four F-84F aircraft at the end of the runway; each was carrying two nuclear gravity bombs. This meant that these nuclear bombs were in the custody of one U.S. Army private armed with a M1 rifle with eight rounds of ammunition. The only safeguard against unauthorized use of an atomic bomb was this single GI surrounded by numbers of foreign troops on foreign territory with thousands of Soviet troops just miles away.

When he got back to the U.S., Agnew contacted a project engineer at Sandia Laboratories and asked if they could put an electronic “lock” on the bomb’s firing circuits that would prevent others from arming the nuclear bomb. They produced a lock and coded switch that would be activated with a three-digit code.

They presented the idea and the device to the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and then to President Kennedy who ordered it to be done. But the military objected. A general asked how a pilot somewhere in the world could get a code from the President of the United States to arm a nuclear weapon before being overrun by a massively superior number of Soviet troops? And why not have other nuclear bombs also coded?

The answer came in the creation of the President’s Football, which is an emergency satchel. This gave the president, not the military, control of America’s nuclear arsenal. The Football must always be near the president.

There is a story of how important it is for the president to have access to the Football.[{5}](#) When President Clinton was visiting Syria, President Hafez al-Assad's handlers tried to prevent Clinton's military aide from riding in an elevator with him. The Secret Service would not let that happen, and they did not let that happen.

Inside is a set of documents known as the Black Book. Robert "Buzz" Patterson served as a military aide to President Clinton, and I was able to interview him one time on [my radio program](#). He likened the Black Book to a "Denny's breakfast menu" because of how it looked. The president must choose retaliatory targets from a predetermined nuclear strike list on the menu.

Let me end with this question: Do you believe the current president has a mental capacity to make a rational decision of about launching nuclear weapons?

War Games

One question that was asked more than forty years ago was whether anyone could win a nuclear war. Spoiler alert: no one can. President Reagan ordered a simulated war game with the name Proud Prophet to explore the outcome and long-term effects of a nuclear war.[{6}](#)

The research used mathematical models to predict outcomes and was conducted at the National War College. Participants were cloistered away inside a secure location to prevent leaks. The results were only declassified in 2012, but much of the material was blacked out. Fortunately, this declassification allowed participants to discuss it without violating the Espionage Act of 1917.

Over the two weeks, every simulated scenario ended the same way. Sometimes they began with a tactical nuclear strike and a so-called limited nuclear war. Other times they simulated

exercises with NATO and then with other exercises without NATO. There were scenarios where the U.S. launched nuclear war preemptively. Sometimes that was when the Pentagon was supposedly in focused calm and other when in a crisis mode.

Sadly, the result was the same. Once a nuclear war starts, there is no way to win it or even end it. No matter how a nuclear war begins, it ends with complete Armageddon-like destruction. As one participant put it, this destruction "made all the wars of the past five hundred years pale in comparison." At least a half billion (and probably more like a billion) people die in the war's opening salvo. Then billions more die of radiation poisoning and starvation.

Nuclear Winter

When the bombs cease striking targets, the world turns cold and dark. Everything is on fire. Smoke produces noxious smog of pyrotoxins. Fires in the cities ignite other fires. Even in the less-populated areas, forest fires rage.

The density of soot reduces global temperatures by 20-40 degrees depending on the location. Earth plunges into the horror known as a "nuclear winter." This might be a familiar term for those of us who lived in the 1980s. Astronomer Carl Sagan wrote about it and warned us of the dangers of nuclear war.

A nuclear war would change the troposphere and thus the amount of sunlight reaching the earth. Once the radioactive fog and haze diminish, the ozone layer disappears, and the sun's warming rays are now killer UV rays.

Earth is no longer as hospitable for humans as it once was. After millennia of planting and harvesting, the few humans to survive return to a hunter-gatherer existence.

Biblical Perspective

We will conclude this discussion of nuclear war with a biblical perspective. Let's begin with the realization that God is sovereign and in control. But that doesn't mean that He would never allow a nuclear war to take place. Throughout history, we have had tyrants and armies destroy people groups and civilizations. God used pagan nations to judge the nation of Israel.

How should we respond? Since the first atomic bombings at the end of World War II, there has been a condition known as "nuclear anxiety." Jesus instructs us not to "be anxious about tomorrow" (Matthew 6:34), and Paul also tells us not to "be anxious about anything" (Philippians 4:6). Jesus even says that "if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved" (Matthew 24:22).

In the book of Daniel, we have another reminder of God's sovereignty that came in the second dream of Nebuchadnezzar. It reminded him of the fact that God "rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will and sets over it the lowliest of men" (Daniel 4:17). Nebuchadnezzar knew more about human sovereignty than anyone and proclaimed God's sovereignty over the earth at the end of his days (4:34).

Some Christians have suggested that the Bible may be describing a nuclear war. In the book of Revelation, there is a description of the poisoning of the waters (8:11), death of the earth's vegetation (8:17), the end of ocean life (16:3), and the inability to block the sun's rays resulting in severe burns (16:8).

There is a description of stars of heaven falling to earth (6:13) that some have suggested might be describing nuclear missiles raining down on earth during a nuclear war. These would be visible as they enter the atmosphere and begin striking the cities on earth.

Even passages in the Old Testament might point to the effects of a nuclear war. For example, in Zechariah 14:12 we read that “the Lord will strike all the peoples that wage war against Jerusalem: their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.”

One prophecy yet to be fulfilled can be found in Ezekiel 38 that describes nations that will come against Israel. But critics point to the fact that it says they are riding horses, wearing helmets and armor, and wielding swords (38:4-5). That doesn't look like a modern army. But I remember a famous quote from Albert Einstein: “I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones.” The world might look very different after a nuclear war.

In this article we have been discussing the unthinkable: a nuclear war. We should remember the words of Jesus: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Notes

1. Annie Jacobsen, *Nuclear War: A Scenario*, NY: Dutton, 2024, xvii.
2. Ibid., 53-55.
3. Ibid., 59-60.
4. Ibid., 86-87.
5. Ibid., 84-85.
6. Ibid., 173-178.

Jesus, American Politics, and Bearing God's Name

Have you ever wondered how to engage in politics as a Christian? How do you filter what our political leaders say through the lens of scripture? How do you determine if someone in a political office just wants your vote and is willing to misuse scripture to do it? Tom Davis addresses the concerns we should have when our political leaders misuse scripture, how to identify their crafty lies, and how to think theologically when listening and evaluating their promises on their political platform.

I started paying attention to politics around the year 2000. Since then, politics has grown more contentious. The two major parties are suspicious of each other, and the rhetoric has grown even more contentious. Every president elected since 2000 has been declared to be an illegitimate president by some of their opponents. Most political pundits and activists increase the contention, especially during election campaigns. The worst part of this political polarization is that both parties claim Jesus is on their side. How can Jesus be on both sides? What is their evidence that confirms their claim? How should Christians respond?

The Third Commandment: Taking God's Name in Vain

To help us address how politicians use the name of Jesus, it will help to look at the third commandment. The Ten Commandments are found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. God leads the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt, and makes a covenant with His people. In Exodus 20, God gives these commandments as the conditions of His covenant with the Hebrews. In Deuteronomy, these commandments are restated as

the Hebrews are preparing to go into the promised land. The third commandment is, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."[\[1\]](#)

These commandments were the foundation for the moral behavior that the Hebrew people were to follow to keep their covenant relationship with God. Sometimes there is a particular confusion over the third commandment. A version of this covenant called "The Redneck Ten Commandments" lists the third commandment as "Watch yer mouth." While humorous, this fails to capture the essence of the commandment. Dropping a "g__d___," or an "OMG" in a conversation is not at the heart of the third commandment. Paul wrote of Jesus, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."[\[2\]](#) This means that Jesus is God incarnate, which means exclaiming "Jesus Christ!" as an expression of disgust or surprise is the same as the expressions just mentioned. These phrases can violate taking God's name in vain, but are not at the heart of the issue. There are other passages in the Bible that address the use of impure, offensive, or vulgar language.

If vulgar and impious phrases such as GD or OMG are not at the heart of the third commandment, what is this commandment about? I suggest two meanings, both of which we see violated in American politics.

When God gave the Hebrews the Ten Commandments, the people were coming out of Egypt. The people were going into the land promised to them, which was inhabited by the Canaanites. Those people, as well as most people of the Ancient Near East, thought that by invoking a god's name, that god could be manipulated into doing what the people liked. Old Testament scholar Abel Ndjerareon tells us, "Pagans end up believing that they can easily manipulate both the name and the god represented by the name. The name thus becomes a way of controlling, of mastering, and taming the divinity. But the God of Israel refuses to allow his name to be used in this

way. He is not an object to be manipulated.”{3} Unlike the gods of the surrounding nations, Yahweh will not be controlled or mastered by people simply because they invoke His name. Old Testament scholar John Walton also states, “The third commandment when read as ancient Near Eastern literature concerns how Yahweh’s power/authority was not to be perceived—people were to recognize it by refraining from attempts to control or misuse it.”{4} In the third commandment Yahweh is telling the Hebrews, with whom He just entered a covenant, that He is not like pagan gods. They cannot manipulate Him by using His name.

Politicians do not use God’s name to manipulate God, they use God’s name to manipulate people. People will take God’s name and attach it to a political party or a politician to convince people to vote for them. Currently “Jesus Saves” is not only a statement of faith, now it is also a political banner. Jesus Saves banners were at the January 6th riots. Why? Were people witnessing to other people during the riot? That is not likely. Politicians use the name of God to gather support for campaigns and political ideas that God does not agree with. While they may not be trying to manipulate God, they are trying to manipulate His people.

There is another aspect to taking God’s name in vain. One use of the Hebrew word for “take” could be something like taking up arms, taking things into your own hands, or taking a bag from someone to help them carry groceries.

The word translated as “take” in the third commandment is also translated as “bear” in other parts of the Old Testament. In Exodus 28, God gives Moses the instructions for how to make the priestly garments and how these garments were to be used. One of the garments, like an apron, is called a breastpiece. The breastpiece has twelve stones attached to it. Each stone represents a tribe of Israel. Aaron is to wear this holy garment when entering the tabernacle: “So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on

his heart, when he goes into the Holy Place, to bring them to remembrance before the LORD. And in the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the LORD. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the LORD." {5}

A few verses later Aaron is instructed to wear a headband with a gold plate with "Yahweh" engraved on it. The instructions are: "It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord." {6} In this passage we can see that Aaron is bearing, or representing, Israel before God by wearing the breastpiece. The gold plate on Aaron's forehead signifies that he is God's representative to Israel. In light of the third commandment and these instructions given to Aaron when fulfilling his priestly role, Israel is to represent God (bear or take his name) to the nations just as Aaron represents (bears) Israel before God. {7}

We Christians should be involved in politics. There is nothing wrong with Christians running for office, or campaigning for a cause. As Christians we bear God's name. We represent God to other people. This means that how we act, what we say, and how we treat people matters to God. When we take God's name and attach it to a political view that does not accurately represent Him, we bear His name in vain. When we campaign, we must do so in a way that honors God. We must not misrepresent Him.

American Politics and God

Throughout the history of America, people have appealed to God and the Bible to justify different social and political movements. The earliest people to settle in what became the United States were devout Christians. The Bible informed their

beliefs and way of life. The Founding Fathers had a variety of religious beliefs ranging from Enlightenment Epicureanism (an ancient Greek philosophy that believed that gods did not exist, and only physical things exist) and deism to Protestant Christianity. Most of them saw value in the Bible, even if they were not Christians. Different Americans at different times have appealed to God and the Bible to gain support for slavery, the abolition of slavery, Manifest Destiny (a cultural belief in the 19th-century United States that American settlers were destined to expand across North America, per *Wikipedia*), the humane treatment of Native Americans, Prohibition, and many other movements and goals. However, these movements are not equal when evaluated by the teachings of the Bible. Politicians and activists still appeal to the Bible to rally voters and supporters for their goals. How should current appeals to the Bible be evaluated?

Matthew Dowd, a Democrat who once worked as an advisor to the Bush administration, said, "If Jesus Christ was alive today, He would be called a groomer, He would be called woke, and He would be called a socialist if He was alive today and speaking the message He spoke in the gospels today about treating everybody with dignity." Dowd went on to say, "Jesus Christ hung around with prostitutes and tax collectors. He was nailed to a cross because He spoke on behalf of the most marginalized people in the Middle East."[\[8\]](#) He also said that a small segment of conservative activists has corrupted Jesus' message, which Dowd said was "love conquers hate."

What should we think about Dowd's statements during the interview? First, notice that Dowd does not quote the Bible at any time during the interview. He references the gospels in a general way. Given that this was a live interview on a news broadcast, I can understand that because time was limited.

The question remains, how do his claims stand up against biblical scrutiny? Would Jesus be called a groomer (slang for a person who builds relationships with children to

manipulate and exploit them)? I think Dowd means that Jesus would be falsely accused of being a groomer. But Dowd seems to think that Jesus would be teaching that same sex intercourse, transgenderism, and things like that are good. I see no evidence of that in the Bible.

Dowd's claim that Jesus died because He spoke out on behalf of marginalized people completely misses the mark. Jesus did disrupt the cultural norms and class divisions of the Jews of that time. Women traveled with Jesus and His disciples. Jesus spoke with the Samaritans. Jesus touched lepers and other unclean people. He even had a tax collector as one of his closest disciples. But there is no indication that He died because He did these things. Jesus did not die for "love conquers hate." The Apostle John tells us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."[{9}](#) John also wrote, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only but also the sins of the whole world."[{10}](#) While Jesus taught that the marginalized should be respected and that the oppressed should be defended, that is not why He died. Jesus did not die for love, He died because He loved the world. His death was not about equality, it was a payment for our sins. Those who confess their sins, oppressors and oppressed, and turn to Jesus as Lord of all creation, will have their sins forgiven.

The latest instance I saw of the Bible being used for politics is California governor Gavin Newsom's campaign billboards promoting the pro-choice position. The bottom of the billboards has Mark 12:31 at the bottom of the poster: "Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these." Newsom seems to think loving your neighbor means supporting abortion. He also left out the first part of Jesus' answer to the question of which command is the greatest, "The most important is, Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your

heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”{11} Does Newsom leave this out because he thinks it would make the billboard cluttered? I don’t think so. The question that Newsom needs to answer is, how does promoting the pro-choice position show love for God? Every person bears the image of God. When, in the development of the baby, is the image put in the baby? Because biology, and more importantly, the Bible does not tell us, it seems the most moral and cautious position is to assume that the image of God is in the baby at conception. Let us not forget that the command to love your neighbor is tied to the command to love God. How does abortion show love for God? Every politician or political activist who wants to use passages of the Bible to support their political cause needs to be able to answer these kinds of questions. Leaving these kinds of questions unanswered does not honor the name of God.

During President Trump’s campaign in 2016 he was a guest speaker at Liberty University. The thing most people remember about his speech is that he said “Two Corinthians” instead of “Second Corinthians.” But why should this matter? Christians in England call the book “Two Corinthians.”

The issue in Trump’s speech is the verse he quoted and what was implied by its use. Trump said, “I hear this is a major theme right here. ... Two Corinthians 3:17, that’s the whole ball game . . . ‘Where the spirit of the Lord is,’ right? ‘Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.’ . . . But we are going to protect Christianity.”{13} Trump referenced 2 Corinthians 3:17 by quoting part of it, then making the verse about his political campaign, implying that Christian freedom depended on electing him. But what is this verse really about? Here is the verse in context:

“But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one

turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”{14}

When viewed in context it is clear that 2 Corinthians is about Christ lifting the veil of sin, and the Spirit of the Lord providing freedom from sin. What does this have to do with Trump, or any other American politician? Nothing.

It is clear that American politicians have used the Bible to gain support from Christians. Most of the time politicians are taking passages out of context so that they can try to gain support from Christians to advance their own agenda. When politicians do this, they are bearing God’s name in vain. When we Christians remain silent, we are bearing God’s name in vain. In order to bear God’s name well we must speak what is true and call out what is false. This includes when people, Christian or otherwise, misrepresent God or the teachings of the Bible.

How Do We Do Politics

Staying out of politics is not a good option. God calls us to be good stewards of the gifts He gives us, one of which is the opportunity to be salt and light in our culture through government. Christians living under dictatorships do not enjoy this blessing. How should we Christians engage in politics then? Where in the Bible can we find guidance? How can we bear God’s name in a way that honors Him in politics? While there are a lot of places to find principles on specific issues, the beatitudes in Matthew 5 are a good place to find general principles for how to engage in politics and life. The beatitudes describe the characteristics that Christians should practice.

The first beatitude is, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”{15} When we are poor in Spirit, we realize that we “can do no good thing without

divine assistance.”[\[16\]](#) We must seek God’s will, not our will, in politics. We are not to be about our political vision, but about the business of God’s kingdom. We must humble ourselves before God and make His priorities our priorities.

The second beatitude is, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” When our political opponents face personal crises, we should not celebrate. We do not honor God by hating our political opponents and finding joy in their misfortunes. We should not celebrate the suffering of the liberals, or the conservatives (whichever one you find more annoying). We should still act in love and mourn with them when they suffer personal loss and misfortune. We should pray for them. We should not cover up the failings of our political allies. We should mourn their failures and encourage them to hold themselves to a higher standard.

The third beatitude is, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” As followers of Christ, we know that we depend on God for what we have. We should not be proud of gaining and wielding political power. Followers of Christ inherit the earth because they are meek (biblical meekness is strength under the control of love), not because they wield political power.

The fourth beatitude is, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” We should not engage in corrupt politics, or tolerate those who do. This means calling out corruption in both parties. We cannot ignore political corruption because it is our guy, or we might lose the next election. We must represent God with integrity.

The fifth beatitude is, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” Jesus was not ruthless. God mercifully offers us forgiveness even though we do not deserve it. How can we refuse to show the same mercy to our political rivals?

The sixth beatitude is, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." We are representatives of God, his priests. We must be pure, no matter how much it costs or inconveniences us. We serve God, not the world. We oppose tyranny wherever we find it.

The seventh beatitude is, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." We should be known by our love, not by our feuds. We should forgive and make peace with our political rivals as much as we can. We should not hold grudges or try to punish our political opponents when we have the power to do so.

The eighth beatitude is, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." We know that by holding to pure standards and representing God well we will be persecuted. We will be called Bible thumpers, Kool-Aid drinkers, backwards, deniers, and all kinds of other things. When this happens, we take the persecution and look to God, who will bring us into His kingdom.

The ninth beatitude is, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." When others mock us because we are loyal to Christ, we remain loyal to Christ.

As Christians we bear God's image in every aspect of our lives. We must bear the image of God well in politics as well. This means that we have to treat others as we want them to treat us, pursue mercy, pursue truth, and pursue peace as best we can. We have to do this because we are bearing God's image. We are representing Him in everything we do. May God grant us the courage and integrity to represent Him well.

Notes

1. Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11
2. Colossians 1:15
3. Abel Ndjerareon, *Exodus. In Africa Bible Commentary*, ed.

- Tokunboh Adeyemo* (Nairobi: WordAlive Publishers, 2006), p. 111.
4. Walton, John, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament 2nd ed* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), p. 121.
5. Exodus 28:29-30 ESV
6. Exodus 28:38 ESV
7. Imes, Carmen Joy, *Bearing God's Name: Why Sin Still Matters* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), pp. 48-52.
8. "MSNBC analyst claims Jesus would be called a 'groomer,' 'woke,' and 'socialist' if 'He was alive today' – TheBlaze," www.foxnews.com/media/msnbc-analyst-matthew-dowd-jesus-christ-groomer-alive-today. Accessed 11/12/2022.
9. John 3:16
10. 1 John 2:2
11. Romans 3:23
12. Mark 12:29, 30 ESV
13. "Trump Saying 'Two Corinthians' Doesn't Matter; His Heresy Does | Opinion News," www.christianpost.com/news/trump-two-corinthians-heresy-liberty.html. Accessed 11/12/2022.
14. 2 Corinthians 3:14-17 ESV
15. The Beatitudes are in Matthew 5:3-12
16. Tasker, R. V. G. *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1961), p. 61.

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Blessings and Judgment

The Bible offers principles concerning blessing and judgment concerning the nation of Israel. Do any of them apply to the

United States? Kerby Anderson examines this question.

Is God blessing America? Will God bring judgment against America? These are questions I often hear, and yet rarely do we hear good answers to these questions. Part of the reason is that Christians haven't really studied the subject of blessings and judgment.



In this article we deal with this difficult and controversial subject. While we may not be able to come to definitive answers to all of these questions, I think we will have a better understanding of what blessings and judgment are from a biblical perspective.

When we think about this topic, often we are in two minds. On one hand, we believe that God is on our side and blessing us. After the attacks on 9/11, for example, we launched a war on terror and were generally convinced that God was on our side. At least we hoped that He was. Surely God could not be on the side of the terrorists.

On the other hand, we also wonder if God is ready to judge America. Given the evils of our society, isn't it possible that God will judge America? Haven't we exceeded what other nations have done that God has judged in the past?

In his book *Is God on America's Side?*, Erwin Lutzer sets forth seven principles we can derive from the Old Testament about blessing and cursing. We will look at these in more depth below. But we should first acknowledge that God through His prophets clearly declared when he was bringing judgment. In those cases, we have special revelation to clearly show what God was doing. We do not have Old Testament prophets today, but that doesn't stop Christians living in the church age from claiming (often inaccurately) that certain things are a

judgment of God.

In the 1980s and 1990s we heard many suggest that AIDS was a judgment of God against homosexuality. In my book *Living Ethically In the 90s* I said that it did not look like a judgment from God. First, there were many who engaged in homosexual behavior who were not stricken with AIDS (many male homosexuals and nearly all lesbians were AIDS-free). Second, it struck many innocent victims (those who contracted the disease from blood transfusions). Was AIDS a judgment of God? I don't think so.

When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, people called into [my talk show](#) suggesting this was God's judgment against the city because of its decadence. But then callers from the Gulf Coast called to say that the hurricane devastated their communities, destroying homes, businesses, and churches. Was God judging the righteous church-going people of the Gulf Coast? Was Hurricane Katrina a judgment of God? I don't think so.

In this article we are going to look at blessings and judgments that are set forth by God in the Old Testament so that we truly understand what they are.

Seven Principles (Part 1)

In his book *Is God on America's Side?* Erwin Lutzer sets forth seven principles we can derive from the Old Testament about blessing and cursing. The first principle is that God can both bless and curse a nation.[\[1\]](#)

When we sing "God Bless America" do we really mean it? I guess part of the answer to that question is what do most Americans mean by the word "God"? We say we believe in God, but many people believe in a god of their own construction. In a sense, most Americans embrace a god of our civil religion. This is not the God of the Bible.

R.C. Sproul says the god of this civil religion is without power: "He is a deity without sovereignty, a god without wrath, a judge without judgment, and a force without power."[\[2\]](#) We have driven God from the public square, but we bring him back during times of crisis (like 9/11) but he is only allowed off the reservation for a short period of time.

We sing "God Bless America" but do we mean it? Nearly every political speech and every State of the Union address ends with the phrase, "May God bless America." But what importance do we place in that phrase?

Contrast this with what God said in the Old Testament. God gave Israel a choice of either being blessed or being cursed. "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse; the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known" (Deuteronomy 11:26-28).

We should first acknowledge that Israel was unique because it had a covenant with God. America does not have a covenant with God. But it does still seem as if the principle of blessing and cursing can apply to nations today.

A second principle is that God judges nations based on the amount of light and opportunity they are given.[\[3\]](#) The Old Testament is a story of Israel. Other nations enter the story when they connect with Israel. Because Israel had a unique relationship with God, the nation was judged more strictly than its neighbors.

God was more patient with the Canaanites—it took four hundred years before their "cup of iniquity" was full, and then judgment fell on them. Likewise, Paul points out (Romans 2:12-15) that in the end time, God would individually judge Jews and Gentiles by the amount of light they had when they

were alive.

A nation that is given the light of revelation will be held to greater account than a nation that is not.

Seven Principles (Part 2)

In his book *Is God on America's Side?* Erwin Lutzer sets forth seven principles we can derive from the Old Testament about blessing and cursing. The third principle is that God sometimes uses exceedingly evil nations to judge those that are less evil.[\[4\]](#)

Israel was blessed with undeserved opportunities, yet were disobedient. God reveals to Isaiah that God would use the wicked nation of Assyria to judge Israel. "Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury! Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isaiah 10:5-6). In another instance, God reveals to Habakkuk that He was raising up the Chaldeans to march through the land, plundering, killing, and stealing (Habakkuk 1:5-11).

As I mentioned above, Christians are often of two minds when they think about America. On the one hand they believe America is a great country. We have been willing to rebuild countries after war or natural disaster. American missionaries travel around the world. Christians broadcast the gospel message around the world.

On the other hand, America is a decadent country. We are the leading exporters of pornography and movies that celebrate sex, violence, and profanity. We have aborted more than 50 million unborn babies. Our judicial system banishes God from public life. Will God use another nation to judge America?

A fourth principle is that when God judges a nation, the

righteous suffer with the wicked.{5} A good example of this can be found in the book of Daniel. When God brought the Babylonians against Judah, Daniel and his friends were forced to accompany them.

We also see a parallel to this in manmade and natural disasters. Whether it is a terrorist attack or a hurricane or tsunami, we see that believers and nonbelievers die together. We live in a fallen world among fallen people. These actions (whether brought about by moral evil or physical evil) destroy lives and property in an indiscriminate way.

A fifth principle is that God's judgments take various forms.{6} Sometimes it results in the destruction of our families. We can see this in God's pronouncement in Deuteronomy 28:53-55. When the Israelites were forced to leave their homes to go to foreign lands, the warnings were fulfilled. Today we may not be forced into exile, but we wonder if "God is judging our families just the same. He is judging us for our immorality."

In Deuteronomy 28:36-37, "The Lord will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone." When the ten tribes of Israel were exiled to Assyria, they were assimilated into the pagan culture and never heard from again.

Seven Principles (Part 3)

The sixth principle is that in judgment, God's target is often His people, not just the pagans among them.{7}

Yes, it is true that God judges the wicked, but sometimes the real purpose of present judgments has more to do with the righteous than the wicked. Not only do we see this in the Old Testament, we also see this principle in the New Testament. 1 Peter 4:17-18 says: "For it is time for judgment to begin at

the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And 'If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?'"

This raises a good question. If judgment begins at the house of God, is the church today under judgment? Have Christians become too worldly? Have Christians become too political and thus depend on government rather than on God? Have Christians become too materialistic? Someone has said we should change the motto on our coins from "In God we trust" to "In gold we trust."

A seventh and final principle is that God sometimes reverses intended judgments.[\[8\]](#) We must begin with an observation. God's blessing on any nation is undeserved. There is always sin and evil in the land. When God blesses us, either individually or corporately, it is an evidence of God's grace.

Sometimes God calls for judgment but then spares a nation. A good example of that can be found in the life of Jonah. God called him to that city to preach repentance for their sins. He didn't want to go because it was the capital city of the Assyrians who had committed genocide against Israel. But when Jonah finally obeyed God, the city was saved from judgment.

God also used Old Testament prophets to preach to Israel. But the people didn't have a heart to care. Consider the ministry of Micah and Jeremiah. Actually, Micah preached a hundred years before Jeremiah and warned Judah that her "wound is incurable." A century later, Jeremiah is brought before the priests and false prophets who want him killed. After hearing him, they appeal to the preaching of Micah (Jeremiah 16:19). King Hezekiah listened to Micah's words and sought God who withheld judgment.

Erwin Lutzer gives another example from eighteenth century England. The country was in decline, but God reversed the

trend through the preaching of John Wesley and George Whitefield.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by returning to the questions about whether God is blessing or judging our nation.

First, we must acknowledge that no nation can claim that God is on its side. In fact, there is a long and sorry history of nations that have claimed this. And the “God is on our side mentality” has done much harm throughout the history of the church.

Kim Riddlebarger: “Instead of letting God be God, our sinful pride leads us to make such pronouncements that are not ours to make. In these cases, God is not sovereign, he is a mascot.”[\[9\]](#) As a nation, we must not claim that God is on our side.

This is also true in the political debates we have within this nation. Richard Land in his book, *The Divided States of America*, says: “What liberals and conservatives both are missing is that America has been blessed by God in unique ways—we are not just another country, but neither are we God’s special people. I do not believe that America is God’s chosen nation. God established one chosen nation and people: the Jews. We are not Israel. We do not have “God on our side.” We are not God’s gift to the world.[\[10\]](#)

This brings us back to the famous quote by Abraham Lincoln who was asked if God was on the side of the Union forces or the Confederate forces. He said: “I do not care whether God is on my side; the important question is whether I am on God’s side, for God is always right.”

Second, we should be careful not to quickly assume that a disease or a disaster is a judgment of God. Above I gave

examples of people wrongly assuming that AIDS or Hurricane Katrina was a judgment of God.

We can take comfort in knowing that this isn't just a problem in the twenty-first century. Apparently it was even a problem in the first century. The tower of Siloam fell and killed a number of people. It appears that those around Jesus thought it was a punishment for their sins. He counters this idea by saying: "Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were *worse* culprits than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4-5).

We should wisely refrain from too quickly labeling a disease or disaster as a judgment of God. But we should take to heart the words of Jesus and focus on our need for salvation and repentance.

Notes

1. Erwin Lutzer, *Is God on America's Side?* (Chicago: Moody, 2008), 11.
2. R.C. Sproul, *When Worlds Collide* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 63.
3. Lutzer, *Is God on America's Side?*, 17.
4. Ibid., 25.
5. Ibid., 35.
6. Ibid., 41.
7. Ibid., 49.
8. Ibid., 65.
9. Kim Riddlebarger, "Using God," *Modern Reformation*, November/December 2007, 14.
10. Richard Land, *The Divided States of America* (Nashville: Nelson, 2007), 197.

A Biblical View on Inflation

For some time, we have been told that inflation is either insignificant or that it is transitory. But even now, most economists and government leaders will acknowledge that inflation is here to stay for the foreseeable future. How should we think about inflation from a biblical perspective? What lessons can we learn from the past? How can we prepare for the future?

History of Inflation

Most countries and empires have had to address the problem of inflation. This includes the nation of Israel. God (speaking through the prophet Isaiah) pronounced judgment on the land because the country that once was full of justice had debased the currency and its products. “Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water” (Isaiah 1:22). People were cheating each other by adding cheaper metals to their silver and by adding water to their wine.

When people do this, it is called counterfeiting and is severely punished. It was punishable by the death penalty in the Roman Empire. Even today, counterfeiting in China warrants life imprisonment. Unfortunately, when governments debase the currency, it is merely called monetary policy and justified to keep the government functioning.

Governments insist on honest weights and measures, but usually exempt themselves from that requirement. Micah 6:11 asks, “Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights?” A government will prosecute someone who has dishonest weights and measures but allow its own government leaders and central bank to debase their currency.

In previous centuries, kings and citizens engaged in coin-clipping. This form of inflation was more visible. Today, paying back investors and citizens with devalued dollars is less visible and more insidious.

In a statement by someone regarded as one of the most important economists of the twentieth century, British economist John Maynard Keynes noted how inflation affects a nation and its citizens. He said: "By a continuing process of inflation, governments can confiscate, secretly and unobserved, an important part of the wealth of their citizens."

He also added, "There is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency. The process engages all the hidden forces of economic law that come down on the side of destruction and does so in a manner that not one man in a million is able to diagnose."

What is the impact of inflation? The impact is felt in higher prices. In fact, the classical definition of inflation is "a rise in the general level of prices of goods and services in an economy over a period of time." If you want to calculate the impact of inflation on your family, you can use the mathematical "rule of 72." Take the current inflation rate and divide it into seventy-two. That will give you the number of years at that rate of inflation it will take for prices to double.

Consumer Price Index

Most Americans are starting to realize that the current inflation rate

is different than the consumer price index (CPI). The government uses a different methodology from the past. Here are a few reasons why the CPI is not an accurate measure of inflation.

First, the government's figures understate the inflation rate because they exclude food and fuel costs from its rate of "core inflation." The argument is that food and fuel are too unstable to be included in the inflation rate. But those costs are the ones we consumers feel the most. In fact, most of us spend one-third of our budgets on food and energy costs.

Second, the government also substitutes less expensive products when prices rise. In the past, economists used a "fixed basket of goods" to calculate the consumer price index. In other words, if I buy the very same goods every year, how much does the price rise? Now the government assumes that people will switch brands or foods if the price goes up. For example, if the cost of steak goes up, the consumer price index replaces the cost of steak with hamburger.

Third, in averaging the price of different commodities, the government uses the geometric mean rather than an arithmetic mean. We don't need to get into the math. All you need to know is that technique also decreases the inflation rate.

Fortunately, various websites do provide a more accurate view of inflation. Some of them, for example, use the same basket of goods used in 1980 to estimate the current inflation rate. They conclude that the real inflation rate is more than twice the CPI estimate.

Why did the government change the way it calculates inflation? One reason is that government officials wanted to reduce the cost-of-living adjustments for government pay outs such as Social Security. A lower consumer price index reduces the amount the government must pay beneficiaries for a cost-of-living adjustment.

Chuck E. Cheese

One of my guests, in trying to explain the impact of inflation, compared it to the experience kids and parents had at Chuck E. Cheese. In the past, they would arrive at the

arcade restaurant and purchase twenty dollars' worth of tokens. The kids spent their tokens and won certain games. At the end of the adventure, the kids counted their tickets and took them to the toy counter to purchase a prize.

They were thrilled that they had 1,700 points in children's currency. They were excited to trade those tokens for some real treasures. The toy counter was stocked with iPods, stuffed animals, and all sorts of prizes they are ready to take home. But their excitement faded quickly when they realized that it took 500 points just to purchase a Blow Pop. It took even more to earn a Chinese handcuff. The prizes they really wanted required hundreds of thousands of points.

This is the reality of inflation. If you type in "how much purchasing power has the dollar lost" into a search engine, you will read that "the US dollar has lost more than 96 percent of its purchasing power since the creation of the Federal Reserve in 1913." That would mean that a one-dollar bill from 1913 would have less than four cents of purchasing power today. The federal government has a CPI Inflation Calculator that will give you an estimate of the amount your money has been devalued based on the government's CPI calculations.

Causes of Inflation

Government leaders have been arguing that the current inflation is merely due to the disruption of supply chains. While that is partially true, it ignores the bigger picture. After all, inflation has been taking place long before the pandemic, lockdowns, and supply chain problems.

Business leaders acknowledge that providing a supply of goods due to the supply chain bottleneck has resulted in increased prices. Demand exceeds supply. Also, there are higher costs for employees and higher freight costs. Limited supplies of lumber and copper, for example, raised those costs.

But the bigger issue is the fact that the federal government and the Federal Reserve have been printing more dollars. In the past, other governments (e.g., China, Japan, etc.) would buy our treasuries. They have ceased buying those financial instruments, perhaps because they believe that this country is on an unsustainable trajectory with its high consumption, low-savings economy. This is easy to see on the graphs provided by the Federal Reserve. The M2 money stock has been increasing for many years. You will also notice that the amount of money printed shoots straight up in 2020. On some charts, you may notice something else. The weekly chart is discontinued and only updated monthly. That might give you some idea of what may be coming.

Is inflation good for you and the economy? That is what some pundits and politicians are telling us. Type in words like “inflation is good for you” or “inflation is good for the economy” and you will see the latest attempt to make us feel good about inflation.

On the one hand, inflation is good for the federal government awash in national debt. It is probably good for people in debt. You can pay back debts with devalued dollars. But inflation also allows the federal government to continue to expand without having to live within its means. State governments must live within their means and balance their state budgets. Families are supposed to live within their means, though many take on significant debt. Our previous books, *A Biblical Point of View on Debt* and *A Biblical Point of View on Money* are relevant to these concerns.

On the other hand, inflation is devastating for most people in society. Rich people can invest in appreciating assets (growth stocks, real estate, etc.) while people in the middle class or lower class are hurt by rising prices in food and energy (a significant portion of their monthly expenses). Most Americans are hurt because wages never rise as fast as inflation. Ultimately, inflation makes income inequality even worse.

Biblical View on Money and Inflation

Debt is one of the reasons for the increasing money supply that is causing inflation. The Bible has quite a bit to say about money, and a significant part of these financial warnings concern debt. Proverbs 22:7 says: "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a servant to the lender." When you borrow money and put yourself in debt, you put yourself in a situation where the lender has significant influence over you. The government is spending more than it is bringing in through revenue. The national debt is increasing every day.

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong to borrow and not repay. Psalm 37:21 says: "The wicked borrows and does not pay back, but the righteous is gracious and gives." The printing of more money has no end in sight. The federal government has been borrowing money from US citizens, foreign governments, and the Federal Reserve. Will we ever repay our debt? Even if we do so, it will be with devalued dollars.

The Bible teaches that individuals (and governments) should have honest weights and measures. Deuteronomy 25:13 says, "You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small" Proverbs 20:10 warns that "Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord." Ezekiel 45:10 says, "You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath."

How should Christians respond to rising inflation? We should begin by paying our debts. We cannot honestly call for the government to live within its means if we won't set the example and live within our means. We should, "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your harvest; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9-10).

We should also make wise investments. We should begin by diversifying. Solomon gives this investment advice: "Divide

your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth" (Ecclesiastes 11:2). It makes sense to diversify your portfolio since no human being can accurately and consistently predict the future (James 4:13-15). By diversifying your investments, you minimize the risk to your entire portfolio.

We are heading for economic uncertainty. That is why we need to trust the Lord with our wealth (Proverbs 3:9) and be good stewards of the resources God has provided to us (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Additional Resources

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Debt*, 2021

Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Money*, 2020

Kerby Anderson, *Christians and Economics*, Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House, 2016.

Bitcoin and Bible Group, chapter three: Inflation, *Thank God for Bitcoin*, Whispering Candle, 2020.

A Christian Worldview Appraisal of Gun Control and the Second Amendment

Steve Cable examines the Second Amendment from a biblical perspective.

In today's America, the Second Amendment invokes intense

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

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



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

In all likelihood, the authors intentionally combined these two thoughts. The states could not muster a militia of their people unless the people were allowed to keep arms. This view is supported by people involved in crafting and/or approving the Bill of Rights. Samuel Adams wrote, "The said Constitution be never construed to authorize Congress to . . . prevent the people of the United States, who are peaceable citizens, from keeping their own arms."^{3} Similarly, Noah Webster wrote, "Before a standing army can rule, the people must be disarmed;

as they are in almost every kingdom in Europe. The supreme power in America cannot enforce unjust laws by the sword; because the whole body of the people are armed, and constitute a force superior to any band of regular troops that can be on any pretense, raised in the United States.”[\[4\]](#)

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

The Second Amendment: Why Was It Added?

As discussed above, those responsible for the Second Amendment intended to ensure individuals could bear firearms legally. What concerns led to this original amendment to our constitution?

To understand, we should review the context for the introduction of the Bill of Rights. When the Constitution was sent to the states for ratification in 1787, two groups formed around adding a bill of rights to the Constitution, the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists. The Federalists supported the Constitution as written, believing that any attempt to list certain rights as remaining with individuals or states would be interpreted as making other rights subject to the federal government. The Anti-Federalists believed it was important to clearly state key fundamental rights over which the federal government would have no jurisdiction. Neither group was arguing against any of the Bill of Rights, but rather whether it was more effective to be silent or to list them explicitly.

The Federalists, who had the majority of delegates to the convention, were wrong in assuming that most people would agree with their hands-off approach. This situation led to

many of the states ratifying the Constitution with the stipulation that a bill of rights be added. The right to bear arms was a common component of these stipulations. As James Madison wrote in the Federalist Papers, "The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation . . . forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition . . . The several kingdoms of Europe . . . are afraid to trust the people with arms."[\[5\]](#)

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

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

The Second Amendment: How Is It Applied Today?

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

In the most recent ruling of 2008, the court ruled

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

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

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

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

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

background.

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

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Ignored?

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Second Amendment: Should It Be Repealed?

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

Many innocent people have been killed by deranged individuals and criminals with guns; at the same time, we cannot remember

a time when American citizens were called to the streets to protect our Constitution. Have we reached a point where the nature of today's weapons and our society make the Second Amendment a detriment?

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

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

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

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

According to Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3, in the last days,

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

Notes

1. *Second Amendment*, Legal Information Institute, Cornell University Law School, www.law.cornell.edu/wex/second_amendment

2. Ibid.

3. Philip Mulivor, *Proclaiming Liberty: What Patriots and Heroes Really Said about the Right to Keep and Bear Arms*, Brightman Press, New York, 2011 quoting Samuel Adams, Amendment introduced on 6 Feb. 1788 in the Massachusetts ratifying convention, qtd. *In Debates and Proceedings in the Convention of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Held in the Year 1788*

4. Ibid., Noah Webster, “An Examination of the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution.” *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States Published During Its Discussion by the People 1787-1788*.

5. Ibid., James Madison, “Paper 46,” *The Federalist Papers*.

6. Romans 13:4

7. Luke 22:35-38

8. John 18:10

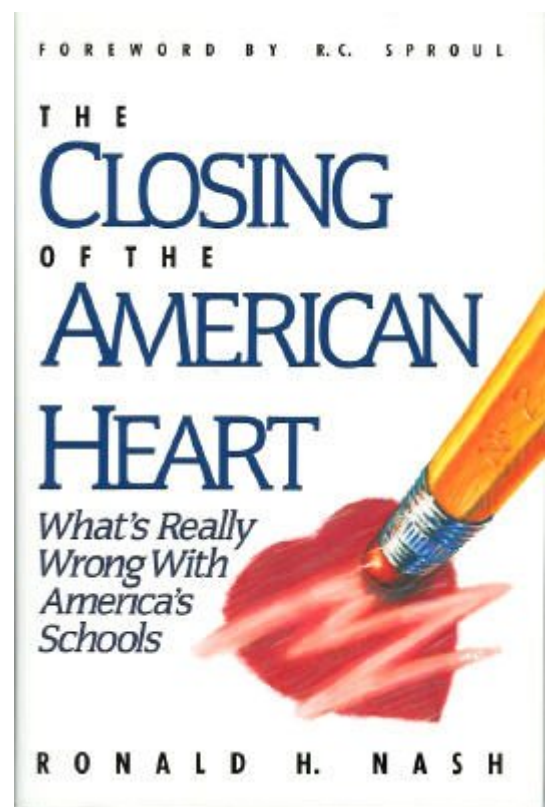
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The Closing of the American Heart

Using Ronald Nash's book as a starting point, Don Closson looks at the philosophical foundations of modern education in America and how they have contributed to low performance.

Every once in a while a book is written that shakes things up. *The Closing of the American Mind*, written by the now-deceased University of Chicago professor Allan Bloom in the late 1980s, was just such a book. You can tell that a book strikes a sensitive societal chord when numerous books follow with similar titles. Some experts hated it, others loved it. And it seemed that everyone was talking about it. What made this book so interesting was that it was written for a very small audience of academicians, and yet it attracted the attention of millions and became a bestseller. Even more amazing, it's a book about education.

Dr. Bloom's book reignited a long and important discussion about the content and purpose of education. Here at Probe, we felt that both the book and the topic it discussed were so important that we needed to add to the conversation with a book of our own. The result was a book titled *The Closing of the American Heart*. We asked Dr. Ronald Nash, also now deceased, who taught philosophy at the University of Kentucky, to write it for us. I had the privilege of providing some of the research for the book.



Both books are an attempt to uncover the root causes of the

many problems facing our public schools. In this article we will consider the critiques given by the two authors as well as their proposed solutions. One concept that runs throughout both books is that ideas have consequences. Allan Bloom writes that “a serious life means being fully aware of the alternatives, Using Ronald Nash’s book as a starting point, Probe’s Don Closson looks at the philosophical foundations of modern education in America and how they have contributed to low performance. thinking about them with all the intensity one brings to bear on life-and-death questions, in full recognition that every choice is a great risk with necessary consequences that are hard to bear.”^[1] This statement relates directly to the educational enterprise. Someone must decide what it means to be an educated person and consequently what students should know and believe when they are graduated from our schools.

Nash argues that this decision—about what it means to be educated—will be based on an educator’s worldview. One’s worldview is built on answers to life’s big questions, answers that might be informed by traditional religious beliefs or by modern secularism. However, since everyone has a worldview, education can never be neutral regarding the “deep” things of life or life’s ultimate concerns. Nash goes one step further by asserting that all public policy is shaped by the ultimate concerns of those holding power in our culture. In other words, worldviews shape institutions and policies, which directly affect how children are educated.

Bloom and Nash agree that one worldview dominates our nation’s schools and universities. In what follows we will investigate the nature of that worldview and how these two men believed we should respond to it.

Education’s Ills

Allen Bloom’s highly influential book *The Closing of the*

American Mind begins with the dramatic observation that “There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.”{2}

Relativism is the view that truth is unknowable and that universal moral virtues do not exist. Bloom’s now famous (or infamous) description of American students rests on his observation that a single way of thinking has come to dominate our campuses. He adds that relativism has left us with only one acknowledged virtue, the virtue of tolerance or openness.

According to Bloom, this assurance that truth does not exist has gutted education and left our students with little desire to seek knowledge. The search for truth has been replaced by an “unsubstantial awareness that there are many cultures.” Since cultures have different values, truth must not exist. From this they derive the maxim that we should just get along with one another, and that no values are superior to others or worth defending. Students are left with a gentle egotism and the desire for comfort. The end result of all this is that books are no longer read as part of a hunger for truth; books have lost their significance.

Nash generally agrees with Bloom, but describes the situation a little differently. His book focuses on three areas of illiteracy among our students: functional illiteracy, cultural illiteracy, and moral illiteracy.

Functional illiteracy is the inability to understand the written word well enough to thrive within our modern culture. The National Assessment of Educational Progress test in 2007 found that thirty-three percent of fourth graders and more than a quarter of eighth graders scored below basic levels in reading.{3} What makes this distressing is the fact that per pupil expenditures have more than doubled since 1970 while achievement has remained flat.

The problem isn't just in our primary and secondary schools. Poet and university professor Karl Shapiro writes that "What is really distressing is that this generation cannot and does not read. I am speaking of university students in what are supposed to be our best universities."[\[4\]](#) It's also estimated that 30 million America adults can be considered to be functionally illiterate.[\[5\]](#)

Bloom and Nash argue that the prevailing functional illiteracy and the loss of interest in books is not a chance occurrence. Nash believes that it is the result of a change in the way the West thinks about truth and human nature, as well as the abandonment of a Christian worldview.

Education's Ills cont.

In addition to students who can't read, or functional illiteracy, there are those who can read but are unable to interpret the meaning of the material because they lack the necessary background information. E. D. Hirsch is the best known author on what has become known as *cultural illiteracy*.

In his book *The Schools We Need*, Hirsch argues that "just as it takes money to make money, it takes knowledge to make knowledge."[\[6\]](#) He contends that those children who begin school with an adequate level of intellectual capital have a framework upon which further learning may be built. But those who lack the necessary educational experiences and sufficient vocabulary tend to fall further and further behind. Not just any information serves as intellectual capital. According to Hirsch, the knowledge taught and learned must be of a type that "constitutes the shared intellectual currency of the society," or put another way, "intellectual capital has to be the widely useful and negotiable coin of the realm."[\[7\]](#)

Nash agrees with Hirsch and charges that modern educational theory deserves much of the blame for causing cultural

illiteracy. Hirsch argues that educators often believe that “a child’s intellectual and social skills will develop naturally without regard to the specific content of education.”[\[8\]](#) Educators are more interested in *how* children learn rather than *what* they learn. Because of this, children fail to store away enough information to become culturally literate.

Some educators will grudgingly admit to the problems of functional and cultural illiteracy, and even assume some of the blame, but they are proud of the decline in what Nash calls *moral illiteracy*. Nash sees the problem of moral illiteracy as a conflict between those who are religious and support traditional values and those who are secular and advocate anti-traditional or modernist values. Those in the midst of the battle understand this conflict, while the typical American often does not.

John Silber, past president of Boston University writes,

In generations past, parents were more diligent in passing on their principles and values to their children, and were assisted by churches and schools which emphasized religious and moral education. In recent years, in contrast, our society has become increasingly secular and the curriculum of the public schools has been denuded of almost all ethical content. As a result universities must confront a student body ignorant of the evidence and arguments that underlie and support many of our traditional moral principles and practices.[\[9\]](#)

Three Philosophies

Nash describes three distinct philosophical ideas that have resulted in the decline in functional, cultural, and moral literacy in America.

The first of these ideas is *relativism*, which we mentioned

earlier. It describes the conviction that there is no such thing as truth. This idea is almost universally accepted among both students and teachers on our campuses. It's often defended with the argument "that might be true for you, but it isn't for me." As Nash points out, this kind of thinking is the result of confusing the veracity of a proposition with one's personal judgment regarding that truth claim. Nash writes, "We may differ in our judgment about what is true, but that does not affect the truth of the matter itself."[\[10\]](#) Relativism itself is making a truth claim about knowledge which is self-defeating. Are we to accept the relativist's statement that there is no truth to be "really true?"

The second idea is *positivism*, an arrogant, quasi-religious devotion to the scientific method. A positivist argues that any belief that cannot be tested by science is irrational. Positivism relegates all of theology and most of ethics to mere opinion or personal preference. However, as philosopher J. P. Moreland has argued, faith in science itself must be defended on a metaphysical basis and cannot be proven scientifically. "The aims, methodologies, and presuppositions of science cannot be validated by science. One cannot turn to science to justify science any more than one can pull oneself up by his own bootstraps."[\[11\]](#)

Positivism often turns out to be based on hidden assumptions, assumptions that make up the third idea (or set of ideas) Nash blames the current state of American education on. This third movement has sometimes been labeled the *bootleg religion* of American education; a mixture of secularism, naturalism, and humanism. The assumptions of this faith include (1) the absence of a transcendent God, (2) the non-existence of anything outside of the physical universe, and (3) the acceptance of the self-actualization of each human being—complete autonomy—as the purpose of life. What makes this set of ideas especially dangerous is that they are presented as being neutral and not in violation of separation of church and

state sensitivities.

As a result, some educators consider their students mal-adjusted or worse if they hold to a worldview that conflicts with these principles. On some campuses, especially at the university level, the monopoly that these ideas enjoy has resulted in Christian thought being systematically filtered out of the curriculum.

Two Solutions

Allen Bloom makes one major recommendation to combat the relativism that is destroying the desire for knowledge in our schools, he writes:

[T]he only serious solution is the one that is almost universally rejected: the good old Great Books approach, in which a liberal education means reading certain generally recognized classic texts, just reading them, letting them dictate what the questions are and the method of approaching them—not forcing them into categories we make up, not treating them as historical products, but trying to read them as their authors wished them to be read.[{12}](#)

Bloom argues that even when these books are read today they are often viewed through the radical lenses of feminism or Marxism. Everything is deconstructed, every idea is neutralized.

Nash agrees that the Great Books are valuable and contribute to a complete education, but he argues that the array of ideas contained in them will baffle students unless they have an over-arching philosophy to guide them through the maze. Although Bloom acknowledges the necessity for individuals and schools to make the hard choices about the big questions in life, he himself fails to do this in regards to a curriculum. Should teachers treat all of the Great Books equally? Since

the authors disagree intensely on basic issues regarding the nature of reality and humanity, are we not promoting a new relativism in place of the old? For instance, do we accept Augustine's *Confessions* and his views on the sinfulness of mankind, or Rousseau's *Confessions*, which assumes that humans are naturally good?

Nash contends that one condition of being an educated person is that he or she develops a single, consistent worldview, something not found in the Great Books. From a Christian perspective, only Christian theism can accomplish the task adequately.

Human beings are never neutral concerning the nature of God, and what people believe to be true about God will ultimately affect their view of education. Although Bloom talks about how modern education has impoverished the souls of today's students, he leaves us without any indication of how those souls should be fed or what connection should be made between knowledge and virtue.

Nash believes that education would greatly benefit from true educational choice. This would empower parents to have their children educated under the worldview assumptions that correspond to their own. Putting more power into parents' hands, thereby increasing local control of education, is one step to re-opening the American heart.

Notes

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6. Hirsch, E.D., Jr. *The Schools We Need: And Why We Don't Have Them* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 20.
7. Ibid, 21.
8. Nash, *The Closing of the American Heart*, 50.
9. Ibid., 53.
10. Ibid., 63.
11. Ibid., 66.
12. Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, 344.

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Educational Choice

Don Closson surveys the state of educational choice in America. Even though educational spending is the largest category in every state's budget, money is not our primary concern. It is the well being of our children.

What does the idea of educational choice have to do with a Christian worldview? Quite a lot, actually. As Christians we are called to be concerned about justice, about the poor, about the weakest individuals in our society. We also have an

interest in having a population educated well enough to read and understand the Bible. It is about “loving our neighbors as ourselves” and “doing unto the least of these” in the society around us.

I must admit that during my twelve years of teaching and administrating in public schools educational choice wasn't a burning issue. I admit that personal interest convinced me to become a supporter. Vouchers made sense as I experienced the difficulty of paying taxes for local public schools even though my children were being home-schooled or were attending private schools. Back then, supporters of vouchers were either fans of free-market economist Milton Freeman or were philosophically opposed to the “one-best-system” approach of government-provided schooling. They were a small but vocal minority.



Times have changed. Today, supporters of educational choice are often people who are shocked by the failure of our inner city schools to educate children in any meaningful sense of the word. A rising number of urban leaders have concluded that the current model of schooling just hasn't worked for many of our children.

What is meant by the term “educational choice”? One definition says, “...it means letting every parent send their child to the school of their choice regardless of where they live or income. Parents choose schools based on their child's needs, not their address.”^{1} The desire for educational choice over the last couple of decades has found expression in the creation of voucher plans, charter schools, private scholarship programs, and personal tax credits or deductions. Since each state is responsible for establishing its own educational policies, there have been multiple variations on each of these categories along with endless court battles to affirm or deny the constitutionality of each plan.

Those who support educational choice begin with the assumption that increased competition is almost always a good thing. Its proponents argue that when schools must compete for students, they generally work harder at providing a better service. They believe in bottom-up reform, letting parents choose what educational methods and content is best for their children rather than a top-down approach that is guided by a centralized government or teachers' union.

In this article we survey the state of educational choice in America. Even though educational spending is the largest category in every state's budget, money is not our primary concern. It is the well being of our children.

Publicly Funded Vouchers

In 1955 economist Milton Friedman argued that America's public school system was not achieving the goals that it was created for. As a government operated monopoly it was failing in its mandate to educate all of our children equally regardless of race or class. In fact, it was a highly segregated system that was failing our most needy students in our inner city schools. His solution was to open up education to market forces by issuing vouchers to parents who could then choose where to spend their education dollars. He wrote, "In the end, the goal of education is to ensure learning and guarantee a free society and stable democracy. These goals are better met when all parents are free to choose the school that works best for their child."

For decades, Friedman was a lone voice, but in the early 1990's Milwaukee Wisconsin began a voucher program with 337 students who could use their publicly funded vouchers to attend religious or non-religious private schools in the city. This program is now in its 17th year and is approaching its legislatively set cap of 15% of the districts students. In the 2007-08 school year over 18,000 students participated,

attending 122 different private schools.^{2} Voucher programs have been established in Cleveland Ohio, Colorado, Florida and Washington D.C., only to be met with an onslaught of legal challenges.

In 2002 the Supreme Court ruled that voucher programs are not a violation of the religious establishment clause of the First Amendment. Although that issue has been settled, state courts have whittled away or restricted these programs at every turn. Teachers' unions have also spent millions of dollars to fight voucher program legislation and to campaign against them in statewide referendums.

It appears that limited voucher programs aimed at poor inner-city students who are trapped in dysfunctional schools now have the best chance of succeeding. While middle-class evangelicals seemed supportive of vouchers early on, they now perceive them to be a threat to the independence of the many private religious schools that have sprung up in the last 20 years. Most middle class suburbanites already have the power of school choice because of their financial ability to move into districts with better schools.

Tax supported vouchers are still popular among the many free market conservatives who argue that competition in the educational marketplace would be good for children and for the public schools. They have also garnered grass root support from the African-American and Hispanic communities in the last decade. There are other ways to inject choice into our educational system, but it is clear to many that choice is needed now, especially for our most needy students.

Why Educational Choice?

Giving inner city parents a choice in where they send their children to school is critical if we hope to solve the crises in our cities' schools. Secretary of Education Margaret

Spellings puts it this way:

“Despite our best efforts, there are still vast inequities within our education system. In too many of our cities, the reality faced by minority and low-income kids is shocking. As you’ve heard, 15% of our high schools produce more than half of our dropouts. Of these dropout factories a majority of the students trapped in them are minorities, and their high school experience looks vastly different from what most kids encounter. They go to schools where trash litters the floors, where graffiti decorates the walls. . . where most freshmen enter unable to read or do math at an eighth grade-level, and where graduation is a 50/50 shot, or worse.”{3}

Why do many reformers believe that educational choice has the greatest potential to solve our nation’s education problems? Referring to legislation passed in 2004 that provided the first federally funded choice scholarships for low income students in Washington D.C., Secretary of Education Rod Paige explained that:

“Educational choice is important for two reasons. First, it extends civil rights and social justice. Second, it enhances school effectiveness. The introduction of opportunity scholarships in the District comes fifty years after the Brown v. Board of Education decision. It comes 40 years after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. demanded a full measure of the American promise. Opportunity scholarships help remove the chains of bureaucracy. They free low-income students to obtain a better education in a school of their choosing.”{4}

Studies have shown how dramatic changes can occur in cities that allow its parents choice. Writing about the longest voucher program in the nation, the *Wall Street Journal* declares:

“There’s no question the program has been a boon to the

city's underprivileged. A 2004 study of high school graduation rates by Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute found that students using vouchers to attend Milwaukee's private schools had a graduation rate of 64%, versus 36% for their public school counterparts. Harvard's Caroline Hoxby has shown that Milwaukee public schools have raised their standards in the wake of voucher competition."[\[5\]](#)

Educational choice works because it puts power into the hands of the people who care most about our nation's children, their parents. It works because it increases the autonomy of school administrators so that they can provide the kind of education that the public wants. It works because it encourages learning communities of like-minded adults to work together to provide the best learning environment possible.

Private Vouchers and Tax Credits

Although the press has focused on the legal battles surrounding the use of tax-supported educational vouchers to pay tuition at private religious schools, there is another type of voucher program that is helping thousands of children and continues to grow without legal controversy. There are now more than two dozen *private* voucher programs in cities across the United States. Millions of dollars are being raised by private citizens in order to offer vouchers to less fortunate children so that they can attend better schools.

In that late 1990's, John Walton of Wal-Mart fame, and Theodore Forstmann of Forstmann Little & Company decided to offer 1,000 scholarships to low income students in Washington D.C. With very little publicity they received over 8,000 applications. Sensing a real need, in 1998 they together donated \$100 million towards a national program that would fund 40,000 scholarships inaugurating the Children's Scholarship Fund.[\[6\]](#) That got people's attention. Former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young, Martin Luther King III, General Colin

Powell, and numerous C.E.O.'s from some of America's best known corporations have served on the organization's board.

By September of 1998 the fund grew to \$170 million. Eventually, the Children's Scholarship Fund received applications from 1.25 million children from 22,000 cities and towns in all fifty states.

Mr. Forstmann concluded that:

The parents of 1.25 million children put an end to the debate over whether low-income families want choice in education: They passionately, desperately, unequivocally do. Now it is up to the defenders of the status quo to tell them, and the millions they represent, why they cannot have it.[{7}](#)

In 2007, the Children's Scholarship Fund gave vouchers to 29,000 students. The families receiving these scholarships earned an average of around \$27,000 a year, and supplemented the scholarship with an additional \$2,000 per student. These low income families have a strong desire to remove their children from their current schools and are willing to make a significant sacrifice to acquire a good education for their children.

State-sponsored tax credits are another alternative to tax-funded vouchers. They are popular because they are simple to administer; they have a relatively long history and a settled legal status. They have limited scope because not all states have an income tax and often it is the families who need help the most who do not benefit from tax credits because of their low tax liability.

Advocates of educational choice agree that it will take many different tactics to provide the freedom parents need to get the best education possible for their children.

Educational Freedom

In 2001, the Manhattan Institute released an interesting study concerning the idea of educational freedom. The study suggested a strong relationship between the amount of freedom a state gives parents in directing their children to a school of their choice and the level of academic achievement accomplished by those children.

Since education is primarily governed at the state level, it makes sense to measure educational freedom by state. In the study, a state's ranking is determined by how much freedom parents are given by its laws regulating vouchers, charter schools, home-schooling, choice within existing public schools, and tax credits allowed for education expenses.

According to the study, the most educationally free state is Arizona. It gets the top spot because of its wide selection of charter schools and its tax credits for private school expenses. The least educationally free state is Hawaii. Hawaii scores lowest on the index because it has one large school district for the entire state, no charter schools, and it highly regulates home-schoolers. Utah is second to last because gives no assistance to those sending their children to private schools, has few charter schools, and has large centralized school districts.

The study concludes that "For many years education reformers have advocated strengthening accountability systems and expanding educational freedom. Our statistical models suggest that such reforms, where implemented, have yielded the academic improvements that reformers predicted."[\[8\]](#) For instance, a one-point increase in a state's freedom index would predict a 4% increase in that state's math test results indicated by the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Educational freedom received another boost in a study released in October 2007 by the Milton & Rose Friedman Foundation. The

research concludes that “A large body of top-quality studies consistently shows that school choice produces higher academic achievement for the students who have the opportunity to use it. On this issue, the evidence supporting school choice is as strong as the evidence on any social policy question whatsoever.”[{9}](#)

Freedom makes a difference in education. Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute writes, “Simply providing families with additional options in the education of their children has a larger independent effect on student achievement than increasing education spending or reducing class size... the magnitude of the benefit of education freedom for student learning is comparable to the benefit of significantly increasing median household income.”[{10}](#)

Christians are called upon to love their neighbors, and their neighbors’ children, as themselves. If we are serious about helping our underprivileged neighbors, especially in our inner-cities schools, educational freedom through greater choice is a policy we can and should endorse.

Notes

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