Smuggling Theology Into "Out of the Silent Planet"

Dr. Michael Gleghorn provides an overview of how C.S. Lewis wove theology into his 'Out of the Silent Planet,' the first book of his space trilogy,

Out of the Silent Planet, C.S. Lewis' first foray into the science-fiction genre, was originally published in 1938.{1} Lewis, who appreciated the science-fiction stories of authors like H. G. Wells, was nonetheless troubled by elements in these stories that were morally and intellectually objectionable. According to Alister McGrath, Lewis realized "that the forms of science fiction . . . used to promote various forms of atheism and materialism could . . . be used to *critique* these viewpoints and advocate an alternative."{2} This is what Lewis *did* in *Out of the Silent Planet*—and what he *continued* to do in two follow-up books: *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength.* Together, these books are commonly known as "the Space Trilogy."

Out of the Silent Planet tells the story of Dr. Elwin Ransom, who is drugged, kidnapped, and taken aboard a spaceship traveling to Mars. Weston and Devine, the two men who kidnap Ransom, have been to Mars before and believe that the planet's inhabitants want them to bring back another human being (wrongly assuming that the person *may* be wanted as a sacrificial offering). Weston is a physicist, interested in finding potential planets for humanity to colonize once our own planet becomes uninhabitable. Devine is an investor, hoping to make some money from the enterprise.

On their way to Mars (known as Malacandra to its own inhabitants), Ransom learns that his life may be in danger once they reach the planet. Hence, shortly after their

arrival, Ransom escapes his kidnappers and ends up meeting a creature called a Hross, one of the planet's native inhabitants. He soon discovers that, much like himself, these are intelligent and moral beings. Indeed, in some ways they, along with the other intelligent species on the planet, are superior to human beings, for they have not been infected with the same moral illness that plagues our own species. Eventually, Ransom even meets the designated ruler of the planet, a spiritual intelligence referred to as an Oyarsa. He then learns why earth is known as "the silent planet."{3}

After publishing the book, Lewis confided to one interested correspondent that most of the early reviews had completely missed of Christian theology that he had woven into his narrative. He humorously noted that, apparently, "any amount of theology can now be smuggled into" such a book without anyone's even noticing.{4} So how much theology did Lewis "smuggle into" *Out of the Silent Planet*? That's what we'll discuss in the remainder of this article.

The Heavens Declare the Glory

As Weston, Devine, and Ransom travel through space on their way to Mars, Ransom is surprised by just how *good* he is feeling: courageous, joyful, alert, and full of life. He reflects upon the fact that he had been educated to regard space as "the black, cold vacuity" separating the worlds. He comes to realize, however, that this was all wrong. The term "space," he muses, was utterly inadequate "for this . . . ocean of radiance in which they swam." He thus *rejects* the term, observing that "Older thinkers had been wiser when they named it simply the heavens—the heavens which declared the glory."{5}

Ransom is here reflecting upon the words of King David in Psalm 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." As one commentator remarks,

“David was moved by observing that the heavens, under the dominating influence of the sun, declare the splendor of God’s handiwork.”{6} The reference to the sun here is apt, for it is largely through the influence of the solar rays that Ransom feels “his body and mind daily rubbed and scoured and filled with new vitality.”{7}

Of course, we must remember that Lewis is here writing science *fiction*—and not science fact. While “the substitution of heaven for space” was Lewis’s “favorite idea in the book,” he also acknowledged “that the rays in interplanetary space, so far from being beneficial,” would actually be harmful to us.{8} But Lewis was attempting to reintroduce a conception of wonder and beauty into the world. He wanted to move his readers’ understanding of “space” from something merely cold, dark, and dead, to a conception of the “heavens” as something radiant and alive with the goodness and bounty of their Creator. And this, in the fictional (and even mythological) world of the story, he has arguably achieved.

Indeed, it’s one of the reasons that many dislike referring to these books as “the *space* trilogy.” Such language misses the fact that Lewis was attempting to shift our attention from the darkness and deadness of “space” to the glory and splendor of the “heavens.” It’s just one of the ways in which Lewis was attempting to reclaim for God a genre of literature that was so often dominated by atheistic and materialistic forms of thinking.{9}

War in Heaven

Before we go any further, we must address the meaning of Lewis’s title, “*Out of the Silent Planet*.” The novel concerns a voyage from Earth to Mars, and details the adventures of the main character, Dr. Elwin Ransom, after his arrival. In the novel, Earth is known as “the *silent* planet.” But why?

The answer has partly to do with “smuggled theology” and partly with the mythological world of the story created by Lewis. In this mythological world, we are introduced to the idea that each planet in our solar system is ruled by a very great, though still created, spiritual being. These beings were created by God and are something like a cross between a Christian archangel and a Roman god or goddess. Hence, the spirit that governs Mars is something like a cross between the archangel Michael and the Roman god Mars (devoid, of course, of all the negative characteristics traditionally ascribed to Mars in Greco-Roman mythology). In fact, this being is a loyal servant of God and was created (at least in part) for the purpose of ruling the planet assigned to it. In the novel, such a ruling spiritual power is referred to an *Oyarsa*.

Eventually, Ransom meets this ruling power and learns why Earth is known as “the silent planet.” He is told that the Oyarsa of *our* world was once very great, even greater than that of Mars.{1}10} Unfortunately, however, he became “bent” (or evil). This happened in the distant past, before there was any life on Earth. Because this “Bent One” desired to destroy “other worlds besides his own,” there was “great war” in the heavens. Eventually, he was “bound . . . in the air of his own world.” “There,” Ransom learns, “doubtless he lies to this hour.”{11} The other planets have no communication with Earth. It is “silent.”

Do you see what Lewis is doing? In the fictional world of the novel, he is telling us a story very similar to that of the fall of the devil. In the Bible, the Apostle Paul refers to Satan as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:1-2) and the “god of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4). Lewis is doing something similar in his description of the “Bent One” who rules the Earth as a rebel against God. But Lewis goes much further than this.

War on Earth

Above, we left Ransom, the hero of C. S. Lewis's novel, *Out of the Silent Planet*, deep in conversation with the divinely appointed spiritual ruler of Mars. After telling Ransom that Earth, alone among the planets in our solar system, is "silent," being ruled by a "bent" (or evil) power, the Martian ruler then says something quite intriguing.

He tells Ransom that they do not think that "Maleldil" (more on this in a moment) would completely surrender Earth to the "Bent One." Indeed, he says, "there are stories among us" that Maleldil has done some "strange" and wonderful things, even personally appearing on Earth and "wrestling with the Bent One" for the right to rule. "But of this," he says, "we know less than you; it is a thing we desire to look into."{12}

So who is Maleldil, and what exactly has he done? In the world of the novel, Maleldil is the name for God in the Old Solar language, which Ransom has gradually learned during his time on Mars.{13} Hence, the Martian ruler is essentially telling Ransom that they do not believe that God would completely surrender Earth to the devil. Indeed, they have even heard stories that God (or Maleldil) has visited "the silent planet" and done battle with the evil one. He admits that there is much they do not know about all this but says that he (and other loyal servants of God) long to look into these things.

Those familiar with the Bible will doubtless see what Lewis is doing here, for he concludes this passage with what is basically a biblical quotation. The Apostle Peter wrote of "the prophets who prophesied about the grace" that was to be ours in Christ. So great was the content of this revelation, notes Peter, that even "angels long to look" into such things (1 Peter 1:10-12). Thus, as Christiana Hale rightly notes, the "strange counsel" that Maleldil has taken, and the wonderful things he has done, "the things that all the angels desire to look into, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ: the Incarnation,

birth, death, and resurrection of the Son of God."{14}

Once again, therefore, we see Lewis "smuggling theology" into his interplanetary space adventure. In this case, though not stating it explicitly, he clearly alludes to the whole gospel message about Jesus. Next, we'll consider one final example of "smuggled theology" in C. S. Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet.*

Divine Providence and the Martial Spirit

Although God, who is known as Maleldil in the novel, is mentioned repeatedly, He is always mentioned in the third person. We hear about things that Maleldil *has done*, *is doing*, or may one day *do*, but we do not hear directly from God (or Maleldil) himself. Nevertheless, it is clear that He is ultimately in charge, and He is providentially at work in and through His creatures.{15}

For example, the spiritual power that Maleldil created to govern Mars, tells Ransom (the hero of the novel) that it was only by Maleldil that he had been able to save his own planet from the destructive rage of the "Bent One" (or devil). Indeed, it was only by Maleldil that the heavenly host were able to stop the "Bent One's" ambitious cruelty and confine him to the Earth.{16} Moreover, we learn that Maleldil has done marvelous things and even personally visited Earth to do battle with the devil.{17}

Lewis thus portrays God (or Maleldil) not only as a king, but also as a warrior. He is characterized (in an appropriate way) by what might be called the "warrior" or "martial spirit." Moreover, the spiritual power that Maleldil created to govern Mars is also (like the god of Roman mythology) imbued with the martial spirit. He, too, is a warrior, loyally engaged in fighting in the service of God. In light of this, once we learn that Ransom has been called to Mars by its planetary ruler, we can rightly surmise that it was, in fact, *God's will*

for Ransom to make this journey. We might even guess that one of the purposes of this journey was to develop the "martial spirit" in Ransom himself.

As Christiana Hale observes, "Lewis does not randomly pick Mars as the location, as if any alien planet would do. No, he chooses Mars for a reason, and an enormous part of that reason is to mold Ransom into a Martial character."{18} In other words, God (or Maleldil) wants to develop certain martial virtues in Ransom, things like courage, strength, determination, perseverance, and grit. Indeed, this is providentially necessary, for He is preparing Ransom for something far greater in the future. Hence, through the providence of God and the influence of Mars, we witness Ransom's growth in the martial spirit, thus preparing him for his next great adventure on a different alien world, that of Perelandra.

Notes

1. C. S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1965).
2. Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 234-35.
3. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 120-21.
4. C. S. Lewis to Sister Penelope CSMV, August 9, 1939, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. Walter Hooper, vol. 2, Books, Broadcasts and War 1931-1949 (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 262.
5. All quotations in this paragraph are taken from Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 32.
6. Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament Edition*. ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Victor Books, 1985), 807.
7. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 31-32.
8. C. S. Lewis to Mrs. Stuart Moore (Evelyn Underhill), October 29, 1938, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed.

Walter Hooper, vol. 2, Books, Broadcasts and War 1931-1949 (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2004), 233-34.
9. See Alister McGrath, *C. S. Lewis: A Life: Eccentric Genius, Reluctant Prophet* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2013), 234-35.
10. See Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 120-21.
11. All quotations in the paragraph are taken from Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 121.
12. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 121.
13. Christiana Hale, *Deeper Heaven: A Reader's Guide to C. S. Lewis's Ransom Trilogy* (Moscow, ID: Roman Roads Press, 2020), 155.
14. Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 88.
15. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet*, 67-8.
16. Ibid., 121.
17. Ibid.
18. Hale, *Deeper Heaven*, 70.

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Money Management in a Crisis

The COVID pandemic caused a worldwide financial crisis, making stewarding God's money more important than ever. Kerby Anderson provides a biblical view of money, giving, debt, and savings.

A number of years ago, I wrote a book with the appropriate title, *Making the Most of Your Money in Tough Times*.{1} Although there have been tough times in the past, we certainly need some biblical wisdom about our money and how to manage it in our current circumstances. Here are some key principles that I discuss in that book and in a more recent book on the subject of *Christians and Economics*.{2}

Biblical View on Money

Let’s start by correcting a common cliché that money is the root of all evil. Actually, the biblical passage says: “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness” (1 Timothy 6:10).

Money is not evil, but the love of money can be a concern. Money can be used to promote good or evil. Money can provide for your family, feed the poor, and promote the gospel. It can also be used to buy drugs, engage in prostitution, and destroy individuals and society.

The real question is: What is your attitude towards money? What do you plan to do with the financial resources God has placed into your hands? Jesus warned us that we should not love money because we cannot serve God and Mammon (Matthew 6:24). In order to have a proper biblical perspective on money, we need to understand what the Bible teaches about wealth and poverty.

While we are talking about money, let’s focus some attention on wealth. Within the Christian community, we are often bombarded with unbiblical views of wealth. At one extreme are those who preach a prosperity gospel of “health and wealth” for all believers. At the other extreme are radical Christians who condemn all wealth and imply that a rich Christian is a contradiction in terms.

What is a biblical view of wealth? First, wealth itself is not condemned. The Bible teaches that God gave material wealth to Abraham (Genesis 13), Isaac (Genesis 26), Jacob (Genesis 30), and Joseph (Genesis 39). Other characters in the Old Testament were also wealthy, such as Job (Job 42) and Solomon (1 Kings 3). In fact, we see in Job 42 that God once again blessed Job with material possessions after his trials. In Deuteronomy,

Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, wealth is seen as evidence of God's blessing (Deuteronomy 8; 28; Proverbs 22:2; Ecclesiastes. 5:19).

Even though wealth might be an evidence of God's blessing, believers are not to trust in it. Passages in the Old Testament and the New Testament teach that the believer should not trust in wealth but in God (Proverbs 11:4; 11:28; Jeremiah 9:23; 1 Timothy 6:17; James 1:11; 5:2).

Second, when wealthy people in the Bible were condemned, they were condemned for the means by which their riches were obtained, not for the riches themselves. The Old Testament prophet Amos railed against the injustice of obtaining wealth through oppression or fraud (4:11; 5:11). Micah spoke out against the unjust scales and light weights with which Israel defrauded the poor (6:1). Neither Amos nor Micah condemned wealth per se; they only denounced the unjust means by which it is sometimes achieved.

Third, Christians should be concerned about the effect wealth can have on our lives. We read in many passages that wealth often tempts us to forget about God. Proverbs 30:8-9 says: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; Feed me with the food that is my portion, That I not be full and deny You and say, 'Who is the Lord?'" Hosea 13:6 says of those who were satisfied that "their heart became proud" and ultimately forget about the Lord.

Biblical View on Giving

In order to develop a biblical point of view on money, we should first focus on the subject of giving. The concept of the tithe in introduced in the Old Testament. The word tithe means "a tenth part." Once you understand that someone who, say, makes $3000 a month and gives only $100 a month is not tithing. A number of studies have found that only 2-3 percent

of households tithe their income to their church.

There is no explicit command in the New Testament to tithe. The primary reason is that the tithe was for the Levites and the priests. The substitutionary death of Christ for our sins did away with the need for a temple and priests.

In the New Testament, we do see numerous verses calling for believers to give. For example, we are to give to those who minister (1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 2:10). We are to give to those who trust God to supply their needs (Philippians 4:19). We are to give as God has prospered them (1 Corinthians 16:2) and are to give cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7). And the Bible teaches that we will ultimately give account of our stewardship (Romans 14:12).

The first century believers set a high standard for giving. They sold their goods and gave money to any believer in need (Acts 2:45). They sold their property and gave the entire amount to the work of the apostles (Acts 4:36-5:2). And they also gave generously to the ministry of Paul (2 Corinthians 8:1-5) on a continual basis (Philippians 4:16-18).

Even though the tithe was no longer required, it appears that the early believers used the tithe as a base line for their giving. After all, a large majority of the first century believers were Jewish, and so they gave not only the tithe but above and beyond the requisite ten percent.

Paul makes it clear that Christians are not to give "grudgingly or under compulsion" but as each believer has "purposed in his heart" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Although the tithe was no longer the mandatory requirement, it seems to have provided a basis for voluntary giving by believers.

There is also a correlation between sowing and reaping. 2 Corinthians 9:6 says: "Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." Elsewhere in Scripture, we read that

the size of a harvest corresponds to what we scatter. Proverbs 11:24-25 says: “There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.” Notice that a spiritual harvest may be different from the kind of seed that is sown. For example, a material seed (giving to ministry) may reap a spiritual harvest (1 Corinthians 9:9).

Finally, we are to give according to what we have purposed in our hearts. 2 Corinthians 9:7 says: “Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Biblical View on Debt – Part 1

The Bible has a number of warnings concerning 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.

Many other verses in the Proverbs also warn about the potential danger of taking on debt, especially another person’s debt (Proverbs 17:18; 22:26-27; 27:13). While this does not mean that we can never be in debt, it does warn us about its dangers.

If you are debt free you are free to follow the Lord’s leading in your life. If you are in debt, you are constrained and become a servant to the lender. People who are in financial bondage are not emotionally or spiritually free. Their financial obligations wear heavy upon their mind and spirit.

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.”

Some have taught that Christians should never go into debt. The basis for that teaching is usually the passage in Romans 13:8 because it says: “Owe nothing to anyone.”

Although some have argued that this verse prohibits debt, the passage needs to be seen in context. This passage is not a specific teaching about debt but rather a summary of our duty as Christians to governmental authority. Paul is teaching that we should not owe anything to anyone (honor, taxes, etc.). But he is not teaching that we should never incur debt. While it is better that we are debt-free, this passage is not commanding us to never go into debt.

The Bible is filled with biblical passages that provide guidelines to lending and borrowing. If debt was always wrong, then these passages would not exist. After all, why have passages providing guidelines for debt if debt is not permitted? Certainly there would be a clear prohibition against debt. We should point out that the clear implication of Romans 13:8 is that we should pay our debts and it would be wise if we would pay our debts off a quickly as possible.

Biblical View on Debt – Part 2

One of the consequences of debt is that we can often deny reality. In order to realistically deal with the debt in our lives we need to get rid of some of the silly ideas running around in our heads.

For example, you are NOT going to win the lottery. Your debt problem is NOT going to go away if you just ignore it. And a computer glitch in your lender’s computer is NOT going to accidentally wipe out your financial records so that you don’t have to repay your debt.

Another consequence of debt is a loss of integrity. When we cannot pay, we start saying “the check’s in the mail” when it isn’t. We not only kid ourselves but we try to mislead others

about the extent of our problem with debt.

Sometimes debt even leads to dishonesty. Psalm 37:21 says: “The wicked borrows and does not pay back.” We should repay our debts.

A third consequence of debt is addiction. Debt is addictive. Once in debt we begin to get comfortable with cars, consumer goods, furniture, etc. all funded through debt. Once we reach that comfort level, we go into further debt.

A final consequence of debt is stress. Stress experts have calculated the impact of various stress factors on our lives. Some of the greatest are death of a spouse and divorce. But it is amazing how many other stress factors are financially related (change in financial state, mortgage over $100,000). When we owe more than we can pay, we worry and feel a heavy load of stress that wouldn’t exist if we lived debt free.

Biblical View on Savings

It is always important for us to get out of debt. I have written another booklet on the subject of debt. If you are in debt or want to learn more about government debt and personal debt, I encourage you to obtain that booklet. Email me your name and address at kerby@probe.org and I will send it to you.

We should not merely work to get out of debt and eventually break even. Savings and investing should be part of your budget and part of your life plan. Saving and investing are ultimately a means to an end. You may be saving for your kids’

college or saving for your retirement.

America used to be a nation of savers. In fact, thrift was a foundational element of American society. The architect Louis Sullivan even carved the word THRIFT over the door of his bank. Thrift was seen as a private moral virtue that made public prosperity possible. Americans supported institutions that encouraged savings.

The Bible encourages us to save. In Proverbs it encourages those who do not save to consider how a lowly creature like the ant prepares for the future. “Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest” (Proverbs 6:6-8).

The writer of Proverbs also talks about how wise people save in contrast to foolish people who do not. “In the house of the wise are stores of choice food and oil, but a foolish man devours all he has” (Proverbs 21:20).

We should always have a budget. Author and speaker, John Maxwell, has a great definition of a budget: “A budget is people telling their money what to do instead of wondering where it went.” A budget is a plan for saving and spending.

The book of Proverbs admonishes us to plan. Proverbs 16:3 says, “Commit your works to the LORD And your plans will be established.” But as we develop these plans for the future, we also need to be sensitive to the Lord’s leading. “The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

The Bible promises that good things will happen when we plan. “Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity” (Proverbs 21:5, NLT). By contrast, the Bible also teaches that your plans will fail if these plans are not within the will of God. Isaiah 30:1 says, “’Destruction is certain for my rebellious children,’ says the Lord. ‘You make plans that are contrary to

my will. You weave a web of plans that are not from my Spirit, thus piling up your sins.'"

If you do not have anything in savings, you need to begin by putting aside a cash reserve for emergencies. Proverbs 22:5 says, "The prudent sees danger and hides himself, but the simple go on and suffer for it." Everyone needs a cash reserve for major emergencies (fire, tornado, earthquake) and even for small emergencies and inconveniences (broken appliance, car repair, flat tire).

Most financial advisors suggest that you have six months' worth of income set aside for an emergency or unexpected expense. You may not have that set aside right now, but today is a good time to start setting aside some money. Make your first goal to set aside one month's worth of income.

This has been a brief overview of money management. I encourage you to read books{3} and visit websites that will give you even more direction on how to use your money. The Bible provides insight in giving, savings, and debt. Apply these principles and allow God to bless you.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, *Making the Most of Your Money in Tough Times* *Eugene, OR: Harvest House), 2009.
2. Kerby Anderson, *Christians and Economics* (Cambridge, OH: Christian Publishing House), 2016).
3. Randy Alcorn, *Money, Possession and Eternity* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House), 2003.
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Did Adam Really Exist?

Were Adam and Eve really the first pair of humans? Rick Wade responds to theistic evolution and OT scholar Peter Enns' belief the human race did not begin with Adam.

Paul and Adam

In 2011, *Christianity Today* reported on the growing acceptance of theistic evolution in the evangelical community and one possible implication of it. If humans did evolve along with other species, was there a real historical first couple? Did Adam and Eve really exist?

In this article I'll address a couple of theological problems this claim raises and a question of interpretation. I'll look at the views of evangelical Old Testament scholar Peter Enns who denies a historical Adam; not, however, to single him out as a target, but rather because he raises the important issues in his writings.

Enns denies a historical Adam for two main reasons. One is that, as far as he is concerned, the matter of evolution is settled. There was no first human couple.{1} The other is his belief that Genesis 1 describes the origins of the world in the mythological framework of the ancient Near East, and thus isn't historical, and that Genesis 2 describes the origins of *Israel*, not *human* origins.{2} So Genesis doesn't intend to teach a historical Adam and Eve, and evolutionary science has proved that they couldn't have existed.

Let's begin with the question of how sin entered the world if

there were no Adam.

In Romans chapter 5, the apostle Paul says sin, condemnation, and death came through the act of a man, Adam. This is contrasted with the act of another man, Jesus, which brought grace and righteousness.

However, if there were no historical Adam, where did sin come from? Enns says the Bible doesn't tell us.{3} The Old Testament gives no indication, he says, "that Adam's disobedience is the cause of universal sin, death, and condemnation, as Paul seems to argue."{4} Paul was a man of his time who drew from a common understanding of human beginnings to explain the universality of sin. Enns acknowledges universal sin and the need for a Savior.{5} He just doesn't know how this situation came about. The fact that Adam didn't exist, Enns believes, does nothing to take away from Paul's main point, namely, that salvation comes only through Christ for all people, both Jews and Gentiles. Is this true?

Paul and Adam: A Response

There are a few problems with this interpretation. First, there is a logical problem. Theologian Richard Gaffin points out that, in Rom. 5:12, 17, and 18, a connection is made between the "one man" through whom sin came and the "all" to whom it was spread. If sin really didn't come in through the "one"—Adam—and spread to the "all"—you and me—how do we take seriously Paul's further declaration that "one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all"?

Second, there is a piling on of error in Paul's claim. One of Enns' foundational beliefs is that God used human understanding to convey His truths in Scripture. God spoke through the myths of the ancient world when He inspired the writing of Genesis.{6} If Enns is correct, one would expect

that God was using the Genesis myth to reveal something true in Paul's claim about Adam. In other words, the Old Testament story would be opened up so a truth would be revealed. However, Paul's first point, that sin came through Adam to the race (Rom. 5:12), is in fact false, according to Enns. The following truth, about righteousness coming through Christ, is beside the point here. Paul's assertion about Adam isn't simply a *historical* one; it is a *doctrinal* one, too. The traditional teaching of the church regarding the source of sin, death, and condemnation is therefore false. Paul delivered a false teaching based upon a non-historical myth. He should have left Adam out of his discussion. It does nothing to buttress his claim about Christ.

Enns says that this matter of the origin of sin is "a vital issue to work through, . . . one of the more pressing and inevitable philosophical and theological issues before us."{7} One has to wonder, though: if Paul didn't have the answer, and he was taught by Christ directly, and if the rest of Scripture is silent about such an important matter, can we really think we can ferret out the solution ourselves?

Paul's Use of the Old Testament

The use of the Old Testament in the New Testament is of great significance in this matter. How does Paul get the point he made out of Genesis if it isn't true?

Peter Enns believes the problem is related to the way Paul interpreted and used the Old Testament. Paul lived in an era which is now called Second Temple Judaism. Writers in this era, Enns says, "were not motivated to reproduce the intention of the original human author" in the text under consideration.{8} Thus, we see Old Testament texts used in seemingly strange ways in the New Testament, strange if what we expect is a direct reproduction or a further development or deeper explanation of the Old Testament writer's original

intent. Texts could be taken completely out of context or words could be changed to make the text say something the New Testament writer wanted to say. In this way, Enns believes, Paul used the Old Testament creatively to explain the universality of sin and of the cross work of Christ.

Some scholars speak of "christocentric" interpretation of the Old Testament. Enns prefers the term "christotelic" which refers to the idea that Christ is the *completion* of the Old Testament or the *end* toward which the Old Testament story was headed. Regarding Adam, Enns writes, "Paul's Adam is a vehicle by which he articulates the gospel message, but his Adam is still the product of a creative handling of the story."{9} Paul presents Adam as a historical person, and then makes the further creative claim that Adam's sin is the reason we all sin. Neither of these are true, but this does no harm to the most important part of the text where Paul claims that salvation for all people came through Christ.

None of this should be problematic for us, in Enns' opinion, for he believes this view of the Bible is similar to our view of the Incarnation of Christ. In Jesus there are both humanity and divinity. Likewise, the Bible is a coming together of the divine and the human. God used the methods of Paul's day to convey the gospel message.

Paul's Use of Old Testament: A Response

How can we respond to this view of Paul's use of the Adam story?

Enns believes "that the NT authors [subsumed] the OT under the authority of the crucified and risen Christ."{10} However, Jesus never referred to the Old Testament in a way that showed the Old Testament incorrect as it stood. Even His "but I say to you" in the Sermon on the Mount appears to be more a matter of teaching the depths of the laws than a correction of the

Old Testament text. He upheld the authority of the Old Testament such as when he said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Mt. 5:17).”{11}

Bruce Waltke is an evangelical Old Testament scholar who accepts theistic evolution but who disagrees with Enns on this matter. He wonders why Jesus rebuked the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:25-27) for not understanding the plain language of Scripture if the plain historical sense isn’t sufficient.{12} He argues that Enns’ method of interpretation can’t be supported by Scripture.

Paul said the gospel he preached was “in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4) by which he meant the Old Testament.{13} Elsewhere he said that the Old Testament Scriptures are “profitable for teaching” in 2 Tim. 3:16-17.{14}

New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham disagrees with the belief that Paul followed the interpretive methods of his day. The apostles weren’t guilty of reading into the Old Testament ideas held independently of it. He says, “They brought the Old Testament text into relationship with the history of Jesus in a process of mutual interpretation from which some of their profoundest theological insights sprang.”{15}

In fact, it was the apostles’ high esteem for the Old Testament that forced them to come to grips with the Trinitarian nature of God given the claims of Jesus.{16}

This doesn’t mean, however, that it’s always easy to understand how the apostles used the Old Testament. However, what the apostles taught was understood to be in continuity with what they had received before, not as a correction of it.

The Matter of Inspiration

It is inevitable that a discussion of the denial of the historical Adam will turn to the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. Old Testament scholar Peter Enns believes that Paul's incorrect use of Adam "has no bearing whatsoever on the truth of the gospel."{17} That's true, but it has a lot to do with how we understand inspiration and its bearing on Paul's writings.

The apostle Paul said that "all Scripture is inspired" or "breathed out" by God (2 Tim. 3:16). Peter explains further that "no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. . . . but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

Paul, who claimed in 1 Thess. 2 that his teachings were the word of God (v. 13), intended to explain how sin and condemnation came into the world in Romans 5. Elsewhere, Peter spoke of Paul's writings as Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15-16). If Paul's explanation of this "vital issue," in Enns' words, was wrong, was it, then, of Paul's own interpretation? Either it came from the Holy Spirit and was inspired Scripture, or it was merely Paul's interpretation and was not. Which is it?

Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke writes this: "A theory that entails notions that holy Scripture contains flat out contradictions, ludicrous harmonization, earlier revelations that are misleading and/or less than truthful, and doctrines that are represented as based on historical fact, but in fact are based on fabricated history, in my judgment, is inconsistent with the doctrine that God inspired every word of holy Scripture."{18}

It might be objected here that I am confusing inspiration with interpretation. These are different things. However, if it is understood that all of Scripture comes from God who cannot lie, then we have to let that set limits on how we interpret

Scripture. Interpretations that include false doctrines cannot be correct.

It seems to me that Enns has put himself into a difficult position. His conviction of the truth of human evolution isn't his only reason for denying the historical Adam, but it puts the traditional understanding of Adam and his place in Paul's theology out of bounds for him. It would be better to hold to what the church has taught for centuries rather than to the tentative conclusions of modern scientists.

Notes

1. Peter Enns, *The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2012), ix, xiv, 122-23.
2. Ibid., 52.
3. Ibid., 124-26.
4. Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapid: Baker, 2005), 82.
5. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 91. See also 124-25.
6. See for example Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 55-56.
7. Enns, *Evolution of Adam*, 126.
8. Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 131.
9. Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*, 102.
10. Peter Enns, "Fuller Meaning, Single Goal: A Christotelic Approach to the New Testament Use of the Old in Its First-Century Interpretive Environment," in *Three Views on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) 208; quoted in Don Collett, "Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Unity of Scripture," p. 10, n.26; accessed on the web site of Trinity School for Ministry, bit.ly/1iBGLYT.
11. See Collett, "Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Unity of Scripture," 10-11.
12. Bruce K. Waltke, "Revisiting Inspiration and Incarnation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009), 90.

13. See Collett, “Trinitarian Hermeneutics and the Unity of Scripture,” 11; referencing Christopher Seitz, “Creed, Scripture, and ‘Historical Jesus’: ‘in accordance with the Scriptures,'” in *The Rule of Faith: Scripture, Canon, and Creed in a Critical Age*, ed. Ephraim Radner & George Sumner (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1998), 126-35.
14. Christopher Seitz, “Canon, Narrative, and the Old Testament’s Literal Sense,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 59.1 (2008), 31-32.
15. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 33.
16. See Collett, “Trinitarian Hermeneutics,” 11-12. Cf. Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel*, 54.
17. Enns, *The Evolution of Adam*, 102.
18. Waltke, “Revisiting Inspiration and Incarnation,” 95.

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The Causes of War

Meic Pearse’s book The Gods of War *gives great insight into the charge that religion is the cause of most war. History shows this is not true: the cause of most war is the sinful human heart, even when religion is invoked as a reason.*

The Accusation

Sam Harris, the popular author and atheist, says that “for everyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict.”{1} Writing for the Freedom from Religion Foundation, fellow atheist Richard Dawkins adds, “Only the willfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the

world today."{2} Speaking more bluntly, one British government official has said, "theocrats, religious leaders or fanatics citing holy texts . . . constitutes the greatest threat to world peace today."{3}

War is the ultimate act of intolerance, and since intolerance is seen as the only unforgivable sin in our postmodern times, it's not surprising that those hostile to religion would charge people holding religious convictions with the guilt for causing war.

This view is held by many others, not just despisers of religion. A 2006 opinion poll taken in Great Britain found that 82% of adults "see religion as a cause of division and tension between people. Only 16% disagree."{4}

To be honest, religion has been, and remains, a source of conflict in the world; but to what degree? Is it the only source of war, as its critics argue? Is it even the primary source? And if we agree that religion is a source of war, how do we define what qualifies as a religion? This leads to another question. Are all religions equally responsible for war or are some more prone to instigate conflict than others? Once these issues are decided, we are still left with one of the most difficult questions: How does a religious person, especially a Christian, respond to the question of war?

When confronted with the accusation that religion, and more importantly, Christianity, has been the central cause of war down through history, most Christians respond by ceding the point. We will argue that the issue is far too complex to merely blame war on religious strife. A more nuanced response is needed. Religion is sometimes the direct cause of war, but other times it plays a more ambiguous role. It can also be argued, as Karl Marx did, that religion can actually restrain the warring instinct.

In his provocative new book, *The Gods of War*, Meic Pearse argues that modern atheists greatly overstate their case regarding religion as a cause for war, and that all religions are not equal when it comes to the tendency to resort to violence. He believes that the greatest source for conflict in the world today is the universalizing tendencies of modern secular nations that are pressing their materialism and moral relativism on more traditional cultures.

The Connection Between Religion and War

When someone suggests a simple answer to something as complex as war, it probably is *too* simple. History is usually more complicated than we would like it to be.

How then should Christians respond when someone claims religion is the cause of all wars? First, we must admit that religion can be and sometimes is the cause of war. Although it can be difficult to separate political, cultural, and religious motivations, there have been instances when men went off to war specifically because they believed that God wanted them to. That being said, in the last one hundred years the modern era with its secular ideologies has generated death and destruction on a scale never seen before in history. Not during the Crusades, the Inquisition, nor even during the Thirty Years War in Europe.

The total warfare of the twentieth century combined powerful advances in war-making technologies with highly structured societies to devastating effect. WWI cost close to eight and a half million lives. The more geographically limited Russian Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 resulted in nine million deaths. WWII cost sixty million deaths, as well as the destruction of whole cities by fire bombing and nuclear devices.

Both Nazi fascism and communism rejected the Christian belief

that humanity holds a unique role in creation and replaced it with the necessity of conflict and strife. By the end of the nineteenth century, Darwin's ideas regarding natural selection and survival of the fittest had begun to affect philosophy, the social sciences, and even theology. Darwin had left us with a brutal universe devoid of meaning. The communist and fascist worldviews were both firmly grounded in Darwin's universe.

Hitler's obsession with violence is well known, but the communists were just as vocal about their attachment to it. Russian revolution leader Leon Trotsky wrote, "We must put an end once and for all to the papist-Quaker babble about the sanctity of human life." Lenin argued that the socialist state was to be "a system of organized violence against the bourgeoisie" or middle class. While critics of the Russian Tsar and his ties with the Orthodox Russian Church could point to examples of oppression and cruelty, one historian has noted that when the communists had come to power "more prisoners were shot at just one soviet camp in a single year than had been executed by the tsars during the entire nineteenth century."{5}

So, religion is not the primary cause of warfare and cruelty, at least not during the last one hundred years. But what about wars fought in the more distant past; surely most of them were religiously motivated. Not really.

Meic Pearce argues that "most wars, even before the rise of twentieth century's secularist creeds, owed little or nothing to religious causation."{6} Considering the great empires of antiquity, Pearce writes that "neither the Persians nor the Greeks nor the Romans fought either to protect or to advance the worship of their gods."{7} Far more ordinary motives were involved like the desire for booty, the extension of the empire, glory in battle, and the desire to create buffer zones with their enemies. Each of these empires had their gods which

would be called upon for aid in battle, but the primary cause of these military endeavors was not the advancement of religious beliefs.

Invasions by the Goths, Huns, Franks, and others against the Roman Empire, attacks by the Vikings in the North and the Mongols in Asia were motivated by material gain as well and not religious belief. The fourteenth century conquests of Timur Leng (or Tamerlane) in the Middle East and India resulted in the deaths of millions. He was a Muslim, but he conquered Muslim and pagan alike. At one point he had seventy thousand Muslims beheaded in Baghdad so that towers could be built with their skulls.{8}

More recently, the Hundred Years War between the French and English, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars were secular conflicts. Religious beliefs might have been used to wrap the conflicts with a Christian veneer, but promoting the cause of Christ was not at the heart of the conflicts.

Pearce argues that down through the millennia, humanity has gone to war for two main reasons: greed expressed by the competition for limited resources, and the need for security from other predatory cultures. The use of religion as a legitimating device for conflict has become a recent trend as it became less likely that a single individual could take a country to war without the broad support of the population.

It can be argued that religion was, without ambiguity, at the center of armed conflict during two periods in history. The first was during the birth and expansion of Islam which resulted in an ongoing struggle with Christianity, including the Crusades during the Middle Ages. The second was the result of the Reformation in Europe and was fought between Protestant and Catholic states. Even here, political motivations were part of the blend of causes that resulted in armed conflict.

Islam and Christianity

Do all religions have the same propensity to cause war? The two world religions with the largest followings are Christianity and Islam. While it is true that people have used both belief systems to justify armed conflict, are they equally likely to cause war? Do their founder's teachings, their holy books, and examples from the earliest believers encourage their followers to do violence against others?

Although Christianity has been used to justify forced conversions and violence against unbelievers, the connection between what Christianity actually teaches and these acts of violence has been ambiguous at best and often contradictory. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians told to use violence to further the Kingdom of God. Our model is Christ who is the perfect picture of humility and servant leadership, the one who came to lay down his life for others. Meic Pearce writes, "For the first three centuries of its history, Christianity was spread exclusively by persuasion and was persecuted for its pains, initially by the Jews but later, from 63, by the Romans."{9} It wasn't until Christianity became the de facto state religion of the Roman Empire around AD 400 that others were persecuted in the name of Christ.

The history of Islam is quite different. Warfare and conflict are found at its very beginning and is embodied in Muhammad's actions and words. Islam was initially spread through military conquest and maintained by threat of violence. As one pair of scholars puts it, there can be no doubt that "Islam was cradled in violence, and that Muhammad himself, through the twenty-six or twenty-seven raids in which he personally participated, came to serve for some Muslims as a role model for violence."{10}

Much evidence can be corralled to make this point. Muhammad himself spoke of the necessity of warfare on behalf of Allah. He said to his followers, "I was ordered to fight all men

until they say, ‘There is no God but Allah.'”{11} Prior to conquering Mecca, he supported his small band of believers by raiding caravans and sharing the booty. Soon after Muhammad’s death, a war broke out over the future of the religion. Three civil wars were fought between Muslims during the first fifty years of the religion’s history, and three of the four leaders of Islam after Muhammad were assassinated by other Muslims. The Quran and Hadith, the two most important writings in Islam, make explicit the expectation that all Muslim men will fight to defend the faith. Perhaps the most telling aspect of Islamic belief is that there is no separation between religious and political authority in the Islamic world. A threat to one is considered a threat to the other and almost guarantees religiously motivated warfare.

Pacifism or Just Wars?

Although most Christians advocate either pacifism or a “just war” view when it comes to warfare and violence, Pearse argues that there are difficulties with both. Pacifism works at a personal level, but “there cannot be a pacifist state, merely a state that depends on others possessed of more force or of the willingness to use it.”{12} Some pacifists argue that humans are basically good and that violence stems from misunderstandings or social injustice. This is hardly a traditional Christian teaching. Pearse argues that “a repudiation of force in all circumstances . . . is an abandonment of victims—real people—to their fate.”{13}

Just war theory as advocated by Augustine in the early fifth century teaches that war is moral if it is fought for a just cause and carried out in a just fashion. A just cause bars wars of aggression or revenge, and is fought only as a last resort. It also must have a reasonable chance of success and be fought under the direction of a ruler in an attitude of love for the enemy. It seeks to reestablish peace, not total destruction of the vanquished, and to insure that

noncombatants are not targeted.

However, even WWII, what many believe to be our most justified use of force, failed to measure up to this standard. Massive air raids against civilian populations by the Allies were just one of many violations that disallow its qualification as a just war. As Pearse argues, “war has an appalling dynamic of its own: it drags down the participants . . . into ever more savage actions.”{14}

How then are Christians to think about war and violence? Let’s consider two examples. In the face of much violent opposition in his battle for social justice, Martin Luther King said, “be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. . . . We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win *you* in the process.”{15} Reform was achieved, although at the cost of his life, and many hearts and minds have been changed.

However, another martyr, German minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, rejected pacifism and chose to participate in an attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler, mainly because he despaired that an appeal to the hearts and minds of the Nazis would be effective.

Neither King nor Bonhoeffer were killed specifically for their faith. They were killed for defending the weak from slaughter, as Pearse puts it. Perhaps Pearse is correct when he argues, “If Christians can . . . legitimately fight . . . , then that fighting clearly cannot be for the faith. It can only be for secular causes . . . faith in Christ is something for which we can only die—not kill. . . . To fight under the delusion that one is thereby promoting Christianity is to lose sight of what Christianity is.”{16}

Notes

1. Meic Pearse, The Gods of War (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.

2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 14.
5. Ibid., 31.
6. Ibid., 53.
7. Ibid., 54.
8. Ibid., 55.
9. Ibid., 134.
10. Ibid., 58.
11. Ibid., 59.
12. Ibid., 173.
13. Ibid., 175.
14. Ibid., 173.
15. Ibid., 180.
16. Ibid.

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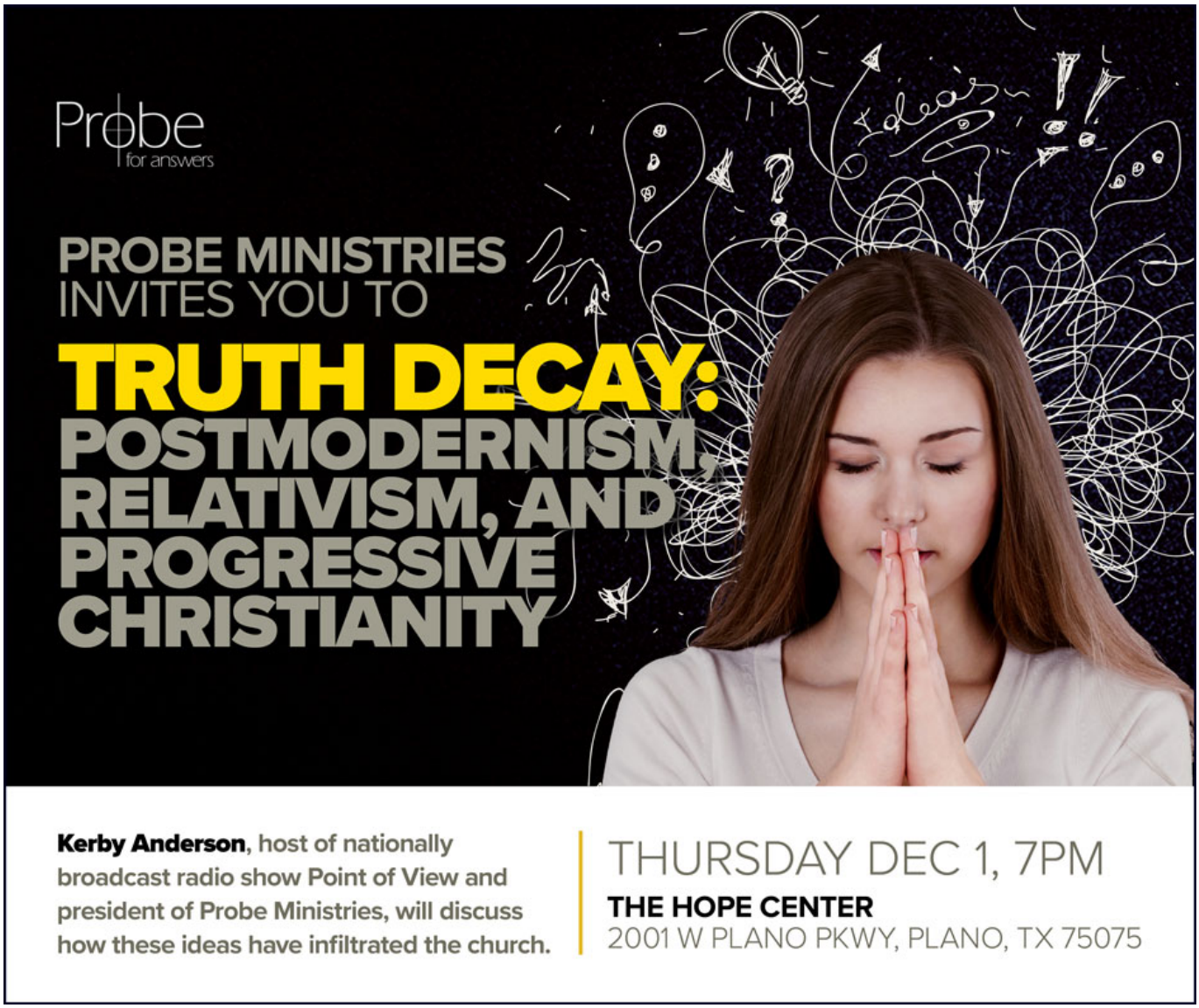
Probe Live: Truth Decay



Join us for the next Probe Live event

Thursday, December 1, 2022
7:00 p.m.
The Hope Center, Plano TX

We encounter postmodern thinking when we share the gospel and then hear, “That’s your truth, but it’s not my truth.” Moral relativism surfaces when someone says, “That may be your morality, but it’s not my morality,” or “Who are you to say abortion or homosexuality is wrong?” And progressive Christians deny absolute moral truth and therefore question the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Probe Ministries President Kerby Anderson will provide an overview of these faulty ways of thinking and answer questions from the audience.

We will record this message but not live stream it.

A Christian Purpose for Life – Proclaiming the Glory of Christ

Steve Cable answers the question, Why does God leave Christians on earth after we are saved?

Misconceptions and Our Identity

Examining the beliefs and behavior of born-again emerging adults over the last few years, one common deficiency is a misunderstanding of their relationship to eternity. Many believers either have not thought about the question of "Why did God leave me here on earth once I was saved?" or they harbor misconceptions about the answer. Let's begin by considering some common misconceptions.

The first misconception is being purposeless. These people believe that thinking about their eternal purpose is a waste of time. Just live for the moment. My eternal destiny is secure so why bother myself with asking, "Why am I still here? I'll worry about the things of heaven after I die." This viewpoint devalues the sacrifice of Christ. He did not give His life for us so that we can be unconcerned about what concerns Him.{1}

The second misconception is focusing on this life's pleasures. Many young people say things like "I don't want Jesus to return until after I have traveled, married, had children, gotten that promotion, etc." They assume these things are of ultimate importance in their lives. Yet, the Bible teaches us that this attitude will choke out God's fruit in our lives. As Jesus said, "[T]he worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things, enter in and choke the word and it becomes unfruitful."{2}

A third misconception is becoming prepared for heaven. Some think that God needs to get our character up to some entrance level requirement before we are ready to move on to heaven. Most people with this view are not really working hard to match their lifestyle to a biblical standard, but they figure at some point they will. However, since our righteousness is not our own, but rather that of Jesus',{3} we don't need to get more righteous to enter heaven. In fact, when we see Him then we will be like Him.{4} The fastest way to make us completely mature is to take us out of this world.

One final misconception is providing for one's family. Caring for our family is certainly part of God's desire for our lives. However, if our sole purpose is to provide for our own family and our children have the same purpose and so on, the church will be limited to us and our progeny—and no one else.

These common misconceptions as to our purpose fall under the warning Paul gave us in Philippians,

> For many walk, of whom I often told you, . . . that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, . . . whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.{5}

Paul goes on to explain, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ . . ."{6}

We are to live our lives constantly aware of our heavenly citizenship, eagerly awaiting the return of our Lord. In this article, we examine the book of 1 Peter to see what Peter has to say about our purpose in life and how we are to live it out.

Called to a Critical Mission

Peter begins the book of 1 Peter by reminding us what Christ has done for us. Let's read the first few verses of this amazing letter.

According to his great mercy, [God] has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Through the resurrection of Jesus we are born again and are looking forward to an eternal inheritance kept in heaven for us to be revealed in the last time. What a wonderful truth helping us to realize that we are already living in eternity as we wait for our inheritance to be revealed. In the meantime, we are living on this earth in a temporary "earthsuit" called to fulfill God's purpose for our lives.

In the remainder of his letter to the churches, Peter addresses what we are to do while we are living on this earth. He first tells us that we are likely to encounter trials and suffering in this world. Then, beginning with verse 13 of chapter 1, Peter conveys to us the importance of our mission, giving us instructions we would expect a military commander to give before sending his team out on a dangerous and critical mission. He tells us to:

> *Prepare our minds for action* – we are to be action oriented, not passively waiting for our life to pass by.

Be alert and focused on the mission – we are to keep our minds focused on God's purpose for our life on this earth.

Keep a long term perspective – don't be deceived into putting your thoughts and your hope on the temporary temptations of the world, and

Realize God has entrusted you with the priceless resource of time – Peter tells us that we are to conduct ourselves in the fear of the Lord while we are on this earth.

In the latter parts of chapter 1, Peter reminds us that we have been redeemed at a very high cost, the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God. We owe a tremendous debt which motivates us to desire to faithfully carry out our mission on this earth.

The calls to action listed above must be accompanied by two critical components to be effective in this life. Specifically, Peter calls on us to purify our hearts not conforming to our former lusts and to love other believers not only as a friend, but also with sacrificial love by which Jesus loves you. The actions listed above are not our purpose on this earth, but rather activities we need to address if we are fulfill our purpose.

Our Purpose: To Proclaim His Excellencies

Why does God leaves us on this earth after we are saved? In the second chapter of his letter, Peter begins by reminding us that we are living stones, part of the holy building God is building on the cornerstone Jesus Christ. This building made up of the lives of Christians is to be a beacon proclaiming the glory of God and the good news of redemption in Jesus.

In verses 9 and 10 of Chapter 2, Paul clearly states the purpose of our lives and of the church when he writes:

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy

> nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

We are a special people on this earth, God's own people. Peter uses the terms used by Yahweh of the Israelites in the wilderness where God told them through Moses,

> Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.{7}

The Israelites discovered that they could not obey His voice or keep His covenant even when ruled by kings who desired to serve the Lord. Jesus Christ had to "become sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God through Him."{8} In Jesus' righteousness, we now become the special people of God given His purposes to accomplish on this earth.

We are left here so that we may proclaim His excellencies. We are to proclaim more than just the general attributes of our Creator. We are to let people know that our Creator is prepared to deliver them out of darkness and let them live in His marvelous light. God has entrusted us with His glory, His light. We have the privilege of proclaiming His glory and offering His grace. At a basic level, we proclaim His excellencies by obeying His commands to proclaim Christ, make disciples, and be available for God to use us on this earth.

If we are to proclaim the glories of Christ and the gospel of redemption to eternal life, how are we to accomplish this wonderful goal?

Fulfilling Our Purpose Through Excellent Behavior and Right Relationships

In this article we have been looking at the question, "What purpose does God have for my life as a Christian here on planet Earth?" We have seen that God leaves us here primarily for the purpose of bringing others into His kingdom. As Paul said, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain . . . if I am to remain on in the flesh if will mean fruitful labor for me."{9} In his letter to the Colossians, Paul stated, "We proclaim [Christ] by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ."{10} The apostle Peter put it this way, "[You are] a people of his own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."{11}

If we are to proclaim Christ in this world, the next obvious question is, how are we to do this? Is the best approach to rent a large electronic bull horn and drive the streets preaching the good news? Or in today's world perhaps we can start a Facebook page or send out a tweet with John 3:16? These techniques may be appropriate in some circumstances, but that is not where the apostle Peter says we should begin.

Peter follows his statement that we are called to proclaim Christ with this interesting instruction:

> Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.{12}

Instead of following this primary purpose with instructions on how to best verbalize our faith, he first focuses on how we live out our faith. He clearly points out that our behavior if

kept excellent in purity and good deeds will attract the attention of non-Christians, of evil doers, causing them to consider the work of Christ in this world. We see that the reason God calls us to excellent behavior is not so that we will be good enough to get into His heaven, but rather to convict others of their need for a savior.

Peter continues to address ways in which we should proclaim Christ in the remainder of the second chapter. He points out that having godly relationships is an important way of proclaiming Christ. What types of relationships does Peter address? He specifically calls out our relationships with unbelievers, government authorities, our bosses, our co-workers, husbands and wives, other believers and the elders He has placed over us.

Relationships are the biggest part of life. As people observe your relationships, they can see that they are different because you offer supernatural love, and your eternal perspective allows you to approach them with a servant's heart. As Christians, our relationships are not about getting what we deserve, but rather about giving to others the same way Jesus has given to us.

Fulfilling Your Purpose Through Your Testimony and Your Prayers

Above we have seen that our post-salvation purpose of life on earth is to proclaim the excellencies of Jesus Christ through the gospel. We also looked at the first two ways that we should use to proclaim Christ in this world. The first way is through excellent behavior lived out before an unbelieving world. The second is through living out right relationships with those with whom we deal in this world. As you can see, these first two ways that Peter addresses do not require us to explain our faith in Jesus Christ. Rather, they draw unbeliever's attention to our lives, building up questions in

their minds.

For example, in 1 Peter 2:18-19, Peter tells us,

> Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.

Having a good attitude toward our boss even in those times when they are unreasonable finds favor with God and testifies to others of our different perspective.

After dealing with a comprehensive list of life relationships, from the government to our husbands and wives, Peter brings up our spoken testimony as well. In 3:15, he says:

> Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

Not only are we to live our lives in ways that proclaim the glories of our Savior, we are to be prepared to give an account for the hope that is in us. We know from the first chapter of 1 Peter that the hope that is in us is the hope that comes from being born again and knowing that we have obtained an eternal inheritance reserved for us in heaven. We need to be prepared to share with others that through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ they too can share in this same hope that drives our lives. The phrase in the verse, to make a defense, is a translation of the Greek world *apologia* from which we obtain our English word “apologetics.”

It is important to note the context in which this call to apologetics is placed. First, it is to be done with gentleness

and reverence, not with arrogance and self-righteousness. The object is not to demonstrate you are right, but rather to help the questioner come to grips with the truth of grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Second, Peter reiterates his instruction found in 2:12, reminding us that we are to focus on living sanctified lives so that even those who slander us know in their hearts of our good behavior in Christ.

Finally, in 1 Peter 4:7, we are called to be “of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.” If we are to be effective in proclaiming Christ in this world we must be consistently praying about the people and the obstacles we face.

Peter makes it clear that our purpose as a church on this earth is to proclaim the goodness of Christ who delivered us out of the domain of darkness and into the eternal kingdom of God. Proclaiming Christ in this way involves our excellent behavior, our right relationships, our gentle defense of the gospel, and a commitment to prayer. Let us examine our lives to see how this call is being lived out in us.

Notes

1. 2 Corinthians 5:14 and 1 Peter 1:13-17

2. Mark 4:19

3. Philippians 3:9-10, 2 Corinthians 5:21

4. 1 John 3:3

5. Philippians 3:18-19

6. Philippians 3:20-21

7. Exodus 19:5-6

8. 2 Corinthians 5:20

9. Philippians 1:21-23

10. Colossians 1:28 NET Bible

11. 1 Peter 2:9b NET Bible

12. 1 Peter 2:11-12

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Christ and the Human Condition

Dr. Michael Gleghorn looks at how God has acted in Christ to address those things which ail us most: sin, suffering, death, and our broken relationship with God.

Early in the book of Job, Eliphaz the Temanite declares that “man is born for trouble, as sparks fly upward” (5:7). Whether it’s the trouble that befalls us as we’re simply minding our own business or the trouble we bring upon others (or even ourselves), difficulties, sin, and suffering seem to plague us wherever we turn. Just think for a moment about some of the natural evils which afflict the human race. This class of evils includes both natural disasters like hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes, and earthquakes, and diseases like cancer, leukemia, Alzheimer’s and ALS. While natural evils are bad enough, they are only part of the problem. In addition to these, we must also consider all the moral evils which human beings commit against God, one another, and

themselves. This second class of evils includes things like hatred, blasphemy, murder, rape, child abuse, terrorism, and suicide. Taken together, the scope and magnitude of human sin and suffering in the world are truly mind-boggling. What does God have to say about issues such as these? Even better, what (if anything) has He done about them?

The Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga has written

> As the Christian sees things, God does not stand idly by, cooly observing the suffering of His creatures. He enters into and shares our suffering. He endures the anguish of seeing his son, the second person of the Trinity, consigned to the bitterly cruel and shameful death of the cross. Some theologians claim that God cannot suffer. I believe they are wrong. God's capacity for suffering, I believe, is proportional to his greatness; it exceeds our capacity for suffering in the same measure as his capacity for knowledge exceeds ours. Christ was prepared to endure the agonies of hell itself; and God, the Lord of the universe, was prepared to endure the suffering consequent upon his son's humiliation and death. He was prepared to accept this suffering in order to overcome sin, and death, and the evils that afflict our world, and to confer on us a life more glorious than we can imagine.{1}

According to Plantinga, then, God *has acted*, and acted decisively through His Son, to address those things which ail us most—sin, suffering, death, and our broken relationship with God. In what follows, we will briefly examine each of these ailments. More importantly, however, we will also see how God has acted in Christ to heal our bleak condition, thereby giving us encouragement, strength and hope, both now and forevermore.

Moral Evil

When Adam and Eve first sinned in the garden (Gen. 3:6), they could hardly have imagined all the tragic consequences that would follow this single act of disobedience. Through this act, sin and death entered the world and the human condition was radically altered (Rom. 5:12-19). Human nature had become defiled with sin and this sinful nature was bequeathed to all mankind. The human race was now morally corrupt, alienated from God and one another, subject to physical death, and under the wrath of God. The entire creation, originally pronounced "very good" by God (Gen. 1:31), was negatively affected by this first act of rebellion. Like the ripples that radiate outward when a stone is thrown into a calm body of water, the consequences of that first sin have rippled through history, bringing evil, pain, and suffering in their wake. As the Christian philosopher William Lane Craig has noted, "The terrible human evils in the world are testimony to man's depravity in his state of spiritual alienation from God."{2} Indeed, we are so hopelessly entangled in this web of sin and disobedience that we cannot possibly extricate ourselves. This, according to the Bible, is the sorry plight in which all men naturally find themselves.

Fortunately for us, however, God has acted to free us from our enslavement to sin, to disentangle us from the web that holds us captive, and to reconcile us to Himself. He did this by sending His Son to so thoroughly identify with us in our painful predicament that He actually *became* one of us. By identifying Himself with sinners who were under the wrath of God, He was able to take our sins upon Himself and endure God's wrath in our place, so that we might be reconciled to God by placing our trust in Him. The apostle Paul put it this way: God made Christ "who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, we're told that anyone hanged on a tree because of their sins is "accursed of God" (21:23). In the New Testament, Paul picks up on this idea and says that through His substitutionary death on the cross, Christ became "a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). We should not lose sight of the significance of these words. By identifying Himself with the guilty human race, and becoming a curse for us, He has opened the way for us to be freed from our sins and reconciled to God as *we* are identified with *Him* through faith. This is just one of the ways in which Christ has met the desperate needs of the human condition.

Natural Evil

Another reason why we suffer arises from what philosophers and theologians call *natural evil*. Natural evil refers to all the causes of human pain and suffering which are not brought about by morally-responsible agents. This would include the pain and suffering arising from natural disasters like earthquakes, famines, and storms, as well as diseases like cancer and ALS.

Now the question I want to pose is this: Is there a sense in which Christ is also a solution to the problem of natural evil? And if so, then how should we understand this? When we examine the life and ministry of Jesus as it's recorded in the Gospels, we can hardly help but be struck by the number of miracles He performs. He walks on water, calms raging storms, feeds thousands of people with a few loaves and fish, cleanses lepers, heals the sick, restores sight to the blind, and even raises the dead! Although some might demur at all these accounts of miracles, Craig has noted that "the miracle stories are so widely represented in all strata of the Gospel traditions that it would be fatuous to regard them as not rooted in the life of Jesus."{3}

So what is the significance of Jesus' miracles? According to New Testament scholar Ben Witherington, Jesus' miracles show

him to be God's special agent of blessing, healing, liberation, and salvation, as well as the "one who brings about the conditions associated with the final . . . dominion of God."{4} Since the kingdom of God is portrayed in Scripture as a reign of peace, prosperity, health, well-being and blessing, Jesus' miracles of healing, as well as his demonstrations of power over nature, indicate that He is indeed capable of ushering in such a wonderful kingdom.{5} And if Jesus has the power to bring in an era of health and well-being, both for our physical bodies and for the physical universe, and if he in fact will do so, then he clearly provides a solution to the problem of natural evil. Ultimately, in the new heaven and new earth, which God will give to those who love Him, we are promised that there "will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Physical Death

The apostle Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, described death as an "enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26). People fear death for any number of reasons. Some fear that the process of dying will be painful. Others dread the thought of leaving behind the ones they love. Some may fear that death is simply the end, that whatever joys and pleasures this life holds, death takes them away forever. But others may fear that there *is* an afterlife and worry that things may not go well for them there. For many people, however, death is feared as the great unknown.{6} Friends and relatives die and we never see or hear from them again. For these people, death is like the ultimate black-hole, from which nothing and no one can ever escape.

But according to the Bible, Christ *did* escape the snares of death, and in doing so He dealt our mortal enemy a mortal blow of his own. I said that Paul describes death as an "enemy," but this is simply to inform us of the fact that our enemy has been conquered by Christ. "The last enemy that will be

abolished," he writes, "is death" (1 Cor. 15:26). But how has Christ conquered this enemy? And how does *His* victory help *us*?

Christ conquered death through his resurrection from the dead and all who put their trust in Him can share in his victory. Pastor Erwin Lutzer has written:

> Thus the resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. Standing at the empty tomb, we are assured of the triumph of Jesus on the Cross; we are also assured that He has conquered our most fearsome enemy. Yes, death can still terrify us, but the more we know about Jesus, the more its power fades.{7}

Consider the life and death of the great Reformation theologian Martin Luther. As a young Augustinian monk, Luther struggled with a very sensitive conscience and a terrible fear of death. But once he understood the gospel and placed his trust in Christ, his fear gradually began to fade. By the time he died, his fear was gone. It's reported that on his deathbed, he recited some promises from the Bible, commended his spirit to God, and quietly breathed his last.{8} Believing that Christ had conquered death and given him eternal life, he was able to die at peace and without any fear. And this is the hope of *all* who trust in Christ!

The Weight of Glory

Christian theologians sometimes describe the knowledge of God as "an incommensurable good."{9} By this they mean that knowing God in an intimate, personal way is quite literally the *greatest good* that any created being can experience. It is an "incommensurable" or "immeasurable" good—a good so great that it surpasses our ability even to comprehend. The apostle Paul once prayed that the Ephesians might "know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19). He understood that "intimate relationship with God . . . is incommensurately

good-for created persons."{10}

Of course, this doesn't mean that one who is intimately related to God will never experience any of the trials and difficulties of life. In fact, it's possible that such a person will actually experience *more* trials and difficulties than would have been the case had they *not* been intimately related to God! Knowing the love of Christ doesn't make one immune to suffering. It does, however, provide indescribable comfort while going through it (see 2 Cor. 1:3-5).

The apostle Paul understood this quite well. In his second letter to the Corinthians, he described himself as a servant of God who had suffered afflictions, hardships, beatings, imprisonments, labors, sleeplessness, and hunger (2 Cor. 6:4-5). In spite of this, however, he did not lose heart. He famously wrote that "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17).

But how could Paul describe his sufferings as just a "momentary, light affliction"? Because, says Craig, he had an *eternal* perspective. "He understood that the length of this life, being finite, is literally infinitesimal in comparison with the eternal life we shall spend with God."{11}

The greatest hunger of the human heart is to know and experience the love and acceptance of God and to enjoy Him forever. In his magnificent sermon "The Weight of Glory," C.S. Lewis wrote, "In the end that Face which is the delight or . . . terror of the universe must be turned upon each of us either with one expression or . . . the other, either conferring glory inexpressible or inflicting shame that can never be . . . disguised."{12} Incredibly, just as Christ has dealt with the problems of sin, suffering, and death, He has also acted decisively to reconcile us to God. Through faith in him, anyone who wants can eventually experience "an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17).

Notes

2. Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 96-97.
3. William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 324.
4. Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 43-44.
5. Some biblical passages that pertain to Christ's coming kingdom are Isaiah 11:1-9, Matthew 19:28, and Acts 3:19-21.
6. I was reminded of many of these examples while watching the round table discussion on suffering and death in Catherine Tatge, "The Question of God: Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis" (U.S.A.: PBS Home Video, 2004).
7. Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Vanishing Power of Death* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 13.
8. Mike Fearon, *Martin Luther* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1986), 157-58.
9. See, for example, Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 100.
10. Marilyn McCord Adams, Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 47.
11. Craig, *Hard Questions, Real Answers*, 99.
12. C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory," in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980), 13.

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No Reason to Fear: Examining the Logic of a Critic

Rick Wade uses the faulty arguments in Sam Harris' book Letter to a Christian Nation *to show why Christians don't have to be afraid of the new atheists' assault on our faith.*

Getting Started

Sometimes we Christians shy away from books which attack our beliefs because we're afraid we can't answer the objections. That's understandable. Often the authors of such books carry impressive credentials. It's easy to feel intimidated.

Another response which is the opposite of fearful avoidance is haughty dismissal. Sometimes we act as if our position is so obviously true that others can be dismissed as downright stupid and hardly worth bothering with. Even if the opponents' arguments *are* bad, that's no reason to adopt an arrogant attitude. It's especially bad when the dismissive Christian hasn't even bothered to read the book!

A better response, I think, is to use such occasions to grow in understanding and to exercise one's apologetic "muscles" by working at answering the challenges posed. So, for example, when a doctrine is challenged, by studying the subject, we grow in our knowledge of Christian beliefs and (here's the uncomfortable part) we are sometimes corrected in our understanding. Another advantage is preparation for real face-to-face encounters with critics. Responding to arguments in a book means there isn't the pressure of a person staring at you, waiting for an answer (and fully expecting one; critics do have such a high view of us!).

In this article I'm going to use Sam Harris's book *Letter to a Christian Nation* to give some suggestions about what to look for in such books.{1} I won't try to address every challenge. Others have given more extensive responses.{2}

I titled this essay "No Reason to Fear" for a good reason. The challenges of critics throughout the ages have not been able to prove Christianity false, and those of modern day critics won't either. Most of their arguments have already been answered. When we brace ourselves and start reading a critic's

book, we often find that the arguments don't pack that great a punch after all, much like the neighborhood bully who the other boys are afraid of but really have no reason to be.

Of course, we can't always answer seemingly good objections, and certainly can't answer them all to the atheist's satisfaction. I'll go further than that. I don't think we *have* to answer every objection. There will always be objections. But it's as intellectually wrong to drop one's convictions because of a few unanswered criticisms as it is to hold to such convictions for no reason at all. Atheists obviously don't abandon their beliefs so easily, and they shouldn't expect us to either.

Fallacious Arguments

If we're going to engage books like *Letter to a Christian Nation* responsibly, we have to be ready to hear some good criticisms of our beliefs or actions. We have to accept the fact that there are some hard things to deal with in our beliefs, especially the problem of evil. We need to admit our inability to give satisfying answers to all objections if we're going to expect that kind of openness from critics. Also, it is often Christians who come under attack rather than Christianity. Harris spends a lot of time here. Christians have done some bad things, and they need to be acknowledged.

More to the point for this article, Christians can sometimes give bad arguments for what they believe. I'm not suggesting that we have to bow to all the demands of skeptics; there are several theories of the proper use of evidences and logical arguments and personal experience, and some formulations are unreasonable. It *is* to say, however, that we must use good reasoning when we make a case.

The problem with using poor reasoning is that it undermines one's case. That's what we find in Harris's book, and that

will be our focus here. When we read a case for a particular belief, we should keep a lookout for such things as questionable assumptions, logical fallacies, and incorrect facts. Harris's book is plagued with fallacious arguments, a surprising turn since he presents his side as being that of reason. So I'm going to spend most of my time on those and mention the other things when appropriate.

Don't let the term "logical fallacies" put you off, like they're things only specialists can understand. It's just another name for poor reasoning. So, for example, if you make the claim that Christianity is the only true religion, and someone responds that you only believe that because you grew up in a Christian nation, you could cry "Foul!" You're making a universal claim; where you're from is irrelevant. If it's true, it's true in India and China and the US and everywhere else, too. This is a kind of fallacy of false cause. No one is a Christian because he lives in a Christian nation. We are Christians because we have believed Jesus' claims that are universal. It also reflects the current mood according to which religions are human constructs, and Christianity is just one such religion among many.

Although fallacious arguments can have *psychological* force (when we don't spot them and they seem correct), they have no *logical* force. Their conclusions should not be believed.

Are We Really So Evil?

Harris's favorite target in his attack on religion is its supposed immorality. He tells us that "Christians have abused, oppressed, enslaved, insulted, tormented, tortured, and killed people in the name of God for centuries, on the basis of a theologically defensible reading of the Bible."{3}Well, *that's* a surprise! Not that Christians have done bad things, but that such acts are *theologically defensible*! Such things are sanctioned by God because He, too, does such things. Harris

accuses Christians of picking and choosing sections of Scripture that present a more loving God while ignoring the truly telling ones which reveal a God who condones slavery and the beating and killing of rebellious children.

But Harris is guilty of this picking and choosing himself. He commits the fallacy which is called the *neglect of relevant evidence*. To be fair, he does note that "it is undeniable that many people of faith make heroic sacrifices to relieve the suffering of other human beings."{4} But he doesn't bother listing them. He gives no space to the great work done by Christians in the fields of medicine, literacy, agriculture, famine relief, etc. He ignores the good work of organizations like Mercy Ships which takes life-changing medical help to people in third world nations in the name of Christ.

Well, he doesn't completely ignore missionary efforts. One of his favorite rants is against the evils perpetrated by missionaries. They waste time preaching about such things as the virgin birth when there is important work to be done. The most memorable accusation is when he charges missionaries who preach against the use of condoms with "genocidal" piety!{5} "Genocidal!" Maybe a little exaggeration there? (And, by the way, while it's true that Christian medical missionaries do present the gospel to people—which they should, since one's eternal life is more important than one's temporal life—I've never heard of any who withhold medical help from people in need until they first preach a sermon on the virgin birth.)

In another place Harris commits the fallacy called *causal oversimplification*. As he sees it, religion is the cause of conflicts in Palestine, the Balkans, Sudan, Nigeria, and other countries. Religion is so unnatural and wrong-headed to atheists, that it becomes an easy target for casting blame.

I'm going to give a bit more space to this charge since it's a very popular one these days.

In 2004, the BBC published what it called a “War Audit” which was conducted to determine how significant religion has been in war, at least in the last century.{6} In the article “God and War: An Audit and an Exploration,” authors Greg Austin, Todd Kranock and Thom Oommen report that

> at a philosophical level, the main religious traditions have little truck with war or violence. All advocate peace as the norm and see genuine spirituality as involving a disavowal of violence. It is mainly when organised religious institutions become involved with state institutions or when a political opposition is trying to take power that people begin advocating religious justifications for war.

They continue:

> After reviewing historical analyses by a diverse array of specialists, we concluded that there have been few genuinely religious wars in the last 100 years. The Israel/Arab wars from 1948 to now, often painted in the media and other places as wars over religion, or wars arising from religious differences, have in fact been wars of nationalism, liberation of territory or self-defense.

Regarding Islamic terrorism, the authors write:

> The Islamist fundamentalist terror war is largely about political order in the Arab countries, and the presence of US forces in Saudi Arabia. It is not about religious conversion or a clash of religions. Nevertheless, bin Laden claims a religious duty in executing the war. . . .
>
> It is mainly when organised religious institutions become involved with state institutions that people begin advocating religious justifications for war.
>
> We need to go back to the wars of Arab expansion, the Crusades and the Reformation Wars for genuine wars over religion.

The authors—or as they call themselves, compilers—of this article include tables which give death tolls in different categories of wars. The writers say that the tables

> show that the overwhelming majority of wars and the overwhelming majority of the victims of such wars cannot be classified primarily according to religious causes or religious beliefs. There have been horrific examples though where particular communities have been *targeted because of their religious faith* [italics mine], and these atrocities have been perpetrated by the three most 17 vicious and blood-thirsty regimes ever to hold power: Stalin's Russia, Mao's China and Hitler's Germany.

It's interesting that Harris tries so hard to make religion a source of violence when, as this report indicates, it is often the religious who are targeted by violence.{7}

A Few More

Sam Harris's book is titled *Letter to a Christian Nation,* not simply because he's against Christianity. He wants all religion to come to an end. It just happens that Christianity is the most prominent religion in America. Because he lumps all religions together, he can smear Christianity with the evils of Islam by implication.

This is a fallacy. It's called the fallacy of *over-generalization* (or *converse accident*). If evil is done in the name of Islam, and Islam is a religion, then every religion is prone to evil. Thus, what counts against Islam counts against Christianity, too. (If one is reluctant to group Christianity with other religions, then one might see here the fallacy of *faulty comparison*, or what is more commonly called "comparing apples to oranges.")

Another argument Harris presents employs a fallacy we've already discussed, the fallacy of *causal oversimplification.*

Harris commits this fallacy when he tells us that "the anti-Semitism that built the Nazi death camps was a direct inheritance from medieval Christianity."{8}

The reality of Christian anti-Semitism through the ages cannot be denied. However, Harris's evaluation is simplistic. It is very easy to narrowly focus on the very real anti-Semitism of Christians and ignore other very significant factors. For example, Harris fails to tell us that the Jews were persecuted quite apart from Christianity and even before Christianity came into existence. For example, serious tensions between the Jews and the Greeks of Alexandria in the first century B.C. spilled over into the next century. Things got so bad that Jews were forced to live in one section of the city. Their houses were broken into and looted. Synagogues were burned, and women were dragged to the theater and forced to eat pork. Historian H. I. Bell reports that "men, women, and even children [were] beaten to death, dragged living through the streets, or flung on to improvised bonfires."{9} He also ignores the shift from religious persecution to racial persecution which occurred in the nineteenth century, notably in Russia.

Of course, this doesn't prove that Hitler *didn't* get his anti-Semitism from Christians; but it *does* mean that one should not immediately assume that Christian prejudice is at the root of anti-Semitism. There have been other causes as well. A significant factor in Hitler's hatred of the Jews was the strong influence of *Darwinism* that led him to think that people who were racially or eugenically inferior needed to be eliminated from the evolving human race.{10}

Although some people already believed in the inferiority of some races, and although Darwinism wasn't Hitler's sole inspiration, Historian Richard Weikart writes, "Darwinism was a central, guiding principle of Nazi ideology, especially of Hitler's own world view." Weikart quotes Richard Evans, a historian at Cambridge University: "The real core of Nazi

beliefs lay in the faith Hitler proclaimed in his speech of September 1938 in science—a Nazi view of science—as the basis for action. Science demanded the furtherance of the interests not of God but of the human race, and above all the German race and its future in a world ruled by ineluctable laws of Darwinian competition between races and between individuals." Weikart continues: "This is not a controversial claim by anti-evolutionists, but it is commonly recognized by scholars who study Nazism."{11}

A Fundamental Commitment to Atheism

One of the questionable assumptions in *Letter to a Christian Nation* is Sam Harris's assertion that "there is no question that human beings evolved from nonhuman ancestors."{12} Of course, there is indeed a question about this, a question raised by highly educated scientists easily as qualified as Mr. Harris.

It's no wonder, really, that Harris makes such bold statements. He is prevented from allowing the possibility of divine creation by his basic worldview commitments. He admits that he doesn't know why the universe exists, but he's confident there's no God behind it. That sounds like a philosophical presupposition. What evidence or reasons does he give for it? Harris might like to pretend that his beliefs are based solely on the "trinity" of science, reason, and nature, but his naturalism cannot be established by these. Rather, it informs his use of them.

One of the (potentially!) maddening things about the arguments of atheists these days is their frequent silence with respect to any justification of their own basic worldview commitments. Harris goes so far as to claim that atheism isn't really a belief; that there shouldn't even *be* the word "atheism."{13} Although "atheism" has long been understood to mean the belief that there is no God, many atheists today deny that. It isn't

the belief that there is no God; it's simply an absence of belief in God.{14} It's a kind of "default" position, a "zero" belief, where everyone should be until given sufficient reasons to believe in God. Thus, the atheist has nothing to defend or prove.

But really, folks. Who's going to believe that atheists are belief-less about God, that they don't actually believe that there is no God? It's astonishing the effort they put forth in arguing against religious belief if indeed they have no belief at all.

However, we can go back and forth with atheists about whether they truly deny the existence of God, or we can let that stand and simply ask what they *do* believe about ultimate reality, for surely they believe *something*. It's simply false to assume that atheism is some kind of zero belief, that it involves no metaphysical commitments. If one denies God, one must have some other view about ultimate reality. Naturalism is a metaphysical position, and it has serious problems of its own.{15} If Christians are responsible to give good reasons for their belief in Christian theism, naturalistic atheists must give reasons for their naturalism.

Sam Harris speaks as a voice on high, shouting down to us poor, ignorant people who are stuck in our absurd religious beliefs. It's hard to imagine anyone with thoughtful convictions changing his or her beliefs based on this book. He's preaching to the choir. Now that you have a few tips on what to look for, you might want to take a look at the book, and hear the rest of the "sermon."

Notes

1. Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).
2. Douglas Wilson addresses many of Harris's arguments in his *Letter from a Christian Citizen* (Powder Springs, GA: American

Vision, 2007) and Ravi Zacharias does the same in *The End of Reason: A Response to the New Atheists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008).
3. Ibid., 22.
4. Ibid., 22.
5. Ibid., 33-34.
6. Greg Austin, Todd Kranock and Thom Oommen, "God And War: An Audit & An Exploration," http://tinyurl.com/a2tpb.
7. For more on this subject, see also Don Closson, "The Causes of War," Probe Ministries, 2008, www.probe.org/the-causes-of-war/.
8. Harris, *Letter*, 41.
9. H. I. Bell, "Anti-Semitism in Alexandria," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 31. (1941), pp. 1-18.
10. Richard Weikart, *From Darwin to Hitler: Evolutionary Ethics, Eugenics, and Racism in Germany* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).
11. Richard Weikart, "Re-examining the Darwin-Hitler Link," The Discovery Institute, http://www.evolutionnews.org/2008/02/reexamining_the_darwinhitler_l.html.
12. Harris, Letter, 71.
13. Ibid., 51.
14. See Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, (Temple University Press, 1990), 463.
15. See Norman Geisler, *Is Man the Measure? An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), chap. 11.

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The Bible: Intentionally Misunderstood (Radio Transcript)

Steve Cable examines the faulty reasoning and interpretation of the Bible in Kurt Eichenwald's Newsweek *article "The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin."*

Dissecting the Bible by Focusing on Nits

Recently, New Testament scholar, Dr. Daniel Wallace, addressing our strong confidence in our modern translations, mentioned others presenting a false view of this situation. One example, *The Bible: So Misunderstood It's a Sin* by Kurt Eichenwald{1}, appeared in *Newsweek*. This article presents arguments intended to undermine the New Testament. Let's evaluate some of these arguments to be better equipped in sharing the truth.{2}

Eichenwald begins by parroting negative stereotypes about American evangelicals. Adding rigor to his rant, he states, "A Pew Research poll in 2010{2} found that evangelicals ranked only a smidgen higher than atheists in familiarity with **the New Testament and Jesus's teachings**."{4}

He referred to a table showing the average number of questions out of twelve answered correctly. However, only **two of the twelve related to the New Testament** and **none to Jesus's teachings**.{5} Two questions are not enough to evaluate someone's knowledge of the New Testament, But, for the record, the two questions were "Name the four gospels" and "Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born?" 53% of those professing to be born again answered these correctly versus 20% of atheists. Apparently to Eichenwald, a "smidgen

higher" must mean almost three times as many.

Eichenwald spends two pages bemoaning the translation problems in the New Testament. But as pointed out by Dr. Wallace and others, his critique really serves to highlight the excellence of today's translations. The areas he points out as having questionable additions in the text are clearly marked in all of today's popular translations{6} and if removed make no difference in the overall message of the New Testament (i.e. the woman caught in adultery in John and snake handling in Mark).

He also lists three short passages, claiming they did not appear in earlier Greek copies. Upon examination, we find that one of those passages does not appear in modern translations. The other two do appear in the translations. Why? Because they appear in numerous early Greek manuscripts.{7} Once again his scholarship is found wanting.

All scholars agree there are variations between ancient manuscripts from different areas but they do not change the message. As Wallace points out, "We are getting closer and closer to the text of the original. . . . The New Testament has more manuscripts that are within a century or two of the original than anything else from the Greco-Roman world. If we have to be skeptical . . . , that skepticism . . . should be multiplied one thousand times for other Greco-Roman literature."{8}

Supposed Biblical Contradictions

Eichenwald continues attacking the Bible with nine different topics he claims reveal contradictions in the biblical record. Let's examine three of them to see if his arguments have substance.

First, he claims there are three different creation models, stating that "careful readers have long known that the two

stories of Genesis 1 and 2 contradict each other."{9}

However, a clear-headed examination sees chapter 1 describing the overall creation while chapter 2 talks about the creation of Adam and Eve. As commentators explain, "what follows Genesis 2:4 is not another account of creation but a tracing of events from creation through the fall and judgment."{10}

In his third creation model "the world is created in the aftermath of a great battle between God and . . . a dragon . . . called Rahab."{11}

Reading the relevant verses shows no creation story but rather the creature Rahab representing Egypt. Job 9:13 says "under (God) the helpers of Rahab lie crushed." Some speculate this could relate to the Babylonian Creation Epic. Even if this speculation were true, rather than a third creation story one would say this reference tells us God destroys all idols raised up by others.

Eichenwald's claim of three different creation models is an illusion.

His second claim states the Gospel of John was written "when gentiles in Rome were gaining dramatically more influence over Christianity; that explains why the Romans are largely absolved from responsibility for Jesus's death and blame instead is pointed toward the Jews,"{12} implying the other gospels put much of the blame on the Romans.

Examining his claim, in Luke we read, "The chief priests . . . were trying to find some way to execute Jesus." While the Roman governor did not find Jesus guilty of anything worthy of death.{13} In Acts, Peter squarely places the responsibility onto the Jewish leaders and nation.{14} We find similar verses in Matthew{15} and Mark{16}. All the gospels place the blame on the Jewish nation. There is no shift in perspective in John.

In a third supposed contradiction Eichenwald writes, "As told in Matthew, the disciples go to Galilee after the Crucifixion and see Jesus ascend to heaven; in Acts, written by Luke, the disciples stay in Jerusalem and see Jesus ascend from there."{17}

The gospel of Matthew ends saying **nothing** about Jesus ascending to heaven. In Acts, Luke says the Lord was with His disciples over a forty-day period and could have easily traveled from Jerusalem to Galilee and back.

Not surprisingly, his other six so-called "contradictions" all fail to hold up when one examines the Scriptures.

Faulty Interpretation Part 1

Eichenwald wants to show that what we think the Bible teaches about homosexuality is not what God intended. He begins by pointing out "the word homosexual didn't even exist until . . . 1,800 years after the New Testament was written . . . these modern Bibles just made it up."{18}

But this could be said of many English words used today. A respected dictionary of New Testament words{19} defines the Greek word he questions as "a male engaging in same-gender sexual activity, a sodomite. . ."

He then tells us not to trust 1 Timothy when it lists homosexuality as a sin because "Most biblical scholars agree that Paul did not write 1 Timothy."{20}

The early church fathers from the second century on and many contemporary scholars{21} do not agree it is a forgery.{22} Regardless, the same prohibition appears in other epistles and not just in Timothy.

Eichenwald points out Romans, Corinthians and Timothy discuss other sins in more detail than homosexual behavior. He

writes, “So yes, there is one verse in Romans about homosexuality . . . and there are eight verses condemning those who criticize the government.”

Most people understand that explaining our relationship to the government is more complex than forbidding homosexuality which is clearly understood.

He claims people are not banished for other sins such as adultery, greed, and lying.

But if you proclaimed you practice those actions regularly and teach them as truth, your church is going to remove you from any leadership position. They should still encourage you to attend worship services out of a desire to see God change your heart.{23} Mr. Eichenwald would be surprised to learn that most evangelical churches handle issues with homosexuality in the same way.

Then he declares, “plenty of fundamentalist Christians who have no idea where references to homosexuality are in the New Testament . . . always fall back on Leviticus.”{24}

Personally, I have never run into another church member who was unfamiliar with the New Testament, but knew the details of Leviticus.

In summary, Eichenwald believes we should declare homosexuality is not a sin and those who practice it should be honored as leaders within the church. He does not suggest that we treat any other sins that way. He does not present a cogent argument that the New Testament agrees with his position. He is saying that we should ignore biblical teaching. But, we really do love those struggling with homosexual behavior and we want to help them gain freedom from those lusts just as much as someone struggling with opposite sex issues.

Faulty Interpretation Part 2

To strengthen his position on homosexuality, Eichenwald calls out "a fundamental conflict in the New Testament – arguably the most important one in the Bible."{25} As Christians, are we to obey the Mosaic Law or ignore it?

He claims, "The author of Matthew made it clear that Christians must keep Mosaic Law like the most religious Jews, . . . to achieve salvation."{26} He says this is contrary to Paul's message of salvation through grace not works.

What a mistaken understanding. In Matthew, Jesus explains that to enter God's kingdom "our righteousness must surpass that of (the most religious Jews){27}." We must not get angry, call people names, or lust even once. In fact, "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."{28} Jesus clearly taught we cannot be good enough. Only through His sacrifice can we be made righteous.

In Acts 15, some believers with Pharisaical backgrounds brought the Mosaic Law up to the apostles. Peter told them, "Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? . . . we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as (the Gentiles) also are."{29} The apostles and the whole church agreed to send the Gentiles word that they were not required to follow the Law.

Eichenwald is right: we are not required to follow the Law. The New Testament is very careful to identify actions and attitudes which are sin so may try to avoid them. This truth is why sexual sins are specifically mentioned in the New Testament.{30} Even in Acts 15, the apostles tell Gentile Christians to abstain from fornication{31}, a term covering all sexual activity outside of marriage.

Eichenwald also castigates us for disobeying the biblical teaching about government. He says Romans has "eight verses condemning those who criticize the government."{32} Pat Robertson sinned by stating, "We need . . . to pray to be delivered from this president."

Actually, Romans says, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. . . . the person who resists such authority resists the ordinance of God."{33} We are not required to say good things about the government, but rather to obey the law. Our Bill of Rights states that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech."{34} So, if we do not voice our opinions about our government, we are not availing ourselves of the law established by our governing authorities.

Faulty Interpretation Part 3

As we examine popular arguments against the Bible, we will conclude by looking at prayer. In his *Newsweek* article, Kurt Eichenwald castigates a Houston prayer rally{35} saying, "(Rick) Perry . . . boomed out a long prayer asking God to make America a better place . . . babbling on . . . about faith and country and the blessings of America." He claimed Perry "heaped up empty phrases as the Gentiles do."

In reality, Perry prayed succinctly for about two minutes with no empty phrases.

Eichenwald explains, Perry is just an example of our error. Most Christians are disobeying by praying in front of people. Jesus told us, "Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray . . . so that they may be seen by others."

But someone can speak a prayer before others without being a hypocrite. Jesus does tell us to make our prayers a personal conversation with our God. But Jesus prayed often before

synagogue attenders, in front of His disciples,{36} and before over 5,000 people.{37} Those times, although numerous, were less than the time He spent praying alone as should be true for us.

Eichenwald states we should repeat the Lord's prayer verbatim.

But in Matthew, Jesus gave an example of how to pray, not a set of words to repeat meaninglessly. The New Testament contains many prayers offered by the apostles and none repeat the words from the Lord's prayer. If Eichenwald were there to instruct them, the apostles would not have sinned so grievously.

Eichenwald claims the only reason anyone could pray in front of a large crowd, or on television, is "to be seen." This claim does not make sense; the people he is judging can build themselves up without having to resort to prayer.

In this article we have seen that critics use an incomplete, shallow examination of Scripture to claim it is not accurate and our application is faulty. In every case, we have seen that these claims leak like a sieve.

Dan Wallace concludes, "But his numerous factual errors and misleading statements, his lack of concern for any semblance of objectivity, his apparent disdain for . . . genuine evangelical scholarship, and his uber-confidence about more than a few suspect viewpoints, make me wonder. . . . Eichenwald's . . . grasp of genuine biblical scholarship (is), at best, subpar."{38}

If Eichenwald's article represents the best arguments discrediting the Bible, one rejoices in our firm foundation. However, realizing many readers of such pieces don't know their flimsy nature, one is saddened by the potential impact on a society inclined to ignore the Bible.

Notes

1. Eichenwald, Kurt, “The Bible: So Misunderstood It’s a Sin,” *Newsweek* Magazine, December 2014.
2. There are numerous web postings placed after release of Eichenwald’s article. Two you may find interesting that deal with areas of the article not addressed herein are as follows: Daniel B. Wallace, “Predictable Christmas fare: Newsweek’s Tirade against the Bible,” blogpost December 2014; and Darrell Bock, “Darrell Bock Responds to Kurt Eichenwald’s Newsweek Article on the Bible,” blogpost December 2014.
3. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey, September 2010, pages 17-23.
4. Eichenwald, paragraph 4.
5. The 12 questions are as follows:

    1. What is the first book of the Bible? (Open-ended)
    2. What are the names of the first four books of the New Testament, that is, the four Gospels?
    3. Where, according to the Bible, was Jesus born? Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth or Jericho?
    4. Which of these is NOT in the Ten Commandments? Do unto others . . ., no adultery, no stealing, keep Sabbath?
    5. Which figure is associated with remaining obedient to God despite suffering? Job, Elijah, Moses or Abraham?
    6. Which figure is associated with leading the exodus from Egypt? Moses, Job, Elijah or Abraham?
    7. Which figure is associated with willingness to sacrifice his son for God? Abraham, Job, Moses or Elijah?
    8. What is Catholic teaching about bread and wine in Communion? They become body and blood, or are symbols?
    9. Which group traditionally teaches that salvation is through faith alone? Protestants, Catholics, both or neither?
    10. Was Mother Teresa Catholic, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or Mormon?
    11. What is the name of the person whose writings and actions inspired the Reformation? Luther, Aquinas or Wesley?

12. Who was a preacher during the First Great Awakening? Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney or Billy Graham?

6. Check your footnotes and the italics applied to the story of the woman caught in adultery and the last few verses of the Gospel of Mark.
7. Insert summary on 1 John 5:7, Luke 22:20, and Luke 24:51.
8. Wallace.
9. Ibid, paragraph .
10. New English Translation, Genesis 59 Chapter 2, Notes 9 and 11.
11. Ibid, paragraph 66.
12. Eichenwald, paragraph 51.
13. See Luke 23:4,14,22.
14. See Acts 2:23,23,3:14-15,4:10,5:30.
15. Matthew 26:4,27:23-24.
16. Mark 14:1, 15:14-15.
17. Eichenwald, paragraph 52.
18. Ibid, paragraph 68.
19. William Mounce, *Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Zondervan, 2006.
20. Eichenwald, paragraph 70.
21. Among those disagreeing with Eichenwald's assertion are Daniel Wallace, John MacArthur, Charles Swindoll, John Stott, and Craig Keener.
22. In Daniel Wallace, *Intro to 1st Timothy*, Dr. Wallace writes, "In sum, although the evidence against the authenticity of the pastorals is as strong as any evidence against the authenticity of any NT book, it still cannot overthrow the traditional view. The traditional view, however, must be modified by the substantial linguistic evidence against authenticity: an amanuensis (possibly Luke) had great freedom in writing these letters for the apostle Paul."
23. See the Watermark Community Church story: www.watermark.org/statement.
24. Eichenwald, paragraph 80.
25. Eichenwald, paragraph 81.

26. Eichenwald, paragraph 82.
27. Matthew 5:20.
28. Matthew 5:48.
29. Acts 15:10-11.
30. For example in Mt 5:xx, Luke x;xx, John x:xx, Romans x:xx, Ephesians x:xx, Phil x:xx, 1 Peter x:xx, 1 John x:xx.
31. Acts 15:20,29.
32. Eichenwald, paragraph 77.
33. Romans 13:1,2.
34. Amendment 1 to the Constitution of the United States of America.
35. Houston 2011.
36. John chapter 17.
37. Luke chapter 9.
38. Wallace, paragraph ??.

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How Do We Respond to Calls to Discuss Justice in the Church?

How do we respond to calls to discuss justice in the church? Not only is this a hot issue right now, but it is a critical issue to discuss. Because it is crucial, we need to address it in the church.

Approaching the Conversation

Primarily, we need to be intentional about how we approach the conversation (and yes it should be a conversation, not just one person teaching or giving a monologue). First, we need to

be extra intrigued as to why others think differently than we do. We need to let them talk and accept their reactions as genuine. We need to stay away from rejecting what is being told by attributing a bad intention.

Second, we need to take note of whether we are processing the information as facts, filters, or identity{1} on our part individually, but as well look to know where others are coming from and why. Our goal should always be understanding, not only of issues but also of other people's perspectives.

Third, we need to be interested and ask questions, *not to beat the other person but to seek reciprocal knowledge* regarding why we differ or where the disagreements and pressure points are.

Fourth, we need to learn reflective listening, to correctly rephrase what we hear others to be saying in the tricky moments in a manner that reassures the other person: "This is what I hear you saying. Did I get it right? Do I understand you correctly?" The importance at this point is that the other person gets to decide whether he/she is being understood. By engaging in these approaches, what is hopefully conveyed to others is that the fundamental purpose of our discussion is to dialogue—to understand each other, not only find out who is correct.{2}

Defining Terms

As with almost any discussion today, I think it is necessary to define terms. This discussion especially calls for defining the term "justice" before we can even begin. For instance, when having this discussion are we saying merely "justice", or the now popular term "social justice", or a seemingly Christian claim to "biblical justice?" This alone takes up a good chunk of the discussion. Read how one popular journalist describes this dilemma: "I put on my prospector's helmet and mined the literature for an agreed-upon definition of social

justice. . . . What I found," he bemoans, "was one deposit after another of fool's gold. From labor unions to countless universities to gay rights groups to even the American Nazi Party, everyone insisted they were champions of social justice."{3}

The word *justice* in Scripture means to prescribe the right way, {4} and the two key metaphors used in Scripture are level scales and an even path (Deuteronomy 16:18-20; Isaiah 1:16-17; Amos 5:21-25; Matthew 23:23). Now any variation of justice could refer to Christian attempts to eradicate human trafficking, help the inner-city needy, creating hospitals and orphanages, overturn racism, and safeguard the unborn. I propose we call this *biblical justice* and use a definition provided by pastor, speaker, and author Dr. Tony Evans: "The equitable and impartial application of the rule of God's moral law in society."{5} He arrives at this definition because God's ways are just (Deuteronomy 32:4) and He is the supreme lawgiver (James 4:12), therefore His laws and judgments are just and righteous (Psalm 19:7-9; 111:7-8). Furthermore, they are to be applied with no partiality (Deuteronomy 1:17; Leviticus 19:15; Numbers 15:16).

What is social justice then? Recently, *social justice* has brought on an exceptionally charged political meaning. It turned into a brandishing poster for groups like Antifa, which finds physical aggression against persons who believe differently as both morally justified and tactically successful, and praises its underreported verbal beatings. Social justice is the brandishing poster for universities across the country where the "oppressor vs. oppressed" narrative of Antonio Gramsci and the Frankfurt School (Note: *Oppression* is a biblical term. The prophets precede these authors by millennia! The term or its presence in the world is not automatically in this area.), the deconstructionism of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, and the gender and queer theory of Judith Butler have been inserted into the very

definition of the term.{6}

As Evans summarizes,

> *Social justice* has become a convoluted term meaning different things to different people. It is often used as a catchphrase for illegitimate forms of government that promote the redistribution of wealth as the collectivistic illegitimate expansion of civil government, which wrongly infringes on the jurisdictions of God's other covenantal institutions (family and church).{7}

However biblical the roots of the term *social justice* are, it has been hijacked (still as some might criticize what is going on for other reasons). There is a concern labels can oversimplify matters and make binary classifications. Pitting "biblical justice" against "social justice" brands is making binary means of seeing ideas and dangers, creating a false dichotomy. Certainly, there are things that the "social justice" group is doing that is other than the biblical response to advocating justice. However, several of the concerns that they are raising are reasonable. One of the troubles is that they are recommending political solutions to problems that are beyond complicated and in the end need God's divine change of individual hearts. But labels can also clarify distinctions between various models. Therefore, for the sake of clarity, I propose when we are discussing *justice,* we aim for the meaning of *biblical justice*. After clarifying and defining terms, we would want to check and make sure all interested parties are on the same page.

CRT

Now I we need to address Critical Race Theory (CRT) because I believe these ideas are a problem that infiltrate Christian thinking and the church. Legal scholar and law professor Richard Delgado defines CRT:

> The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights discourse, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. {8}

I think we can all agree racism is bad, and because CRT has been pushed to the forefront and claims to deal with the issue of racism, it has been extremely easy for Christians to adopt a terrible framework with good intentions. This needs to be corrected. Otherwise, it remains an elephant in the room especially for Neo-Fundamentalist Evangelicals and Mainstream Evangelicals (as defined by Michael Graham here).

As pastor and theologian Dr. Voddie Baucham points out, the movement has several qualities of a cult, including keeping near enough to the Bible to prevent instant exposure and concealing the truth that it has a different theology and a novel lexicon that deviates from Christian orthodoxy. In traditional cult style, they steal from the common and acknowledged, then immerse it with different connotation. {9} The worst part about this theory is there is no final solution to the problem. CRT just offers an endless cycle of division and racism at worst. At best, it draws attention to the sin of racism.

There is much more that can be said on this, and I would suggest anyone who wants to explore this more read the books listed in my bibliography below. Most of them cover CRT in some fashion.

Does Focusing on Biblical Justice Get Us Off Mission?

I want to address the concern of whether focusing on biblical justice gets the church off mission. I think the mission of the church is to equip the saints and make disciples. That is a broad vision. The question is still whether focusing on biblical justice is part of that mission. If it is not already clear in the definition of the term above (even the name *biblical* justice supplies a hint to this answer), I would like to clearly and explicitly answer whether this is part of the mission of the church.

The responsibility of the church is to perform biblical justice for the poor, orphans, widows, foreigners, enemies, oppressed, hungry, homeless, and needy. Scripture concerns biblical justice particularly to these parties as a main matter; for it is these parties that best denote the powerless in the world and take the burden of injustices. The church is not to harm or ostracize the poor (James 2:15-16), or to have status and racial prejudice (Galatians 2:11-14). Instead, the church is appointed to take on the basic needs of the disadvantaged. I would also point out (particularly for the Evangelical Christians) this does not mean promoting reckless handouts, which the Bible rigorously forbids (2 Thessalonians 3:10; Proverbs 6:9-11; 10:4; 13:18; 30-34).

Furthermore, Probe Ministries President Kerby Anderson made a marvelous point (to me over email) regarding Christians in the workforce: “ALL Christians are to be salt and light. But believers who are CALLED to positions related to justice (judges, lawyers, law enforcement, political leaders) are to use their gifts to promote justice. Not only is that not OFF MISSION, but it is exactly their mission in their job.”

Ultimately, *doing justice* satisfies the two highest commandments granted to us by Jesus: to love God and love

others (Matthew 22:37-40). “Biblical justice is a foundational part of fulfilling the purpose of the church as intimated by the heart of God. It is a result of God’s people becoming one through being what God has called us to be and participating in what He has called us to do—*justice*.”{10}

Asians and Other Minorities

Usually, at least in our environment, the discussion about racial friction is likely a black/white discussion, although lately it has come to be obvious that this is not only a black-and-white discussion. Often, people of Asian background are not being addressed in any way. Now the COVID pandemic ignited some racial prejudice and hatred against Chinese individuals and other Asian individuals. What we are getting more in the news and social media is that for Asians, issues have shifted, and matters appear to be extremely different for them. So, you look at these events and, I believe for certain individuals, they are living with more concern since, whether they have faced that sort of prejudice, they are watching it being discussed in the news and on social media. So, for those that are reading this and even considering this for the first time, I want to point out what is truly a shortage of emotional quotient in the sense we relate with each other. Jesus speaks, “treat people the same way you want them to treat you.” {11} One of the shifts of philosophy demands that we manage to stop seeing people through a lens of stereotypes that we have, and see the one we are relating with individually. I believe it is extremely useful to think about our longing to develop the proper sort of community in our church. The further we take part and understand the various types of life encounters and experiences that individuals have, the richer we will be as we communicate with individuals.

Recommendations for the Church

As Tony Evans says, “Theology must never be limited to esoteric biblical conclusions void of practical strategies for bringing God’s truth to life through our obedience and good works.”{12} The church needs to take the lead in creating unity through clearly showing it in our lives. What I would recommend the church does is follow this three-point plan: {13}

1. *Assemble: Unified Hallowed Meeting*

Build a community-wide pastors’ group that meets consistently and holds a yearly sacred gathering (Isaiah 58:1-12; Ephesians 2:11-22).

a. Begin or enter a racially and denominationally varied community of kingdom-inclined pastors in our community region. A national group has already been formed at letstalklive.org/.

b. Come together consistently with kingdom-inclined pastors to improve relations, offer reciprocal support and to meet the demands of one another.

2. *Address: Unified Caring Tone*

Aggressively cultivate disciples who speak out with unified messaging, presenting biblical truths and answers on current social problems (John 17:13-23; Matthew 28:16-20).

a. Pursue common ground and common goals that encourage biblical answers to current problems needing to be tackled, instead of becoming caught on the areas of conflict. Demonstrate grace.

b. Hold conversation groups and prayer meetings to discover biblical responses to social problems.

3. *Act: Unified Community Affect*

Jointly organize our church to achieve a noticeable spirit of continuing good works enhancing the good of underserved neighborhoods (Jeremiah 29:5-7; Matthew 5:13-16).

a. Create a group for business leaders who would like to help in establishing work prospects and economic growth for underserved areas.

When we work together to *Assemble, Address,* and *Act* for God's kingdom in the public, we will create a larger effect as one. The extent of our unity will affect the extent of our influence.

Notes

1. Darrell L. Bock, *Cultural Intelligence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2020), 54-58.
2. These approaches and intentions are adapted from Bock, *Cultural Intelligence*, 59-60.
3. Jonah Goldberg, "The Problem with 'Social Justice,'" *Indy Star*, February 6, 2019, www.indystar.com/story/opinion/2019/02/10/jonah-goldberg-the-problem-social-justice/2814705002/.
4. Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 328.
5. Evans, 329.
6. Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 4-5.
7. Evans, 328.
8. Richard Delgado, *Critical Race Theory*, Third Edition. NYU Press. Kindle Edition, p. 3.
9. Voddie T. Baucham Jr., *Fault Lines* (Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2021), 67.
10. Evans, 335.
11. New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Matthew 7:12.
12. Tony Evans, *Kingdom Race Theology* (Chicago: IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 89.

13. Adapted from *Kingdom Race Theology*, 100.

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