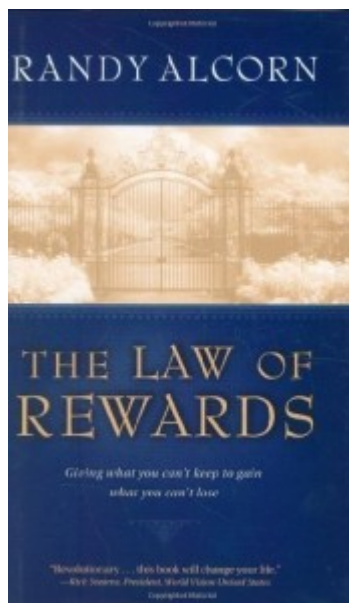


The Law of Rewards

Dr. Michael Gleghorn explore the biblical doctrine of eternal rewards. The Bible promises believers heavenly rewards for earthly obedience.

Introducing the Law of Rewards

The hit movie *Gladiator* begins with a powerful scene. Just before engaging the German barbarians in battle, General Maximus addresses some of his Roman soldiers. “Brothers,” he says, “what we do in life echoes in eternity.” Although Maximus was a pagan, his statement is entirely consistent with biblical Christianity, particularly the Bible’s teaching on eternal rewards.



In *The Law of Rewards*, [{1}](#) Randy Alcorn writes: “While our faith determines our eternal destination, our behavior determines our eternal rewards” [{2}](#). The Bible clearly teaches that we are saved by God’s grace, through personal faith in Christ, apart from any works whatever (Eph. 2:8-9). But it also teaches, with equal clarity, that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that we may be recompensed for what we have done in the body, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). This judgment (which is only for believers) is not to determine whether or not we are saved. Its purpose is to evaluate our works and determine whether we shall receive, or lose, eternal rewards (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

Alcorn writes, “Our works are what we have done with our resources—time, energy, talents, money, possessions.” [{3}](#) The apostle Paul describes our works as a building project. At the

judgment seat of Christ the quality of our work will be tested with fire. If we have used quality building materials (gold, silver, precious stones), then our work will endure and we will be rewarded by the Lord. If we have used poor building materials (in this case, wood, hay, or straw), then our work will be consumed and we will suffer the loss of rewards (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

This raises some important questions. What are we doing with the resources that God has entrusted to us? Are we seeking to build God's kingdom, in God's way, empowered by God's Spirit? Or are we merely engaged in empire-building for our own glory? Are we investing our resources in reaching the world for Christ, making disciples, and helping the poor and needy? Or are we only concerned with satisfying our own immediate wants and desires?

It's here that the worldview dimensions of our subject can be most clearly seen. Most of us would probably find it difficult to use our resources in the service of God or our fellow man if we thought that this life was all there is and that death is the end of our personal existence. But Christianity says that there's more – a *lot* more. And if Christianity is true, then Maximus was right: "What we do in life echoes in eternity." Randy Alcorn has observed, "The missing ingredient in the lives of countless Christians today is *motivation*. . . . The doctrine of eternal rewards for our obedience is the neglected key to unlocking our motivation." [\[4\]](#)

Questioning Our Motivation

Is the desire for eternal rewards a proper or legitimate motivation for serving Christ? Isn't it somewhat shallow, maybe even selfish, for our service to Christ to be motivated by a desire for heavenly rewards? Furthermore, shouldn't we serve Christ simply because of who He is, rather than for what we can get out of it? To some people, the promise of eternal

rewards sounds like a crass appeal to our baser instincts. But is it?

Before we jump to any unwarranted conclusions and possibly overstate the case, we may first want to take a step back, take a deep breath, and remind ourselves of a few things. In the first place, as Randy Alcorn observes, “it wasn’t *our* idea that God would reward us. It was *his* idea!”[{5}](#) If we search the pages of the New Testament, we repeatedly find promises of heavenly rewards for earthly obedience. Indeed, Jesus himself urges our obedience in light of future rewards (Luke 6:35). Not only that, in Matthew 6:20 he *commands* us to store up for ourselves “treasures in heaven.” Now this leads to an interesting little twist. In John 14:21 Jesus says, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.” We *could* make the argument, then, that the one who does *not* seek to store up treasures in heaven is being disobedient to Christ’s command and demonstrating a lack of love for him!

In a somewhat similar vein, Alcorn wrote:

It is certainly true that desire for reward should not be our only motivation. But it is also true that it’s a fully legitimate motive encouraged by God. In fact, the two most basic things we can believe about God are first that he exists, and second that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6). If you don’t believe God is a rewarder, you are rejecting a major biblical doctrine and have a false view of God.[{6}](#)

Of course, we must always remember that the Lord knows the motivations of our hearts – and these will be taken into account at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 4:5). In addition, Jesus solemnly warns us: “Be careful not to do your ‘acts of righteousness’ before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven” (Matt. 6:1).

The biblical picture of rewards, then, would seem to go something like this. The Lord is absolutely worthy of our obedience and service, whether we ever personally profit from it or not (e.g. see Luke 17:10). Nevertheless, the Lord is a rewarder of those who seek Him and He commands us to seek His rewards as well! And when one really thinks about it, "Hearing our Master say, 'Well done' will not simply be for our pleasure but for *his!*"[\[7\]](#)

The Life God Rewards

What kind of life does God reward? For what sort of works will believers be rewarded when they stand before the judgment seat of Christ? The simplest answer to this question, and the most general, is that we will be rewarded for everything we've done that was motivated by our love for the Lord and empowered by His Spirit. Indeed, Jesus said that we would even be rewarded for simply giving a cup of cold water to someone because he is a follower of Christ (Matt. 10:42).

But the Bible specifically mentions many other things for which we can also be rewarded. The New Testament describes as many as five different crowns which will be given to believers for various works of faithfulness, obedience, discipline, and love. For example, there is the *imperishable crown* (1 Cor. 9:25), which appears to be rewarded for "determination, discipline, and victory in the Christian life."[\[8\]](#) There is the *crown of righteousness* which, according to Paul, will be awarded by the Lord "to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). There is the *crown of life*, "given for faithfulness to Christ in persecution or martyrdom."[\[9\]](#) In the book of Revelation, Jesus tells the church in Smyrna, "the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life" (2:10; see also James 1:12). Additionally, there is the *crown of rejoicing* (1 Thess. 2:19; Phil. 4:1), "given for pouring

oneself into others in evangelism and discipleship.”[{10}](#) And finally, there is the *crown of glory* (1 Pet. 5:4), “given for faithfully representing Christ in a position of leadership.”[{11}](#)

Of course, as Alcorn observes, “There’s nothing in this list that suggests it’s exhaustive.”[{12}](#) Indeed, as we’ve already seen, the Bible seems to say that we will be rewarded for every act of love and service which we did for the glory of God. But there’s another side to this discussion which we dare not overlook. The Bible not only indicates that we can gain rewards; it also warns us that we can lose them as well.

Paul compared the Christian life to an athletic competition in which our goal is to win the prize. This is why, he told the Corinthians, “I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize” (1 Cor. 9:27). The Bible suggests that the works of some believers will be completely consumed at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:15). Tragically, these believers will enter heaven without any rewards from their Lord. To avoid this catastrophe, let us heed Paul’s advice and “run in such a way as to get the prize” (1 Cor. 9:24).

Power, Pleasures, and Possessions

What should we think about power, pleasures, and possessions? Are they merely temptations that should be avoided, or genuine goods that can be legitimately sought and desired? Although some may find it surprising, each of these things *is* good—at least considered simply in itself. Each finds its ultimate source in God. And each existed *before* sin and evil corrupted His good creation. God has always been *powerful*. He clearly took *pleasure* in His work of creation, repeatedly describing it as “good” (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). And as the Creator of all that exists (other than himself, of course),

everything ultimately belongs to God (1 Cor. 10:26). Indeed, the Bible sometimes describes Him as the “*possessor* of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:19). Clearly, then, there’s nothing inherently wrong with power, pleasures, or possessions.

So why have these things gained such tainted reputations? Probably because they’ve so often been misused and abused by sinful men and women. Indeed, describing sin and evil as the misuse, abuse, perversion or corruption of some good gift of God is part of a long and venerable tradition in the history of philosophy and theology. And one doesn’t have to look very far to find plenty of examples of man’s sinful misuse of power, pleasures, and possessions. Just turn on the evening news, or read the local paper, and you’ll find many such examples. But we must always remember that it’s the *misuse* of these things that is sinful and wrong; the things in themselves are good and desirable. And this is confirmed by the teaching of Scripture.

Consider the kind of rewards God offers us. For faithful and obedient service now, He promises power, pleasures, and possessions in eternity! Jesus made it clear that those who are faithful with the little things in this life, will be rewarded with great power and authority in the next (Luke 19:15-19). He taught that those who invest their time, talents, and treasures in building God’s kingdom here and now are laying up great treasures in heaven for themselves in the hereafter (Matt. 6:19-21; 19:21). And pleasures? The psalmist wrote of God, “In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever” (16:11).

Randy Alcorn has written, “God has created us each with desires for pleasure, possessions, and power.”[{13}](#) We want these things “not because we are sinful but *because we are human.*”[{14}](#) Although our sinfulness can, and often does, lead us to misuse these things, we’ve seen that they’re actually good gifts of God. “Power, possessions, and pleasures are legitimate objects of desire that our Creator has instilled in

us *and* by which he can motivate us to obedience.”[{15}](#) May we faithfully serve the Lord, trusting him as “the Rewarder of those who diligently seek him.”[{16}](#)

Investing in Eternity

A Christian worldview must be fleshed-out in the rough and tumble world of our daily lives if we’re going to be salt and light to the surrounding culture. Now, as always, true disciples must be “doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves” (Jas. 1:22).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his followers:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 6:19-21).

Many of us read these verses and only hear Jesus’ command not to store up treasures on earth. But if this is all we hear, then we’re missing the main point that Jesus is trying to make. As Alcorn observes, the central focus of this passage “is not the renunciation of earthly treasures but the accumulation of heavenly treasures. We’re to avoid storing up unnecessary treasures on earth not as an end in itself, but as a life strategy to lay up treasures in heaven.”[{17}](#) In a sense, Jesus is calling us to adopt a long-term investment strategy.

Think about the fate of all our earthly treasures. Isn’t Jesus right? Won’t they either wear out, break down, rust, become outdated, or get stolen? And even if none of this happens, we can’t hold on to earthly wealth forever, can we? “Either it leaves us while we live, or we leave it when we die.”[{18}](#) So is it really smart to pour all our time and energy into the

accumulation of earthly treasures? Is this really a wise investment strategy?

We've been discussing issues raised by Randy Alcorn's excellent book, *The Law of Rewards*. I can think of no better way to conclude than with this powerful and thought-provoking citation:

Gather your family and go visit a junkyard or a dump. Look at all the piles of "treasures" that were formerly Christmas and birthday presents. Point out things that people worked long hours to buy and paid hundreds of dollars for, that children quarreled about, friendships were lost over, honesty was sacrificed for, and marriages broke up over. Look at the remnants of gadgets and furnishings that now lie useless after their brief life span. Remind yourself that most of what you own will one day end up in a junkyard like this. And even if it survives on earth for a while, you won't. . . . When you examine the junkyard, ask yourself this question: 'When all that I ever owned lies abandoned, broken, useless, and forgotten, what will I have done with my life that will last for eternity?{19}

Notes

1. Much of the material for this article comes from Randy Alcorn, *The Law of Rewards* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003). If you're interested in exploring this topic further, you may also want to read Bruce Wilkinson (with David Kopp), *A Life God Rewards: Why Everything You Do Today Matters Forever* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2002).
2. Alcorn, 7.
3. Ibid., 6.
4. Ibid., 99-100.
5. Ibid., 105.
6. Ibid., 116.
7. Ibid., 92.
8. Ibid., 91.

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., 92.
13. Ibid., 111.
14. Ibid., 112.
15. Ibid., 113.
16. Ibid., 121.
17. Ibid., 22.
18. Ibid., 23.
19. Ibid., 23.

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Restoring the Sacred

The Loss of the Sacred

There are several ways to define modernism. One way is this: modernism was an attempt to remove the sacred from society and to replace it with a mechanistic naturalism. Everything was to be understood and explained in scientific terms.

The late philosopher of religion Mircea Eliade wrote this:

The completely profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos [that is, the cosmos with the sacred removed] is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit . . . desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies.[\[1\]](#)

Profane, here, is another word for *secular*. It is contrasted with *sacred*. My *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *sacred* as “connected with God or a god or dedicated to a religious

purpose and so deserving veneration.” It is closely related to *sanctified* which means “holy” which means “dedicated or consecrated to God.”{2}

Ours is obviously a secular society. Everything open for public discussion is to be explained with no reference to the sacred; there is no acknowledged connection to God. It seems the only time the sacred makes it into the news is when there is a tragedy and reporters talk about people praying, or when a famous religious person, such as the Pope, dies.

Once upon a time in the West, our society operated as though God mattered. Now, such views are considered quaint relics of the past which shouldn't be allowed to invade the public square. The late Christopher Reeve in a speech about stem cell research at Yale University said that “our government should not be influenced by any religion when matters of public policy are being debated.”{3} Religion is to be a private affair only.

The late theologian and missionary Lesslie Newbigin, after spending four decades in India, said this about the West:

The sharp line which modern Western culture has drawn between religious affairs and secular affairs is itself one of the most significant peculiarities of our culture, and would be incomprehensible to the vast majority of people.{4}

Why should this matter to us? Among other reasons is the simple unfairness in a democracy of “religious people” not being able to bring *their* worldviews into public debates while the nonreligious can. I can think of two explanations for this idea. First, it's thought that religion necessarily creates unreasonable *bias* whereas irreligion doesn't. Religious belief removes our ability to be objective, it is thought. People who think this way need to catch up with current philosophy! There are no value-free facts, and no perspectives that do not begin with unprovable assumptions.{5}

Second, it's thought that religious biases are likely to be *destructive* because of their "intolerant" character. This is a popular mantra today; it is trotted out with all the authority of unassailable fact. Didn't the events of 9/11 prove it? Responding to the observation that people see those horrible events as illustrating what religious monotheism causes, writer Os Guinness noted that "In the last century, more people were killed by secularist intellectuals, in the name of secularist ideologies, than in all the religious persecutions and repressions in Western history combined."[\[6\]](#) If the twentieth century is a good witness, there is greater danger from secular powers than from religious ones.

Beyond that, though, is a problem Christians have individually and corporately. When so much of our time is spent in a realm in which our Christian beliefs aren't welcomed, we begin to forget their importance for all of life. So we start thinking from a secular perspective. In addition, we even find it easier to let our Christian beliefs be shaped by non-Christian thinking.

In her latest book, *Total Truth*,[\[7\]](#) Nancy Pearcey has reminded us of the importance of destroying the divide between the sacred and the secular in our thinking. But it can't stop with our thinking; the sacred needs to be an integral part of our lives. As part of that process it would be good to be reminded of just what we mean by the sacred.

Sacredness

As noted earlier, *sacred* means to be dedicated or devoted to God. It involves a separation of purpose: something is separated from the use of the world for the use of God.

The idea of sacredness is reflected in a number of ways in the various religions of the world. There are holy books and places and festivals. The sacred is reflected in religious

architecture. Islamic mosques, for example, are designed to point people to Allah. Muslim writer Hwaah Irfan speaks of “sacred geometry [which] is the science of creating a space, writing or other artwork, which reminds one of the greatness of Allah.”[{8}](#) In the past, Christianity too, of course, was conscious of the sacred in its architecture. Medieval era churches were built for the purpose of “signifying the sacred,” of reflecting something about God. The furnishings of churches were designed to aid in this focus.

Old Testament

What does the Bible tell us about sacredness or holiness?[{9}](#) In the Old Testament it refers primarily to God. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts” Isaiah said (6:3). In Old Testament times, God showed Himself to be set apart from His created order through such events as Moses being told to remove his shoes before the burning bush because he was standing on holy ground (Ex. 3:5). Later, at Sinai, God called Moses up onto a mountain to teach him His laws, far away from the people signifying His separateness from a fallen world (Ex. 19). His separation from unclean things was reflected also through His laws (e.g., Lev. 11:43, 44). Anyone who would approach God, who would “ascend His holy hill,” according to the Psalmist, must have “clean hands and a pure heart” (24:4).

The word *holy* was applied to other things that were separated by God, such as the nation of Israel (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 20:26), the Sabbath (Ex. 16:23), the tabernacle with both the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (Ex. 26:33), and the various feasts and special observations, such as the Day of Atonement (Ex. 30:10). This even extended to objects used for worship. For example, there was special incense that was too holy to be used by people for themselves (Ex. 30:37). In the Old Testament, then, we find God using things and events to teach His people about His holy nature.

New Testament

What do we find in the New Testament? Again, the primary reference is to God. All three members of the Trinity are said to be holy. Peter repeated God's admonition recorded in Lev. 11:44—"Be holy because I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). He called Jesus "the Holy One of God" (Jn. 6:69). And, of course, the Spirit is called the Holy Spirit (e.g., Lk. 2:26).

Whereas in the Old Testament, God's separateness from creation and the unclean was the emphasis, in the New Testament the moral dimension comes to the fore (although the moral wasn't absent from the Old Testament). In the Old Testament the concern is more with external matters; in the New Testament the focus is on the internal. The writer of Hebrews says we were "made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (10:10). This doesn't mean we've fully "arrived" in our personal sanctification. Paul says we're to "purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God" (2 Cor. 7:1). The shift in emphasis between Testaments doesn't indicate a change in the meaning of holiness or its importance. For example, God's people are called saints—holy ones or sanctified ones—in both Testaments (e.g., Ps. 34:9; Acts 9:13). However, in the Old Testament times, God used external matters, which could be seen, to teach about the inward change He desired.

Does this mean that we no longer think about events and physical things as holy as in the Old Testament? Certainly not in the same way Old Testament saints did. We no longer have the Temple and the sacrificial system and the Aaronic priesthood. All things are God's, and all things are to be offered up to Him with a pure heart. There should be no sacred/secular split in the sense that some things are under God's jurisdiction and some aren't. However, we might find that, just like the Israelites, certain items or observances might help in directing us to God or reminding us of His

character.

Secularism—The Loss of the Sacred

Contrasted with *sacred* is the idea of *secular*. The root of the word “secular” is interesting. It comes from a Latin word that means “time.” James Hitchcock says “to call someone secular means that he is completely time-bound, totally a child of his age, a creature of history, with no vision of eternity. Unable to see anything in the perspective of eternity, he cannot believe that God exists or acts in human affairs.”^{10} A secular society, then, is one which is tied to time, to the temporal, with no reference to the eternal, to God.

We shouldn't think that there was no distinction between the sacred and the secular in the West until modern times. In the Medieval era, there was secular music and poetry. However, there was an increasing turn to the secular following the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century. By the eighteenth century writers such as Voltaire were openly espousing secularism. If religion was the cause of such terrible things as the wars of the sixteenth century, it should be removed from the public square.

Over time, secularism gradually encroached on almost all areas of human life. In the university in the nineteenth century, a movement began to remove religion from its central place in education and segregate it to its own department. In the workplace, *efficiency* became a watchword; because religion could disrupt the workplace, it was to be left at home. By the twentieth century buildings and art and law and . . . well, you name it; all areas of human life were now to be thought of in secular terms and developed according to the methods of science. Life would be much improved, it was thought, if we were freed from the narrowness of religion to make of ourselves what we would. Humanism was the fundamental worldview, and secular humanism at that. The name given to

this era was “modernism.”

What has this gotten us as a society? We’re free to construct our reality any way we wish now that God is supposedly dead. But what have we done with our freedom? Henry Grunwald, former ambassador to Austria and editor-in-chief of Time, Inc. said this:

Secular humanism . . . stubbornly insisted that morality need not be based on the supernatural. But it gradually became clear that ethics without the sanction of some higher authority simply were not compelling. The ultimate irony, or perhaps tragedy, is that secularism has not led to humanism. We have gradually dissolved—deconstructed—the human being into a bundle of reflexes, impulses, neuroses, nerve endings. The great religious heresy used to be making man the measure of all things; but we have come close to making man the measure of nothing.[\[11\]](#)

What the Loss of the Sacred Means for Us

Life in a secular world

What does it mean to live in a secular society? How does it color our Christian experience? How does it affect the way we make decisions? The way we spend our money and time? The way we relate to people?

In 1998, Craig Gay published a book titled *The Way of the Modern World: Or, Why It’s Tempting to Live As if God Doesn’t Exist*.[\[12\]](#) In the introduction, he addresses the question why there needs to be another book on modernism. He gives a couple of reasons. First, he says, is the possibility of unfruitfulness. He points to the Parable of the Sower in Matthew as a biblical example. Could any ineffectiveness on our part or the part of our churches be traced back to accommodation to the secular mind? Could our many church programs and strategies be found wanting because we are using

modern methods which run counter to the ways of God? Our private lives have become divided: Monday through Friday are for money-making endeavors; Saturday is for working around the house or going to the lake; Sunday is for religion. We live bifurcated lives.

Second is “the threat of apostasy and spiritual death.” Think of the proverbial frog in the pot of water slowly coming to a boil, and then think about how easy it is to adopt the notion that “you only go around once” and the modernistic solution of getting all the “toys” we can *while* we can . . . and gradually not only *look* like the world but become card-carrying members of it.

The sacred brought down to the secular

The late Francis Schaeffer taught many of us the meaning and significance of “secular humanism,” and, as a result of such teaching, evangelicals have taken on the project of integrating the sacred and the secular in more and more areas of their lives. Much of this has been good. Determining to let one’s Christian beliefs inform all aspects of life is hard in itself; in a secular culture that doesn’t care for such things, it’s a major challenge. As noted earlier, it is an uphill battle living as a Christian in our secular society, so one should be cautious about criticizing the sincere efforts of fellow believers.

In my opinion, however, some or many of us have unconsciously pulled a “switcheroo.” In our efforts to tear down the divide between sacred and secular, we have been guilty to a significant extent of bringing the sacred down to the secular rather than lifting all of life up to the secular, as it were. We live so much of our lives in the “lower story” as Nancy Pearcey calls it (following Schaeffer) that we have simply baptized as Christian attitudes and ways of life that are questionable. We’ve secularized the sacred rather than vice versa.

Ask yourself this: Besides things internal to you—attitudes, beliefs, etc.—what externals in your life clearly reflect the divine? How does the sacred color your life? What habits of life, objects or tools, what signifiers of the sacred, are part of your life?

Restoring the Sacred, *Not* the Sacred-Secular Split

In so far as this describes us, we need to make the conscious decision to bring about change. The first order of business is to re-acknowledge the sacredness of God. Then we must recognize that we are sanctified, set apart. We are to be drawn up to God, and one significant area in which this should be seen is in worship. Think of worship as the sanctified being drawn up to the Sanctifier. In another place I wrote this:

The object of one's worship reflects back on the worshipper. Those who worship things lower than themselves end up demeaning themselves, being brought down to the level of their object of worship. But those who worship things higher are drawn up to reflect their object of worship. To worship God is to be drawn up to our full height, so to speak. We are ennobled by worshipping the most noble One. [{13}](#)

Two thoughts to add which might seem contradictory at first. In response to the secularization of our society, it is our responsibility to bring God back into all the affairs of our lives, even the mundane. In our *private* lives that will be easier to do than in our *public* lives simply because we don't set all the rules for the latter. For example, a person working for a financial institution probably won't be able to insist that the boss leads the office in prayer before work each morning. However, there *are* ways we can bring a Christian view of the world and godly morality into the workplace. We

want God to be over the full sweep of our lives such that we don't have a brick wall dividing our lives in two.

Along with that, however, we might find it helpful to bring into our lives some kinds of signifiers of the sacred, some kinds of objects or places or routines or *something* that will provide reminders to us that the world we see isn't all there is. Christians have used symbols for ages to remind them of the "otherness" of God. Art has made a big comeback in recent decades as a means of portraying truths about God and a Christian view of life and the world. Such things aren't prescribed in Scripture. What *is* prescribed, of course, is the rejection of idolatry. Therefore, anything we use as an aid must remain just that—an aid, not the object of our faith.

Thomas Molnar argues that a strong Christian belief in the supernatural needs worship symbols such as prayer, ritual, a sense of the sacred community, sincere piety, and the élan (enthusiastic energy) of the clergy."[14](#) He believes that the only way the church can remain strong in a pagan environment is to "remain unquestionably loyal" to both the intellectual component—doctrine—and the sacred component which employs symbolic forms.[15](#) The intellectual component gives us an understanding of our faith and our world. By being renewed, it enables us to "test and approve what God's will is" (Rom. 12:2). The symbolic component can help us focus on and learn about God. Things like visual aids, postures, particular times set aside for a focus on God, along with Bible reading and prayer, can be very beneficial, as long as they don't lead to idolatry or a diminished or altered view of God.

We don't have the law with all its stipulations about the Temple and its furnishings, sacrifices, and special feasts. In my opinion, however, to simply set all such things aside *because* they aren't required by law is short-sighted. Human nature hasn't changed; if sacred signifiers were helpful to the Israelites, maybe they would be to us, too.

To give people a list of things to do that goes beyond clear scriptural exhortation to such practices as prayer, learning God's Word, gathering together as a body, and participating in the sacraments or ordinances would be to overstep our boundaries. The most I can do, then, is ask you think about it. Consider how you can restore a clear sense of the sacred in your life. Not just any sacredness *per se*, of course, but a sense of the presence of the One who is truly sacred and of the significance of the sacred for how you live.

Notes

1. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), 13.
2. *The Pop-up New Oxford Dictionary of English*, Selectsoft Publishing, 1992.
3. Christopher Reeve, "Stem Cells and Public Policy" Yale University, April 3, 2003. Accessed from www.yale.edu/opa/v31.n25/story7.html on 4/6/2005. The offending statement was reported in Mitch Horowitz, "Ambassador of the Miraculous" on Horowitz' Web site at www.mitchhorowitz.com/christopher-reeve.html (Accessed 4/6/2005).
4. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 31.
5. Thomas Kuhn got the ball rolling with respect to science, the supposed bastion of objectivity, with his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970; first published in 1962). For philosophical treatments see Arthur F. Holmes, *Fact, Value, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986); and Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2002).

6. Mary A. Jacobs, "Q&A With Os Guinness: Standing in Defense of 'One True God'," *Dallas Morning News*, March 26, 2005.
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What's the Meaning of Life?

Former Probe staffer Jerry Solomon explains how Christianity answers the biggest question of them all: What is the meaning of life?

Cathy has been married to her husband Dan for twenty years and is the mother of two teenagers. She is very involved in family, church, and community activities. Many consider her to be the model of one that “has it together,” so to speak. Unknown to her family and her many friends, lately she has been thinking a lot about her lifestyle. As a result, she has even questioned whether there is any ultimate meaning or purpose underlying her busyness. At lunch one day she finds herself in an intimate conversation with a good friend named Sarah. Even though they have never talked about such things, Cathy decides to see how Sarah will respond to her questioning. Lets eavesdrop on their conversation.

Cathy: Sarah, I've been doing some serious thinking lately.

Sarah: Is something wrong?

Cathy: I don't know that I would say something is wrong. I just don't know what to make of these thoughts I've been having.

Sarah: What thoughts?

Cathy: This may sound like I'm going off the deep end or something, but I promise you I'm not. I've just started asking some really heavy questions. And I haven't told another soul about it.

Sarah: Well, tell me! You know you can trust me.

Cathy: Okay. But you promise not to laugh or blow it off?

Sarah: Stop being so defensive. Just say it!

Cathy: Sarah, why are you here? I mean, what is your purpose in life?

Sarah: (She pauses before responding flippantly.) You're right, you *have* gone off the deep end.

Cathy: Sarah, I need you to be serious with me here!

Sarah: Okay! I'm sorry! I'm just drawing a blank. Actually, I try *not* to think about that question.

Cathy: Yeah, well, denying it doesn't work anymore. It just keeps rolling around in my head.

Sarah: Cant you talk to Dan about it?

Cathy: I've thought about it, but I don't want him to think there's something wrong between *us*.

Sarah: Well, what about talking to your pastor? I bet he'd have some answers.

Cathy: Yeah, I've thought about that too. Maybe I will.

Is Cathy really "weird," or is she an example of people that rub shoulders with us each day? And what about Sarah? Was her nervous response typical of how most of us would respond if we were asked questions about meaning and purpose?

James Dobson relates an intriguing story about a remarkable seventeen-year-old girl who achieved a perfect score on both sections of the "Scholastic Achievement Test, and a perfect on the tough University of California acceptance index. Never in history has anyone accomplished this intellectual feat, which is almost staggering to contemplate."[\[1\]](#) Interestingly, though, when a reporter "asked her, What is the meaning of life? she replied, I have no idea. I would like to know

myself.”{2}

This intellectually brilliant young lady has something in common with Cathy and Sarah, doesn't she? She is able to understand complicated subject matter, but she has no idea if life has any meaning.

Our goal in this essay is to see if there is an answer for them, as well as all of us.

The Questions Around Us

As I was driving to my office one day I heard a dramatic radio advertisement for a book. It began something like this: “Would you like to find meaning in life?” As I listened to the remainder of the ad I realized that the book's author was focusing on New Age concepts of purpose and meaning. But the striking thing about what was said was that the advertisers obviously believed that they could get the attention of the radio audience by asking about meaning in life. Some may think it is advertising suicide to open an ad with such a question. Or perhaps the author and her publicists are on to something that “strikes a chord” with many people in our culture.

Questions of meaning and purpose are a part of the mental landscape as we enter a new millennium. Some contend this has not always been the case, but that such questions are an unprecedented legacy of the upheavals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.{3} Others assert that such questions are a result of man's rejection of God.{4}

Even though most of us don't make such issues a part of our normal conversations, the questions tend to lurk around us. They can be heard in songs, movies, books, magazines, and many other media that permeate our lives. For example, Jackson Browne, an exceptionally reflective songwriter of the 60s and 70s, wrote these haunting lyrics in a song entitled *For a Dancer*:

Into a dancer you have grown
From a seed somebody else has thrown
Go ahead and throw
Some seeds of your own
And somewhere between the time you arrive
And the time you go
May lie a reason you were alive...{5}

Russell Banks, the author of *Affliction* and *The Sweet Hereafter*, both of which became Oscar-nominated films, has this to say about his work: "I'm not a morbid man. In my writing, I'm just trying to describe the world as straightforwardly as I can. I think most lives are desperate and painful, despite surface appearances. If you consider anyone's life for long, you find its without meaning."{6}

Woody Allen, the film writer, director, and actor, has consistently populated his scripts with characters who exchange dialogue concerning meaning and purpose. In *Hannah and Her Sisters* a character named Mickey says, "Do you realize what a thread were all hanging by? Can you understand how meaningless everything is? Everything. I gotta get some answers."{7}

Even television ads have focused on meaning, although in a flippant manner. A few years ago you could watch Michael Jordan running across hills and valleys in order to find a guru. When Jordan finds him he asks, "What is the meaning of life?" The guru answers with a maxim that leads to the product that is the real focus of Jordan's quest.

Even though such illustrations can be ridiculous, maybe they serve to lead us beyond the surface of our subject. We often get nervous when we are encouraged to delve into subject matter that might stretch us. When we get involved in conversations that go beyond the more mundane things of everyday life we may tend to get tense and defensive. Actually, this can be a good thing. The Christian shouldn't

fear such conversations. Indeed, I'm confident that if we go beyond the surface, we can find peace and hope.

Beyond the Surface

Listen to the sober words of a famous writer of the twentieth century:

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy... I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living. I see others paradoxically getting killed for the ideas or illusions that give them a reason for living (what is called a reason for living is an excellent reason for dying). I therefore conclude that the meaning of life is the most urgent of questions.[\[8\]](#)

These phrases indicate that Albert Camus, author of *The Plague*, *The Stranger*, and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, was not afraid to go beyond the surface. Camus was bold in exposing the thoughts many were having during his lifetime. In fact, his world view made it obligatory. He was struggling with questions of meaning in light of what some called the "death of God." That is, if there is no God, can we find meaning? Many have concluded that the answer is a resounding "No!" If true, this means that one who believes there is no God is not living consistently with that belief.

William Lane Craig, one of the great Christian thinkers of our time, states that:

Man cannot live consistently and happily as though life were ultimately without meaning, value or purpose. If we try to live consistently within the atheistic worldview, we shall find ourselves profoundly unhappy. If instead we manage to live happily, it is only by giving the lie to our worldview.[\[9\]](#)

Francis Schaeffer agrees with ' analysis, but makes even bolder assertions. He also maintains that the Christian can close the hopeless gap that is created in a persons godless worldview. Listen to what he wrote:

It is impossible for any non-Christian individual or group to be consistent to their system in logic or in practice. Thus, when you face twentieth-century man, whether he is brilliant or an ordinary man of the street, a man of the university or the docks, you are facing a man in tension; and it is this tension which works on your behalf as you speak to him. [{10}](#)

What happens when we go “beyond the surface” in order to find meaning? Can a Christian worldview stand up to the challenge? I believe it can, but we must stop and think of whether we are willing to accept the challenge. David Henderson, a pastor and writer, gives us reason to pause and consider our response. He writes:

Our lives, like our Daytimers, are busy, busy, busy, full of things to do and places to go and people to see. Many of us, convinced that the opposite of an empty life is a full schedule, remain content to press on and ignore the deeper questions. Perhaps it is out of fear that we stuff our lives to the walls—fear that, were we to stop and ask the big questions, we would discover there are no satisfying answers after all. [{11}](#)

Let's jettison any fear and continue our investigation. There are satisfying answers. It is not necessary to “stuff our lives to the walls” in order to escape questions of meaning and purpose. God has spoken to us. Let us begin to pursue His answers.

Eternity in Our Hearts

The book of Ecclesiastes contains numerous phrases that have

entered our discourse. One of those phrases states that God “has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart. . .” (3:11). What a fascinating statement! Actually, the first part of the verse can be just as accurately translated “beautiful in its time.” Thus “a harmony of purpose and a beneficial supremacy of control pervade all issues of life to such an extent that they rightly challenge our admiration.”[{12}](#) The second part of the verse indicates that “man has a deep-seated sense of eternity, of purposes and destinies.”[{13}](#) But man can’t fathom the vastness of eternal things, even when he believes in the God of eternity. As a result, all people live with what some call a “God-shaped hole.” Stephen Evans believes this hole can be understood through “the desire for eternal life, the desire for eternal meaning, and the desire for eternal love.”[{14}](#)

The desire for *eternal life* is the most evident manifestation of the need for God. Deep in our hearts we feel death should not be, was not meant to be. The second dimension of our craving for eternity is the desire for *eternal meaning*. We want lives that are eternally meaningful. We crave eternity, and earthly loves resemble eternity enough to kindle our deepest love. Yet earthly loves are not eternal. Our sense that love is the clue to what its all about is right on target, but earthly love itself merely points us in the right direction. What we want is an *eternal love*, a love that loves us unconditionally, accepts us as we are, while helping us to become all we can become. In short, we want *God*, the God of Christian faith.[{15}](#)

We must trust God for what we cannot see and understand. Or, to put it another way, we continue to live knowing there is meaning, but we struggle to know exactly what it is at all times. We are striving for what the Bible refers to as our future glorification (Rom. 8:30). “There is something self-defeating about human desire, in that what is desired, when achieved, seems to leave the desire unsatisfied.”[{16}](#) For

example, we attempt to find meaning while searching for what is beautiful. C.S. Lewis referred to this in a sermon entitled *The Weight of Glory*:

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have not visited. [{17}](#)

Lewis's remarkable prose reminds us that meaning must be *given* to us. "Meaning is never intrinsic; it is always derivative. If my life itself is to have meaning (or a meaning), it thus must derive its meaning from some sort of purposive, intentional activity. It must be endowed with meaning." [{18}](#) Thus we return to God, the giver of meaning.

Meaning: Gods Gift

Think of all the wonderful gifts that God has given you. No doubt you can come up with a lengthy record of God's goodness. Does your list include meaning or purpose in life? Most people wouldn't think of meaning as part of Gods goodness to us. But perhaps we should. This is because "only a being like God—a creator of all who could eventually, in the words of the New Testament, work all things together for good—only this sort of being could guarantee a completeness and permanency of meaning for human lives." [{19}](#) So how did God accomplish this? The answer rests in His amazing love for us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Consider the profound words of Carl F.H. Henry: "the eternal and self-revealed Logos, incarnate in Jesus Christ, is the

foundation of all meaning.”[{20}](#) Bruce Lockerbie puts it like this: “The divine nature manifesting itself in the physical form of Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the integrating principle to which all life adheres, the focal point from which all being takes its meaning, the source of all coherence in the universe. Around him and him alone all else may be said to radiate. He is the Cosmic Center.”[{21}](#)

Picture a bicycle. When you ride one you are putting your weight on a multitude of spokes that radiate from a hub. All the spokes meet at the center and rotate around it. The bicycle moves based upon the center. Thus it is with Christ. He is the center around whom we move and find meaning. Our focus is on Him.

When the apostle Paul reflected on meaning and purpose in his life in Philippians 3, he came to this conclusion (emphases added):

7...whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value *of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order *that I may gain Christ*, 9 *and may be found in Him*, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 *that I may know Him*, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order *that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead*.

Did you notice how Christ was central to what Paul had to say about both his past and present? And did you notice that he used phrases such as “knowing Christ,” or “that I may gain Christ?” Such statements appear to be crucial to Paul’s sense of meaning and purpose. Paul wants “to know” Christ

intimately, which means he wants to know by experience. "Paul wants to come to know the Lord Jesus in that fulness of experimental knowledge which is only wrought by being like Him." [\[22\]](#)

Personally, Paul's thoughts are important words of encouragement in my life. God through Christ gives meaning and purpose to me. And until I am glorified, I will strive to know Him and be like Him. Praise God for Jesus Christ, His gift of meaning!

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Worldview and Truth

Each day Christians are confronted with a bewildering array of choices in ethics, actions, and lifestyles. The only way to make sense of this data is to have a consistent worldview. And Christians should be operating from a biblical worldview. As we will see, that is often not the case.

The Barna Research Group conducted a national survey of adults and concluded that only 4 percent of adults have a biblical worldview as the basis of their decision-making. The survey

also discovered that 9 percent of born again Christians have such a perspective on life.[{1}](#)

Everyone has a worldview, but relatively few people (even religious people) have a biblical worldview. This explains a great deal about behavior. One reason so few people act like Christians is because they don't think like Christians. Behavior results from our values and beliefs. Thinking biblically about the issues of life should ultimately result in living biblically in society. Conversely, not thinking biblically should result in not living biblically within society.

Nancy Pearcey, in her latest book *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, tells the story of Sarah, a practicing Christian who worked for years as a counselor for Planned Parenthood. She did not try to talk women out of an abortion, but merely was content to make sure they knew what they were doing. She said that after she graduated from college, "My Christianity was reduced to a thin veneer over the core of a secular worldview. It was almost like having a split personality."[{2}](#)

Unfortunately, there are millions of Sarahs in the world who willingly live with a split personality. The split is between the sacred and the secular. Or the split is between fact and value. In their personal lives they try to live as Christians, but in their public world they think and act just like the non-Christians around them. They do not have a Christian worldview even though they are Christians.

Now you might wonder where the pastors are in all of this. After all, shouldn't pastors and church leadership be calling people to think and behave according to Christian principles? It turns out that part of the problem is the lack of sound biblical teaching about a biblical worldview.

The Barna Research Group found in a nationwide survey of

senior pastors that only half of the country's Protestant pastors have a biblical worldview. The gap among churches is reflected in the outcomes from the nation's two largest denominations. Southern Baptists had the highest percentage of pastors with a biblical worldview (71 percent), while the Methodists were lowest (27 percent).[\[3\]](#)

Obviously we need to do a better job within the church thinking about the array of issues that confront us from a biblical perspective. Unfortunately, there is growing evidence that we have not been doing this effectively.

Absolute Truth

One of the foundational aspects of a Christian worldview is the matter of absolute truth. The Bible rests upon belief in it. Yet surveys by George Barna show that a minority of born again adults (44 percent) and an even smaller proportion of born again teenagers (9 percent) are certain of the existence of absolute moral truth.[\[4\]](#)

Even more disturbing is the growing evidence that even adults have abandoned their belief in absolute truth. By a three-to-one margin adults say truth is always relative to the person and their situation. This perspective is even more lopsided among teenagers who overwhelmingly believe moral truth depends on the circumstances.[\[5\]](#)

Social scientists as well as pollsters have been warning that American society is becoming more and more dominated by moral anarchy. Writing in the early 1990s, James Patterson and Peter Kim said in *The Day America Told the Truth* that there was no moral authority in America. "We choose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded more respect."[\[6\]](#)

Researcher George Barna, writing ten years later in his book

Boiling Point, concludes that moral anarchy has arrived and dominates our culture today.^{7} His argument hinges on a substantial amount of attitudinal and behavioral evidence, such as rapid growth of the pornography industry, highway speeding as the norm, income tax cheating, computer hacking, rampant copyright violations (movies, books, and recordings), increasing rates of cohabitation and adultery, Internet-based plagiarism, etc^{8}.

When asked the basis on which they form their moral choices, nearly half of all adults cite their desire to do whatever will bring them the most pleasing or satisfying results. Although the Bible should be the basis of our moral decision-making, the survey showed that only four out of every ten born again Christian adults relies on the Bible or church teaching as their primary source of moral guidance.^{9}

The survey also found that the younger generation was even more inclined to support behaviors that conflict with traditional Christian morals. "Among the instances in which young adults were substantially more likely than their elders to adopt a nouveau moral view were in supporting homosexuality, cohabitation, the non-medicinal use of marijuana, voluntary exposure to pornography, profane language, drunkenness, speeding and sexual fantasizing."^{10}

Clearly, Christians are neither thinking nor behaving as Christians. And a large part of the problem centers on this abandonment of a belief in absolute truth. If Christians believe that morality is relative and determined by the situation, then they have changed biblical moral principles. Today there is a critical need for Christians to think and act biblically in every area of life.

De-conversion

You have no doubt known of young people who go off to college

and end up rejecting their faith. The story is more common than we might imagine. Nancy Pearcey, in her book *Total Truth*, tells the story of two such people.[{11}](#)

One said, “In my senior year of high school I accepted Jesus as my Savior and became a born-again Christian. I had found the One True Religion, and it was my duty—indeed it was my pleasure—to tell others about it, including my parents, brothers and sisters, friends, and even total strangers.”[{12}](#)

But his religious convictions waned when he confronted the theory of evolution. The student underwent “a de-conversion in graduate school six years later when I studied evolutionary biology.” Who is this person? He is Michael Shermer, the director of the Skeptics Society and publisher of *Skeptic* magazine. He has dedicated his life to debunking Christianity and defending evolution against people who believe in intelligent design.

Another prominent atheist tells a similar story. “I was a born-again Christian. When I was fifteen, I entered the Southern Baptist Church with great fervor and interest in the fundamentalist religion.” But he also found that his religious convictions were adversely affected by the theory of evolution. He says that he left the church “at seventeen when I got to the University of Alabama and heard about evolutionary theory.”[{13}](#)

This person described his encounter with evolution as an “epiphany” and was enthralled with the implications of evolution. Who is this person? He is E.O. Wilson, Harvard professor and founder of sociobiology (which attempts to explain everything in life from an evolutionary process).

Sadly, these stories are repeated year after year at universities throughout this country. The students who go through this de-conversion may not grow up to become famous skeptics or atheists like the ones we just mentioned. But they

will grow up without a solid, Christian faith.

Teenagers who are raised in stable Christian homes, educated in Christian schools, all too often go to college and reject their Christian faith. They fall prey to the naturalistic, evolutionary foundation of modern education. Or they adopt one of the current intellectual or cultural fads on campus.

So how are we to better prepare these young people for their college experience? A key element is to teach a Christian worldview. As our secular culture becomes more hostile to Christian ideas, it is more difficult to live out our Christian worldview consistently. When the culture was more hospitable to Christian values, a Sunday school understanding of Christianity could survive. Now we live in a culture hostile to those values. A rudimentary understanding of Christianity in such a hostile culture will soon wilt and die.

Young people, and youth ministry to young people, must be more intentional if Christian beliefs are to survive. Teaching a Christian worldview and training young people in the basics of apologetics are absolutely crucial if their faith is to survive.

Dichotomy of Truth

A Christian worldview should encompass all of reality. But the world today (and even most Christians) has divided truth into two categories. Francis Schaeffer used the concept of a two-story building. Science and reason are found on the lower story. Religion and morality can be found in the upper story.

Nancy Pearcey says that the upper story is the realm of private truth. This is where we hear people say such things as "that may be true for you, but it isn't true for me." Or to put it another way, the lower story is modernism, while the upper story is postmodernism.

This dichotomy of truth has served to marginalize Christianity. When Christians attempt to speak to moral issues of the day, their perspective is dismissed because critics believe that it is in the realm of private truth. So when they speak on subjects ranging from bioethics to science to public policy, the world perceives these comments as merely subjective value assumptions.

Unfortunately, Christians have also accepted this dichotomy of truth. They assume that science deals with facts and their faith deals with values. And they also assume that the two can exist simultaneously and independently of each other.

A good illustration of this can be found in a recent article in which a young writer described her first day in a theology class at a Christian high school. "My theology teacher drew a heart on one side of the blackboard and a brain on the other side. He informed us that the two are as divided as the two sides of the blackboard—the *heart* is what we use for religion, and the *brain* is what we use for science."[\[14\]](#)

Even more disturbing was the fact that in a classroom of some two hundred students, she was the only one who objected to the teacher's division of truth. Sadly, this is how more and more Christians have decided to deal with the conflicting and confusing facts of the modern world. And this is how we are supposedly "preparing" young people for college and society.

We need to give young people more than just a "heart" religion which will most certainly fail to equip them for the hostility towards Christianity found in modern society. They need a "brain" religion that includes at least training in worldview and apologetics.

Christian education and youth ministry must be more than opening the session in prayer. It must address this dichotomy of truth that places science and reason on one story of the building and leaves religion and morality on another story of

the building. If we don't address this problem, we will continue to turn out students who are Christians in their private life but essentially secular in their public life. And ultimately, their brains win out over their hearts so they end up living and thinking like non-Christians.

Christian Worldview

There are many elements to a Christian worldview, and the Probe Web site is full of articles that will help you in the development of a Christian worldview. A key verse in this endeavor is Mark 12:30: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength."

Jesus is telling us that we cannot live with a dichotomy of truth. We are to love God with our heart, soul, and mind. We cannot live our Christian life out on two different floors of a building where science and reason are on one story of the building and religion and morality are on another.

Jesus is also telling us that we must strive to know God intimately. He describes this as a whole-hearted, consuming desire to know God. Christianity isn't a hobby; it's a lifestyle. We are to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Another important verse is 2 Corinthians 10:5: "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." The apostle Paul wrote these words because he knew how important it was for Christians to have a Christian worldview in the midst of the pagan, secular culture of his day.

Notice that he describes the Christian mind in terms of warfare. We are engaged in a battle of worldviews and must be prepared for battle. We are to put all things under the

Lordship of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, he is our commander in this battle of worldviews.

Another key verse is Colossians 2:8: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." The apostle Paul's words warn all Christians not to be "taken captive" by false philosophy. How true that is especially for young people headed off to college.

When we consider these last two verses, we notice an interesting contrast. Either we take every thought captive (2 Cor. 10:5) or we run the risk of being taken captive (Col. 2:8) by false philosophies.

A final verse is 1 Peter 3:15: "But 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." The Greek word *apologia* is where we get our word apologetics. It does not mean to apologize. But it does mean to provide reasonable answers to honest questions and to do it with humility, respect, and reverence.

Christianity requires both offense and defense. While 2 Corinthians 10:5 focuses on the "offensive" nature of Christianity, 1 Peter 3:15 focuses on its "defensive" nature. We must always be ready to give an answer for our faith as we engage a world that is often hostile to the Christian worldview.

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12. Michael Shermer, *How We Believe: The Search for God in an Age of Science* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 2000), 2-3.
13. E. O. Wilson, "Toward a Humanistic Biology," *The Humanist* 42 (September/October 1982), 40.
14. Mary Passantino, "The Little Engine That Can," *Christian Research Journal*, April 2003.

The Origin of Man's Religions: Evolutionary Artifact or Remnants of Knowing Our Creator

Dr. Zukeran examines different theories on the origin of different religions. Are they made up from different experiences and dominant myths in a region or are they remnants of memories from a common Creator and a common fall from grace? He presents examples of how beginning from the remnant in a culture has been an effective way of introducing the gospel in a culture.



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

Is It Psychological?

What is the origin of man's religion? Why does every culture in the world worship some divine being? Anthropologists and historians have studied this question, and presently there are three primary theories: the subjective theory, the evolutionary theory, and the theory of original monotheism.

The subjective theory teaches that religion originates with man. Humans have a psychological need for a transcendent being that provides meaning and hope to their existence in this vast impersonal universe. Adherents of this view believe that this religious makeup exists below our conscious awareness. Cultures have various views of reality according to their experience, but the awareness and desire for religion is a universal phenomenon. They therefore conclude that this disposition lies in our subconscious. In other words, our beliefs about a transcendent being are not the result of external realities or interactions with such a being. Rather,

these beliefs derive from our psyches.

These feelings are expressed in more concrete terms through symbols and attitudes, not through a set of defined belief systems. As a culture progresses, these symbols and attitudes are developed into a set of beliefs and practices.

Several proponents were important in promoting this theory. Friedrich Schleiermacher believed that religion began with a feeling of dependence. This led to a need for an object to depend on which resulted in the idea of God. Ludwig Feuerbach taught that the concept of God is really a picture of an idealized person. Sigmund Freud believed that God derived from the basic human need for a father image. The idealized father figure becomes our image of God. [\[1\]](#)

The subjective theory may teach us about human nature, but it does not adequately explain the origin of religion or where this universal desire to know and understand God comes from. Dr. Winfried Corduan writes, "I may carry in my subconscious mind an abstract representation of God, but I cannot on that basis conclude that there is no independently existing, objective being that is God. God may have created me with that idea so that I can relate to God." [\[2\]](#) Every effect has a cause. What is the cause of this powerful desire for a relationship with God? If we are the products of a divine creator, that would explain this universal drive in all mankind to know Him because He placed this desire within us.

The Bible provides answers to the questions the subjective theory cannot answer. Genesis 1 states that we are created in the image of God. Therefore, we were created in the image of God with the intent to have a relationship with Him. Romans 1:20 states that all men have ingrained in their hearts a knowledge of God. Chapter 2 states that our conscience testifies that a moral law giver exists. The desire for God is a basic part of human nature.

Darwinian Theory of Religion

The second theory regarding the origin of religion is the evolutionary approach. This is the most popular view that is taught or implied in the study of religion. Proponents of this theory believe, as in the subjective theory, that religion originates with man. Religion is the result of an evolutionary process in human culture.

In the most primitive period of a culture, the most basic form of religion begins with an innate feeling that a spiritual force exists. This force is impersonal and pervades all of creation. It is called *mana*, derived from the name given to it by the inhabitants of Melanesia. Mana may be concentrated more intensely in some areas and objects more than others. A magnificent tree, or unique rock, or a certain animal may contain a higher concentration of mana.

The goal is to manipulate this force so that one may attain a desired outcome. Objects such as sticks or dolls, called *fetishes*, may contain the force and be used or worshipped.

The next stage is animism. At this stage, the force is visualized as personal spirits. Animism teaches that a spirit or spiritual force lies behind every event, and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.

There are two categories of spirits: nature spirits and ancestor spirits. Nature spirits have a human form and inhabit natural objects such as plants, rocks, or lakes. Ancestral spirits are the spirits of the ancestors. Both categories of spirits are limited in knowledge, power, and presence. One must maintain a favorable relationship with the spirits or else suffer their wrath.

The next stage is polytheism. Cultures progress from belief in finite spirits to the worship of gods. From polytheism a culture evolves to henotheism, which is belief in many gods

but worship directed to only one of them. The final stage is monotheism, the worship of one God.

There are several problems with this theory. The first is that these stages of development have never actually been observed. There is no record of a culture moving in sequence from the *mana* stage to the monotheistic stage as described in the evolutionary model. With *mana* and animism, evolutionary proponents expect that cultures in these stages would be free of the notion of any gods. However, this is not the case. Animistic cultures have gods, and most have a belief in a supreme being. Finally, there is evidence that indicates religions actually develop in the opposite direction from the evolutionary model.

For these reasons the evolutionary and subjective theories do not provide an adequate explanation for the origin of religion. Does history or even the Bible provide us with a better answer?

Original Monotheism

The third model for the origin of religion is original monotheism. This theory teaches that religion originates with God disclosing Himself to man. The first form religion takes is monotheism, and it deviates from there. Dr. Winfried Corduan identifies nine characteristics of man's first form of religion.

- *God is a personal God.*
- *He is referred to with masculine grammar and qualities.*
- *God is believed to live in the sky.*
- *He has great knowledge and power.*
- *He created the world.*
- *God is the author of standards of good and evil.*
- *Human beings are God's creatures and are expected to live by his standards.*

- *Human beings have become alienated from God by disobeying his standards.*
- *Lastly, God has provided a method of overcoming the alienation. Originally this involved sacrificing animals on an altar of uncut stone. {3}*

Studies of world cultures have revealed that each one has a vestige of monotheistic beliefs which are described by Dr. Corduan's nine qualifications. Cultures that are very primitive provide some of the strongest proof of original monotheism.

Anthropologists Dr. Wilhelm Schmidt, author of the 4000 page treatise, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*, and, more recently, Don Richardson, author of *Eternity in Their Hearts*, documented this fact in the hundreds of cultures they studied. They discovered that the religion of some of the most ancient cultures were monotheistic and practiced little or no form of animism or magic. In almost every culture around the world, the religion of a particular culture began with a concept of a masculine, creator God who lives in the heavens. He provided a moral law by which the people would enter into a relationship with him. This relationship was broken when the people were disobedient, and as the relationship deteriorated, the people distanced themselves from the creator and their knowledge of him faded. As the civilization moved further away, they began to worship other lesser gods. In their search to survive in a world filled with spiritual forces, they desired power to manipulate the forces, and thus there was an increase in the use of magic.

This theory fits very well with what is revealed in Scripture. Genesis teaches us that God created man and that man lived according to his knowledge of God and His laws. However, from Adam's first act of disobedience, mankind continued his sinful path away from God. Paul summarizes this history in Romans 1. The theory of original monotheism is the most consistent with

Scripture and appears to have strong historical support.

Examples of Original Monotheism

Here are just a few examples. The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* states that the Chinese culture before Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, 2600 years before Christ, worshipped Shang Ti. They understood Him to be the creator and law-giver. They believed that He was never to be represented by an idol. When the Zhou Dynasty controlled China during the years 1066-770 B.C., the worship of Shang Ti was replaced by the worship of heaven itself, and eventually three other religions were spawned in China.

In a region north of Calcutta, India, there lived the Santal people. They were found worshipping elements of nature. However, before these practices developed, they worshipped Thakur Jiu, the genuine God who created all things. Although they knew Thakur Jiu was the true God, the tribe forsook worshipping Him and began entering into spiritism and the worship of lesser gods who ruled over some aspect of creation.

In Ethiopia, the Gedeo people number in the millions and live in different tribes. These people sacrifice to evil spirits out of fear. However, behind this practice is an older belief in Magano, the one omnipotent creator.

The Incas in South America also have this same belief. Alfred Metraux, author of *History of the Incas*, discovered the Inca's originally worshipped Viracocha, the Lord, the omnipotent creator of all things. Worship of Inti, the Sun God, and other gods are only recent departures from this monotheistic belief.

These examples follow Paul's description in Romans 1 where he states that men departed from worship of the creator to the worship of the creation.

Original Monotheism and the Missionary Revolution

If original monotheism is true, it should impact our strategy for missions. {4} In fact, this theory has had a tremendous impact on evangelistic strategies throughout the world.

Don Richardson's book, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, illustrates how this theory shaped the missionary effort in China and Korea. In ancient China, the Lord of the Heavens was referred to as Shang Ti. In Korea, he was referred to as Hananim.

Over the centuries, the Chinese departed from the worship of Shang Ti and adopted the beliefs of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism that taught the worship of ancestors and the Buddha. However, even after two thousand years, the Chinese still mentioned the name of Shang Ti.

The first Christian missionaries to China arrived in the eighth century A.D. In the years that followed, instead of capitalizing on the residual monotheistic witness already in the land, missionaries imposed a completely foreign name to the God of the heavens. They emphasized that the God of the Bible is foreign and completely distinct from any God the Chinese had ever heard of before. As Don Richardson writes, "Those who took this position completely misunderstood the real situation." {5} Roman Catholic missionaries adopted new terms like Tien Ju, Master of Heaven or Tien Laoye for God in the Chinese language.

When Protestant missionaries arrived, they debated as to whether they should use Shang Ti or another term for the Almighty. Some argued that there should be a new name for a new thing. Those who chose to use Shang Ti did not take advantage of the full meaning behind the term. As a result, Protestant missionaries did not have as great an impact in China as they were to have in Korea.

In 1884, Protestant missionaries entered Korea. After studying the culture, they believed that Hananim was the residual witness of God. As these missionaries began to preach utilizing this remnant witness, their message was enthusiastically received. Instead of introducing a foreign God from the west, they were reintroducing the natives to the Lord of their ancestors whom they were interested to know. The Catholic missionaries who had been in Korea for decades were still employing designations for God from Chinese phrases like Tien Ju. As a result, the Korean people responded to the message from the Protestant missionaries and Christianity spread throughout the country at an explosive rate.

Paul writes in Acts 14, "In the past he (God) let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony." (vv. 16-17) The fact that all cultures have this remnant witness has had—and should continue to have—an impact on the missionary movement all over the world.

Notes

1. See Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 22-23.
2. Ibid., 24.
3. Ibid., 33.
4. Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura: Calif.: Regal Books, 1984), 33-71.
5. Ibid., 67.

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The Failure of Modern Ethics

Rick Wade looks at the rejection of the idea that ethics are rooted in reality external to us and the consequences of that rejection for modern ethics.



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

The Fall of Ethics

When you hear people discussing ethical issues today, do you get the sense they're talking on different levels? I don't mean different intellectual levels; I mean talking as though they are on different planes, in different worlds, even. When

we discuss ethical differences, we often find we're so at odds that the discussion quickly grinds to a halt . . . or degenerates into name-calling.

For example, consider the matter of a just war, something that's been a hot topic in recent years. Some say there can be no just war because it's impossible to tell who's the good guy and who's the bad, and no way to predict the outcome. So we ought to all be pacifists. Others say it is just to prepare militarily to meet potential threats, and to make clear that we will go to war to defend ourselves. Still others see justice as applying only to the defense of Third World nations against the exploitation of the Great Powers.[\[1\]](#) Such differences are the result of different fundamental beliefs about what justice *is*.

Because there are competing ideas about ethics, all of which seem to have some truth, the idea has taken root that there is no way to rationally justify ethical beliefs, that they come from within us rather than from some source outside us. The idea that our ethical assertions are rooted in our feelings and desires is called *emotivism*. Traditionally it was believed that ethics were rooted in something external to us, something objective and permanent. A fundamental reason for the change from the traditional view to contemporary subjective emotivism was that foundational beliefs about the nature of man and the universe were lost.

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre says ethicists today are like scientists trying to piece together a right understanding of science after a catastrophe has destroyed most of the records of scientific thought from the past. They have the jargon of ethics from former times, but they don't understand the fundamental principles underlying it or how it all ties together. Their task is similar to trying to put together a puzzle with pieces missing and no picture on the box to show what the puzzle is supposed to look like when put together.

It's tempting here to simply attribute this to the fact that Christian beliefs no longer have authority in our society. While this is true, it doesn't provide enough detail. For two reasons (at least) we need to have a fuller understanding of why people think the way they do with respect to ethics beyond just attributing their ideas to unbelief. First, understanding how we got where we are will help us see the problems with our view of ethics today. To simply say, "Well, that isn't biblical" means little today—indeed, some might be *pleased* to know their ideas don't accord with Scripture! If we want to bring about change in individuals and in society, it will be helpful to offer a more detailed and nuanced response.

Second, because we ourselves are so profoundly influenced by our society, Christians often think like non-Christians about moral issues. If we can't find it in a list of rules in the Bible, we often rely on our feelings or pragmatic thinking to guide us. Or if challenged about something we do, we might say, "Well, that's between me and the Holy Spirit. Stop being so legalistic!"

So how did we get here? Let's begin with a brief overview of the history of ethics in the West.

Traditional Ethics

Today people tend to ground their ethical beliefs in their own feelings or desires. Traditionally, however, ethics were grounded in the nature of external reality and the nature of man.

In the days of the ancient Greeks, morality had its foundation in the role into which one was born, or in the nature of the universe. In the tradition of Homer, for example, one's role in life defined one's good. So the king was a good king if he acted as a king should. A carpenter was good if he built well, and a slave was good if he served well.

For Plato, the ground of ethics was the nature of external reality. The standard for goodness, he believed, exists in a world beyond that of our senses—in the world of what he called the *forms*. Forms are abstract entities which allow us to identify a particular thing on earth. So, for example, we know what a dog is because we have an idea of the form “dog.” Forms provide a standard by which particular things in the universe are measured. And the highest form, according to Plato, was “the Good.”

For Aristotle, the universals Plato called “forms” are not off in some abstract, immaterial realm, but are inherent in the universe. Because the forms are in the natural world, Aristotle believed *purpose* was built into the natural world; by nature things are intended to move toward particular goals, to fit the image of the form.

Early Christian thinkers accepted the basic idea of Plato’s forms. However, they believed the forms—including the form of the Good—were in the mind of God, not in some abstract realm. Because God created the universe out of His wisdom and knowledge, morality was thus built into the order of the universe.

Aristotle believed that, as part of this purposeful universe, we, too, have purpose; we too move toward a goal or *telos*. The good toward which we move Aristotle called *well-being*. He believed all of us share a nature which requires us to live a certain kind of life in order to find well-being. Fulfillment is achieved by living a life of virtue. By reason we learn what is good for us in keeping with our nature, and we seek to find that end through the virtues.

A millennium later, Thomas Aquinas agreed with Aristotle that the universe has purpose built into it. He believed that this was due to the creative work of God. For Aquinas, the supreme good is higher than the universe. It is God Himself who is the Good that defines all goods. Our lives are to lead upward to

God. Although the ultimate fulfillment of the experience of God will only occur in the next life, Aquinas taught we are now to pursue the goodness of God, our well-being, through a virtuous life governed by the law found in Scripture and in nature.

Both Greek and early Christian ethics, then, were grounded in objective realities: the nature of man, the nature of the universe, and, with Christians, the nature and creative work of God. What we *ought* to do was determined by what *is*, by the nature of ultimate realities. But this was all to change.

Modern Ethics: The Loss of a *Telos*

About the time Aquinas was formulating his ideas on ethics, some other Christian scholars decided that God's law was *not* grounded in His *mind* but rather in His *will*. What was the significance of this shift? Well, God's law could change (according to His will), rather than being something eternally fixed. Laws were thus not universal and eternal. They could be provisional or have exceptions.

This change eventually resulted in a major shift in ethical thought. If morality wasn't grounded in God's reason and hence into the order of the universe He created, there was no necessary connection between what *was* and what *ought to be*. Ethics no longer had any ground in the universe itself. Fact and value were separated.^{2} Without value built into the universe, the idea of a purposeful (or *teleological*) universe was lost.

In modern times, the loss of the idea of an end or *telos* for the universe was extended to mankind. Belief in human nature had been undercut. What are we supposed to be? Alasdair MacIntyre says that previously there were three elements in ethics: man-as-he-is, man-as-he-should-become (referring to man's end or *telos*), and the ethical precepts that would enable him to move from one to the other. Now, because it is

no longer known what man really is by nature (or is supposed to be) the second part (man-as-he-should-become) was lost. What was left was man-as-he-is and some ethical principles that were mostly just holdovers from the past. So ethics is no longer about helping us become what we should be, but about helping us do our best as we are now.

In modern times multiple ethical systems have been devised to improve man-as-he-is with no understanding of man-as-he-should-become. Some have looked to psychological impressions as guiding principles (David Hume, for example). Utilitarians believe our greatest good is happiness, and they use a scientific approach to determine what makes for happiness. With Friedrich Nietzsche, in the nineteenth century, the split between fact and value was complete—his ideal man stands alone under no other rules but those of his own making.

One result of all this is that Westerners have ended up with a rule mentality in ethics rather than a character mentality. Because there is no universal law and no *telos* of man, we confine ourselves to what we should *do* rather than what we should *be*. Also, as noted earlier, because there are so many opinions about ethics, some have concluded that reason isn't a reliable source for ethics, that moral assertions are simply expressions of our own feelings and desires.

Emotivism

Thus, modern ethics has been left with the chore of understanding what makes for the good life for man-as-he-is with no notion of man-as-he-should-become. Different systems have been presented, each of which has a different starting point. While there is often agreement on particular ethical precepts, this is usually because these precepts are held over from traditional ethics albeit without their traditional foundation. It is also because of our God-given basic understanding of the law (Rom. 2:14-15).

How is it that two people can present systems of belief, each of which seems to be logically consistent, yet which are very different? It can be very confusing! Thoughtful people put together systems of ethics they think are objective and consistent, and then don't understand why others don't agree with them. This is because of different starting points. Starting points for ethics are important, for they determine which direction the logical progression of thought will lead. These starting points include ideas about the nature of mankind and the existence of God and whether He has revealed His desires to us. Other ideas grow out of these, such as notions about freedom and obligation. Such starting points are rarely brought into the conversation; they are simply assumed. And I think most people have no clue that, first, they *do* simply make important assumptions like those just noted, and second, that the ethical precepts they espouse are dependent upon these unspoken (and often unrecognized) starting points. Thus they state their moral opinions as if they are settled facts which everyone should recognize, and they are baffled when others don't agree. When people with opposing ethical ideas or systems clash, it is rather like two groups of people deciding to build highway systems, choosing places to start building on the basis of some nonrational reason, and constructing their highways according to different ideas about how highways are to function in transportation. Would it be any wonder if the two highway systems don't fit together well?

This is one reason ethical debates so often degenerate into name calling. For surely if someone doesn't recognize how clearly true what I'm saying is, it must be because the person is just being stubborn or dogmatic, or (one of the worst charges one can make today) allowing his religious beliefs to inform his moral beliefs!

The perceptive listener who understands the importance of starting points might want to press the individual to clarify his starting points and defend them. [{3}](#) What one is likely to

find, however, is that the person hasn't given such matters any thought. All we know is that we should be free to do what we like. Even the old maxim, "One's freedom goes as far as the next man's nose" doesn't mean too much. He should just move his nose!

One might excuse this on the basis that the average person doesn't have the time or training to probe such philosophical minutia. But even with philosophers, it has been observed they too have simply chosen or accepted their starting points for no rational reason.[{4}](#) The fact is that, philosophically speaking, the basic principles of each system cannot themselves be proved; they are *nonrational*. (This isn't to say they are *irrational*; just that they are outside the limits of rational proof.) They might be simply assumed or consciously chosen, but they have their basis in something other than reason.

As a result of all this confusion, some have concluded that there really *is* no rational basis for ethics; that all moral statements are in the final analysis just expressions of our own feelings, attitudes, or preferences.[{5}](#) As noted previously, this is called *emotivism*. But one has to ask: If our feelings and preferences are ultimately personal and individual, how can we then expect others to hold to the same beliefs? And in a society in which we must function together, how do we get others to agree with us if our beliefs aren't grounded in something external to the individual which can be rationally understood and acknowledged? It is done by swaying people emotionally. Morality isn't considered a factual matter, but an emotional, psychological one.

MacIntyre describes the situation this way:

Moral judgments, being expressions of attitude or feeling, are neither true nor false; and agreement in moral judgment is not to be secured by any rational method, for there are none. It is to be secured, if at all, by producing certain

non-rational effects on the emotions or attitudes of those who disagree with one. We use moral judgments not only to express our own feelings and attitudes, but also precisely to produce such effects in others.[\[6\]](#)

In traditional ethics, one could present a law to a person—a law coming from an outside source and presented as factual—along with reasons to believe it, and leave that person to think about it and decide whether it was true or false. But with emotivism, since there are no objective reasons behind a precept, one person must manipulate another to get the other to change his or her mind. C. L. Stevenson, “the single most important exponent of the theory” according to MacIntyre, said “that the sentence This is good’ means roughly the same as I approve of this; do so as well’. . . . Other emotivists,” MacIntyre continues, “suggested that to say This is good’ was to utter a sentence meaning roughly Hurray for this!’” Thus, to say “arson is wrong,” for example, is simply to express one’s own feelings and to try to influence others by producing certain feelings or attitudes in them. It’s like saying, “I disapprove of arson and you should, too.”

Thus, although I might *talk* as though I’m giving you good reasons, I’m really just trying to emotionally manipulate you. A *law* isn’t the authority; the person making the ethical claim is. When we realize this, we become suspicious, expecting others to try to manipulate us to get us to agree with them.

We see this kind of manipulation routinely in our society. An advertisement selling fast food might say absolutely nothing about the food itself (which may actually be bad for one’s health), but instead will seek to evoke feelings of warmth and happiness using images of people having a good time together. Intimidation through name-calling has been used by supporters of abortion rights in saying that pro-lifers are woman haters, vindictive, unconcerned about women’s health. Gay rights supporters call proponents of the traditional (and biblical) model of human sexuality “homophobic.”

In his excellent study on the rise of secular humanism in our society, James Hitchcock describes three stages of acceptance employed by the mass media that served to bring about a transformation in our moral outlook that had little or nothing to do with reason.^{7} The first stage was bringing to light things which were previously unmentionable all in the spirit of a new openness. The second was ridicule, “the single most powerful weapon in any attempt to discredit accepted beliefs.” Hitchcock notes that “countless Christians subtly adjusted their beliefs, or at least the way in which they presented those beliefs to the public, in order to avoid ridicule. Negative stereotypes were created, and people who believed in traditional values were kept busy avoiding being trapped in those stereotypes.” The third stage was “sympathy for the underdog.” Those upholding traditional morality (thinking primarily of the Judeo-Christian tradition) were depicted as bullies.

Such charges work on our emotions. Who wants to be considered a bigot or be charged with being a “fundamentalist” with all the negative baggage that term bears today? On the other hand, shouldn’t we support the “rights” of the supposed “oppressed” among us? The “victims” of “repressive” laws?

The Failure of Emotivism

There are a number of problems with emotivism.^{8} One problem is the moral divisions it permits in society. There is no single moral “umbrella” which covers all people. If your morality is yours, I cannot correct you; I cannot pull you under the umbrella, so to speak. When someone is accused of moral wrongdoing, the accused will likely say something such as, “Who are *you* to tell *me* I’m wrong? To each his own!” The person who responds this way believes an individual’s morality is his own and not objectively true for everyone. The person is thus offended that another person would try to force *his* preferences on him. The idea that the accusation might be

based on objective, universal moral law isn't even considered. Moral consensus is faltering in our society today largely because of such thinking.

The closest people get to thinking in objective terms is when they agree that something could be bad because of its practical consequences. But that's not at all the same as morality grounded in something universal and eternal. The individual is left to weigh the odds: to do the thing in question and suffer such-and-such consequences, or *not* to do it and suffer the loss of whatever he or she is trying to obtain or accomplish. Although it can be helpful to point out the consequences of our actions—there *are* consequences to sin—we can't base our moral decision making on such things, because we can't always predict the future. Even if we're accurate, the other person can still think, "Well, it won't hurt me," or, "I can handle that (the particular consequence)" and brush our objection aside.

The flip side of that is that we are often afraid to take a stand on ethical matters ourselves for fear of being accused of pushing our own subjective beliefs on others. We are only heard if we can couch our objection in terms of the other person's self-interest.

Another obvious problem with emotivism is inconsistency. Although emotivists *claim* to believe that moral precepts are expressions of personal preference, they often speak as though they are making objective moral claims binding on everyone. They exhibit here, I think, the truth of Paul's comment in Romans 2 that we all have the law written on our hearts. We *do* believe there is a difference between right and wrong, and that there are universal moral laws. As C.S. Lewis was fond of pointing out, we all know about fairness, and we expect others to as well. Thus, the emotivist moves back and forth between expressing moral beliefs as though they should hold for everyone, while also meeting challenges to their *own* actions by saying the challenger's beliefs are his own and can't be

forced on others. They can tell *you* what *you* should do, but don't dare tell *them* what *they* should do.

Finally, on the philosophical level, emotivists try to mix too different kinds of statements, which results in confusion. They hold that *evaluative* statements—those which are supposed to be making objective evaluations such as “arson is wrong”—express personal *preferences*. Evaluative statements and statements of preference are two different kinds. To substitute one for the other is illegitimate. If a person says arson is wrong, does he mean that arson is really wrong—for everyone? Or is he really just saying that he doesn't like arson? If a person is making an evaluative statement, then I need to consider his case and decide whether to continue my career as an arsonist! However, if he is just expressing his personal preferences, I can smile and say “that's nice” and start flicking my matches. Imagine the difficulty in public discussions of ethical issues under such circumstances.

Response

How shall we respond? To simply point people back to the Bible as the proper source of morality won't do today. The Bible is seen as just a religious book with rules pertinent only for those who believe it. That isn't to say we *shouldn't* speak God's Word into our society. The question is *how* we are to do that. When Paul was in Athens and had the chance to address the whole crowd assembled in the marketplace, he didn't quote Scripture. He *did*, however, give people biblical truth (Acts 17: 22-31)—in his own words and addressing their specific need.

Thus, we ought to consider offer more sophisticated arguments which are thoroughly biblical and which address the need of the day. As part of our efforts to convince people of the rightness of a biblical view of ethics, it would be helpful to follow the lead of early champions of traditional morality and reinvigorate the notion of purpose in the universe. We should

seek to reestablish the truth that we share certain characteristics simply because we are human, and that a virtuous life makes for a good life because of the way we're made. We can point out specific needs all humans share, such as security, belonging, and physical provision (food, etc.). We also know that certain things are wrong (such as incest), and that certain things are right (such as justice and courage). These kinds of things are universal; we rightly expect others to recognize their value or their evil. They are not matters of individual tastes.

We might not be able to gain the agreement of every individual on all the universals we propose, but if we work at it we can find at least one moral "law" any given individual will agree is universal. Once one is established, we can go for a second and third and so forth, until we think the person is willing to seriously rethink the current belief that ethics is a subjective matter. From there we can explain these realities by the fact that we are created by God.

Some scholars propose a return to the virtue tradition of ethics.[\[9\]](#) As Christians we can easily see the ethical benefit of recognizing that we have a nature given us by God through creation, and that there is an end or *telos* toward which we are moving which is defined by the character of Christ. This makes ethics a matter of character development rather than just rule following. Perhaps Protestants should reconsider the natural law tradition long championed in Roman Catholic theology. Whether that is the best direction to go is now being considered by reputable evangelical scholars. Whatever we decide about that, we must turn away from emotivism. It is bad for individuals and bad for society.

Notes

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 6.

2. Cf. Arthur Holmes, *Fact, Value, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 77.
 3. The late Francis Schaeffer is a very helpful resource for understanding the significance of starting points and learning how to expose them. See his *The God Who is There*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), especially Section IV.
 4. MacIntyre, 19f.
 5. Ibid., 11-12.
 6. Ibid., 12.
 7. James Hitchcock, *What Is Secular Humanism? Why Humanism Became Secular and How It Is Changing Our World* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1982), 83f.
 8. Those wishing to consider a more philosophically rigorous study are urged to read MacIntyre's *After Virtue*.
 9. Recall the popularity of William Bennett's book *The Book of Virtues* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993). Bennett, by the way, is a Roman Catholic who holds a B.A. in philosophy and a Ph.D. in political philosophy in addition to his law degree.
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Utilitarianism: The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number

Utilitarianism is an ethical system that determines morality on the basis of the greatest good for the greatest number. A modern form of utilitarianism is situation ethics. Kerby

Anderson examines the problems with this ethical system, and evaluates it from a biblical perspective.



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

You have probably heard a politician say he or she passed a piece of legislation because it did the greatest good for the greatest number of citizens. Perhaps you have heard someone justify their actions because it was for the greater good.

In this article, we are going to talk about the philosophy behind such actions. The philosophy is known as utilitarianism. Although it is a long word, it is in common usage every day. It is the belief that the sole standard of morality is determined by its usefulness.

Philosophers refer to it as a “teleological” system. The Greek word “telos” means end or goal. This means that this ethical system determines morality by the end result. Whereas Christian ethics are based on rules, utilitarianism is based on results.

Utilitarianism began with the philosophies of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Utilitarianism gets its name from Bentham’s test question, “What is the use of it?” He conceived of the idea when he ran across the words “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” in Joseph Priestly’s *Treatise of Government*.

Jeremy Bentham developed his ethical system around the idea of pleasure. He built it on ancient hedonism which pursued physical pleasure and avoided physical pain. According to Bentham, the most moral acts are those which maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This has sometimes been called the “utilitarian calculus.” An act would be moral if it brings the greatest amount of pleasure and the least amount of pain.

John Stuart Mill modified this philosophy and developed it apart from Bentham’s hedonistic foundation. Mill used the same

utilitarian calculus but instead focused on maximizing the general happiness by calculating the greatest good for the greatest number. While Bentham used the calculus in a quantitative sense, Mill used this calculus in a qualitative sense. He believed, for example, that some pleasures were of higher quality than others.

Utilitarianism has been embraced by so many simply because it seems to make a good deal of sense and seems relatively simple to apply. However, when it was first proposed, utilitarianism was a radical philosophy. It attempted to set forth a moral system apart from divine revelation and biblical morality. Utilitarianism focused on results rather than rules. Ultimately the focus on the results demolished the rules.

In other words, utilitarianism provided for a way for people to live moral lives apart from the Bible and its prescriptions. There was no need for an appeal to divine revelation. Reason rather than revelation was sufficient to determine morality.

Founders of Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham was a leading theorist in Anglo-American philosophy of law and one of the founders of utilitarianism. He developed this idea of a utility and a utilitarian calculus in the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1781).

In the beginning of that work Bentham wrote: "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will

serve but to demonstrate and confirm it.”{1}

Bentham believed that pain and pleasure not only explain our actions but also help us define what is good and moral. He believed that this foundation could provide a basis for social, legal, and moral reform in society.

Key to his ethical system is the principle of utility. That is, what is the greatest good for the greatest number?

Bentham wrote: “By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness.” {2}

John Stuart Mill was a brilliant scholar who was subjected to a rigid system of intellectual discipline and shielded from boys his own age. When Mill was a teenager, he read Bentham. Mill said the feeling rushed upon him “that all previous moralists were superseded.” He believed that the principle of utility “gave unity to my conception of things. I now had opinions: a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one among the best senses of the word, a religion; the inculcation and diffusion of what could be made the principle outward purpose of a life.”{3}

Mill modified Bentham’s utilitarianism. Whereas Bentham established an *act* utilitarianism, Mill established a *rule* utilitarianism. According to Mill, one calculates what is right by comparing the consequences of all relevant agents of alternative rules for a particular circumstance. This is done by comparing all relevant similar circumstances or settings at any time.

Analysis of Utilitarianism

Why did utilitarianism become popular? There are a number of reasons for its appeal.

First, it is a relatively simple ethical system to apply. To determine whether an action is moral you merely have to calculate the good and bad consequences that will result from a particular action. If the good outweighs the bad, then the action is moral.

Second, utilitarianism avoids the need to appeal to divine revelation. Many adherents to this ethical system are looking for a way to live a moral life apart from the Bible and a belief in God. The system replaces revelation with reason. Logic rather than an adherence to biblical principles guides the ethical decision-making of a utilitarian.

Third, most people already use a form of utilitarianism in their daily decisions. We make lots of non-moral decisions every day based upon consequences. At the checkout line, we try to find the shortest line so we can get out the door more quickly. We make most of our financial decisions (writing checks, buying merchandise, etc.) on a utilitarian calculus of cost and benefits. So making moral decisions using utilitarianism seems like a natural extension of our daily decision-making procedures.

There are also a number of problems with utilitarianism. One problem with utilitarianism is that it leads to an "end justifies the means" mentality. If any worthwhile end can justify the means to attain it, a true ethical foundation is lost. But we all know that the end does *not* justify the means. If that were so, then Hitler could justify the Holocaust because the end was to purify the human race. Stalin could justify his slaughter of millions because he was trying to achieve a communist utopia.

The end never justifies the means. The means must justify themselves. A particular act cannot be judged as good simply because it may lead to a good consequence. The means must be judged by some objective and consistent standard of morality.

Second, utilitarianism cannot protect the rights of minorities if the goal is the greatest good for the greatest number. Americans in the eighteenth century could justify slavery on the basis that it provided a good consequence for a majority of Americans. Certainly the majority benefited from cheap slave labor even though the lives of black slaves were much worse.

A third problem with utilitarianism is predicting the consequences. If morality is based on results, then we would have to have omniscience in order to accurately predict the consequence of any action. But at best we can only guess at the future, and often these educated guesses are wrong.

A fourth problem with utilitarianism is that consequences themselves must be judged. When results occur, we must still ask whether they are good or bad results. Utilitarianism provides no objective and consistent foundation to judge results because results are the mechanism used to judge the action itself.

Situation Ethics

A popular form of utilitarianism is *situation ethics* first proposed by Joseph Fletcher in his book by the same name.^{4} Fletcher acknowledges that situation ethics is essentially utilitarianism, but modifies the pleasure principle and calls it the *agape* (love) principle.

Fletcher developed his ethical system as an alternative to two extremes: legalism and antinomianism. The legalist is like the Pharisees in the time of Jesus who had all sorts of laws and regulations but no heart. They emphasized the law over love.

Antinomians are like the libertines in Paul's day who promoted their lawlessness.

The foundation of situation ethics is what Fletcher calls the law of love. Love replaces the law. Fletcher says, "We follow law, if at all, for love's sake."[{5}](#)

Fletcher even quotes certain biblical passages to make his case. For example, he quotes Romans 13:8 which says, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law."

Another passage Fletcher quotes is Matthew 22:37-40. "Christ said, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Proponents of situation ethics would argue that these summary verses require only one absolute (the law of love). No other universal laws can be derived from this commandment to love. Even the Ten Commandments are subject to exceptions based upon the law of love.

Situation ethics also accepts the view that the end justifies the means. Only the ends can justify the means; the means cannot justify themselves. Fletcher believes that "no act apart from its foreseeable consequences has any ethical meaning whatsoever."[{6}](#)

Joseph Fletcher tells the story of Lenin who had become weary of being told that he had no ethics. After all, he used a very pragmatic and utilitarian philosophy to force communism on the people. So some of those around him accused him of believing that the end justifies the means. Finally, Lenin shot back, "If the end does not justify the means, then in the name of sanity and justice, *what does?*"[{7}](#)

Like utilitarianism, situation ethics attempts to define morality with an “end justifies the means” philosophy. According to Fletcher, the law of love requires the greatest love for the greatest number of people in the long run. But as we will see in the next section, we do not always know how to define love, and we do not always know what will happen in the long run.

Analysis of Situation Ethics

Perhaps the biggest problem with situation ethics is that the law of love is too general. People are going to have different definitions of what love is. What some may believe is a loving act, others might feel is an unloving act.

Moreover, the context of love varies from situation to situation and certainly varies from culture to culture. So it is even difficult to derive moral principles that can be known and applied universally. In other words, it is impossible to say that to follow the law of love is to do such and such in every circumstance. Situations and circumstances change, and so the moral response may change as well.

The admonition to do the loving thing is even less specific than to do what is the greatest good for the greatest number. It has about as much moral force as to say to do the “good thing” or the “right thing.” Without a specific definition, it is nothing more than a moral platitude.

Second, situation ethics suffers from the same problem of utilitarianism in predicting consequences. In order to judge the morality of an action, we have to know the results of the action we are about to take. Often we cannot know the consequences.

Joseph Fletcher acknowledges that when he says, “We can’t always guess the future, even though we are always being forced to try.”[\[8\]](#) But according to his ethical system, we

have to *know* the results in order to make a moral choice. In fact, we should be relatively certain of the consequences, otherwise our action would by definition be immoral.

Situation ethics also assumes that the situation will determine the meaning of love. Yet love is not determined by the particulars of our circumstance but merely conditioned by them. The situation does not determine what is right or wrong. The situation instead helps us determine which biblical command applies in that particular situation.

From the biblical perspective, the problem with utilitarianism and situation ethics is that they ultimately provide no consistent moral framework. Situation ethics also permits us to do evil to achieve good. This is totally contrary to the Bible.

For example, Proverbs 14:12 says that “There is a way *which* seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” The road to destruction is paved with good intentions. This is a fundamental flaw with an “ends justifies the means” ethical system.

In Romans 6:1 Paul asks, “Are we to continue sinning so that grace may increase?” His response is “May it never be!”

Utilitarianism attempts to provide a moral system apart from God’s revelation in the Bible, but in the end, it does not succeed.

Notes

1. Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, printed in 1781 and published in 1789 (Batoche Books: Kitchener, ON Canada, 2000), 14.
2. Ibid.
3. John Stuart Mill, “Last Stage of Education and First of Self-Education,” *Autobiography, 1873* (New York: P.F. Collier & Sons, 1909-14).

4. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966).
5. Ibid., 70.
6. Ibid., 120.
7. Ibid., 121.
8. Ibid., 136.

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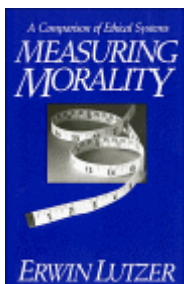
Cultural Relativism

Kerby Anderson presents the basics of cultural relativism and evaluates it from a Christian worldview perspective. Comparing the tenets of cultural relativism to a biblical view of ethics shows how these popular ideas fail the reasonableness test.

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



John Dewey



Any student in a class on anthropology cannot help but notice the differences between various cultures of the world. Differences in dress, diet, and social norms are readily apparent. Such diversity in terms of ethics and justice are also easily seen and apparently shaped by the culture in which we live.

If there is no transcendent ethical standard, then often

culture becomes the ethical norm for determining whether an action is right or wrong. This ethical system is known as *cultural relativism*.^[1] Cultural relativism is the view that all ethical truth is relative to a specific culture. Whatever a cultural group approves is considered right within that culture. Conversely, whatever a cultural group condemns is wrong.

The key to cultural relativism is that right and wrong can only be judged relative to a specified society. There is no ultimate standard of right and wrong by which to judge culture.

A famous proponent of this view was John Dewey, often considered the father of American education. He taught that moral standards were like language and therefore the result of custom. Language evolved over time and eventually became organized by a set of principles known as grammar. But language also changes over time to adapt to the changing circumstances of its culture.

Likewise, Dewey said, ethics were also the product of an evolutionary process. There are no fixed ethical norms. These are merely the result of particular cultures attempting to organize a set of moral principles. But these principles can also change over time to adapt to the changing circumstances of the culture.

This would also mean that different forms of morality evolved in different communities. Thus, there are no universal ethical principles. What may be right in one culture would be wrong in another culture, and vice versa.

Although it is hard for us in the modern world to imagine, a primitive culture might value genocide, treachery, deception, even torture. While we may not like these traits, a true follower of cultural relativism could not say these are wrong since they are merely the product of cultural adaptation.

Clifford Gertz argued that culture must be seen as “webs of meaning” within which humans must live.^{2} Gertz believed that “Humans are shaped exclusively by their culture and therefore there exists no unifying cross-cultural human characteristics.”^{3}

As we will see, cultural relativism allows us to be tolerant toward other cultures, but it provides no basis to judge or evaluate other cultures and their practices.

William Graham Sumner

A key figure who expanded on Dewey’s ideas was William Graham Sumner of Yale University. He argued that what our conscience tells us depends solely upon our social group. The moral values we hold are not part of our moral nature, according to Sumner. They are part of our training and upbringing.

Sumner argued in his book, *Folkways*: “World philosophy, life policy, right, rights, and morality are all products of the folkways.”^{4} In other words, what we perceive as conscience is merely the product of culture upon our minds through childhood training and cultural influence. There are no universal ethical principles, merely different cultural conditioning.

Sumner studied all sorts of societies (primitive and advanced), and was able to document numerous examples of cultural relativism. Although many cultures promoted the idea, for example, that a man could have many wives, Sumner discovered that in Tibet a woman was encouraged to have many husbands. He also described how some Eskimo tribes allowed deformed babies to die by being exposed to the elements. In the Fiji Islands, aged parents were killed.

Sumner believed that this diversity of moral values clearly demonstrated that culture is the sole determinant of our ethical standards. In essence, culture determines what is

right and wrong. And different cultures come to different ethical conclusions.

Proponents of cultural relativism believe this cultural diversity proves that culture alone is responsible for our morality. There is no soul or spirit or mind or conscience. Moral relativists say that what we perceive as moral convictions or conscience are the byproducts of culture.

The strength of cultural relativism is that it allows us to withhold moral judgments about the social practices of another culture. In fact, proponents of cultural relativism would say that to pass judgment on another culture would be ethnocentric.

This strength, however, is also a major weakness. Cultural relativism excuses us from judging the moral practices of another culture. Yet we all feel compelled to condemn such actions as the Holocaust or ethnic cleansing. Cultural relativism as an ethical system, however, provides no foundation for doing so.

Melville Herskovits

Melville J. Herskovits wrote in *Cultural Relativism*: "Judgments are based on experience, and experience is interpreted by each individual in terms of his own enculturation."⁵ In other words, a person's judgment about what is right and wrong is determined by their cultural experiences. This would include everything from childhood training to cultural pressures to conform to the majority views of the group. Herskovits went on to argue that even the definition of what is normal and abnormal is relative to culture.

He believed that cultures were flexible, and so ethical norms change over time. The standard of ethical conduct may change over time to meet new cultural pressures and demands. When

populations are unstable and infant mortality is high, cultures value life and develop ethical systems to protect it. When a culture is facing overpopulation, a culture redefines ethical systems and even the value of life. Life is valuable and sacred in the first society. Mercy killing might become normal and acceptable in the second society.

Polygamy might be a socially acceptable standard for society. But later, that society might change its perspective and believe that it is wrong for a man to have more than one wife. Herskovits believed that whatever a society accepted or rejected became the standard of morality for the individuals in that society.

He believed that “the need for a cultural relativistic point of view has become apparent because of the realization that there is no way to play this game of making judgment across cultures except with loaded dice.”^{6} Ultimately, he believed, culture determines our moral standards and attempting to compare or contrast cultural norms is futile.

In a sense, the idea of cultural relativism has helped encourage such concepts as multiculturalism and postmodernism. After all, if truth is created not discovered, then all truths created by a particular culture are equally true. This would mean that cultural norms and institutions should be considered equally valid if they are useful to a particular group of people within a culture.

And this is one of the major problems with a view of cultural relativism: you cannot judge the morality of another culture. If there is no objective standard, then someone in one culture does not have a right to evaluate the actions or morality of another culture. Yet in our hearts we know that certain things like racism, discrimination, and exploitation are wrong.

Evolutionary Ethics

Foundational to the view of cultural relativism is the theory of evolution. Since social groups experience cultural change with the passage of time, changing customs and morality evolve differently in different places and times.

Anthony Flew, author of *Evolutionary Ethics*, states his perspective this way: "All morals, ideas and ideals have been originated in the world; and that, having thus in the past been subject to change, they will presumably in the future too, for better or worse, continue to evolve."^[7] He denies the existence of God and therefore an objective, absolute moral authority. But he also believes in the authority of a value system.

His theory is problematic because it does not adequately account for the origin, nature, and basis of morals. Flew suggests that morals somehow originated in this world and are constantly evolving.

Even if we concede his premise, we must still ask, Where and when did the first moral value originate? Essentially, Flew is arguing that a value came from a non-value. In rejecting the biblical idea of a Creator whose character establishes a moral standard for values, Flew is forced to attempt to derive an *ought* from an *is*.

Evolutionary ethics rests upon the assumption that values are by nature constantly changing or evolving. It claims that it is of value that values are changing. But is *this* value changing?

If the answer to this question is no, then that would mean that moral values don't have to always change. And if that is the case, then there could be unchanging values (known as absolute standards). However, if the value that values change is itself unchanging, then the view is self-contradictory.

Another form of evolutionary ethics is *sociobiology*. E. O. Wilson of Harvard University is a major advocate of sociobiology, and claims that scientific materialism will eventually replace traditional religion and other ideologies.[{8}](#)

According to sociobiology, human social systems have been shaped by an evolutionary process. Human societies exist and survive because they work and because they have worked in the past.

A key principle is the reproductive imperative.[{9}](#) The ultimate goal of any organism is to survive and reproduce. Moral systems exist because they ultimately promote human survival and reproduction.

Another principle is that all behavior is selfish at the most basic level. We love our children, according to this view, because love is an effective means of raising effective reproducers.

At the very least, sociobiology is a very cynical view of human nature and human societies. Are we really to believe that all behavior is selfish? Is there no altruism?

The Bible and human experience seem to strongly contradict this. Ray Bohlin's [article](#) on the Probe Web site provides a detailed refutation of this form of evolutionary ethics.[{10}](#)

Evaluating Cultural Relativism

In attempting to evaluate cultural relativism, we should acknowledge that we could indeed learn many things from other cultures. We should never fall into the belief that our culture has all the answers. No culture has a complete monopoly on the truth. Likewise, Christians must guard against the assumption that their Christian perspective on their cultural experiences should be normative for every other culture.

However, as we have already seen, the central weakness of cultural relativism is its unwillingness to evaluate another culture. This may seem satisfactory when we talk about language, customs, even forms of worship. But this non-judgmental mindset breaks down when confronted by real evils such as slavery or genocide. The Holocaust, for example, cannot be merely explained away as an appropriate cultural response for Nazi Germany.

Cultural relativism faces other philosophical problems. For example, it is insufficient to say that morals originated in the world and that they are constantly changing. Cultural relativists need to answer how value originated out of non-value. How did the first value arise?

Fundamental to cultural relativism is a belief that values change. But if the value that values change is itself unchanging, then this theory claims an unchanging value that all values change and evolve. The position is self-contradictory.

Another important concern is conflict. If there are no absolute values that exist trans-culturally or externally to the group, how are different cultures to get along when values collide? How are we to handle these conflicts?

Moreover, is there ever a place for courageous individuals to challenge the cultural norm and fight against social evil? Cultural relativism seems to leave no place for social reformers. The abolition movement, the suffrage movement, and the civil rights movement are all examples of social movements that ran counter to the social circumstances of the culture. Abolishing slavery and providing rights to citizens are good things even if they were opposed by many people within society.

The Bible provides a true standard by which to judge attitudes and actions. Biblical standards can be used to judge

individual sin as well as corporate sin institutionalized within a culture.

By contrast, culture cannot be used to judge right and wrong. A changing culture cannot provide a fixed standard for morality. Only God's character, revealed in the Bible provides a reliable measure for morality.

Notes

1. The general outline for this material can be found in chapter two of *Measuring Morality* (Richardson, Tx.: Probe Books, 1989).

2. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

3. E. M. Zechenter, "Cultural Relativism and the Abuse of the Individual, *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 1997, 53:323.

4. William Graham Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1906), 76.

5. Melville J. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism* (New York: Random House, 1973), 15.

6. *Ibid.*, 56.

7. Anthony Flew, *Evolutionary Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968), 55.

8. E. O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

9. Robert Wallace, *The Genesis Factor* (New York: Morrow and Co., 1979).

10. Dr. Ray Bohlin, "[Sociobiology: Evolution, Genes and Morality](#)"

Living in Babylon

How are Christians to be in the world but not of it? Don Closson offers a way to think about the American culture that God has placed us into.



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

Since the era of the Moral Majority and the rise of the so called “religious right,” there has been an ongoing debate within the Christian community about how to define the appropriate relationship between Christians and the contemporary American culture. Many believers find the teaching that Christians are to be “in the world but not of it” difficult to interpret and apply to their daily lives.

Part of our problem in relating to our culture is in identifying an accurate metaphor for modern America. Some see America as a new Israel, a nation that God has providentially blessed, a nation that is special to God in a way that other nations are not. When pressed, few would actually claim that America has replaced Israel of the Old Testament, but many see America as a uniquely Christian nation. Although one cannot dismiss the powerful influence that Christian thought has had on this country, this view of America raises some difficult questions.

For instance, how should believers respond when a majority of Americans reject the Christian worldview regarding specific moral issues such as abortion or gay rights? To what length are we required to go to maintain a Christian society? Many now believe that we are confronted with the dilemma of living

in a largely post-Christian America, and that soon we will no longer have the political power to pass legislation that would enforce our views.

A few have already given in to the temptation to respond violently when the legal system fails to promote a biblical standard, resulting in murdered abortion doctors and bombs set off outside of gay bars in the name of Christ. They reason that if God ordered the Promised Land to be purged of Baal worshippers and their sinful culture by force, violence is justified today in the U.S. to remove its sinful practices.

Christians almost seem surprised to encounter sin in America, or to discover that our culture might be following the path of European nations that had previously been influenced by biblical truth. Some act as if God has promised that America would be exempt from worldly temptations. Even though the vast majority of Christians don't stockpile weapons or plan violent revolution, some of us become angry and paralyzed by the way America has changed over the last few decades.

Rather than seeing the U.S. as the new Israel, it might be more helpful to see it as a modern Babylon. Christians in America should see a reflection of themselves in Daniel, who found himself exiled in Babylon and having to live in an alien culture that was often hostile to his faith. Or perhaps we should identify with the apostle Paul who planted churches and disciplined future leaders under the cruel and tyrannical Roman government.

Let's consider what it means to live a life worthy of the calling that we have in Christ in modern day America, and seek to better understand the admonition to be "in the world but not of it."

Aliens and Strangers

In his new book, *Standing for Christ in a Modern Babylon*,

Marvin Olasky argues that if we are to have an influence on the culture that exists in America today, we need to see ourselves more like Daniel in Babylon than like Joshua taking the Promise Land. America is very different from Joshua's situation. Ancient Israel was a theocracy established and ruled by God for a people who had covenanted with God to live according to Mosaic Law and to be separate from other cultures. America is neither a theocracy nor a promised land. Although America benefited from the participation of godly men and biblical ideals during its founding, it is a republic that derives the right to rule from its people. As people have moved away from strongly held Christian convictions, so have its institutions.

Olasky describes modern America as a theme park for liberty, noting that it is idolized by the rest of the world as a country that promotes nearly unlimited personal freedom without any commensurate requirement for virtue. It is very much part of the "world" or *cosmos* that the New Testament writers John, Paul and James warn us that is contrary to the Gospel of Christ. Regarding this "world" James writes, "don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God." (James 4:4) To be a friend of the world is to agree with a system of values that the world represents. This worldview refuses to acknowledge God's role as creator and sustainer of the universe and rejects the moral structure that He made part of its existence. It also rejects the need for a savior. It's not that there is no support for Christian virtue left in America, but that the predominant set of values found in our major institutions no longer reflects a biblical worldview.

If asked, most believers would agree that our life here on earth is principally a place to prepare for the next life. The New Testament provides a clear picture of what our relationship to the world should be characterized by. In 1

Peter (2:11-12) we are told, "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."

Our lives here in America, or wherever God puts us, are to be characterized by the awareness that the world as it exists is not our permanent abode. Our affection for the things of this world should fade, and our desire to build God's Kingdom should increase because we have become "fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household." (Eph. 2:19)

Ambassadors for Christ

Considerable energy is spent by sincere and well-meaning Christians to make America a more righteous nation. Their dream is to use political power to transform the American culture and its institutions into a society that becomes a beacon to the world for God's righteousness and compassion. Others have given up on America and see separation from its worldly culture as the only appropriate Christian response, turning their backs to the political process as well as the arts and entertainment that it offers. Many Christians live in a state of constant tension between the heavenly Kingdom of God and the earthly kingdom that God has placed them into. They endure a dual citizenship that seems to pull them in two opposite directions.

The problem for Christians hoping to transform American society is that, although the Bible tells us much about the kind of culture that is to exist within the church, it says little about what kind of culture should exist outside of it. The New Testament doesn't encourage believers to fight for political reform or even for religious freedom within the Roman political system of the day. There are many "one another" passages that describe how one believer is to relate

to another believer, and there are places where we are told to pray for our political leaders and to obey our country's laws. But little is said about the kind of political or social institutions that should be endorsed by Christians. Beyond working for justice and human dignity in a general way, how should Christians relate to the current society that we live in?

A clear biblical teaching for all believers is that we are to be ambassadors for Christ. Some may be called vocationally to politics, the arts, or even the entertainment world, but each of us can and should be an ambassador for God's Kingdom wherever He places us and regardless of how He has gifted us as individuals. To do this well, ambassadors need to be cognizant of our sovereign's message or agenda. 2 Cor. 5:18-20 says that we have been given a message of reconciliation, and that God is using us to appeal to our neighbors to be reconciled with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

All of us desire to see our culture transformed into a reflection of God's truth, justice, and mercy. However, we also need to acknowledge the role of providence in both the timing and the extent of any future cultural revival. America has experienced awakenings in the past and God has certainly used individuals and organizations to realign our culture with His character. But ultimately the timing and the manner of revival is in God's hands and it will be accomplished by those who see themselves as ambassadors sharing Christ, not as a King David ruling on God's throne over America.

Jeremiah's Charge

Using the metaphor of believers in Babylon, it might be helpful to read how the prophet Jeremiah told the children of Israel to live among the pagans of that day. He told them to:

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives

for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." (Jer. 29:4-7)

It is significant what Jeremiah did *not* tell the Jews to do while in Babylon. They were not told to establish the Kingdom there; it wasn't the right place or time. They were also not instructed to use guerilla tactics to overthrow the Babylonian political structures. God Himself would eventually bring about the conditions of their release to rebuild the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem. They were to instead seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which God had sent them, and to pray to God for it. This is very similar to the language that Paul uses in writing to Timothy when he tells him to pray "for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." (1 Tim. 2:1-3) As mentioned earlier, Peter says we are to "live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us." (1 Pet. 2:12) He literally says that we are to live a "noble lifestyle" so that the pagans will see our good works and eventually recognize and give glory to God.

Unfortunately, according to recent surveys Christians are not known for their "noble lifestyles." In one survey, George Barna discovered that "evangelicals" ranked near the bottom of a list of population segments regarding favorable or positive impressions, right between lesbians and prostitutes.^{1} We are often so consumed by our displeasure with what unbelievers are doing that we fail to see the activities of our daily lives in terms of ministry. When we integrate into our daily living an understanding to reflect God's image, be stewards over His creation, and love others as we love ourselves, we will begin to view all of our activities as acts of worship and service

to God. As Peter reminds us regarding Christian maturity: “For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 1:8)

The Language of Addition

How do we stand for Christ as His ambassador in America without getting depressed? It might be helpful to ask how the apostle Paul kept his cool in Athens as he viewed the various idols built for a pantheon of Greek and Roman gods, or how Daniel was able to function in a pagan Babylonian government that “praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand.” (Dan. 5:23) Both men probably had to turn to God often, quiet their souls, and occasionally see some humor in the culture in which God had placed them, all the while realizing that it is ultimately God who changes cultures by working through flawed but redeemed individuals.

Marvin Olasky remarks in *Standing for Christ in a Modern Babylon* on the impractical focus Christians often have on using censure, boycotts, or legislation to erase sinful behavior from American society. He writes: “We need to understand that saying, ‘Thou shalt do X because God says so,’ leads to blank stares or incredulous glances. . . .”^{2} He adds “We should understand that in the American liberty theme park, we cannot eliminate the negative; so our realistic option is to emphasize the positive.”^{3} A nation that has elevated tolerance and choice to its greatest virtues is much more likely to respond to positive moral alternatives than to chastisement.

Just as Paul offered an alternative to the gods of Athens, we need to be prepared to suggest a Christian alternative to the views held by unbelievers in America. As effective ambassadors everywhere must do, we need to understand the issues of the day and respond in a manner that resonates with the culture.

When P.E.T.A. and others extol the rights of the “species of the month” while saying nothing of the killing of unborn children, we need to suggest the view that children are far more precious than chickens, dogs, and cats. When the splendor and wonder of human sexuality is twisted and perverted in novel ways, we need to be ready to offer the benefits and beauty of monogamous heterosexual unions for both spouses and their offspring. When someone argues that morality is subjective and that anarchy is a reasonable response, we should be prepared to offer a picture of how biblically revealed virtues can profit a society. Using the language of addition will encounter far more listening ears in America than will the language of boycotts, censure, and anger.

The ultimate reason for being an effective ambassador, and for apologetics, is to improve the chances that the gospel will be heard and received. Our mission is not to merely reduce sin but to model Christ so that people will come to know and accept the wonderful message “that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them . . . so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:19,21)

Notes

1. Barna Research Online, <http://www.barna.org/cgi-bin/PagePressRelease.asp?PressReleaseID=127&Reference=D> (Jan. 30, 2004).
2. Marvin Olasky, *Standing for Christ in a Modern Babylon* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2003), 23.
3. Ibid.

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The Gnostic Matrix

In the wake of the mega-hit movie The Matrix, which features gnostic themes, Don Closson examines gnosticism and the influence this philosophy has on our culture.

When *The Matrix* came out in 1999, it became an instant hit movie and a trend setter for the science fiction genre. The story takes place in a future dystopia where intelligent machines have taken over and are farming humans to generate electrical power. The matrix itself is a computer program that gives humans the illusion that they are living in a late twentieth century world when, in reality, they are existing in womb-like pods that provide nutrients while siphoning off the natural electrical current that human bodies create. The movie is known both for its visual style and its references to many postmodern and religious ideas. The writers used a biblical motif throughout their story. The main character of the movie Neo, played by Keanu Reeves, is called the "one." He dies and comes to life again after being kissed by a love interest named Trinity. In this resurrected state he is able to destroy the evil agents within the matrix and appears to ascend into the heavens at the end of the movie. A ship called the *Nebuchadnezzar* is used by the rebel humans to hide from the intelligent machines and to search for the lost city of Zion. However, in spite of its use of many biblical terms, this is not a Christian movie.

In fact, *The Matrix* is syncretistic; it uses ideas from a number of religious traditions that are popular in American culture. Along with Christian notions, the authors have incorporated ideas from Zen Buddhism and Gnosticism. Gnosticism is a belief system named after the Greek word "gnosis" or knowledge. If the authors had been attempting to portray a Christian view of the human condition, they would have focused on sin and the need for a savior. Instead, the movie's characters find a kind of salvation in discovering

secret knowledge and in realizing that the world is not what it appears to be. Neo becomes a Gnostic messiah, one chosen to be a way-shower out of the illusion of the matrix.

Gnostic gospels began to compete with Christianity in the second century after Christ. Our first clue to their existence is found in the writings of early Church Fathers like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus who defended Christian orthodoxy from these heretical ideas. The popularity of Gnosticism began to decline by the end of the third century and lay largely dormant until the recent discovery of Gnostic texts in Egypt in 1945. Now known as the Nag Hammadi Library, this remarkable find was made available in English in 1977 and has been used by both religious leaders and secular scholars to argue that a Gnostic gospel should be considered alongside the orthodox Christian message.

In this article we will consider both the content of Gnosticism and influence Gnostic ideas are having on our culture.

The Birth of Gnosticism

In December 1945, an Arab named Muhammad Ali found a jar buried in the ground near Nag Hammadi, Egypt, that contained thirteen leather-bound codices or books dating from around 350 A.D. For the first time modern scholars had access to early copies of Gnostic writings which had previously been known only through derogatory references made by early Christians.

The core beliefs of the Gnostic gospel begin with the assertion that the world in its current state is not good, nor is it the creation of a good god. In fact, the cosmos is seen as a mistake, the action of a minor deity who was unable to achieve a creation worthy of permanence. The result is a world of pain, sorrow and death filled with human beings that long to be freed from a material existence. Deep within each person is a divine spark that connects humanity with the ultimate

spiritual being who remains hidden from creation. The only hope for humanity is to acquire the information it needs to perfect itself and evolve out of its current physical state. The Gnostic Jesus descended from the spiritual realm to show the way for the rest of humanity, not to die as an atonement for sin, but to make available information necessary for self-perfection.

Although a common core of ideas is found within Gnostic writings, a variety of religious ideas were popular among its leaders. There are four second century Gnostic teachers who have contributed to our current understanding of Gnosticism. Two consist of mythical reinterpretations of the Old Testament. The *Apocryphon of John* claims to possess a vision of John, the son of Zebedee. It offers a hierarchy of deities based on the names of Yahweh, ultimately concluding with a minor god named Ialdabaoth who is the angry and jealous god of the OT who falsely claims there is no other god beside him. The second writer named Justin authored *Baruch*, a work that mixed together Greek, Jewish and Christian ideas. Again, it portrays OT characters as minor deities, but both Hercules and Jesus have a role in this system. Gnostics baptized into this cult claimed to enter into a higher spiritual realm and swore themselves to secrecy.

The other two second century forms of Gnosticism were more philosophically developed. Basilides of Alexandria and Valentinus, who wrote in Rome about 140 A.D., brought together secular Greek thinking with New Testament concepts. Basilides' starting point of absolute nothingness indicates that he may have encountered Indian Hindu ideas in Alexandria. He also regarded the God of the Old Testament as an oppressive angel. But the most important Gnostic concepts are those of Valentinus. It is his system that has been borrowed from by today's New Age followers.

The Gnosticism of Valentinus

Valentinus claimed to have learned his gospel message from a student of the apostle Paul named Theodas. At the center of this Gnostic system is the notion that something is wrong, that the human condition and experience is defective. Orthodox Christianity and Judaism both point to human rebellion as the source of this flawed existence; however Gnosticism blames the creator. Valentinus' version of creation begins with a primal being called Bythos who, after a long period of silence, emanates 30 beings called "aeons" (also known as the "pleroma"). Eventually, one of the lowest aeons, Wisdom or Sophia, becomes pregnant and gives birth to a demiurge, Jehovah, who in turn creates the physical world. The world is not "good" as indicated by the Genesis account. It is flawed and a barrier to humanity's redemption.

Valentinus argued that the fallen nature of the cosmos was not our doing, and that we each have the capacity to transcend the physical creation to achieve redemption. The key is to possess correct knowledge about reality. Like the humans suffering in the movie *The Matrix*, he believed that "the human mind lives in a largely self-created world of illusion from whence only the enlightenment of a kind of Gnosis can rescue it."[\[1\]](#) Valentinus taught that both body and soul are part of the corrupt creation and that redemption is only for the spirit or inner man. His view of personal redemption has more in common with Hinduism and Buddhism than with orthodox Christianity. To the Gnostics, Jesus is significant only because of the knowledge he possessed and the example that he set, not for being God in the flesh or for being a sacrifice for sin. Because the illusion presented to us by the world can only be corrected by the right knowledge, any guilt we feel for our rebellion against an all-powerful holy God is false guilt; for such a God doesn't exist.

The teachings of Valentinus had considerable impact on his

world. Modern day Gnostics, however, don't teach all of his ideas. Let's see why.

Modern Day Gnostics

World religion scholar Joseph Campbell writes that, "We are all manifestations of Buddha consciousness, or Christ consciousness..." and that our main problem is that we have merely forgotten this truth. He admonishes us to wake up to this awareness, which he adds, "is the very essence of Christian Gnosticism and of the Thomas Gospel."[\[2\]](#)

The concept of a "Christ consciousness" is common in New Age literature. The origin of this idea can be traced back to Gnostic ideas that competed with the traditional teachings of the Apostles in the early church.

As New Age thinking has progressed in its many forms, the use of Gnosticism as a theoretical underpinning has grown. Since English translations become widely available in the late 1970s, Gnostic texts such as the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *First Apocalypse of James* have been used in conjunction with Eastern religious writings to support both New Age radical environmentalism and neo-pagan feminist religion. Gnostic writings have motivated scholars like Elaine Pagels and Joseph Campbell to find parallels between Buddhism and Christianity. They have also lent support to the belief that it was a Christ (or Buddha) consciousness that made Jesus a powerful example of how humans can experience enlightenment. But are the Gnostic scriptures faithfully represented in these modern ideas?

Author Douglas Groothuis argues that the Gnostic worldview is often misrepresented by its modern adherents. For instance, Pagels and psychologist Carl Jung translate the teachings of the Gnostics into general psychological truths while rejecting their teachings regarding the origin and operation of the universe. It seems inconsistent at best to adopt the supposed

outcomes of the Gnostic faith while rejecting its core teachings.

Neither does Gnosticism affirm current attitudes towards the environment found among many New Agers. Gnosticism teaches that all matter, including mother Earth, is seen as a deterrent towards reaching our true spiritual state. In fact, Gnosticism holds that all matter is a mistake. It is certainly not to be worshipped or revered as many of our pantheistic friends do.

Although female divinities are part of the Gnostic hierarchy of emanations and the New Age journal *Gnosis* devoted an entire issue to the Goddess movement, the Gnosticism of the early church era was decidedly not feminist. The divinity Sophia is at the heart of the problem facing humanity; her offspring brought into existence the physical world from which the Gnostic must escape.

Women in general do not fair well in the Gnostic texts. The *Gospel of Thomas* quotes Peter as saying, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life." Jesus supposedly adds, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven." [\[3\]](#) Jesus shows no sign of Gnostic influence in the New Testament. He never demeans women for being female, nor does he suggest that they become men.

Finally, Gnostic texts are used to support the New Age doctrine of tolerance for those on a different spiritual journey, and the popular belief in reincarnation. But Groothuis notes that "several Gnostic documents speak of the damnation of those who refuse to become enlightened, particularly apostates from Gnostic groups." [\[4\]](#) It's interesting that these passages aren't often taught by New Age followers.

The Reliability of Gnostic Texts

Is the *Gospel of Thomas* a more reliable witness to the real teachings of Christ than the New Testament? Is it factually more trustworthy? Famed Bible scholar F. F. Bruce is pretty blunt regarding the competing truth claims. He writes, "There is no reason why the student of this conflict should shrink from making a value judgment: the Gnostic schools lost because they deserved to lose."[\[5\]](#) Few would question the historical record that Gnosticism was rejected by the church in the second and third centuries. But what about today? Are there valid reasons to reevaluate the legitimacy of the Gnostic writings?

First, a decision must be made between the two conflicting depictions of Christ. The content and the literary style of the Gnostic writings compared to the biblical record are so different that they cannot both be accurate.

It's significant to note that the Gnostic texts do not offer a recounting of the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Much of what is attributed to Jesus is detached from any historical setting. *The Letter of Peter to Philip* depicts Jesus "more as a lecturer on philosophy than a Jewish prophet."[\[6\]](#) The Apostles supposedly ask Jesus, "Lord, we would like to know the deficiency of the aeons and of their pleroma."[\[7\]](#) Jesus responds with Gnostic teachings about God the Father and a female deity whose disobedience results in the physical cosmos. This is not the Jesus of the New Testament.

Another question regarding Gnostic texts is their date of origin. The documents found at Nag Hammadi are quite old, probably dating from A.D. 350-400. The original writings are even older, but not prior to the second century A. D. Thus, the consensus of most scholars is that they appeared after the New Testament had been completed. The *Gospel of Truth*, which is attributed to Valentinus, actually quotes the New Testament

at length. It would be odd to accept its authority over the New Testament.

Unfortunately, the documents have also experienced considerable physical deterioration. The English translation of The Nag Hammadi Library exhibits many ellipses, parentheses, and brackets that point to gaps in the text due to this deterioration. Since most of the texts have no other manuscript copies available, their accuracy is questionable.

There is also the question of authorship. The *Letter of Peter to Philip* is usually dated at the end of the second century or possibly into the third.^{8} Since this is long after Peter's death, it is considered to be pseudepigraphic, falsely attributed to a noteworthy individual for added credibility.

Finally, the most popular and ardently defended text, the *Gospel of Thomas*, was not mentioned in the early church until the early third century.

The Gnostic view of Jesus was rejected by the early church and should be rejected today.

Notes

1. >Stephan A. Hoeller, *Valentinus: A Gnostic For All Seasons*, <http://www.gnosis.org/valentinus.htm> on 12/20/2002
2. Douglas Groothuis, *Jesus In an Age of Controversy* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 74.
3. *Gospel of Thomas*, 114.
4. Groothuis, 100.
5. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon Of Scripture*, (InterVarsity Press, 1988), 277.
6. Groothuis, 104.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 107.