

The Importance of Parents in the Faith of Emerging Adults

Steve Cable explores the results of Probe's survey of 18- to 40-year-old born agains, focusing on the role of parents in their faith.

The State of Born Again Emerging Adults

In previous articles[{1}](#) we considered the dramatic changes in the beliefs of American evangelicals particularly among young adults. It certainly appears that we are sliding into an era of cultural captivity where one's identification with Christ and an evangelical church does not keep one from holding a set of beliefs consistent with the culture and counter to biblical truth. Here we want to consider the role that parents had in establishing these inconsistent belief systems of their children, and think about some ways today's parents may be able to counter these destructive patterns in the future. Before looking at the roles parents do and should play in establishing these belief systems, let's consider some of the key belief trends that are driving our concern.



Foremost among our concerns is the dramatic change in the number of young adults who hold to no Christian religious beliefs or espouse a liberal view of Christianity. Looking at data from 1970 to the present, we uncover a disturbing new trend. From 1970 through 1990, the number of 18- to 25-year-old Americans who professed no Christian belief was constant at about twenty percent of the population. In 2000, this non-Christian group had grown to about thirty percent of this young generation, and by 2010 the numbers had exploded to around thirty-six percent.[{2}](#) If this trend continues, less than half of young adults will consider themselves Christians by the year 2020.

This concern over the future is heightened by the conflicted beliefs of young born agains. Among young adults, who consider themselves born again believers, only about one-third of them ascribe to a basic set of biblical beliefs. These beliefs include a creator God, a sinless Jesus, salvation through grace, a real Satan, an accurate Bible and the existence of absolute moral truths. This statistic means that over two-thirds of these born agains do not ascribe to one or more of these beliefs. Overall, this means that less than ten percent of young American adults profess to being born again and hold to a set of biblical beliefs as compared to the sixty-eight percent who hold to no Christian beliefs or a liberal view of Christianity.

When we delve further into young adult beliefs, we find that their beliefs appear to be hodgepodge of cultural concepts and what's going on in their life, with little or no connection to their religious upbringing. Even though emerging adults looked to religion as a place to learn good morals, in his study Christian Smith discovered a chilling paradox. "It was clear . . . that emerging adults felt entirely comfortable describing various religious beliefs that they affirmed but that appeared to have no connection whatsoever to the living of their lives." [\[3\]](#) One emerging adult observed, "I don't think it's the basis of how I live, it's just, I guess I'm just learning about my religion and my beliefs. But I still kinda retain my own decision or at least a lot of it on situations I've had and experiences." [\[4\]](#) In fact, when we look at how many have a consistent biblical worldview that carries over into their views on sexuality, science, a concern for the poor, and basic religious practices, the survey data indicates that less than two percent of evangelical young adults would qualify. So the overwhelming majority of young evangelicals are not carrying their basic religious beliefs into the realm of everyday decision making.

The Impact of Parents on Spiritual Beliefs

So, what role did their parents have in establishing these inconsistent beliefs?

In 2010, we commissioned a survey to help us examine the causes and potential opportunities to change the marked shift in the thinking of young adults over the last decade. We surveyed over 800 born again, young adults across America to get an understanding for what they thought about spiritual and cultural issues *and* how they felt about their beliefs and actions. One area of questioning was, “When you think about how you developed the religious beliefs you hold today, who do you feel had the greatest influence on you? Did your beliefs come from your family, your friends, your church, your independent studies, your college professors, or others?”

The answers we received to this question were not shocking but still sobering. More than sixty-five percent of the respondents reported that the source that had the greatest influence on their religious beliefs was a family member, with the vast majority of those saying it was parents or grandparents. Over twenty percent of the respondents pointed to another influential individual such as a pastor, youth leader, or college professor. Only about eleven percent stated that something less personal such as a youth group or the Bible was the greatest influencer of their religious beliefs.

As Christian Smith noted, “What the best empirical evidence shows . . . is that . . . when it comes to religion, parents are in fact *hugely* important.”[\[5\]](#) In fact, “religious commitments, practices, and investments made during childhood and the teenage years, by parents and others in families and religious communities, matter—they make a difference.”[\[6\]](#)

Of those who stated that a family member was the primary influence, over seven out of ten stated it was their mother or

grandmother while less than three out of ten said it was their father or grandfather. So clearly among born again young adults, the female side of the family has a greater influence in passing down religious beliefs than do the males. One can postulate that this may be due to a combination of greater spiritual involvement on the female side of the family and a higher level of communication with their children. However, the rate of fatherly influence almost doubles for young adults with a biblical worldview compared to those without such a worldview. So it appears that fathers who hold a biblical worldview are much more likely to be involved in establishing the spiritual beliefs of their children.

Less than one out of ten of the respondents listed a pastor as the primary source of influence, and only three percent listed a youth group. These church-related functions may have an important role in helping to shape our religious beliefs, but our survey shows that it is at best a secondary role for the vast majority of people. We are mistaken if we are relying on the church to pass on the right type of beliefs to our children. Parents, what you communicate through your lives is picked up by your children. What are you communicating to them concerning religious beliefs?

The Translation of our Beliefs

Since the beliefs of today's young adults are dramatically different than the dominant beliefs of forty years ago, does this mean that older adults have changed their beliefs as well, or have the beliefs been translated by the younger culture into something different?

An important part of understanding this question is that the survey results on who was the most significant source of our religious beliefs were almost identical regardless of racial background or levels of church attendance. In other areas of consideration such as biblical worldview, views on cultural

behavioral issues, and church involvement, we found significant differences based on racial background, education, etc. But it appears clear that no matter our race, economic level, or religious beliefs, our mothers are the primary sources that pass down those beliefs to the next generation. In other words, if born-again believers have degraded views on worldview and cultural issues, it appears that their parents are communicating (or at least not contradicting) similar views.

As we look at the hodgepodge of religious and cultural beliefs held in our society, we can see the results of what Christian Smith referred to as “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism.”[\[7\]](#) The Baby Boomers and their children are captives of our society’s focus on pluralism and tolerance as the only acceptable views. With this view, I can hold to certain religious beliefs that are strictly private in their application. But, when those religious views begin to move into areas which may imply someone else’s belief is wrong, then I need to modify my beliefs to be more accepting. To believe in God as creator and Jesus as his sinless Son is probably okay. But when I say that Jesus is the only way we can be reconciled to God, I am starting to step on other’s toes, making it inherently wrong.

On the one hand, Baby Boomers have bought into the cultural distaste for absolute beliefs which makes them loathe to state their beliefs too strongly. This viewpoint has been interpreted by the younger generation as an indication that those beliefs are not firm but rather culturally determined. So living in a more multi-ethnic, culturally diverse, and sexually liberated generation, these young adults pick and choose among biblical beliefs and distinctly non-biblical beliefs, with no apparent concern for the discontinuity in their belief systems.

The culture is winning the battle on two fronts. First, the older generation is buying into the importance of not being too forthright with their views. Second, the younger

generation, given no clear direction from their parents, is buying into a disjointed set of views that avoids any conflict with others. According to Smith's research, the result is that the vast majority of young adult Americans are holding to some form of mainline Protestant philosophy. This philosophy states that Jesus is a worthwhile model of good behavior but our focus should be on getting along and not making waves rather than promoting faith in Christ.

Countering Parents with a Truth Experience

Have we, the Baby Boomers, the parents and grandparents of our society, so flummoxed up the works that we have started a downward spiral of disconnected beliefs from which we cannot recover? Of course, time will tell, but if we hold to a consistent set of biblical worldview beliefs, we should not sit back and wait patiently for the end of Christianity as we know it. We are called to "proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man so that we might present every man complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28).

Interestingly, of those respondents who graduated from college and have a biblical worldview, a much greater percentage of them pointed to a source other than a family member as the most influential. This factor is probably the result of college students having their faith challenged and looking for answers from pastors, Bibles, and books. In other words, the direct challenge to their faith presented by some professors and many of their peers caused some to fall away but caused others to examine the reasons for their belief in Christ. We do not need to fear this examination. Our Lord's case is more than capable of standing up to examination. In fact, it is the only religion that has a consistent, viable explanation for the complexities and shortcomings of life as we know it.

If a hostile, or at least a highly skeptical, attack on the

basis of their faith caused some to examine their reasons for belief and come out with a stronger, more biblical faith, perhaps a friendly encouragement to examine their faith could produce similar results. If the parents are passing on a watered down, inconsistent set of beliefs, perhaps we can change those beliefs by causing the young adults to run them through a consistency and credibility filter. Probe has been doing this for years through our [Mind Games](#) conferences and summer camps for high school students. We have seen that this approach makes a difference.

Is it too late to make a difference in the lives of our young adults? When Viggo Olsen was in his mid-twenties, beginning his residency to become a doctor, his wife's parents had a change in their belief system, becoming followers of Jesus Christ. Viggo wanted to restore his wife's parents to sanity so he began an intense study to show the obvious failure of Christianity to address the real world. What he discovered was that a biblical worldview was the only viable answer to understanding our lives and our future. He went from a mission to disprove Christianity to accepting Jesus not only as his Savior but as his purpose in life as a medical missionary to Bangladesh.[\[8\]](#)

In a similar way, we need to encourage, or better yet force our younger church-goers to examine their beliefs and compare them with the teachings of Christ. Ask them not to live an unexamined life conforming to the culture, but rather to examine their beliefs and see if they stand up to close examination.

Consistent Worldview Parents are Best

Unfortunately, many parents have not been passing on a clear view of faith in Christ from generation to generation. Instead our belief system, even among those who believe they are going to heaven when they die because of their faith in Jesus, has

been eroding into a mishmash of popular cultural beliefs mixed in with some variation of beliefs taught in the Bible.

Confronting young adults with the disconnects and shortcomings created by their mixture of beliefs as compared to a consistent Christian worldview can get their attention and bring about changes in their thinking. This confrontation with truth has been a major focus of Probe throughout the years.

However, a major take-away from these studies should be for the young adults who are parents of our future generations. Listen up, young adults! If you do not communicate a clear set of biblical worldview beliefs through your words and through your actions, your children are going to pick up on the worldview you *do* communicate. Your desire to fit in with the culture and not make too many waves will result in children who believe that the culture is the ultimate authority on truth and right living. Why? Because that is what your life is saying to them loud and clear.

Suzie strongly believed that sex outside of marriage was wrong before God. It had a detrimental effect on the individuals caught up in it and on the society which promoted it. However, she felt that many of her friends did not view it in the same way she did. So, to get along, she never said much about it. What she did not realize was that her children were watching what she said. Even though she had told them she hoped they would remain pure until marriage, they did not hear her standing up for sexual purity among her friends. Without even thinking about it, her children relegated sexual purity to a nice ideal but not an important belief to live by. Suzie was instrumental in establishing their thinking on this topic. Their thinking lined up with what Suzie demonstrated was important to her even though it did not really line up with what she truly believed.

As parents, our beliefs have the greatest impact on our children's views. Things that you may not believe but grit

your teeth and say nothing about will become core beliefs of your children. The society is saying they are true; they don't see a consistent disagreement from your words or your life. Thus, it must be the right value to hold. This process of gradually turning over our core beliefs to be reset by the culture is at least partially the reason for the tremendous shift in our cultural morality over the last sixty years.

As parents, we can make a difference in future generations. We need to hold fast to the truths of Jesus Christ, speak them with our tongues, and live them through our actions. Our children are still looking to us for truth in this area. Let us commit to not let them down by deferring to the norms of the culture.

Notes

1. "Emerging Adults and the Future of Faith in America," probe.org/emerging-adults-and-the-future-of-faith-in-america/; "Emerging Adults Part 2: Distinctly Different Faiths," probe.org/emerging-adults-part-2-distinctly-different-faiths/; "The True State of Evangelicals in 2011," probe.org/the-true-state-of-american-evangelicals/.

2. Source General Social Surveys taken from 1976 through 2010.

3. Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 154.

4. Ibid., 154.

5. Ibid., 285.

6. Ibid., 256.

7. Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-170.

8. Viggo Olsen, *Daktar: Diplomat in Bangladesh* (Moody Press, 1973).

Paul and the Mystery Religions – Christianity Defended

Was early Christian teaching influenced by the mystery religions of the day? Don Closson presents a solid look at this question; concluding that Christian doctrine as taught by Paul and others was grounded in truth and was not influenced by these other religious concepts.

Introduction

A common criticism of Christianity found on college campuses today is that its core ideas or teachings were dependent upon Greek philosophy and religious ideas. It is not unusual for a student to hear from a professor that Christianity is nothing more than a strange combination of the Hebrew cult of Yahweh, notions adopted from the popular Greek mystery religions of the day, and a sprinkling of ideas from Greek philosophic thought. This criticism of traditional Christianity is not new. In fact, its heyday was in the late 1800s to the 1940s and coincides with what is now called the History of Religions movement. This group of theologians and historians accused Paul of adding Greek ideas to his Hebrew upbringing, and in the process, creating a new religion: one that neither Jesus nor His first disciples would recognize.



Was the origin of Christianity dependent on existing Greek philosophical and religious ideas? That question hinges upon how one is using the word “dependent.” Philosopher Ron Nash argues that dependency can be weak or strong and that the

difference is a vital one. A strong dependency would mean that the idea of Jesus as a dying and rising savior-god would never have occurred to early believers if they had not become aware of them first in pagan thought. It would be admitting that Paul and the other new Christians came to believe that Christ was a resurrected God-man who made an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world because of pagan ideas. Proving a strong dependency of Christianity on Greek thought would be very damaging to those who hold a high view of Scripture.

A weak dependency means that the followers of Jesus used common religious terminology of the day in order to be understood by the Hebrew and Greek culture surrounding them. This poses no problem for a high view of Scripture. As Nash states, " . . . the mere presence of parallels in thought and language does not prove any dependence in the strong sense."[\[1\]](#) Nash and others argue that only a weak dependency can be shown to have existed between Greek religious thought and the Gospel of Christ.

In this article we will consider arguments against the strong dependency claims of the History of Religions movement and modern critics. Specifically, we will compare the theology of the apostle Paul with ideas found in the popular Greek mystery religions present during the early church period.

Although these ideas rarely surface in everyday discussions, Christians entering the academic world of our college campuses would benefit from time spent understanding this issue. In the hands of a professor hostile to Christianity, partial truths and exaggerated similarities between Christianity and the mystery religions can overwhelm an unaware teen. Being conscious of these arguments against Christian thought prepares us to give an answer to everyone who questions the hope that we have in Christ.

Arguments Against a Strong Dependency on Mystery Religions Viewpoint

Previously we noted that the History of Religions movement claimed that Christian thought had a direct and strong dependency on the mystery religions. Although some scholars agreed with this view, many did not. A good example is the famous German historian Adolf von Harnack, who wrote:

We must reject the comparative mythology which finds a causal connection between everything and everything else. . . . By such methods one can turn Christ into a sun god in the twinkling of an eye, or one can bring up the legends attending the birth of every conceivable god, or one can catch all sorts of mythological doves to keep company with the baptismal dove . . . the wand of 'comparative religion' triumphantly eliminate(s) every spontaneous trait in any religion.[{2}](#)

What were the basic traits of the mystery religions? The annual vegetation cycle was often at the center of these cults. Deep significance was given to the concepts of growth, death, decay and rebirth. The cult of Eleusis and its central deity, Demeter, goddess of the soil and farming, is one example. The mystery religions also had secret ceremonies and rites of initiation that separated its members from the outside world. Every mystery religion claimed to impart secret knowledge of the deity. This knowledge would be communicated in clandestine ceremonies often connected to an initiation rite. The focus of this knowledge was not on a set of revealed truths to be shared with the world, but on hidden higher knowledge to be kept within the circle of believers.

At the core of each religion was a myth in which the deity returned to life after death, or else triumphed over his enemies. As one scholar explains, the myth "appealed primarily to the emotions and aimed at producing psychic and mystic

effects by which the neophyte might experience the exaltation of a new life.”{3} On the other hand, the mysteries were not concerned as much with correct doctrine or belief, but with the emotional state of the followers. The goal of the believers was a mystical experience that led them to believe that they had achieved union with their god.

The various religious movements found throughout the Roman Empire were not united in doctrine or practice, and they changed dramatically over time. Any impact that they may have had on Christianity must be evaluated by the time frame in which the religions encountered one another. When comparing religious systems, Philosopher Ronald Nash warns that caution is advised against using careless language. He states, “One frequently encounters scholars who first use Christian terminology to describe pagan beliefs and practices and then marvel at the awesome parallels they think they have discovered.”{4}

What if someone told you that the root of Paul’s New Testament theology was in obscure Greek mystery religions, rather than his Jewish training and his encounter with Jesus Christ? That’s exactly what the History of Religions movement argued at the end of the 19th century. Many scholars still teach that Paul’s portrayal of Jesus as a dying and rising savior would never have occurred without the presence of the mystery religions. Next, we will continue to consider arguments against what might be called “the strong dependency view.”

Weaknesses in the Strong Dependency View

The first argument against this view is the logical fallacy of *false cause*. This fallacy occurs when someone argues that just because two things exist side by side, that one must be the cause of the other. As one theologian has written, the History of Religions School had the tendency “to convert parallels into influences and influences into sources.”{5} Causal

connection is much harder to prove than proximity. The mere fact that other religions may have had a god who died and then came back to life in some manner does not mean that this was the source of Christian ideas, even if it can be shown that the apostles knew of this other set of beliefs.

Some scholars, hostile to Christianity, tend to exaggerate, or invent, similarities between Christianity and the mystery religions. British scholar Edwyn Bevan writes:

Of course if one writes an imaginary description of the Orphic mysteries . . . filling in the large gaps in the picture left by our data from the Christian Eucharist, one produces something very impressive. On this plan, you first put in the Christian elements, and then are staggered to find them there.[{6}](#)

An example might be the practice of the taurobolium in the cult of Cybele or Great Mother. This initiation rite, in which the blood of a sacrificed bull is allowed to pour over a neophyte, is claimed by some to be the source of baptism in Christianity. Arguments have been made that the language “blood of the lamb” (Rev. 7:14), and “blood of Jesus” (1 Peter 1:2) was borrowed from the language of the taurobolium and criobolium in which a ram was slaughtered. In fact, a better argument can be made that the cult borrowed its language from the Christian tradition.

The cult of Cybele did not use the taurobolium until the second century A.D.; the best available evidence for dating the practice places its origin about one hundred years after Paul wrote his epistles.[{7}](#) German scholar Gunter Wagner points out that there was no notion of death and resurrection in the cultic practice.

After noting the change in meaning that the taurobolium experienced over time, scholar Robert Duthoy writes:

It is obvious that this alteration in the taurobolium must have been due to Christianity, when we consider that by A.D. 300 it had become the great competitor of the heathen religions and was known to everyone.[*{8}*](#)

More Weaknesses in the Strong Dependency View

A simple but powerful argument against the likelihood that Paul would have turned to pagan thought for his theology was his strict Jewish training. In Philippians 3:5 Paul boasts of being a Hebrew of Hebrews. He had studied under Gamaliel, the most celebrated teacher of the most orthodox of the Jewish parties, the Pharisees. And in Colossians he warns against the very syncretism he is being accused of proposing. According to Bruce Metzger:

[W]ith regard to Paul himself, scholars are coming once again to acknowledge that the Apostle's prevailing set of mind was rabbinically oriented, and that his newly found Christian faith ran in molds previously formed at the feet of Gamaliel.[*{9}*](#)

We find no accusations in the New Testament of Paul incorporating pagan thought into his theology, nor does he defend himself against such claims.

The very nature of the mystery cults, with the conflicting pantheon of deities and mythical beings, makes it highly unlikely that the strict monotheism and the body of doctrines found in the New Testament would be their source. Although the mystery religions did move towards advancing a solar god above all the others, this change began after 100 A.D., too late to impact the theology of the New Testament.

It should also be noted that early Christianity was an

exclusivistic religion while the mystery cults were not. One could be initiated into the cult of Isis or Mithras without giving up his or her former beliefs. However, to be baptized into the church one had to forsake all other gods and saviors. This was a new development in the ancient world. Machen writes, "Amid the prevailing syncretism of the Greco-Roman world, the religion of Paul, with the religion of Israel, stands absolutely alone."[\[10\]](#)

Paul's religion was grounded in real events. The mystery religions were not. They were based upon dramas written to capture men's hearts and passions. Reformed scholar Herman Ridderbos writes:

Whereas Paul speaks of the death and resurrection of Christ and places it in the middle of history, as an event which took place before many witnesses . . . the myths of the cults in contrast cannot be dated; they appear in all sorts of variations, and do not give any clear conceptions. In short they display the timeless vagueness characteristic of real myths. Thus the myths of the cults . . . are nothing but depictions of annual events of nature in which nothing is to be found of the moral voluntary, redemptive substitutionary meaning, which for Paul is the content of Christ's death and resurrection.[\[11\]](#)

Next we will conclude with further arguments against Paul's use of the mystery religions.

Conclusion

Muslim author Yousuf Saleem Chishti writes that the doctrines of the deity of Christ and the atonement are pagan teachings that come from the apostle Paul, not from Christ Himself.[\[12\]](#) He states that, "The Christian doctrine of atonement was greatly coloured by the influence of the mystery religions, especially Mithraism, which had its own son of God and virgin

Mother, and crucifixion and resurrection after expiating for the sins of mankind and finally his ascension to the seventh heaven.”[\[13\]](#) Were these doctrines something Paul made up or borrowed? What did Jesus teach regarding the atonement?

First, both Jesus and Paul taught that Christianity was the fulfillment of Judaism. In Matthew 5:17 Jesus said that He came to fulfill the law and the teaching of the Prophets, not to abolish them. In Colossians (2:16-17), Paul writes that the religious codes of the Old Testament were merely a foreshadowing of the things that were to come, and that the new reality is found in Christ. Both Christ and Paul taught the necessity of the blood atonement for sin. Jesus stated that, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). At the Last Supper He added, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Paul affirmed Christ’s teachings when he wrote, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Tying the doctrine back to the Old Testament, Paul wrote, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

The idea that Jesus was the Son of God, born of a virgin, dying on the cross, and being resurrected are hardly Paul’s ideas alone. They are found in the earliest Christian writings and held consistently wherever the faith spread. The parallels between Christianity and Mithraism claimed by Chishti are hard to evaluate or confirm. He gives us no references as evidence for the similarities.[\[14\]](#) Other scholars who have looked at the issue find that most of the similarities disappear on close inspection. Where they do occur, it can be argued that Mithraism borrowed ideas from Christianity rather than vice versa. Bruce Metzger writes, “It must not be uncritically assumed that the Mysteries always influenced Christianity, for it is not only possible but probable that in certain cases,

the influence moved in the opposite direction.”[\[15\]](#)

Those who find Christianity hard to accept have offered many reasons for not doing so. The claim that the doctrines of Christianity had a strong dependency on the mystery religions stands on shaky ground and should be investigated thoroughly before one rejects the good news of the New Testament writers.

Notes

1. Ronald Nash, *The Gospel And The Greeks*, (Probe Books: Dallas, TX, 1992), 18.
2. Ibid, 118.
3. Ibid, 124.
4. Ibid, 126.
5. Ibid, 193.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid, 154.
8. Ibid, 155.
9. Ibid, 196.
10. Ibid, 197.
11. Ibid. 198.
12. Normal Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Baker Books, 1999), 490.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid. 492.
15. Nash, 198.

The Federalist Papers

Kerby Anderson takes through a summary of the Federalist Papers as seen from a biblical worldview perspective. Does a Christian view of man and government undergird these foundational documents? Kerby considers this question.

Introduction

The Federalist Papers are a collection of eighty-five essays written by James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay between October 1787 and May 1788. They were written at the time to convince New York State to ratify the U.S. Constitution.



They are perhaps the most famous newspaper columns ever written, and today constitute one of the most important documents of America's founding period. They provide the justification for the Constitution and address some of the most important political issues associated with popular self-government.

Clinton Rossiter says that "*The Federalist* is the most important work in political science that has ever been written, or is likely ever to be written, in the United States. . . . It would not be stretching the truth more than a few inches to say that *The Federalist* stands third only to the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution itself among all the sacred writings of American political history."[\[1\]](#) Jacob Cooke agrees. He believes that "The United States has produced three historic documents of major importance: The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and *The*

Federalist." {2}

All the essays were signed "Publius" even though they were written by three different authors (Hamilton wrote fifty-two, Madison wrote twenty-eight, and Jay wrote five). Political leaders in New York opposed the new government because the state had become an independent nation under the Articles of Confederation and was becoming rich through tariffs on trade with other states. When it became apparent that New York would not ratify the Constitution, Alexander Hamilton enlisted the aid of James Madison (who was available because the Continental Congress was sitting in New York) and John Jay. Unfortunately, Jay was injured and was only able to complete a few essays.

There are many reasons for the importance of *The Federalist Papers*. First, the authors were significant figures during the founding era. James Madison is considered the architect of the Constitution and later served as President of the United States. Alexander Hamilton served in George Washington's cabinet and was a major force in setting U.S. economic policy. John Jay became the first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Each of these men was present at the constitutional convention and was respected by their peers.

Second, *The Federalist Papers* provide the most systematic and comprehensive analysis of the constitution. Not only do the authors explain the structure of the constitution, but they also defend their decisions against the critics of their day. They were, after all, writing to convince New York to ratify the constitution.

Third, *The Federalist Papers* explain the motives of the Founding Fathers. Often when Supreme Court justices are trying to discern the founder's intentions, they appeal to these writings.{3} *The Federalist Papers* are the most important interpretative source of constitutional interpretation and give important insight into the framers' intent and purpose

for the Constitution.

Human Nature

The writers of *The Federalist Papers* were concerned about the relationship between popular government and human nature. They were well aware that human beings have the propensity to pursue short-term self-interest often at the expense of long-term benefits. The writers were also concerned that factions that formed around these areas of immediate self-interest could ultimately destroy the moral foundations of civil government.

James Madison argued in *Federalist Paper #51* that government must be based upon a realistic view of human nature:

But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.[\[4\]](#)

The writers of *The Federalist Papers* certainly believed that there was a positive aspect to human nature. They often talk about reason, virtue, and morality. But they also recognized there was a negative aspect to human nature. They believed that framing a republic required a balance of power that liberates human dignity and rationality and controls human sin and depravity.

As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government

presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form.[\[5\]](#)

As we will discuss in more detail later, James Madison concluded from his study of governments that they were destroyed by factions. He believed this factionalism was due to “the propensity of mankind, to fall into mutual animosities” (*Federalist Paper #10*) which he believed were “sown in the nature of man.” Constitutional scholars have concluded that “the fallen nature of man influenced Madison’s view of law and government.”[\[6\]](#) He therefore concluded that government must be based upon a more realistic view which also accounts for this sinful side of human nature.

A Christian view of government is based upon a balanced view of human nature. It recognizes both human dignity (we are created in God’s image) and human depravity (we are sinful individuals). Because both grace and sin operate in government, we should neither be too optimistic nor too pessimistic. We should view governmental affairs with a deep sense of biblical realism.

Factions and the Republic

The writers of *The Federalist Papers* were concerned about the previous history of republics. Alexander Hamilton writes that “the history of the petty republics of Greece and Italy” can only evoke “horror and disgust” since they rocked back and forth from “the extremes of tyranny and anarchy.”

James Madison focused on the problem of factions. “By a faction I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of the citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”[\[7\]](#)

Madison believed there were only two ways to cure the problem

of factions: remove the causes or control the effects. He quickly dismisses the first since it would either destroy liberty or require everyone to have “the same opinions, the same passions, and the same interests.”

He further acknowledges that “causes of faction are thus sown in the nature of man.” So he rejects the idea of changing human nature. And he also rejects the idea that a political leader will be able to deal with the problem of factions: “It is vain to say that enlightened statesmen will be able to adjust these clashing interests and render them all subservient to the public good. Enlightened statesmen will not always be at the helm.”[\[8\]](#)

Madison believed the solution could be found in the extended republic that the framers created. While a small republic might be shattered by factions, the larger number of representatives that would be chosen would “guard against the cabals of a few.”

Also, since “each representative will be chosen by a greater number of citizens, it will be more difficult for unworthy candidates to practice with success the vicious arts by which elections are too often carried.” Also, the voters are “more likely to center on men who possess the most attractive merit and the most diffusive and established characters.”[\[9\]](#)

Madison also believed that this extended republic would minimize the possibility of one faction pushing forward its agenda to the exclusion of others. This was due to the “greater number of citizens and extent of territory.” A smaller society would most likely have fewer distinct parties. But if you extend the sphere, you increase the variety and interests of the parties. And it is less likely any one faction could dominate the political arena.

Madison realized the futility of trying to remove passions or human sinfulness, and instead designed a system that minimized

the influence of factions and still provided the greatest amount of liberty for its citizens.

Separation of Powers

The writers of *The Federalist Papers* were concerned with the potential abuse of power, and set forth their rationale for separating the powers of the various branches of government. James Madison summarizes their fear of the centralization of political power in a famous quote in *Federalist Paper* #47.

No political truth is certainly of greater intrinsic value, or is stamped with the authority of more enlightened patrons of liberty, than that on which the objection is founded. The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny.[{10}](#)

Madison quickly dismisses the idea that constitutional provisions alone will prevent an abuse of political power. He argues that mere “parchment barriers” are not adequate “against the encroaching spirit of power.”[{11}](#)

He also believed that the legislature posed the greatest threat to the separation of powers. “The legislative department is everywhere extending the sphere of its activity and drawing all power into its impetuous vortex.”[{12}](#) The framers therefore divided Congress into a bicameral legislature and hoped that the Senate would play a role in checking the passions of popular majorities (*Federalist Paper* #63).

His solution was to give each branch separate but rival powers. This prevented the possibility of concentrating power into the hands of a few. Each branch had certain checks over the other branches so there was a distribution and balance of power.

The effect of this system was to allow ambition and power to control itself. Each branch is given power, and as ambitious men and women seek to extend their sphere of influence, they provide a check on the other branch.

Madison said, "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government."[{13}](#) This policy of supplying "opposite and rival interests" has been known as the concept of countervailing ambitions.

In addition to this, the people were given certain means of redress. Elections and an amendment process have kept power from being concentrated in the hands of governmental officials. Each of these checks was motivated by a healthy fear of human nature. The founders believed in human responsibility and human dignity, but they did not trust human nature too much. Their solution was to separate powers and invest each branch with rival powers.

Limited Government

The writers of *The Federalist Papers* realized the futility of trying to remove passions and ambition from the population. They instead divided power and allowed "ambition to counteract ambition." By separating various institutional power structures, they limited the expansion of power.

This not only included a horizontal distribution of powers (separation of powers), but also a vertical distribution of powers (federalism). The federal government was delegated certain powers while the rest of the powers were reserved to the states and the people.

James Madison rightly called this new government a republic which he defined as "a government which derives all its powers

directly or indirectly from the great body of people, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure for a limited period, or during good behavior.”{14}

He also argued that “the proposed government cannot be deemed a national one; since its jurisdiction extends to certain enumerated objects only, and leaves to the several states a residuary and inviolable sovereignty over all other objects.”{15}

Governmental power was limited by the Constitution and its interpretation was delegated to the judicial branch. As Alexander Hamilton explained, the Constitution was to be the supreme law of the land.

A constitution is, in fact, and must be regarded by the judges as, a fundamental law. It therefore belongs to them to ascertain its meaning as well as the meaning of any particular act proceeding from the legislative body. If there should happen to be an irreconcilable variance between the two, that which has the superior obligation and validity ought, of course, to be preferred; or, in other words, the Constitution ought to be preferred to the statute, the intention of the people to the intention of their agents.{16}

Although Hamilton referred to the judiciary as the weakest of the three branches of government, some of the critics of the Constitution warned that the Supreme Court “would be exalted above all power in the government, and subject to no control.”{17} Unfortunately, that assessment certainly has proved correct over the last few decades.

The Federalist Papers provide an overview of the political theory that undergirds the U.S. Constitution and provide important insight into the intentions of the framers in constructing a new government. As we have also seen, it shows us where the current governmental structure strays from the original intent of the framers.

The framers fashioned a government that was based upon a realistic view of human nature. The success of this government in large part is due to separating power structures because of their desire to limit the impact of human sinfulness.

Notes

1. Clinton Rossiter, *The Federalist Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1961), vii.
2. Jacob E. Cooke, *The Federalist* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), ix.
3. James G. Wilson, "The Most Sacred Text: The Supreme Court's Use of The Federalist Papers," *Brigham Young University Law Review* I (1985).
4. James Madison, *Federalist Papers*, #51 (New York: New American Library, 1961), 322.
5. Madison, *Federalist Papers* #55, 346.
6. John Eidsmoe, *Christianity and the Constitution* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1987), 101.
7. Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, #10, 78.
8. Ibid., 80.
9. Ibid., 82-3.
10. Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, #47, 301.
11. Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, #48, 308.
12. Ibid., 309.
13. Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, #51, 322.
14. Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, #39, 241.
15. Ibid, 245.
16. Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist Papers*, #78, 467.
- 17 Herbert Storing and Murray Day, eds. *The Complete Anti-Federalist* (University of Chicago Press, 1981) II, 420.

Adultery

Staggering numbers of people are engaged in adultery, and grievously, this includes the church. Kerby Anderson explores several myths about adultery and offers sound suggestions for preventing adultery by meeting spouses' needs.



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

Adultery and Society

The seventh commandment says “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” Nevertheless, this sin has been committed throughout history. Today, though, adultery seems more rampant than ever. While tabloid stories report the affairs of politicians, millionaires, and movie stars, films like “The English Patient,” “The Prince of Tides,” or “The Bridges of Madison County” feature and even promote adultery.

How prevalent is adultery? Two of the most reliable studies come to similar conclusions. The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior estimates that “More than one-third of men and one-quarter of women admit having had at least one extramarital sexual experience.”[\[1\]](#) A survey by the National Opinion Research Center (University of Chicago) found lower percentages: 25 percent of men had been unfaithful and 17 percent of women. Even when these lower ratios are applied to the current adult population, that means that some 19 million husbands and 12 million wives have had an affair.[\[2\]](#)

Whatever the actual numbers, the point to be made is that adultery is much more common than we would like to admit. Family therapist and psychiatrist Frank Pittman believes “There may be as many acts of infidelity in our society as there are traffic accidents.”[\[3\]](#) He further argues that the fact that adultery has become commonplace has altered society’s perception of it. He says, “We won’t go back to the

times when adulterers were put in the stocks and publicly humiliated, or become one of those societies and there are many in which adultery is punishable by death. Society in any case is unable to enforce a rule that the majority of people break, and infidelity is so common it is no longer deviant.”{4}

Perhaps you are thinking, “This is just a problem with non-Christians in society. It can’t be a problem in the church. Certainly the moral standards of Christians are higher.” Well, there is growing evidence that adultery is also a problem in Christian circles. An article in a 1997 issue of *Newsweek* magazine noted that various surveys suggest that as many as 30 percent of male Protestant ministers have had sexual relationships with women other than their wives.{5}

The Journal of Pastoral Care in 1993 reported a survey of Southern Baptist pastors in which 14 percent acknowledged they had engaged in “sexual behavior inappropriate to a minister.” It also reported that 70 percent had counseled at least one woman who had had intercourse with another minister.

A 1988 survey of nearly 1000 Protestant clergy by *Leadership* magazine found that of the 300 pastors who responded, 12 percent admitted to sexual intercourse outside of marriage, and that 23 percent had done something sexually inappropriate with someone other than their spouse. The researchers also interviewed nearly 1000 subscribers to *Christianity Today* who were not pastors. They found the numbers were nearly double: 45 percent indicated having done something sexually inappropriate, and 23 percent having extramarital intercourse.{6}

Adultery is in society and is now in the church. Next, we’ll look at some of the myths surrounding extramarital affairs.

Myths About Adultery

Marital infidelity destroys marriages and families and often leads to divorce. Public sentiment against adultery is actually very strong as approximately eight out of ten of Americans disapprove of adultery.[\[7\]](#)

Yet even though most people consider adultery to be wrong and know that it can be devastating, our society still perpetuates a number of untruths about adultery through a popular mythology about extramarital affairs. At this point we want to examine some of the myths about adultery.

Myth #1: “Adultery is about sex.” Often just the opposite seems the case. When a sexual affair is uncovered, observers often say, “What did he see in her?” or “What did she see in him?” Frequently the sex is better at home, and the marriage partner is at least as attractive as the adulterous partner.

Being pretty, handsome, or sensual is usually not the major issue. Partners in affairs are not usually chosen because they are prettier, more handsome, or sexier. They are chosen for various sorts of strange and nonsexual reasons. Usually the other woman or the other man in an adulterous relationship meets needs the spouse does not meet in the marriage. Dr. Willard Harley lists five primary needs for a man and five primary needs for a woman in his book *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage*. He believes that unmet needs, by either partner, are a primary cause of extramarital affairs. He has also found that people wander into these affairs with astonishing regularity, in spite of whatever strong moral or religious convictions they may hold. A lack of fulfillment in one of these basic emotional areas creates a dangerous vacuum in a person’s life. And, unfortunately, many will eventually fill that need outside of marriage.

Frank Pittman, author of the book *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*, found in his own personal study that

many of his patients who had affairs had a good sex life, but came from marriages with little or no intimacy. He concluded that, "Affairs were thus three times more likely to be the pursuit of a buddy than the pursuit of a better orgasm." [\[8\]](#)

Sex may not be involved in some affairs. The relationship may be merely an emotional liaison. Counselor Bonnie Weil warns that these so-called "affairs of the heart can be even more treacherous than the purely physical kind. Women, particularly, are inclined to leave their husbands when they feel a strong emotional bond with another man." [\[9\]](#)

Myth #2: "Adultery is about character." In the past, society looked down on alcoholics as having weak character because of their problem. Now we see it as an addiction or even a disease. While that doesn't excuse the behavior, we can see that can't be merely labeled as bad character.

There is growing psychological evidence that adulterous behavior in parents dramatically affects children when they reach adulthood. Just as divorce in a family influences the likelihood of the adult children to consider divorce, adulterous behavior by parents seems to beget similar behavior by their offspring. Is this not one more example of the biblical teaching that the sins of one generation being visited upon the next?

Myth #3: "Adultery is therapeutic." Some of the psychology books and women's magazines circulating through our culture promote extra-marital affairs as positive. This myth that an affair can revive a dull marriage is a devastating lie. Depending on which source you are reading, an affair will: make you a better lover, help you with your mid-life crisis, bring joy into your life, or even bring excitement back into your marriage. Nothing could be further from the truth. An affair might give you more sex, but it could also give you a sexually transmitted disease. It might bring your marriage more excitement, if you consider divorce court exciting.

Remember that adultery results in divorce 65 percent of the time. “For most people and most marriages, infidelity is dangerous.”[\[10\]](#)

Myth #4: “Adultery is harmless.” Movies are just one venue in which adultery has been promoted positively. *The English Patient* received twelve Oscar nominations including best picture of the year for its depiction of an adulterous relationship between a handsome count and the English-born wife of his colleague. *The Bridges of Madison County* relates the story of an Iowa farmer’s wife who has a brief extra-marital affair with a *National Geographic* photographer that supposedly helped re-energize her marriage. *The Prince of Tides* received seven Oscar nominations and shows a married therapist bedding down her also-married patient.

Notice the euphemisms society has developed over the years to excuse or soften the perception of adultery. Many are not repeatable, but ones that are include: *fooling around, sleeping around, flings, affairs, and dalliances*. These and many other phrases perpetuate the notion the adultery is guilt-free and hurts no one. Some have even suggested that it’s just a recreational activity like playing softball or going to the movies. Well, don’t pass the popcorn, please.

Forbidden sex is an addiction that can—and usually does—have devastating consequences to an individual and a family. Adultery shatters trust, intimacy, and self-esteem. It breaks up families, ruins careers, and leaves a trail of pain and destruction in its path. This potential legacy of emotional pain for one’s children should be enough to make a person stop and count the costs before it’s too late.

Even when affairs are never exposed, emotional costs are involved. For example, adulterous mates deprive their spouses of energy and intimacy that should go into the marriage. They deceive their marriage partners and become dishonest about their feelings and actions. As Frank Pittman says, “The

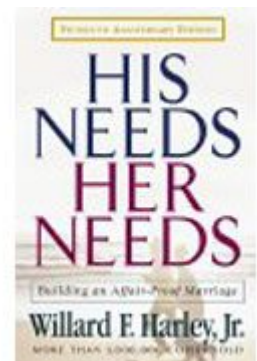
infidelity is not in the sex, necessarily, but in the secrecy. It isn't whom you lie with. It's whom you lie to." [\[11\]](#) 1

Myth #5: "Adultery has to end in divorce." Only about 35 percent of couples remain together after the discovery of an adulterous affair; the other 65 percent divorce. Perhaps nothing can destroy a marriage faster than marital infidelity.

The good news is that it doesn't have to be that way. One counselor claims that 98 percent of the couples she treats remain together after counseling. Granted this success rate is not easy to achieve and requires immediate moral choices and forgiveness, but it does demonstrate that adultery does not have to end in divorce.

Preventing Adultery: Her Needs

How can a couple prevent adultery? Dr. Willard Harley in his book *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* provides some answers. He has found that marriages that fail to meet a spouse's needs are more vulnerable to an extramarital affair. Often the failure of men and women to meet each other's needs is due to a lack of knowledge rather than a selfish unwillingness to be considerate. Meeting these needs is critically important because in marriages that fail to meet needs, it is striking and alarming how consistently married people seek to satisfy their unmet needs through an extramarital affair. If any of a spouse's five basic needs goes unmet, that spouse becomes vulnerable to the temptation of an affair.



First, let's look at the five needs of a wife. The first need is for *affection*. To most women affection symbolizes security, protection, comfort, and approval. When a husband shows his wife affection, he sends the following messages: (1) I'll take

care of you and protect you; (2) I'm concerned about the problems you face, and I am with you; (3) I think you've done a good job, and I'm so proud of you.

Men need to understand how strongly women need these affirmations. For the typical wife, there can hardly be enough of them. A hug can communicate all of the affirmations of the previous paragraph. But, affection can be shown in many ways such as: kisses, cards, flowers, dinners out, opening the car door, holding hands, walks after dinner, back rubs, phone calls—there are a thousand ways to say “I love you.” From a woman's point of view, affection is the essential cement of her relationship with a man.

The second need is *conversation*. Wives need their husbands to talk to them and to listen to them; they need lots of two-way conversation. In their dating life prior to marriage, most couples spent time time showing each other affection and talking. This shouldn't be dropped after the wedding. When two people get married, each partner has a right to expect the same loving care and attention that prevailed during courtship to continue after the wedding. The man who takes time to talk to a woman will have an inside track to her heart.

The third need is *honesty and openness*. A wife needs to trust her husband totally. A sense of security is the common thread woven through all of a woman's five basic needs. If a husband does not keep up honest and open communication with his wife, he undermines her trust and eventually destroys her security. To feel secure, a wife must trust her husband to give her accurate information about his past, the present, and the future. If she can't trust the signals he sends, she has no foundation on which to build a solid relationship. Instead of adjusting to him, she always feels off balance; instead of growing toward him, she grows away from him.

Financial commitment is a fourth need a wife experiences. She needs enough money to live comfortably: she needs financial

support. No matter how successful a career a woman might have, she usually wants her husband to earn enough money to allow her to feel supported and to feel cared for.

The fifth need is *family commitment*. A wife needs her husband to be a good father and have a family commitment. The vast majority of women who get married have a powerful instinct to create a home and have children. Above all, wives want their husbands to take a leadership role in the family and to commit themselves to the moral and educational development of their children.

Preventing Adultery: His Needs

Now, let's look at the five needs husbands have. The first is *sexual fulfillment*. The typical wife doesn't understand her husband's deep need for sex anymore than the typical husband understands his wife's deep need for affection. But these two ingredients can work very closely together in a happy, fulfilled marriage. Sex can come naturally and often, if there is enough affection.

The second need for a man is *recreational companionship*. He needs her to be his playmate. It is not uncommon for women, when they are single, to join men in pursuing their interests. They find themselves hunting, fishing, playing football, and watching sports and movies they would never have chosen on their own.

After marriage wives often try to interest their husbands in activities more to their own liking. If their attempts fail, they may encourage their husbands to continue their recreational activities without them. But this option is very dangerous to a marriage, because men place surprising importance on having their wives as recreational companions. Among the five basic male needs, spending recreational time with his wife is second only to sex for the typical husband.

A husband's third need is *an attractive spouse*. A man needs a wife who looks good to him. Dr. Harley states that in sexual relationships most men find it nearly impossible to appreciate a woman for her inner qualities alone—there must be more. A man's need for physical attractiveness in a mate is profound.

The fourth need for a man is *domestic support*. He needs peace and quiet. So deep is a husband's need for domestic support from his wife that he often fantasizes about how she will greet him lovingly and pleasantly at the door, about well-behaved children who likewise act glad to see him and welcome him to the comfort of a well-maintained home.

The fantasy continues as his wife urges him to sit down and relax before taking part in a tasty dinner. Later the family goes out for an evening stroll, and he returns to put the children to bed with no hassle or fuss. Then he and his wife relax, talk together, and perhaps watch a little television until they retire at a reasonable hour to love each other. Wives may chuckle at this scenario, but this vision is quite common in the fantasy lives of many men. The male need for his wife to "take care of things"—especially him—is widespread, persistent, and deep.

The fifth need is *admiration*. He needs her to be proud of him. Wives need to learn how to express the admiration they already feel for their husbands instead of pressuring them to greater achievements. Honest admiration is a great motivator for men. When a woman tells a man she thinks he's wonderful, that inspires him to achieve more. He sees himself capable of handling new responsibilities and perfecting skills far above those of his present level.

If any of a spouse's five basic needs go unmet, that person becomes vulnerable to the temptation of an affair. Therefore, the best way to prevent adultery is to meet the needs of your spouse and make your marriage strong.

Notes

1. Samuel Janus and Cynthia Janus, *The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 169.
2. Joannie Schrof, "Adultery in America," *U.S. News and World Report*, 31 Aug. 1998, 31.
3. Frank Pittman, *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy* (New York: Norton, 1989), 117.
4. Ibid., 13.
5. Kenneth Woodward, "Sex, Morality and the Protestant Minister," *Newsweek* (28 July 1997), 62.
6. "How Common Is Pastoral Indiscretion?" *Leadership* (Winter 1988), 12.
7. In this poll Americans were asked: "What is your opinion about a married person having sexual relations with someone other than his or her spouse? Their answers: 79% answered "always wrong" and another 11% answered "almost always wrong." Cited in "Attitudes on Adultery," USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll, 1997.
8. Pittman, 122.
9. Bonnie Eaker Weil, *Adultery: The Forgivable Sin* (Norwalk, Conn.: Hastings House, 1994), 9.
10. Pittman, 37.
11. Ibid., 53.

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Same Sex Marriage: A Facade

of Normalcy

Sue Bohlin takes a look at the arguments for same sex marriage and finds them lacking from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective. She explains that those pushing for same sex marriage have redefined it into something it never was and was never intended to be.

What's Marriage For?

In any discussion on same sex marriage, we need to start at the beginning: What is marriage is for, anyway? Marriage begins a family. The family is the basic building block of society. It has always been this way from Adam and Eve down to today.

Man did not invent marriage; God did. He invented and ordained marriage as the foundation for all human society when He gave Eve to Adam and pronounced them man and wife. Marriage is one of those institutions that is found in every human culture. Across the globe and across the ages, marriage has always been defined the same way: one man and one woman in a committed relationship, providing a safe place to bear and raise children. I would suggest that since this pattern for marriage applies to all cultures and all times, this indicates that God is its inventor and creator. It's such an intrinsic part of the way we relate to each other that even those who have lost track of the story of the true God (the non-Judeo-Christian cultures) still practice marriage according to the pattern God designed: one man and one woman in a committed relationship, providing a safe place to bear and raise children.

God has woven "marriage into human nature so that it serves two primary purposes throughout all societies."[\[1\]](#) The first is the way men and women were created to complement each other. Marriage balances the strengths and weaknesses of masculinity and femininity. Women help civilize men and

channel their sexual energy in productive rather than destructive ways. Men protect and provide for women—and any children they produce together.

Marriage is built on a basic building block of humanity—that we exist as male and female. The strong benefit of marriage as God intended it is that males and females are designed with profound and wonderful differences, and these differences are coordinated in marriage so that each contributes what the other lacks.[\[2\]](#)

The second purpose of marriage is producing, protecting, and providing for children. Marriage ensures that children have the benefits of both mother and father. Each gender makes a unique and important contribution to children's development and emotional health, and marriage provides the best possible environment for children to thrive as they enjoy the benefits of masculinity and femininity.

Those who are pushing for same sex marriage don't see marriage this way. They seek to redefine it as a way to get society's stamp of approval on their sexual and emotional relationships, and a way to secure financial and other benefits. Both of these reasons are about the adults, not about children. Both reasons are driven by the philosophy of "How can I get what I want? How can I be happy?" It's a very self-centered movement.

Many homosexuals want the right to marry only because it confers society's ultimate stamp of approval on a sexual relationship—*not* because they want to participate in the institution of marriage.

Why Same Sex Relationships Are Wrong

Let's look at several reasons (though not an exhaustive list by any means) that same sex relationships are wrong.

First, homosexuality is an attempt to meet legitimate needs in

illegitimate, ungodly ways. We all have God-given heart hungers to feel loved and known and validated—to feel that we matter. God intends for us to have those needs met first by our parents and then by our peers, but sometimes something goes wrong. People find themselves walking around with a gaping, aching hole in their souls, longing to make the connections that didn't happen when they were supposed to, earlier in their lives. From both the women and the men that I know who are dealing with unwanted homosexuality, I hear the same thing: "I just want to be held, I just want to be known, I just want to be special to someone." But turning to homosexual or lesbian relationships to get those needs met is not God's intention for us.

Second, same sex relationships are outside of (and fall far short of) God's created intention for sex. God made us male and female, designed to complement each other physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Two men or two women coming together can never live out God's intent for His creation. The biology of our gender shows us that same sex relationships don't work, but opposite sex relationships do. It is unwise to ignore the obvious about how the pieces fit, or don't fit, as the case may be.

Third, marriage is an earthbound illustration of the mystery of Christ and the church.[\[3\]](#) There is a mystical unity of two very different, very *other* beings coming together as one. Only the profound differences of man and woman display this mystery. "If the man represents Christ and the woman represents the church, then a male to male partnering would be, in essence, a symbolic partnering of God with Himself apart from His people. Likewise, a lesbian relationship would become a symbolic partnering of God's people without Him. Either option is incomplete, unnatural, and abhorrent."[\[4\]](#)

Fourth, same sex relationships are idolatrous. In Romans 1, Paul describes the downward spiral of people who worship the creature instead of the Creator. When God says intimate

relationships with people of the same sex are forbidden, and people insist on pursuing them anyway, they have elevated something else to the position of a god. It could be the other person, or sexual pleasure, or even just one's own feelings, but all these things become idols because they are more important than anything else, including God.

Homosexual and lesbian relationships are wrong because God designed us for something far better. The nature of the gospel is to bring transformation to every aspect of a believer's life, and many people have discovered the "something better." (See my article, "[Can Homosexuals Change?](#)")

The Differences Between Heterosexual and Homosexual Relationships

Sometimes you hear gays or lesbians say, "We're just like anybody else. We have two kids, a dog, a mortgage, and we worry about the economy. We just don't want anybody telling us who we can love." My friend Brady, who used to be part of that gay sub-culture, calls the homosexual lifestyle "a façade of normalcy." And it is *only* a façade.

Consider the huge variance in the stability of relationships. Despite a high divorce rate, 57% of heterosexual marriages last over twenty years.^{5} The average length of homosexual relationships is two to three years.^{6} Only 5% of them last 20 years.^{7}

And consider the issue of promiscuity. In heterosexual marriages, over three-fourths of the men and 88% of the women remain faithful to their marriage vows.^{8} Most sexually active gay men are promiscuous, engaging hundreds of sexual partners over a lifetime.^{9}

The concept of a committed relationship is very different for the two groups. Most heterosexual couples are faithful and

stable. When homosexual men are in what they call a “committed” relationship, this usually includes three to five outside partners each year.[{10}](#) Rev. Troy Perry, founder of the Metropolitan Community Church, told the *Dallas Morning News*, “Monogamy is not a word the gay community uses. . . . We talk about fidelity. That means you live in a loving, caring, honest relationship with your partner. Because we can’t marry, we have people with widely varying opinions as to what that means. Some would say that committed couples could have multiple sexual partners as long as there’s no deception. Each couple has to decide.”[{11}](#)

In Holland, which legalized gay marriage in 2001, the average is eight outside partners.[{12}](#) One study of gay men who had been together for over five years could not find one single monogamous relationship.[{13}](#) Not one!

Women in lesbian relationships often stay together not because they want to, but because they’re stuck financially and emotionally. “I heard one speaker say at a Love Won Out conference, “We don’t have partners, we have prisoners.” Of course, that’s not universally true, but over the years of walking toward Jesus with women who were no longer in lesbian partnerships, I have heard over and over, “We didn’t know how to do life apart from each other.”

Heterosexuals live longer, happier lives. Sexually active homosexual men live a dangerous and destructive lifestyle. They are at huge risk for contracting AIDS, and run a much higher risk of sexually transmitted diseases than straight men. The gay community experiences three times more alcoholism and drug abuse,[{14}](#) and much more promiscuity and domestic violence than the straight world.[{15}](#) Gay men can expect to live twenty years less than their straight neighbors.[{16}](#)

And finally, a home with a mom and a dad is the best possible place for children. Homosexual parents put kids at risk. The American College of Pediatrics discovered that children raised

by gay parents tend to be more dissatisfied with their own gender, suffer a greater rate of molestation in the family, have homosexual experiences more often, and are encouraged to experiment in dangerous, destructive lifestyle choices.[\[17\]](#)

Please hear me: We're commenting on the extremely high-risk *behavior* that is part and parcel of a homosexual lifestyle. That's not the same thing as condemning the *people* who engage in it. A homosexual lifestyle *is* a façade of normalcy, but it can be changed.

Answering Arguments for Same Sex Marriage

Let's look at several arguments being offered for same sex marriage.

The first is that marriage will encourage faithfulness and stability in volatile homosexual relationships. But the nature of homosexual and lesbian relationships is broken to begin with. Two broken people will not create a whole, healthy relationship. The best description I've ever heard of same sex relationships is "one broken little boy looking for his daddy, connecting with another broken little boy, looking for *his* daddy." And the same is true of women. Neither a marriage license, nor the approval of society, can fix the nature of a relationship that is irretrievably broken at its core.

Another argument is that we need same sex marriage to insure hospital visitation. But it's the patient who decides. If he appoints his partner as a health-care proxy, even if he's in a coma that document will insure access to the hospital. We don't need marriage for that. It's a smokescreen.

A third argument is that we need same sex marriage to insure survivorship benefits. But that's what a will is for. You don't need marriage for that.

Some say that we need same sex marriage for Social Security

benefits. This is an interesting argument, since Social Security benefits were created to address the financial inequity of father as breadwinner and mother as stay-at-home caregiver. Homosexual relationships are usually two-incomes. It's very rare to have one stay-at-home caregiver of the kids, since homosexual relationships do not and cannot produce children naturally. When they do, they are borrowing from God's plan for creating families.

Then there's the discrimination argument. There are really two issues that fall under this argument: *denied liberties* and *denied benefits*.

Concerning the issue of denying the liberty to marry, this argument doesn't hold water. Any person can marry whoever he or she pleases, with certain restrictions that are true for everyone. You can't marry a child, a close blood relative, a person who is already married, or a person of the same sex. These restrictions apply equally to everyone; there is no discrimination here. The problem is, some people don't like the restrictions.

True discrimination functions against an unchangeable identity, such as gender or color. Homosexuality is a lifestyle, a chosen behavior. Even sexual orientation is changeable. It's not easy, but it *is* possible.

The other issue of discrimination is denied benefits. But benefits are granted to families because society has an interest in providing a safe place for children to grow up and be nurtured. So the government provides child-oriented benefits such as inheritance rights and tax relief to ease the financial burden of children. Insurance policies and Social Security benefits provide for the money gap between wage-earner and caregiver. These benefits are inherent to *families*. The essence of marriage is about building families. Homosexual relationships cannot build families legitimately. They have to borrow from heterosexual relationships or technology to create

children.

Final Points to Consider

Joe Dallas draws on his wisdom and experience as a former homosexual to address the issue of same sex marriage in his book *When Homosexuality Hits Home*. He provides some excellent points to consider about this subject.[\[18\]](#)

We can recognize that people genuinely love each other, and we can respect their right to form a partnership, even if we disagree with the nature of their partnership. We can say a relationship is wrong without disrespecting or condemning the people in that relationship.

For example, look at the relationship between Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn. Tracy was a married man when he met and fell in love with her. For decades they had a deeply committed and affectionate relationship although they never married. Note two glaring and conflicting facts about their relationship: it was adulterous, and therefore wrong, and they truly loved each other. You can find a number of good things about their relationship, such as the way they respected each other and cared deeply for each other and seemed to be good for each other. When we say it was morally wrong, this does not deny the good things about their relationship. But to recognize the good things does not change the fact that it was morally wrong. The two are not mutually exclusive.

With gay or lesbian couples, we can acknowledge that there may, indeed, be deep love and commitment to each other. After all, humans have an amazing God-given capacity to love—even outside the bounds of His design and commands. But God cannot and does not sanction homosexual relationships, so we cannot either. We can respect those involved without capitulating to their demands.

Redefining marriage is especially unacceptable to Christians,

since it is spelled out in both Testaments as a type of God's relationship with His people. In the Old Testament, God is portrayed as the husband of the nation of Israel, and in the New Testament, Jesus is the bridegroom of the Church. Marriage is far more than a social construct that provides for the creation of new families. It is a living parable that helps us to understand the dynamic, mysterious relationship between God and His people. How can we redefine something that has such a deep, spiritual meaning? Even if that were not part of the equation, we would still need to deal with the truth that marriage was created by God, and we do not have the right to tinker with His creation.

The problem with same sex marriage is that it doesn't work, it doesn't fit, and it is an attempt to make right something that is intrinsically, irretrievably wrong. God created us in His image as both male and female, and intends that His full image be expressed as men and women come together in designed complementarity. This is impossible in same sex marriage.

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See Also:

- [Can Homosexuals Change?](#)
 - [Did Phil Get It Wrong? Is Homosexuality Sin?](#)
 - [Homosexual Myths](#)
 - [Homosexuality: Questions and Answers](#)
 - [Homosexual Theology](#)
 - [When Someone In Your Congregation Says “I’m Gay”](#) (Pastors’ Brochure)
- [And also our answers to e-mails about homosexuality issues](#)

Globalization and the Internet – A Christian Considers the Impact

Kerby Anderson looks at the growth and role of the Internet through a Christian worldview perspective. It is important that we continue to understand its capabilities and its dangers.

Introduction

More than one billion people use the Internet and benefit from the vast amount of information that is available to anyone who connects. But any assessment of the Internet will show that it has provided both surprising virtues and unavoidable vices.

Contrary to the oft-repeated joke, Al Gore did not invent the

Internet. It was the creation of the Department of Defense that built it in case of a nuclear attack, but its primary use has been during peace. The Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency created a primitive version of the Internet known as ARPAnet. It allowed researchers at various universities to collaborate on projects and conduct research without having to be in the same place.

The first area network was operational in the 1980s, and the Internet gained great popularity in the 1990s because of the availability of web browsers. Today, due to web browsers and search engines, Internet users in every country in the world have access to vast amounts of online information.

The Internet has certainly changed our lives. Thomas Friedman, in his book *The World is Flat*, talks about some of these changes.[\[1\]](#) For example, we used to go to the post office to send mail; now most of us also send digitized mail over the Internet known as e-mail. We used to go to bookstores to browse and buy books; now we also browse digitally. We used to buy a CD to listen to music; now many of us obtain our digitized music off the Internet and download it to an MP3 player.

Friedman also talks about how the Internet has been the great equalizer. A good example of that is Google. Whether you are a university professor with a high speed Internet connection or a poor kid in Asia with access to an Internet café, you have the same basic access to research information. The Internet puts an enormous amount of information at our fingertips. Essentially, all of the information on the Internet is available to anyone, anywhere, at anytime.

The Internet (and the accompanying digital tools developed to use it) has even changed our language. In the past, if you left a message asking when your friend was going to arrive at the airport, usually you would receive a complete sentence. Today the message would be something like: AA 635 @ 7:42 PM

DFW. Tell a joke in a chat room, and you will receive responses like LOL (“laughing out loud”) or ROFL (“rolling on the floor laughing”). As people leave the chat room, they may type BBL (“be back later”). Such abbreviations and computer language are a relatively new phenomenon and were spawned by the growth of the Internet.

I want to take a look at some of the challenges of the Internet as well as the attempt by government to control aspects of it. While the Internet has certainly provided information to anyone, anywhere, at any time, there are still limits to what the Internet can do in the global world.

The Challenge of the Internet

The Internet has provided an opportunity to build a global information infrastructure that would link together the world’s telecommunications and computer networks. But futurists and governmental leaders also believed that this interconnectedness would also bring friendship and cooperation, and that goal seems elusive.

In a speech given over a decade ago, Vice-President Al Gore said, “Let us build a global community in which the people of neighboring countries view each other not as potential enemies, but as potential partners, as members of the same family in the vast, increasingly interconnected human family.”[\[2\]](#)

Maybe peace and harmony are just over the horizon because of the Internet, but I have my doubts. The information superhighway certainly has connected the world together into one large global network, but highways don’t bring peace. Highways connected the various countries in Europe for centuries, yet war was common and peace was not. An information superhighway connects us with countries all over the world, but global cooperation hasn’t been the result, at

least not yet.

The information superhighway also has some dark back alleys. At the top of the list is pornography. The Internet has made the distribution of pornography much easier. It used to be that someone wanting to view this material had to leave their home and go to the other side of town. The Internet has become the ultimate brown wrapper. Hard core images that used to be difficult to obtain are now only a mouse click away.

Children see pornography at a much younger age than just a decade ago. The average age of first Internet exposure to pornography is eleven years old.^[3] Sometimes this exposure is intentional, usually it is accidental. Schools, libraries, and homes using filters often are one step behind those trying to expose more and more people to pornography.

But the influence of the Internet on pornography is only one part of a larger story. In my writing on personal and social ethics, I have found that the Internet has made existing social problems worse. When I wrote my book *Moral Dilemmas* back in 1998, I dealt with such problems as drugs, gambling, and pornography. Seven years later when I was writing my new book, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I noticed that every moral issue I discussed was made worse by the Internet. Now my chapter on pornography had a section on cyberporn. My chapter on gambling had a section dealing with online gambling. My chapter on adultery also dealt with online affairs.

Internet Regulation

All of these concerns lead to the obvious question: Who will regulate the Internet? In the early day of the Internet, proponents saw it as the cyber-frontier that would be self-regulating. The Internet was to liberate us forever from government, borders, and even our physical selves. One writer said we should “look without illusion upon the present

possibilities for building, in the on-line spaces of this world, societies more decent and free than those mapped onto dirt and concrete and capital.”{4}

And for a time, the self-government of the Internet worked fairly well. Internet pioneers were even successful in fighting off the Communications Decency Act which punished the transmission of “indecent” sexual communications or images on the Internet.{5} But soon national governments began to exercise their authority.

Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu, in their book, *Who Controls the Internet?*, describe the various ways foreign governments have exercised their authority.{6}

- France requires Yahoo to block Internet surfers from France so they cannot purchase Nazi memorabilia.{7}
- The People’s Republic of China requires Yahoo to filter materials that might be harmful or threatening to Party rule. Yahoo is essentially an Internet censor for the Communist party.{8}
- The Chinese version of Google is much slower than the American version because the company cooperates with the Chinese government by blocking search words the Party finds offensive (words like Tibet or democracy).

Even more disturbing is the revelation that Yahoo provided information to the Chinese government that led to the imprisonment of Chinese journalists and pro-democracy leaders. Reporters Without Borders found that Yahoo has been implicated in the cases of most of the people they were defending.{9}

Columnist Clarence Page points out that “Microsoft cooperates in censoring or deleting blogs that offend the Chinese government’s sensibilities. Cisco provides the hardware that gives China the best Internet-blocking and user-tracking technology on the planet.”{10}

All of this censorship and cooperation with foreign governments is disturbing, but it also underscores an important point. For years, proponents of the Internet have argued that we can't (or shouldn't) block Internet pornography or that we can't regulate what pedophiles do on the Internet. These recent revelations about Yahoo, Google, and Microsoft show that they can and do block information.

The book *Who Controls the Internet?* argues that the last decade has led to the quiet rediscovery of the functions and justification for territorial government. The Internet has not replaced the legitimate structure of government with a self-regulated cyber-frontier. The Internet may change the way some of these territorial states govern, but it will not diminish their important role in regulating free societies.

Government and Intermediaries

Governments have been able to exercise control over the Internet in various ways. This should not be too surprising. The book *Who Controls the Internet?* points out that while some stores in New York's Chinatown sell counterfeit Gucci bags and Rolex watches, you don't find these same products in local stores. That is because the "most important targets of the laws against counterfeits—trademark laws—are local retailers."[\[11\]](#)

The U.S. government might not be able to go after manufacturers in China or Thailand that produce these counterfeits, but they certainly can go after retail stores. That's why you won't find these counterfeit goods in a Wal-Mart store. And while it is true that by controlling Wal-Mart or Sears doesn't eliminate counterfeit goods, government still can adequately control the flow of these goods by focusing on these intermediaries.

Governments often control behavior through intermediaries.

“Pharmacists and doctors are made into gatekeepers charged with preventing certain forms of drug abuse. Bartenders are responsible for preventing their customers from driving drunk.”[{12}](#)

As the Internet has grown, there has also been an increase in new intermediaries. These would include Internet Service Providers (ISPs), search engines, browsers, etc. In a sense, the Internet has made the network itself the intermediary. And this has made it possible for governments to exert their control over the Internet. “Sometimes the government-controlled intermediary is Wal-Mart preventing consumer access to counterfeit products, sometimes it is the bartender enforcing drinking age laws, and sometimes it is an ISP blocking access to illegal information.”[{13}](#)

More than a decade ago, the German government raided the Bavarian offices of Compuserve because they failed to prevent the distribution of child pornography even though it originated outside of Germany.[{14}](#) In 2001, the British government threatened certain sites with criminal prosecution for distributing illegal adoption sites. The British ISPs agreed to block the sites so that British citizens could not access them.[{15}](#)

Internet Service Providers, therefore, are the obvious target for governmental control. In a sense, they are the most important gatekeepers to the Internet.[{16}](#)

Governmental control over the Internet is not perfect nor is it complete. But the control over intermediaries has allowed territorial governments to exercise much great control and regulation of the Internet than many of the pioneers of cyberspace would have imagined.

Globalization and Government

In [previous articles](#) we have addressed the issue of globalization and have recognized that technology (including the Internet) has made it much easier to move information around the world. There is no doubt that the Internet has accelerated the speed of transmission and thus made the world smaller. It is much easier for people around the world to access information and share it with others in this global information infrastructure.

Those who address the issue of globalization also believe that it diminishes the relevance of borders, territorial governments, and geography. Thomas Friedman believes that the Internet and other technologies are [flattening the world](#) “without regard to geography, distance, or, in the near future, even language.”[\[17\]](#)

In one sense, this is true. The lower costs of moving information and the sheer amount of information exchanged on the Internet have made it more difficult for governments to suppress information they do not like. The explosive growth of blogs and web pages have provided a necessary outlet for opinion and information.

It is also true that there has been some self-governing behavior on the Internet. Friedman, for example, describes eBay as a “self-governing nation-state—the V.R.e., the Virtual Republic of eBay.” The CEO of eBay even says, “People will say that eBay restored my faith in humanity—contrary to a world where people are cheating and don’t give people the benefit of the doubt.”[\[18\]](#)

But it also true that territorial governments work with eBay to arrest and prosecute those who are cheaters or who use the website in illegal ways. And it also relies on a banking system and the potential of governmental prosecution of fraud.

We have also seen in this article that governments have also been able to exert their influence and authority over the Internet. They have been able to use the political process to alter or block information coming into their country and have been able to shape the Internet in ways that the early pioneers of the Internet did not foresee.

Goldsmith and Wu believe that those talking about the force of globalization often naively believe that countries will be powerless in the face of globalization and the Internet. "When globalization enthusiasts miss these points, it is usually because they are in the grips of a strange technological determinism that views the Internet as an unstoppable juggernaut that will overrun the old and outdated determinants of human organization."[{19}](#)

There is still a legitimate function for government (Romans 13:1-7) even in this new world of cyberspace. Contrary to the perceived assumption that the Internet will shape governments and move us quickly toward globalization, there is good evidence to suggest that governments will in many ways shape the Internet.

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The Historical Reliability of the Gospels – An Important Apologetic for Christianity

Dr. Pat Zukeran provides a succinct argument for the reliability of our current copies of the four gospels. This data is an important part of any apologetic argument, i.e. defense of the veracity of the Christian faith.

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



Differences Between the Four Gospels

Skeptics have criticized the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament, as being legendary in nature rather than historical. They point to alleged contradictions between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They also maintain the Gospels were written centuries after the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses. The late date of the writings allowed legends and exaggerations to proliferate, they say.

Are the Gospels historical or mythological?

The first challenge to address is how to account for the differences among the four Gospels. They are each different in nature, content, and the facts they include or exclude. The reason for the variations is that each author wrote to a different audience and from his own unique perspective. Matthew wrote to a Jewish audience to prove to them that Jesus is indeed their Messiah. That's why Matthew includes many of the teachings of Christ and makes numerous references to Old Testament prophecies. Mark wrote to a Greek or Gentile audience to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, he makes his case by focusing on the events of Christ's life. His gospel moves very quickly from one event to another,

demonstrating Christ's lordship over all creation. Luke wrote to give an accurate historical account of Jesus' life. John wrote after reflecting on his encounter with Christ for many years. With that insight, near the end of his life John sat down and wrote the most theological of all the Gospels.

We should expect some differences between four independent accounts. If they were identical, we would suspect the writers of collaboration with one another. Because of their differences, the four Gospels actually give us a fuller and richer picture of Jesus.

Let me give you an example. Imagine if four people wrote a biography on your life: your son, your father, a co-worker, and a good friend. They would each focus on different aspects of your life and write from a unique perspective. One would be writing about you as a parent, another as a child growing up, one as a professional, and one as a peer. Each may include different stories or see the same event from a different angle, but their differences would not mean they are in error. When we put all four accounts together, we would get a richer picture of your life and character. That is what is taking place in the Gospels.

So we acknowledge that differences do not necessarily mean errors. Skeptics have made allegations of errors for centuries, yet the vast majority of charges have been answered. New Testament scholar, Dr. Craig Blomberg, writes, "Despite two centuries of skeptical onslaught, it is fair to say that all the alleged inconsistencies among the Gospels have received at least plausible resolutions."[\[1\]](#) Another scholar, Murray Harris, emphasizes, "Even then the presence of discrepancies in circumstantial detail is no proof that the central fact is unhistorical."[\[2\]](#) The four Gospels give us a complementary, not a contradictory, account.

The Date of the New Testament Writings: Internal Evidence

Critics claim that the Gospels were written centuries after the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses. This would allow for myths about Jesus' life to proliferate. Were the Gospels written by eyewitnesses as they claim, or were they written centuries later? The historical facts appear to make a strong case for a first century date.

Jesus' ministry was from A.D. 27-30. Noted New Testament scholar, F.F. Bruce, gives strong evidence that the New Testament was completed by A.D. 100.[\[3\]](#) Most writings of the New Testament works were completed twenty to forty years before this. The Gospels are dated traditionally as follows: Mark is believed to be the first gospel written around A.D. 60. Matthew and Luke follow and are written between A.D. 60-70; John is the final gospel, written between A.D. 90-100.

The internal evidence supports these early dates for several reasons. The first three Gospels prophesied the fall of the Jerusalem Temple which occurred in A.D. 70. However, the fulfillment is not mentioned. It is strange that these three Gospels predict this major event but do not record it happening. Why do they not mention such an important prophetic milestone? The most plausible explanation is that it had not yet occurred at the time Matthew, Mark, and Luke were written.

In the book of Acts, the Temple plays a central role in the nation of Israel. Luke writes as if the Temple is an important part of Jewish life. He also ends Acts on a strange note: Paul living under house arrest. It is strange that Luke does not record the death of his two chief characters, Peter and Paul. The most plausible reason for this is that Luke finished writing Acts before Peter and Paul's martyrdom in A.D. 64. A significant point to highlight is that the Gospel of Luke precedes Acts, further supporting the traditional dating of

A.D. 60. Furthermore, most scholars agree Mark precedes Luke, making Mark's Gospel even earlier.

Finally, the majority of New Testament scholars believe that Paul's epistles are written from A.D. 48-60. Paul's outline of the life of Jesus matches that of the Gospels. 1 Corinthians is one of the least disputed books regarding its dating and Pauline authorship. In chapter 15, Paul summarizes the gospel and reinforces the premise that this is the same gospel preached by the apostles. Even more compelling is that Paul quotes from Luke's Gospel in 1 Timothy 5:18, showing us that Luke's Gospel was indeed completed in Paul's lifetime. This would move up the time of the completion of Luke's Gospel along with Mark and Matthew.

The internal evidence presents a strong case for the early dating of the Gospels.

The Date of the Gospels: External Evidence

Were the Gospels written by eyewitnesses of the events, or were they not recorded until centuries later? As with the internal evidence, the external evidence also supports a first century date.

Fortunately, New Testament scholars have an enormous amount of ancient manuscript evidence. The documentary evidence for the New Testament far surpasses any other work of its time. We have over 5000 manuscripts, and many are dated within a few years of their authors' lives.

Here are some key documents. An important manuscript is the Chester Beatty Papyri. It contains most of the N.T. writings, and is dated around A.D. 250.

The Bodmer Papyri contains most of John, and dates to A.D. 200. Another is the Rylands Papyri that was found in Egypt

that contains a fragment of John, and dates to A.D. 130. From this fragment we can conclude that John was completed well before A.D. 130 because, not only did the gospel have to be written, it had to be hand copied and make its way down from Greece to Egypt. Since the vast majority of scholars agree that John is the last gospel written, we can affirm its first century date along with the other three with greater assurance.

A final piece of evidence comes from the Dead Sea Scrolls Cave 7. Jose Callahan discovered a fragment of the Gospel of Mark and dated it to have been written in A.D. 50. He also discovered fragments of Acts and other epistles and dated them to have been written slightly after A.D. 50.[\[4\]](#)

Another line of evidence is the writings of the church fathers. Clement of Rome sent a letter to the Corinthian church in A.D. 95. in which he quoted from the Gospels and other portions of the N.T. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote a letter before his martyrdom in Rome in A.D. 115, quoting all the Gospels and other N.T. letters. Polycarp wrote to the Philippians in A.D. 120 and quoted from the Gospels and N.T. letters. Justin Martyr (A.D. 150) quotes John 3. Church fathers of the early second century were familiar with the apostle's writings and quoted them as inspired Scripture.

Early dating is important for two reasons. The closer a historical record is to the date of the event, the more likely the record is accurate. Early dating allows for eyewitnesses to still be alive when the Gospels were circulating to attest to their accuracy. The apostles often appeal to the witness of the hostile crowd, pointing to their knowledge of the facts as well (Acts 2:22, 26:26). Also, the time is too short for legends to develop. Historians agree it takes about two generations, or eighty years, for legendary accounts to establish themselves.

From the evidence, we can conclude the Gospels were indeed

written by the authors they are attributed to.

How Reliable was the Oral Tradition?

Previously, I defended the early dating of the Gospels. Despite this early dating, there is a time gap of several years between the ascension of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels. There is a period during which the gospel accounts were committed to memory by the disciples and transmitted orally. The question we must answer is, Was the oral tradition memorized and passed on accurately? Skeptics assert that memory and oral tradition cannot accurately preserve accounts from person to person for many years.

The evidence shows that in oral cultures where memory has been trained for generations, oral memory can accurately preserve and pass on large amounts of information. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 reveals to us how important oral instruction and memory of divine teaching was stressed in Jewish culture. It is a well-known fact that the rabbis had the O.T. and much of the oral law committed to memory. The Jews placed a high value on memorizing whatever writing reflected inspired Scripture and the wisdom of God. I studied under a Greek professor who had the Gospels memorized word perfect. In a culture where this was practiced, memorization skills were far advanced compared to ours today. New Testament scholar Darrell Bock states that the Jewish culture was “a culture of memory.”[\[5\]](#)

Rainer Reisner presents six key reasons why oral tradition accurately preserved Jesus’ teachings.[\[6\]](#) First, Jesus used the Old Testament prophets’ practice of proclaiming the word of God which demanded accurate preservation of inspired teaching. Second, Jesus’ presentations of Himself as Messiah would reinforce among His followers the need to preserve His words accurately. Third, ninety percent of Jesus’ teachings and sayings use mnemonic methods similar to those used in Hebrew poetry. Fourth, Jesus trained His disciples to teach His lessons even while He was on earth. Fifth, Jewish boys

were educated until they were twelve, so the disciples likely knew how to read and write. Finally, just as Jewish and Greek teachers gathered disciples, Jesus gathered and trained His to carry on after His death.

When one studies the teachings of Jesus, one realizes that His teachings and illustrations are easy to memorize. People throughout the world recognize immediately the story of the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, and the Lord's Prayer.

We also know that the church preserved the teachings of Christ in the form of hymns which were likewise easy to memorize. Paul's summary of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15 is a good example of this.

We can have confidence then that the oral tradition accurately preserved the teachings and the events of Jesus' life till they were written down just a few years later.

The Transmission of the Gospel Texts

When I am speaking with Muslims or Mormons, we often come to a point in the discussion where it is clear the Bible contradicts their position. It is then they claim, as many skeptics, do that the Bible has not been accurately transmitted and has been corrupted by the church. In regards to the Gospels, do we have an accurate copy of the original texts or have they been corrupted?

Previously, we showed that the Gospels were written in the first century, within the lifetime of the eyewitnesses. These eyewitnesses, both friendly and hostile, scrutinized the accounts for accuracy.

So the original writings were accurate. However, we do not have the original manuscripts. What we have are copies of copies of copies. Are these accurate, or have they been tampered with? As shown earlier, we have 5000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. When you include the quotes

from the church fathers, manuscripts from other early translations like the Latin Vulgate, the Ethiopic text, and others, the total comes out to over 24,000 ancient texts. With so many ancient texts, significant alterations should be easy to spot. However, those who accuse the New Testament of being corrupted have not produced such evidence. This is significant because it should be easy to do with so many manuscripts available. The truth is, the large number of manuscripts confirm the accurate preservation and transmission of the New Testament writings.

Although we can be confident in an accurate copy, we do have textual discrepancies. There are some passages with variant readings that we are not sure of. However, the differences are minor and do not affect any major theological doctrine. Most have to do with sentence structure, vocabulary, and grammar. These in no way affect any major doctrine.

Here is one example. In our Bibles, Mark 16:9-20 is debated as to whether it was part of the original writings. Although I personally do not believe this passage was part of the original text, its inclusion does not affect any major teaching of Christianity. It states that Christ was resurrected, appeared to the disciples, and commissioned them to preach the gospel. This is taught elsewhere.

The other discrepancies are similar in nature. Greek scholars agree we have a copy very accurate to the original. Westcott and Hort state that we have a copy 98.33% accurate to the original.[\[7\]](#) A.T. Robertson gave a figure of 99% accuracy to the original.[\[8\]](#) As historian Sir Fredric Kenyon assures us, "...the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."[\[9\]](#)

Do Miracles Discredit the Gospels?

Skeptics question the accuracy of the Gospels because of the miracles. However, this is an issue of worldviews. Those who hold to a naturalistic worldview do not believe an omnipotent creator exists. All that exists is energy and matter. Therefore, miracles are impossible. Their conclusion, then, is that the miracle accounts in the Gospels are exaggerations or myths.

Those who hold to a theistic worldview can accept miracles in light of our understanding of God and Christ. God can intervene in time and space and alter the natural regularities of nature much like finite humans can in smaller limited ways. If Jesus is the Son of God, we can expect Him to perform miracles to affirm His claims to be divine. But worldviews are not where this ends. We also need to take a good look at the historical facts.

As shown previously, the Gospels were written by eyewitnesses to the events of the life of Christ. Early dating shows eyewitnesses were alive when Gospels were circulating and could attest to their accuracy. Apostles often appeal to the witness of the hostile crowd, pointing out their knowledge of the facts as well (Acts 2:22, Acts 26:26). Therefore, if there were any exaggerations or stories being told about Christ that were not true, the eyewitnesses could have easily discredited the apostles accounts. Remember, they began preaching in Israel in the very cities and during the lifetimes of the eyewitnesses. The Jews were careful to record accurate historical accounts. Many enemies of the early church were looking for ways to discredit the apostles' teaching. If what the apostles were saying was not true, the enemies would have cried foul, and the Gospels would not have earned much credibility.

There are also non-Christian sources that attest to the miracles of Christ. Josephus writes, "Now there was about that

time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew to him both many of the Jews and many of the gentiles." The Jewish Talmud, written in the fifth century A.D., attributes Jesus' miracles to sorcery. Opponents of the Gospels do not deny He did miracles, they just present alternative explanations for them.

Finally, Christ's power over creation is supremely revealed in the resurrection. The resurrection is one of the best attested to events in history. For a full treatment, look up the article [Resurrection: Fact or Fiction](#) here at Probe.org.

Notes

1. Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 10.
2. Ibid., 9.
3. F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 5th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 14.
4. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2002), 530.
5. Michael Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 1995), 80.
6. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 27-28.
7. Geisler, 474.
8. Ibid.
9. Quoted by Norman Geisler, *General Introduction to the Bible*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 405.

Jehovah's Witnesses: Witnessing to the Witnesses – Understanding and Responding to False Doctrine

Dr. Zukeran provides us with a concise summary of the key doctrinal issues in the beliefs taught by Jehovah's Witnesses. Understanding these problems held by their followers in areas such as the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and false prophecies, prepares us to be more effective witnesses for Christ to members of their faith.

History of the Watch Tower

One of the most aggressive and fastest growing cults is the Jehovah's Witnesses. Today they have a worldwide organization that numbers about 3.5 million members operating in 205 countries. Several factors account for this rapid growth. The first is their zealous door-to-door evangelism. Second, we Christians have failed to make a solid defense of our faith against their attacks when they have come to our door. The result is the Witnesses continue unchallenged in the propagation of their organization and deceive many. Third, the rise of the cults are a fulfillment of the prophetic warnings given by Jesus and the Apostles.

In this essay I want to look at the beliefs of the Witnesses and then give the reader practical witnessing strategies. The history of the Jehovah's Witnesses begins with the founder of the organization Charles Taze Russell. He was a member of the Congregational Church who came to reject the doctrine of hell and eternal punishment. In 1870, with no formal education, he

began a Bible society which eventually named him pastor. In 1884, he founded Zion's Watchtower and Tract Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is now the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society headquartered in Brooklyn, New York. Since then they have mushroomed into an organization which produces more literature in one year than the Christian and Catholic churches combined. And, of all the cults, their missionary forces are the most well trained in evangelism.

Witnesses deviate from biblical Christianity in several areas. I will discuss some of their major doctrinal errors. First, like all the cults, they deny the Trinity. They believe there is one God, Jehovah. Jesus, is actually Michael the Archangel, the first of God's creation, who became flesh at the incarnation. After the resurrection, He returned to heaven as Michael the Archangel.(1) The Holy Spirit is not God but an active force much like electricity or fire.(2)

Second, Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of Christ, but instead believe He was raised as a spirit and manifested Himself several times in different materialized bodies.(3)

Third, they deny the existence of hell and eternal punishment, but believe in total annihilation after death. Only the elite ruling class, the 144,000, are allowed to go to heaven. The faithful Jehovah's Witnesses remain unconscious after death till they are resurrected in the Millennium. Those who are not in the organization are annihilated after death.(4)

Fourth, Witnesses have a works-oriented salvation. Salvation is not based upon a relationship with Christ, but found in the organization. One must serve the society, and depending on one's faithfulness and absolute obedience, one **may** be saved.(5)

Fifth, they believe that Jesus returned invisibly in 1914 and established His throne in heaven. At Armageddon, God will destroy all evil, and abolish all the world's governments, and

establish a new Paradise on earth. Then the living and resurrected Jehovah's Witnesses will inherit Paradise earth. The 144,000 mentioned earlier will rule with Jesus. At this time all unbelievers who have died will be raised (with some exceptions) and will study under the Witnesses during the Millennium, a period of a thousand years. Studying with them will be the unbelievers who have survived Armageddon. After the thousand years, their faith will be tested because God will release Satan from the abyss. At that point all unbelievers will have to choose between Satan or Jehovah. Those who reject Jehovah will be annihilated.(6)

Clearly the doctrines of the Jehovah's Witnesses deviate in critical ways from sound biblical principles. Next, I want to discuss approaches to evangelizing Jehovah's Witnesses.

False Prophecies of the Watch Tower

One of the most effective ways to evangelize Jehovah's Witnesses is to destroy their faith in the Society. Remember, salvation is found only in this organization. The Watch Tower Society is seen as the spokesman for God. If you can show Witnesses the serious errors of the organization, they will begin to have doubts and questions. This can sometimes lead them to leave the Society.

Attacking the Society's record of false prophecy can cause JWs to question the organization. This approach is effective because they claim to have the true understanding of the end times. If we can show them that the organization has been constantly wrong in the area of prophecy, this will certainly make an impact. When the Jehovah's Witnesses show up at your door again, begin first by asking them, "Are you prophets of God?" Some will say, "Yes." Others may say, "We are prophets in a sense." You must make it clear there is no such thing as "a prophet in a sense." There are only true prophets and false prophets. Some may deny being prophets. If so, show them a copy of the April 1, 1972, *Watch Tower* article on page 197,

which states clearly that they are prophets.

Second, define clearly what makes a true prophet and a false prophet using Deuteronomy 18:20-22. A true prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which come to pass. A false prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and predicts future things which do not come to pass. Make sure they understand this, for this is the most critical step.

Third, ask them, "Is there an organization that fits the character of a false prophet?" That's when you say, "Let's take a look at the Watch Tower Organization." Have handy copies of the articles mentioned here. The 1889 issue, "The Time is at Hand," page 101 states, "The battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14), which will end in A.D. 1914, with the complete overthrow of earth's present rulership, is already commenced." This 1914 prediction of Christ's return never came true.

Then the *Watch Tower* predicted that Christ would return in 1925. The 1918 issue of, "Millions Now Living Will Never Die," p. 89 states, "Therefore we may confidently expect that 1925 will mark the return of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the faithful prophets of old, particularly those named by the apostle in Hebrews 11 to the condition of human perfection." This proved to be another false prophecy.

The *Watch Tower* made a third prophecy of the return of Christ; this one was to occur in 1975. The August 15, 1968, issue of, *Why Are You Looking Forward to 1975?*, p. 494, predicted the return of Christ in 1975. Once again the Witnesses were shown to be false prophets. If the Witnesses don't believe these articles are real, tell them to look them up in their church's library.

Another interesting prophecy is found on page 154 of their book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*. Here they state, "Some of the generation living in 1914 will see the end

of the system of things and survive it.” Most of the 1914 generation are dead, and the few remaining are very old. In just a few years, the *Watch Tower* will again have another false prophecy. When presented clearly, the record of the *Watch Tower's* false prophecies is a very effective tool in witnessing to JWs.

(A free PDF file of copies of these false prophecies, as well as helpful information on the invention of the word “Jehovah,” is available here: [JW-False_Prophecies](#))

The Name of God

Another effective avenue of witnessing to the Witnesses is in the name of God. Jehovah's Witnesses state that God's true name is “Jehovah.” They say the term “God,” is merely a title, and that the real name for God is “Jehovah.” In fact they go so far as to say that unless one calls on the true name of God, “Jehovah,” one cannot be saved.(7)

Let's take a real close look at the name “Jehovah” and see if it is in fact the true name of God. The term “Jehovah” is actually a false reading of the Hebrew pronunciation of God, or YAHWEH. Allow me to explain where the word “Jehovah” comes from. The words in the Hebrew Old Testament contained no vowels. The words were constructed of consonant letters only. The Scribes knew what vowels to use in the pronunciation of the words by the construction of the consonants, the context, and memory. It was written this way until the fifth century when the Masoretes added the vowels under the consonants in their version of the Old Testament known as the Masoretic Text.

The name of God in the Old Testament spelled YHWH, was considered holy, and was not to be read aloud. Instead, when the Hebrews came upon YHWH, they would say ADONAY, which means “Lord.” In order to indicate this substitution, the Massoretes placed the vowels of ADONAY or the English equivalent of e, o,

and a underneath the consonants of YHWH. Later some Christian translators mistakenly combined the vowels of ADONAY with the consonants of YHWH producing the word "Jehovah." Now the term is recognized to be a late hybrid form never used by the Jews. That's the origin of the word "Jehovah." Let's now look at what other scholars say about the name "Jehovah."

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: "Jehovah" – False reading of the Hebrew YAHWEH.(8)

Encyclopedia Americana: "Jehovah" – erroneous form of the name of the God of Israel.(9)

Encyclopedia Britannica: The Masoretes who from the 6th to the 10th century worked to reproduce the original text of the Hebrew Bible replaced the vowels of the name YHWH with the vowel signs of Adonai or Elohim. Thus the artificial name Jehovah came into being.(10)

The Jewish Encyclopedia: "Jehovah" – a mispronunciation of the Hebrew YHWH the name of God. This pronunciation is grammatically impossible.(11)

The New Jewish Encyclopedia: It is clear that the word Jehovah is an artificial composite.(12)

According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, p. 680, vol. 7, "the true pronunciation of the tetragrammaton YHWH was never lost. The name was pronounced Yahweh. It was regularly pronounced this way at least until 586 B.C., as is clear from the Lachish Letters written shortly before this date."

Therefore, for Jehovah's Witnesses to insist Jehovah is the true name of God and that one is saved only if he calls on that name, is an error. When Witnesses appear at your door explain to them the name "Jehovah" and read what the scholars say about Jehovah. Also remember, God uses many names for Himself such as, King of Kings, the Lion of Judah, the Alpha and the Omega, and others. When JWs realize what the

authoritative sources have to say, especially the encyclopedia references, they will begin to realize the need to take a serious look at this error in the organization.

The Bodily Resurrection of Christ

A third subject area for effective witnessing to Witnesses is the bodily resurrection of Christ. Witnesses believe that Christ's crucified body was disintegrated by Jehovah never to exist again. Accordingly, Jesus was raised as a spirit who then materialized and appeared in several different fleshly bodies as the angels had done. Indeed, it was in this form that He appeared to His disciples; i.e., He wasn't in a human body; He just appeared to be human. He ascended into heaven as a spirit and once again became Michael the Archangel.(13) This doctrine can be easily disproved.

First, in Luke 24:36-43, Jesus clearly states in verse 39 that He is not a spirit but a man of flesh and bone. He even ate food to prove that He was not a spirit but had a physical body. In John 20:24-27, Jesus shows Thomas His wounds. Jesus is clearly demonstrating to His disciples that the body previously on the cross had been resurrected. If Jesus had a different body than the one on the cross, He would have been deliberately deceiving the disciples. Ask the Witness, "Would Jesus deliberately deceive His disciples into believing something that was not true?"

Next, turn to some passages where Jesus predicts the resurrection of His body. In John 2:19-21 Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." See Acts 2:26-27, another prophecy of the Messiah's bodily resurrection. Clearly the prophecies and Jesus' appearances prove a bodily resurrection.

Witnesses cite 1 Peter 3:18 and 1 Cor. 15:44-50 to back up their belief. In 1 Peter 3:18 we read, "Christ died once and for all... he being put to death in the flesh but made alive by

the spirit.” This verse does not prove Jesus is a spirit. This verse says that Jesus was raised in the Spirit and by the Spirit of God who gives life. Romans 8:11 states that the Holy Spirit was involved in raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus was not raised as a spirit but *by* the power of the Holy Spirit.

According to 1 Cor. 15:50, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Since Jesus is in heaven, Witnesses say He must be a spirit.(14) They are correct in saying that the earthly body cannot enter heaven. However, when Jesus rose, He had a glorified body (Luke 24:39). Therefore, He can dwell in heaven because of His glorified state. According to 1 Cor 15:39, “All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another... There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies.” Christ’s glorified body allows Him to travel in the earthly and heavenly dimensions. Some verses indicate that Christ exists in heaven in bodily form. “For in him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” Colossians 2:9. The verb “dwells” in the Greek is *katoikei*, and is in the present tense. In other words, Jesus has a glorified body in heaven, the one that was resurrected. Note also 1 Timothy 2:5, “There is one God and one mediator, the man Christ Jesus.” The verb “is,” is a present tense verb also. How can Jesus be a man if He is Michael the Archangel? Seeing these errors may prompt them to seek the truth.

The Holy Spirit

A fourth avenue of effective evangelism with Jehovah’s Witnesses is the subject of the deity of the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned earlier, the Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person because they see the Holy Spirit as a force—much like electricity or fire. Here is what Jehovah’s Witnesses say about the Holy Spirit.

In their book *You Can Live Forever In Paradise on Earth*, they state, “As for the ‘Holy Spirit,’ the so-called third person of the Trinity, we have already seen that this is not a person

but God's active force."(15)

In their magazine *Why Should You Believe in the Trinity?* they state, "To a certain extent it (Holy Spirit) can be likened to electricity, a force that can be adapted to perform a great variety of operations."(16)

Here are some verses that are effective in proving the deity of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 5 Ananias and Sapphira lied to the church about the amount they sold their land for and the amount they gave to the church. Peter confronts them on this issue and states in 5:3, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit...?" Peter later states in the next verse, "You have not lied to men but to God." Here the Holy Spirit is called "God" with a capital G both in our Bibles and in the Witnesses' Bible. Another interesting question to ask Witnesses is, "Can you lie to a force like fire or electricity?" The answer is "No." You can only lie to an intelligence, a person.

In Acts 13:2 the Holy Spirit speaks, "While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.'" Ask the Witness, "When was the last time electricity or fire spoke to you?" It is obvious only an intelligent person can communicate in language.

Ephesians 4:30 states, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Any logical person should realize you can only grieve a living being. Ask a Jehovah's Witness, "How can you grieve or bring sorrow to an impersonal force like electricity?"

When you put all these facts together, the fact that the Holy Spirit is called God, He can be lied to, He speaks, and He can be grieved, the evidence shows that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an inanimate force. When presented clearly, I have not met any Jehovah's Witness who have been able to refute these verses.

God bless and good Witnessing!

Notes

1. *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1982), p. 39.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
3. *Reasoning From the Scriptures* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1985), pp.333-36.
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 76-80.
5. *Live Forever*, pp. 350-55.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 170-84.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-44.
8. "Jehovah," *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1973 ed.
9. *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 16., 1972 ed.
10. "Yahweh," *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 12, 1993 ed.
11. "Jehovah," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 7, 1904 ed.
12. "Jehovah," *The New Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1962 ed.
13. *Live Forever*, pp. 143-45.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 143-46.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
16. *Should You Believe in the Trinity?* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1989), p. 20.

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Romney vs. Obama and Beyond: The Church's Prophetic Role

in Politics

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese answers a common question of a Christian view of politics and government: How would a biblical worldview inform us on being in the world of politics but not of it? "Dr. T" models a critical yet engaged distance in assessing the beliefs of Presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Barack Obama.

Christian Government

During each new election season Christians ask, "What is a biblical view of government?" Does it teach Theocracy, Communism or maybe Democracy? The Old Testament does teach theocracy, which means the Priests ruled the people through the Mosaic Law. Later in its history Israel became a monarchy by its own decision under King Saul—a choice God was not very pleased with, but He accommodated Israel's demand (I Samuel 8).

The New Testament does not adopt theocracy because it applied only to the chosen nation of Israel; it gives no endorsement of any one form of government, but instead offers the Church a special role as a prophetic voice engaging any and all forms of government. There is no such thing as *Christian (civil) Government*, only *Christians in government*. Instead of creating a new system, the Church brings biblical principles to bear on all governments.[\[1\]](#) This position allows the Church everywhere to be actively involved in its particular political situation through maintaining its witness to Christ.

Israel and the Church

The role of Israel and the Church are often conflated in Christian minds, especially during the political season. Many still believe that Christians should create laws or vote for candidates that will bring us closer to a "Christian America"

ideal. This is a revised version of an old notion of Christendom that joins church and state going back to the Constantinian Church which espoused a Christian Roman Empire. Some of our Puritan forebears held that America was the New Jerusalem. America as a nation replaces Israel as the people of God and the Church becomes a political entity like Israel.

In approaching politics, it is essential that we keep in mind the differences between Israel and the Church. Israel was a national people with its own civil law and identity. It was closed to the rest of the world and had to live in strict separation from the Gentile nations. Their call was to isolation, to establish Theocracy and to drive the Gentiles out from Canaan, a goal they were never really successful at accomplishing (Judges 1: 19, 28, 32). Israel was one civil nation among many civil nations and it was usually at war with those neighbors.

Israel foreshadowed the Church. They prepared the world for the coming of the messiah and the Church. Their history and law serves as an example or model of instruction for the Church (Romans 15: 4 and I Corinthians 10: 6), but the Church is not obligated to adopt Israel's civil identity because this would violate her broader mission to reach all people (Acts 1: 8). The Church is called to political and cultural engagement with all systems and all people, not isolation. When the Church becomes a political or cultural system, it loses its message of grace through faith and reverts back to Law (Galatians 3). Faith cannot be legislated.

The Church could not be true to its universal calling if it was a political power like Israel because this turns its mission into one of war and conquest, such as the Crusades in the middle ages, rather than conversion through faith (John 18: 36). Islam is a good example of a religion that does follow Israel's kind of political identity in the establishment of Sharia Law. The Church is not one nation, but one people among many nations, cultures and systems. It cannot

afford to be a nation with its own civil law and government, which sets itself against other governments and other people. When the Church establishes itself as a political power it compromises its prophetic mission and loses its unique contribution to politics. Instead the Church has a more complex role in any system it finds itself in.

In The World but Not of It

Christians are in the world, but not of the world. Jesus prayed that his followers will not be taken out of the world, but that they be sent into the world and kept from its evil (John 17: 15). The Apostle Paul argued similarly that we must maintain our association with people in the world, even immoral people—and not to isolate ourselves (I Corinthians 5: 9, 10). He says, “the form of this world is passing away,” an awareness that creates in us an “undistracted devotion to the Lord” in every area of life. We are to participate in the world, but not get too attached to it. We “should be as those who buy, but do not possess...and those who make use of the world as though they did not make full use of it” (I Corinthians 7: 31-35). We bring awareness of the temporal nature of the world.

The Prophetic Role of the Church

The Apostle Peter states that the Church is a unique people of God, “a people for God’s own possession” or a “peculiar people” as the King James Version says, called to proclaim the truth. He exhorts Christians to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness...” and to keep our “behavior excellent” in the world. (I Peter 2: 9- 12).

The Church lives differently in society by setting an example. As God’s special people, the Church is called to witness His truth to the world, including to the government structures. This means that the Church works within various systems, something Paul accomplished effectively in his use of Roman

Citizenship and with his appeal to Caesar (Matthew 17: 24-27; I Peter 2: 13-20, Romans 13: 1-7, Acts 16: 35-39; 23: 11; 24 and 25).

In preaching the Word the Church acts as prophet to “the world,” the societal structures arrayed against God (Romans 12: 2). This includes all political systems under satanic control (Luke 4: 5-8). A prophet brings a timely and meaningful message of relevance. He has insight to speak to a particular situation. For example when Nathan the prophet spoke the Word of the Lord to King David in confronting David’s sin of murder he held him accountable for his behavior (2 Samuel 12: 1-15). The Bible teaches us through this example that the political powers are not absolute. *The king is not God*, a radical statement in ancient times.

Prophets call people back to obedience to God. They were the conscience of the nation. Likewise, the Church acts as prophet through active participation, but with an attitude of critical distance.

Critical Distance

Critical distance does not mean isolation or withdrawal where we go live in the woods and wait for the world to die. It means involvement in everything the world offers, especially politics, but with an approach from a *different perspective*, an eternal perspective. Criticism means Christians work from within society and offer a perpetual challenge to the status quo that reflects a Christian conscience; it never arrives at a final form of society in which it is completely comfortable. This is an important, albeit an uncomfortable, role to play. It can never endorse any system uncritically because this acceptance negates the fact of the inherent evil of the world and announces the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church then is swallowed in the world’s identity. This reflects what happened in the Christian Roman Empire and in the Christian America ideal, which is often the ideology

behind so called “Christian Conservative” political activism. The United States is identified with Christendom as “a Christian country.” Criticism in this sense does not simply entail a good word of advice, but active participation guided by an ethic of love (Matthew 5: 43-48; Romans 13: 8-10). This may manifest in working to repeal an unjust law or establishing a new law that meets certain needs in society, but especially the needs of the weakest members of society, who cannot speak for themselves and are powerless. This reflects a Christian conscience of concern for others, rather than just ourselves. Laws must protect those who need the most protection, rather than empower those who make it. Law is the enforcement of the personal morality of its makers (hence, when people say you “cannot legislate morality,” that’s an absurdity).

Perhaps the greatest example in recent times of the Church’s prophetic voice in American politics was in bringing attention to the cause of the unborn in its efforts to stem the tide of abortion, both in its political activism and through nonpolitical work of advocating adoption as an alternative to abortion. Another good example was the American Civil Rights Movement when it spoke against racism and the unjust social structures in American society.

Just as the Old Testament prophets held the king accountable to the Law of God—*the king is not God*—so the Church reminds the world of its limitations, that its systems have flaws and must allow for improvement. *The world is not yet in the kingdom of God.* There is no perfect system any more than there are perfect people. There is always room for growth and change. Only in the kingdom of God does change and growth cease because it is no longer necessary in the final state of perfection (Revelation 21).

Democracy offers a better system for Christians than Communism or Theocracy because it reflects an ideal of freedom, the basis of love and faith. But it has flaws, such as the tyranny

of the majority (de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*). Nor is democracy “the end of history,” a popular idea after the Cold War, arguing that democracy has emerged from the ideological struggles of history to become the greatest and final system. Nothing will succeed it. The post–Cold War world has reached the end of history, or the end of struggle and the end of change.[\[2\]](#)

There is every reason to consider that democracy will perish from the earth if its people grow complacent and do not defend it or practice it and any idea to suggest that it cannot perish on the basis of a metaphysical law of history will only contribute to that complacency. There is never a final system of society in which the Church refuses to adjure and criticize toward change because that entity would then be equal to the kingdom of God.

Romney vs. Obama

We apply the same standard of *critical distance* in voting for our favorite candidate or party. Voting is often the choice of the lesser of two evils. This popular maxim expresses the same idea of critical distance as long as we understand that the choice of the lesser evil is still a far less than perfect choice. Critical distance includes self-criticism.

Most people choose a candidate who comes closest to their own position and then largely ignore their differences. Critical distance will not dismiss the differences because through it we hold ourselves accountable by seeing our blind spots and recognizing potential problems. We show humility and responsibility through admitting the limits of our own position and choices.

Many contrasts exist between Governor Romney and President Obama, not least of which is personal religious belief. Ironically, Evangelical Christians largely ignore this issue, though each candidate’s views represent a serious difference

as compared to biblical Christianity. In the past, Evangelicals have stressed the importance of personal belief. After all, most people hold to a particular political and economic view because of their religious views, not despite them.

President Obama reflects Liberation Theology in his belief that government must act as champion of the people. This should be done, in his view, by elevating the condition of the disenfranchised into the middle class, mainly through economic redistribution, but also through religious pluralism, toleration of minorities, woman's rights and gay rights. Liberation Theology adapts Christianity to a socialist political agenda that uses government as a tool to free people from oppressive social structures such as capitalism, racism and patriarchy. There is a strong emphasis on social justice, radical equality and group sin, meaning the structure of a society is to blame for its problems rather than the individual, who is a victim.

Governor Romney styles himself as a stalwart defender of free enterprise informed by Mormon beliefs that reflect traditional American values of family, faith, and work ethic. Government must protect those values from its own encroachment in order to maintain the middle class. Although Mormonism is radically different from Evangelical Christianity in its doctrinal formulation, it accepts similar social values, which stress personal responsibility and initiative.

Although, no election can be reduced to one issue or to personal beliefs, these considerations' potential impact cannot be disregarded. Behind Obama stands a Liberation Christianity that has and will continue to benefit from his re-election. A Romney victory will lift the cultural status of Mormons in America from outsiders to the mainstream. In the past, the election to the Presidency of a member from a group struggling for recognition in mainstream America received a stamp of approval at the highest level of political office

that gave them increased cultural recognition and cache . The election of one of your own to the Presidency is a sign of arrival. President Kennedy's election to office brought American mainstream acceptance to Roman Catholics, just as President Carter brought it to Evangelicals and President Obama brought the full acceptance of African-Americans, so a "President Romney" will create a greater cultural awareness and acceptance of Mormons.

The contemporary political logic of the American system says put your criticism out there during the primaries, but put it away once a candidate for your party is chosen. You're supposed to fall in line behind him or her. Christians often follow the same logic and refuse to entertain criticism of our chosen candidate because it suggests a preference for the opposing side. The lack of criticism generally continues through our chosen candidate's administration. Problems and faults are usually blamed on the other side and Christians become as politically polarized as the parties. This surrenders any critical distance gained and the Church loses its unique contribution for political advantage. It's like Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of soup (Genesis 25: 27-34). We can in good conscience choose a candidate that we do not completely agree with *if* we retain our criticism of him. We should participate, yet with reservations.

Critical distance can tolerate voting for someone of a different faith if he is a better choice than the alternative, but it cannot live with softening its differences in order to win an election or modifying its convictions for political gain. Evangelicals are faced with a difficult choice, not between Liberation Theology or Mormonism, but whether or not they will retain their doctrinal critique and rejection of Mormonism, when those differences threaten its economic and political interests.

Recently, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association dropped Mormonism from its cult list. And the language of "values"

between Christians and Mormons grows indistinguishable, so that now “Christian values” are somehow equated with “Mormon values” and a vote for a Mormon is a vote for “biblical values.” The greatest “value” for Christians is the deity of Jesus Christ, which most Mormons do not accept. Evangelicals and Mormons share a similar political agenda in preserving the free enterprise system and in protecting the traditional American family ideal, which they both consider preferable to the creeping socialism of the Obama administration. There is no need to drop the hard and fast differences between Christianity and Mormonism; Christians can work with anyone if we effectively practice *critical distance* at the same time.

So, it comes down to retaining our prophetic role as members of Christ’s Body—not as much who we vote for, but why and how.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, “A Christian View of Politics, Government, and Social Action,” *Mind Games Survival Course Manual* (Plano, Texas: Probe Ministries, 1998), www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Politics/Gov1.htm

2. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). The idea of the end of history here is really a Hegelian version of Christian America, just as the idea of progress, the foundation of Fukuyama’s argument, reflects a secularization of the older notion of the idea of providence that founded “Christian America.” Both identify either Christendom or the Western World with the kingdom of God, the final form of society. One is traditionally religious in its conception and the other secular.

Redeeming The Hunger Games: From a Christian Worldview Perspective

Although not explicitly anti-Christian, The Hunger Games presents a very disturbing future world where children are forced to fight one another to the death. Sue Bohlin presents solid, biblically based concepts on how we are to consider movies in general and redeeming questions we should ask of this movie if one chooses to see it. Viewing movies with the intent of understanding the worldview behind the movie can help us present our Christian worldview in a way that communicates with the people around us.

Should Christians read (or see) *The Hunger Games*? Some people make strong arguments for avoiding any contact with the books or movie. No one will lie on their deathbed and say, "Oh, how I regret missing *Hunger Games*." But this is the latest "big thing" to hit our culture; is there a way for Christ-followers to redeem it and not simply consume it as entertainment?

This separatist (and unrealistic) position confirms an unhealthy false dichotomy between "things of the world" and "things of the spirit realm." We need to see the world as one reality where Christ rules over all and has something to say about everything. It would be better to ask, "How does the Bible relate to *Hunger Games*?" It would be better to compare biblical truths and biblical values to any body of work people are reading or viewing or listening to, the way that we can better judge the crookedness of a stick by laying it next to a straightedge.

Developing our critical thinking skills protects us from absorbing and internalizing ungodly ideas, creating yet more

“cultural captives” who are more conformed to the surrounding cultures than the Word and character of God.

“It’s just a story. . .”

Many people dismiss concern over blockbuster novels and movies by saying, “Come on, it’s just a story, it’s *fiction!*” But we need to be *more* careful about how we process ideas and images that come through story, since most people’s defenses are down with this genre, and they just absorb the story without thinking or analyzing. That’s a major contributing factor to cultural captivity in the church—people have been absorbing the ideas and values of the culture through music, TV, movies, books, and even just personal conversation, without comparing them to what God says.

When people take in and digest *Hunger Games* as mere entertainment, their unthinking discernment puts them in the same category as the Capitol spectators who have no concept of the atrocity of human beings being sacrificed for their diversion. But if you are deeply troubled by its depiction of the broken reality of life in a fallen world, if you are able to think about the implications of the story, then you are interacting with the books and movie with wisdom.

I think the best way to build wisdom and develop critical thinking is by asking questions that help us evaluate what we read or see.

For example, something is terribly wrong in the world that author Suzanne Collins paints in *Hunger Games*. Our souls rebel against the evil, the sense of “not right-ness” in it. We need to ask ourselves (and others), *What is the “terribly wrong”?* *And where did that sense of right and wrong come from?* I suggest that the visceral reaction comes from the imprint of God, the *imago Dei*, on our souls. The rightness of the image of God on our souls contrasts painfully with the crookedness of the dystopian world of *Hunger Games*.

The presence of evil and sin in the books is not bad in and of itself; as in the Bible, they are never glorified or promoted. The result is that most readers/viewers react along moral lines: murder and betrayal are bad, sacrifice and loyalty are good. This is a legitimate and edifying use of literature and film.

Questions to Ask

My colleague Todd Kappelman, an accomplished literature and film critic, suggests several thoughtful questions to ask about films and books:

- *How important is life to the director/writers etc.? Are the tough issues dealt with or avoided?*
- *Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your interpretation?*
- *Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to determine if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that is in agreement with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality.*
- *Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film seek to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone?*
- *Is the film technically well made, written, produced and acted?*[{1}](#)

Christian thinker Leland Ryken proposes three more questions that the Christian ask when interpreting a work of art:

- *Does the interpretation of reality in this work conform or fail to conform to Christian doctrine or ethics? (The answer may be mixed for a given work.)*

- *If some of the ideas and values are Christian, are they inclusively or exclusively Christian? That is, do these ideas encompass Christianity and other religions or philosophic viewpoints, or do they exclude Christianity from other viewpoints?*

- *If some of the ideas and values in a work are Christian, are they a relatively complete version of the Christian view, or are they a relatively rudimentary version of Christian belief on a given topic?*[\[2\]](#)

Our good friend Dan Panetti from Prestonwood Christian Academy has assembled a deeply insightful white paper for parents to use in talking about *Hunger Games* with their children, to help them build a biblical worldview analysis of something students are intent on reading or seeing anyway. (And it's not just older students, either. One of my friends' eight-year-old son insisted on going to see the movie. His mother told me, "He was attracted by the movie trailers and he knew people reading the book. He was enticed by the action, but kids killing kids did bother him [but not that much].")

I am grateful for Dan's generosity in allowing us to share his questions in this article, and to make his entire PDF document available for you on our website [here](#). Below are three of the nine major themes he highlights for discussion. I invite you to read through his paper to sharpen your own critical thinking skills!

And that's how we redeem *The Hunger Games*.

The Hunger Games Trilogy Parent Book Discussion

by Dan Panetti, Prestonwood Christian Academy – Plano, Texas

Substitutionary Atonement

The most important theme of this book, in my opinion, is the concept of substitutionary atonement (or penal substitution).

God made him who had no sin to be sin [or be a sin offering] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. – 2 Corinthians 5:21

Katniss voluntarily takes the place of her sister Primrose as the “tribute” from District 12—essentially Katniss took the place of Primrose replacing her sister’s life with her own. Compare this story to the story of the sacrifice of Jesus in our place. While Katniss is willing to give her own life to protect her younger sister, Jesus was willing to give His life as a ransom for ours...while we were yet sinners—still IN rebellion against His Father! While Prim was young, “innocent” and weak and Katniss was far more skilled and able to defend herself; it was Jesus who was perfect and sinless dying for us!

Violence

The primary complaint aired about *The Hunger Games* (both the books and the movie) related primarily to the violence; and, yes, the books and movie do have a violent theme and depictions. The first question is whether the violence is appropriate or simply gruesome for effect. Both Collins (the author) and those responsible for the movie do a remarkable job of actually restraining the emphasis on the violence. This does not mean that the books and movie are appropriate for all ages—quite to the contrary. But in discussing this concept with your own children you can point out the fact that there are times in human history when people have had to stand up and fight for what they believe in. Engraved into the wall of the Korean War Veterans Memorial is the statement, “Freedom is not free.” Katniss lives under an oppressive government and is forced to fight not only to protect herself and those she loves, but in the second and third book she fights for an ideal of something that is greater than just herself. Later we

will discuss the ideals of the Founding Fathers of our nation and their decision to throw off an oppressive government agreeing to pledge their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. Unlike previous generations, this generation is not as familiar with the cost of freedom born by those who give their lives in service to our nation. *The Hunger Games* reminds us that there are some things that are worth fighting for—and even dying for – meaning there will be a certain level of violence along the way.

Freedom is a fragile thing and is never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation, for it comes only once to a people. Those who have known freedom, and then lost it, have never known it again. ~ Ronald Reagan

Ethical Dilemmas

One of the most fascinating aspects of *The Hunger Games* is the presentation of numerous ethical dilemmas – questions where you could ask yourself, “What would I do if I were in that situation?”

Examples of ethical dilemmas for conversation purposes:

Is lying wrong? Is lying always wrong? Would you be willing to lie to protect the life of another person? Would you be willing to lie to save your own life?

Obviously Katniss finds herself faced with these fascinating ethical dilemmas and she has choices to make. Whether she is inside the arena fighting for her life or leading a rebellion against President Snow and the oppressive government, Katniss is often faced with the choice of either having to lie or someone (including herself) having to pay the ultimate price of their lives!

Is killing wrong? Is killing another person always wrong? Would you be able to kill another person to save the life of someone you loved? Would you be able to take the life of another person to save your own life?

Again Katniss finds herself faced with these difficult situations. At the end of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss and Peeta decide that they would rather die than kill one another—and although Katniss hopes that those in control would rather have two victors than none, the reality is that both Katniss and Peeta take the poisonous berries with the intent of killing themselves.

Katniss struggles with this dilemma when she makes an alliance with Rue and when she remembers that Thresh let her live when he could have killed her. Why is it so difficult for Katniss to take the life of another while others in the arena appear to be so cavalier and nonchalant about it?

If you want to discuss more about ethical dilemmas, I suggest you read *The Hiding Place* by Corrie tem Boom. Corrie and her family were Dutch Christians who helped hide numerous Jews during WWII. Eventually Corrie and her family were arrested and sent away to concentration camps – her father and sister both died in a concentration camp.

As Christians we should look to God's Word for guidance in making decisions about life. Psalm 119:105 reminds us that God's Word "is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path." Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Wise counsel is also strongly encouraged in Scripture. Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed."

Notes

1. www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Movies/Movies2.htm

2. www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Movies/Movies3.htm

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See Also:

[The Hunger Games: A hunger, a game or a calculated viewing option for Christians?](#)