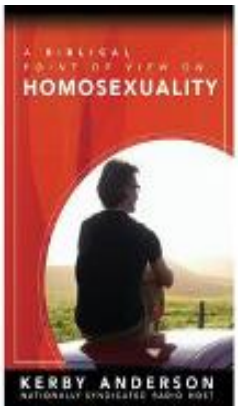
Answering Arguments for Same-Sex Marriage – A Christian Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson considers the arguments in favor or same-sex marriage from a biblical worldview perspective. He shows that arguments such as tolerance, equal rights, and no impact on others do not hold up under critical examination. As Christians, we can love those who live a different lifestyle without allowing them to claim their lifestyle is identical and harmless to society.

Shouldn't We Be Tolerant?



As more and more states are either legalizing same-sex marriage or willing to recognize same-sex marriages from other states, it is crucial that Christians know how to answer arguments for same-sex marriage. We will look at some of these arguments and provide answers from my book, *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality*.{1}

One of the first arguments for same-sex marriage is that we should be tolerant. We used to live in a society where the highest value was a word with a capital T. It was the word Truth. Today, we live in a society that has switched that word for another word with a capital T: Tolerance.

Should we be tolerant of other people and their lifestyles?

The answer to that depends upon the definition of "tolerance." If by tolerance someone means we should be civil to other people, then the answer is a resounding "yes." In fact, civility should be the hallmark of Christians. Jesus expressed the goal of civility when he taught that "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

Civility also includes being gracious even in the midst of disagreement or hostility. Other people may be disagreeable, and we are free to disagree with them. But we should disagree in a way that gives grace. Often such a gentle response can change a discussion or dialogue. Proverbs 15:1 reminds us that "a gentle answer turns away wrath."

Civility also requires humility. A civil person acknowledges that he or she does not possess all wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, one should listen to others and consider the possibility that they might be right and that he is wrong. Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself."

There is also an important distinction we should make between judging a person and judging their sinful behavior. Some have said that the most frequently quoted Bible verse is no longer John 3:16 but Matthew 7:1. It is where Jesus says, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." People misuse this verse all the time to say you should not judge anything another person does.

The context of this verse is important. It seems that what Jesus was condemning was a critical or judgmental spirit. It is a judging spirit when someone believes they are superior to you. Jesus was obviously not saying that people should not make judgments. A few verses later Jesus calls certain people "pigs" and "dogs" (Matthew 7:6). He even calls some "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matthew 7:15). There are many passages in the Bible that admonish us to use sound judgment and

discernment (1 Kings 3:9; Proverbs 15:14; 1 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 1:9-10).

The Bible says that Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) and provides a model we should follow. We should model both biblical compassion and biblical convictions when considering the issue of homosexuality and same-sex marriage.

Don’t Homosexuals Deserve Equal Rights?

Each person in our society deserves equal rights. But redefining marriage is not about equal rights but about adding special rights to our laws and Constitution. Currently we all have the same right to marry a person of the opposite sex who is of a certain age and background. We don’t give people the right to marry their siblings. We don’t give people the right to marry a young child. As a society we have placed certain limits on marriage but give everyone the equal right to marry under those specified conditions.

When we redefine marriage, then all sorts of new relationships will also vie for social acceptance. Already the legalization of same-sex marriage in one state had resulted in the call for the legalization of polygamy. Some gay activists are calling for the legalization of polyamory (multiple sexual relationships with multiple partners).

We should also realize that the government is not prohibiting homosexuals from engaging in their behavior or even having a partner. All government is saying is that it is not going to redefine marriage to include same-sex relationships. And when citizens of this country have been given an opportunity to vote on a constitutional amendment in their state defining marriage, they have overwhelmingly approved of the traditional definition of marriage.

As we have already noted, the push for same-sex marriage has been more about respect and acceptance than it has been about

rights. If government recognizes the legal validity of gay marriage, then that places government's "seal of approval" on homosexuality.

Often when gay activists are calling for equal rights, they are really asking for special benefits. Homosexuals have the same right to marry as heterosexuals. They have the right to marry a qualified person (age, marital status) of the opposite sex. Homosexuals and heterosexuals cannot marry someone of the same sex, someone who is too young, someone who is already married, etc.

But the activists argue that because they cannot marry someone of the same sex, they lose out on certain benefits. But that is not a justification for redefining marriage. It may be a justification for reconsidering the benefits we provide as a society, but it isn't a justification for changing the definition of marriage.

Consider the issue of visitation rights. Gay activists argue that government needs to grant same-sex marriage rights to homosexuals so they will have visitation rights. But again, this may be an argument for changing the laws concerning visitation, but it isn't an argument for redefining marriage.

A bigger question is whether this is really a problem. In this day where major corporations and governmental entities are granting domestic partnership rights, it is difficult to see this as a problem. If such a case were brought to light people could use public pressure to force the hospital to change its policies.

Isn't Homosexual Marriage Like Interracial Marriage?

When objections are raised about legalizing same-sex marriage, proponents argued that the same concerns were said about

interracial marriage. For years gay activists have tried to hitch their caboose to the civil rights train. While many in the African-American community have found this comparison offensive, the tactic is still used on a fairly regular basis.

There are significant differences between interracial marriage and same-sex marriage. First, removing certain state laws banning interracial marriage did not call for a *redefinition* of marriage but merely an *affirmation* of marriage. Traditional marriage is not about equal rights but about establishing norms for sexual relationships within society. We ban discrimination based on race because it is an immutable characteristic that each person has from the moment of conception. And the word "race" appears in the Constitution.

A person who participates in homosexual *behavior* is different from someone who is born with an immutable *characteristic*. As many people have pointed out, there are no former African-Americans or former Asian-Americans. But there are hundreds of people who have left homosexuality.

Actually, interracial marriage and same-sex marriage differ from one another at the most fundamental level. The genetic difference between various races is insignificant biologically. A recent study of human genetic material of different races concluded that the DNA of any two people in the world would differ by just 2/10ths of one percent.{2} And of this variation, only six percent can be linked to racial categories. The remaining ninety-four percent is "within race" variation. And the moral difference between the races is also insignificant since the Bible teaches that God has made all of us "from one blood" (Acts 17:26, KJV).

But even though race and ethnicity are insignificant to marriage, gender is fundamental to marriage. There is a profound biological difference between a man and a woman. Marriage is defined as a bond between a man and a woman.

The Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia* struck down state laws prohibiting interracial marriage, arguing that marriage is one of the "basic civil rights of man."{3} The Supreme Court of Minnesota later ruled in *Baker v. Nelson* that race and homosexual behavior are not the same.

To legalize same-sex marriage is to change the very nature and definition of marriage. And there is good reason to believe that is exactly what gay activists want. Michelangelo Signorile is a leading voice in the homosexual community. He explained in *OUT* magazine that the real goal in legalizing same-sex marriage was to radically transform marriage.{4}

He later goes on in the article to admit that the idea of the "freedom to marry" was actually a suggestion from the Los Angeles PR firm which they thought would be successful because it would play well in the heterosexual world.

Does Same-Sex Marriage Hurt Traditional Marriage?

One of the arguments against legalization of same-sex marriage is that it will have an adverse effect on traditional marriage. Proponents of same-sex marriage argue that it will not have any impact. They ask, "How can my marriage to someone of the same sex have any impact at all on your marriage?" So what would be the consequences of same-sex marriage?

First, when the state sanctions gay marriage, it sends a signal of legitimacy throughout the culture. Eventually marriage becomes nothing more than sexual partnership and the sanctity of marriage and all that goes with it is lost.

When same-sex marriage is legalized, the incidences of cohabitation increases. This is not theory but sociological fact. Essentially, Europe has been engaged in a social experiment with same-sex marriage for decades.

Stanley Kurtz has written numerous articles documenting the impact of same-sex marriage on traditional marriage in the Scandinavian countries. When the governments of Sweden and Norway permitted same-sex marriage, he noted a trend away from marriage. According to Kurtz: “Marriage is slowly dying in Scandinavia.” A majority of children in Sweden and Norway are born out of wedlock, and sixty percent of first-born children in Denmark have unmarried parents.{5}

A second consequence of same-sex marriage legalization would be the complete redefinition of marriage and the introduction of a variety of marital relationships. Already we are seeing court cases attempting to legalize polygamy. The most prominent case involved Utah polygamist Tom Green. He and his lawyer used the Supreme Court case of *Lawrence v. Texas* as a legal foundation for his marriage to multiple wives.{6} It is interesting to note that when the Supreme Court rendered its decision in the *Lawrence* case, Justice Antonin Scalia warned that the decision could lead to the legalization of same-sex marriage and the redefinition of marriage.{7}

Traditional marriage rests on the foundation of biblical teaching as well as cultural tradition. Theology, legal precedent, and historical experience all support the traditional definition of marriage. Once you begin to redefine marriage, any sexual relationship can be called marriage.

Third, the redefinition of marriage will ultimately destroy marriage as we know it. For many gay activists, the goal is not to have lots of same-sex marriages. Their goal is to destroy the institution of marriage.

Stanley Kurtz believes that once same-sex marriage is legalized, “marriage will be transformed into a variety of relationship contracts, linking two, three or more individuals (however weakly or temporarily) in every conceivable combination of male and female.”{8}

Does Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage Really Affect Families?

Those who oppose same-sex marriage often point to the connection between marriage and family. Traditional marriage provides a moral and legal structure for children. Proponents of gay marriage point out that many marriages do not have children. Thus, the connection is irrelevant.

While it is true that some marriages do not result in children due to choice or infertility, that does not invalidate the public purpose of marriage. Marriage, after all, is a public institution that brings together a father and mother to bring children into the world. Individuals may have all sorts of private reasons for marrying, but there is an established public purpose for marriage.

If couples choose not to have children or are not able to have children, it does not invalidate this public purpose. There is a distinction between purpose and use. Over the years I have written a number of books. I would like to believe that every person who has a copy of one of my books has read it. I know that is not true. Some sit on shelves and some sit in boxes. Others sit in used bookstores. The fact that some people don't read my books doesn't mean they were not intended to be read.

Likewise, we shouldn't assume that the connection between marriage and family is insignificant simply because some couples do not or cannot have children. One of the public purposes of traditional marriage is procreation.

At the center of every civilization is the family. There may be other social and political structures, but civilizations survive when the family survives. And they fall apart when the family falls apart. Michael Novak, former professor and winner of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, put it this way: "One unforgettable law has been learned through all the oppressions, disasters, and injustices of the last thousand

years: if things go well with the family, life is worth living; when the family falters, life falls apart."{9}

Marriage between a man and a woman produce children that allow a civilization to exist and persist. Marriage begins the foundation of a family. Families are the foundation of a civilization.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008).
2. J. C. Gutin, "End of the Rainbow," *Discover*, Nov. 1994, 71-75.
3. *Loving v. Virginia*, Supreme Court of U.S., 388 U.S. 1, 1967.
4. Michaelangelo Signorile, "I DO, I DO, I DO, I DO, I DO," *OUT*, May 1996, 30-32.
5. Stanley Kurtz, "The end of marriage in Scandinavia: The conservative case for same-sex marriage collapses," The Weekly Standard, 2 February 2004, http://tinyurl.com/3xpkz.
6. Alexandria Sage, "Utah polygamy ban is challenged: U.S. Supreme Court' sodomy ruling is cited," *Associated Press*, 26 January 2004.
7. "The Supreme Court: Excerpts from Supreme Court's decision striking down sodomy laws," *New York Times*, 27 June 2003, A18.
8. Stanley Kurtz, "Beyond gay marriage," *Weekly Standard*, 4 August 2003.
9. Michael Novak, "The family out of favor," *Harper's Magazine*, April 1976, 37-46.

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The Mitchell Report: Christian Response to Steroids in Sports

Heather Zeiger considers the question of how Christians should respond to the revelations regarding steroid use in sports. The Mitchell report is one example accompanied by many others such as the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency report on cyclist, Lance Armstrong. Heather takes a biblical worldview perspective on this issue taking into consideration their impact on our bodies, our perception of the world, and the perception of young people on what is acceptable in our society. As a Christian, their are numerous reasons not to take steroids and not to glorify the accomplishments of those who do.

Former Senator George Mitchell was charged to investigate and document the prevalence of steroid and human growth hormone use in Major League Baseball. The objective of the report was not only to bring to light the steroid problem, but to offer solutions to help eradicate its use and abuse. Senator Mitchell specifically wanted "the media to focus less on names and more on central conclusions and recommendations of the report."{1}

Later this month and in February, hearings before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform will be held to determine if stronger penalties for steroid use and more rigorous testing are appropriate. The committee will also investigate whether certain athletes are guilty of using performance enhancing drugs. This has brought the topic of steroid abuse in sports to the forefront of the media, providing an excellent opportunity for discussion.

Sport is an important part of life. The Apostle Paul wrote about running and boxing, and used it as an analogy for the

Christian walk.{2} And unlike the Gnostics who despise the body, we honor it as part of our *imago dei* or being created in God's image (for more information see Bodybuilding: Edifying Thoughts About Our Bodies by Michael Gleghorn). So as Christians, we embrace playing sports and exercise. But like so many things, there is a way to play sports that is consistent with a Christian worldview and a way that is not. There are both physical and biblical reasons why steroid use is dangerous and unethical.

What are Steroids?

The first reported use of performance enhancers was in 776 B.C.{3} when athletes would eat sheep testicles to increase their testosterone levels. Today athletes don't use sheep, but the intention is still to increase their testosterone beyond natural levels. Steroids are chemicals that are either a form of testosterone or a testosterone precursor. *Anabolic androgenic steroids* (AAS){4} increase muscle mass and muscle recovery by producing five to thirty times the testosterone that the typical male body produces.{5} Athletes who abuse steroids do see an increase in muscle mass and/or speed, and at first, will see improvements in their performance. ESPN's *The Dope on Steroids* reports that steroids can make the body as much as 50 percent more muscular than is possible without them.{6}

Using steroids to increase muscle strength is illegal, but there are many forms of steroids that remain undetectable in drug tests making it difficult to regulate their use. Furthermore, players have also abused another illegal, undetectable drug called *human growth hormone*, which is not a steroid, but is often used in conjunction with steroids to make a player bigger and to speed injury recovery.{7} Random drug testing creates controversy over privacy violations, and announced tests are easy to beat. By using water-based steroids, it only takes a couple of weeks for players' bodies

to dilute the chemicals to undetectable levels.

While steroids do produce short-term results, the side effects and long-term effects can be devastating.

The Problem

Side-Effects

Physical side-effects from steroid use include increases in cholesterol, acne on arms and back, increase in blood pressure, stiffening of heart tissue, increased production of body hair yet decreased production of scalp hair, stunted growth, hypogonadism (diminished hormonal or reproductive functioning in the testes or the ovaries), sexual dysfunction, and increased risks for both strokes and heart attacks. Psychological side effects include aggressiveness, depression, and addiction/dependence. See Dangers of Steroid Abuse for a more detailed look at these and other possible side-effects to steroid abuse.

Influence on Teens

Athletes are role models for kids, and some studies indicate that athletes are second only to parents in their influence on teen choices. I remember watching track and field as a child and later as a teenager and being captivated by the runners. They had this combination of grace and strength that I admired, so I eventually took up running.

Kids turn to athletes for inspiration all the time, but the problem is they also believe that the athletes are successful because they use steroids. Take this testimonial from www.steroidabuse.com as an example:

> *For me, taking steroids was a natural move. I was an athlete in high school and got a college scholarship to play football at a major university. Between my senior year of high school and my freshman year of college I started my first cycle*

> *because I thought I needed to be faster. I took injectable testosterone and winstrol. I figured that winstrol must be good because it's what Ben Johnson got busted using. I wanted to be fast like him.*
>
> *I was getting stronger at every workout and feeling great. I had heard that steroids can make your joints weaker but I figured Ben Johnson didn't have that problem, so it was probably just a rumor.{8}*

Another testimonial discusses how a parent's obsession with his son, Corey, and his athletic success eventually lead him to administering steroids to Corey when he was only 13. He thought this was how the pros compete. In the end, Corey, now 18, comments about his steroid experience:

> *As Corey tries to scrounge together enough money to get his own place, one point still gnaws at him: He firmly believes he could have been a champion without pharmacological enhancement.*
>
> *Soft-spoken and reserved, Corey wavers among embarrassment, regret and awe when he reflects on his fractured teenage years and his experiment with steroids. "People make it sound like these medications are only performance-enhancing, but they have a huge mental impact as well," he says. "By the time I was done, I was a wreck…."{9}*

And as the Mitchell Report stated, "After the Associated Press reported Mark McGwire was using androstenedione (a testosterone precursor)…sales of that substance increased by over 1000%."{10} Athletes have a strong influence on people, especially teens.

The Christian Worldview

When the news of Barry Bonds' alleged steroid use broke last summer, *Newsweek* commentator George Will observed that "Athletes who are chemically propelled to victory do not merely overvalue winning, they misunderstand why winning is properly valued…. In fact, it becomes a display of some chemists' virtuosity and some athlete's bad character." He later adds that "the athlete's proper goal is to perform unusually well, not unnaturally well."{11} We have a moral foundation for these points in God's word.

First of all, steroids cause the body to be enhanced beyond what it was designed to do. We believe that God has designed us with his purposes in mind, and he has gifted people with different talents and abilities. From an engineering perspective, he put the parts together with a particular design in mind, so when a steroid user becomes stronger than that for which he was designed, the rest of the parts, his joints, tendons, and ligaments, become damaged.{12}

Secondly, steroids are often taken for cosmetic reasons—usually by men obsessed with acquiring a certain physique. As we see from Scripture, this is a disproportionate view of the human body. The Bible tells us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.{13} And as we see in Luke 12:22-34, Jesus tells us not to worry over what we will eat or drink and what to wear, that He will provide what is necessary. This puts the body in its proper perspective as something to care for, but not something to obsess over.

Lastly, there is a character issue here. Consider the Apostle Paul's view of weakness, which we could apply to physical weakness as well:

> *So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from*

> *being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, and that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10, ESV).*

As Christians, we believe in being good stewards of our health, but there is a difference between "therapeutic" and "enhancement." Therapeutic medical advancements alleviate the effects of the fall of man, such as death and suffering. Enhancements involve man trying to become what he deems as "better" than how God made him, which essentially was the very cause of the fall. Obviously, there is gray area here, but this helps us make some distinctions. As we see from Paul's statements, the human idea of weakness is not necessarily God's idea of weakness. God's view is that in our weakness Christ is glorified.

Notes

1. Mitchell, George L. "Report to the Commissioner of baseball of an independent investigation into the illegal use of steroids and other performance enhancing substances by players in major league baseball," Dec. 13, 2007, Office of the Commissioner of Baseball, pg. SR 35-37.
2. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (ESV)
3. www.steroidabuse.com
4. *Anabolic* = metabolic process of building larger muscles from smaller ones, *Androgenic* = production of male traits
5. Mitchell, pg. 7. The complete Mitchell report can be viewed at Major League Baseball's official site: mlb.mlb.com/mlb/news/mitchell/index.jsp
6. sports.espn.go.com/specialdesign/steroids/window.html
7. Both Anabolic steroids and human growth hormone (HGH) are

legal when used for prescribed medical reasons. Muscle growth or cosmetics is not an FDA approved medical use for either of these drugs.

8. www.steroidabuse.com/true-stories-of-steroid-abuse.html
9. sportsillustrated.cnn.com/2008/magazine/01/15/sins.of.a.father0121/index.html
10. Mitchell, pg. 16.
11. George Will, *Newsweek* , May 21, 2007, www.newsweek.com/id/34762
12. Genesis 1:27, Psalm 139:13-16, Proverbs 16:4 (ESV)
13. Romans 12:1,2 (ESV)

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The Changing American Family

Kerby Anderson looks at the latest data on the American family and highlights trends that are changing the nature of family in America as well as debunking some sensationalist headlines. From a biblical worldivew perspective, Christians should be concerned about these trends which reflect an ongoing breakdown of family in America.

Introduction

Are we headed toward a post-marital society where marriage is rare and the traditional family is all but extinct? One would certainly think so by reading some of the stories that have appeared lately. A *New York Times* headline in 2003 warned of

“marriage’s stormy future” and documented the rise in the number of nontraditional unions as well as the rising percentage of people living alone.{1} A 2006 *New York Times* article documented the declining percentage of married couples as a proportion of American households and thus declared that married households are now a minority.{2} And a 2007 headline proclaimed that “51% of women are now living without a spouse.”{3}

Well, let’s take a deep breath for a moment. To borrow a phrase from Mark Twain, rumors about the death of marriage and family are greatly exaggerated. But that doesn’t mean that marriage as an institution is doing well and will continue to do well in the twenty-first century.

Let’s first take on a few of these headlines pronouncing the end of marriage. The October 2006 *New York Times* headline proclaimed that “To Be Married Means to Be Outnumbered.” In other words, married households are now a minority in America and unmarried households are the majority. But the author had to manipulate the numbers in order to come to that conclusion. This so-called “new majority” of unmarried households includes lots of widows who were married. And this claim only works if you count households and not individuals. For example, if you have two households—one with two married people and three children and another with a single widow living alone—they would be split between one married household and one unmarried household. But one household has five people, and the other household has one person.

What about the January 2007 *New York Times* headline proclaiming that “51% of Women Are Now Living Without a Spouse”? Columnist and radio talk show host Michael Medved called this journalistic malpractice({4} and the ombudsman for the *New York Times* took his own paper to task for the article.{5} The most recent available figures showed that a clear majority (56%) of all women over the age of twenty are currently married.

So how did the author come to the opposite conclusion? It turns out that the author chose to count more than ten million girls between the ages of fifteen and nineteen as "women." So these so-called "women" are counted as women living without a spouse (never mind that they are really teenage girls living at home with their parents). This caused the ombudsman for the *New York Times* to ask this question in his op-ed: "Can a 15-year-old be a 'Woman Without a Spouse'?"{6}

It is also worth mentioning, that even with this statistical sleight of hand, you still cannot get to the conclusion that a majority of women are living without a spouse. The article's author had to find a way to shave off an additional 2% of the married majority. He did this by including those women whose "husbands are working out of town, are in the military, or are institutionalized."{7}

Conflicting Attitudes about Marriage and Family

It is certainly premature to say that married couples are a minority and women living without a husband are a majority. But there has been a definite trend that we should not miss and will now address. The definition of marriage and the structure of family in the twenty-first century is very different from what existed in the recent past.

A few decades ago, marriages were the foundation of what many commentators referred to as "the traditional family." Now marriages and families are taking some very unfamiliar shapes and orientations due to different views of marriage and family.

Americans are not exactly sure what to think about these dramatic changes in marriage and family. On the one hand, they believe that marriage and family are very important. A *Better Homes and Garden* survey found that their readers rated their

relationship to their spouse as the single most important factor in their personal happiness.{8} And a MassMutual study on family values (taken many years ago) reported that eight out of ten Americans reported that their families were the greatest source of pleasure in their lives—more than friends, religion, recreation, or work.{9}

On the other hand, Americans are much less sanguine about other people's marriages and families. I call this the "Lake Wobegon effect" where "all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are about average." In other words, *their* marriage and family are fine, but the rest of the marriages and families are *not*. While the MassMutual Family Values Study found that a majority (81%) pointed to their family as the greatest source of pleasure, it also found that a majority (56%) rated the family in the U.S. "only fair" or "poor." And almost six in ten expected it to get *worse* in the next ten years. The survey concluded that "Americans seem to see the family in decline everywhere but in their own home."{10}

Similar results can be found in many other nationwide polls. A Gallup poll found that Americans believe the family is worse off today than it was ten years ago. And they believed it would be worse off in the future as well.{11} Americans also demonstrated their ambivalence toward marriage and family not only in their attitudes but their actions. One trend watcher predicted more than a decade ago in an article in *American Demographics* that marriage would become in the 1990s and the twenty-first century "an optional lifestyle."{12}

Changing Trends in Marriage

While it may be too early to put the institution of marriage on the endangered species list, there is good reason to believe that changing attitudes and actions have significantly transformed marriage in the twenty-first century. The current

generations are marrying later, marrying less, and divorcing more than previous generations.

A major transition in attitudes toward marriage began with the baby boom generation. From 1946 to 1964, over seventy-six million babies were born. By the 1960s the leading edge of the baby boom generation was coming of age and entering into the years when previous generations would begin to marry. But baby boomers (as well as later generations) did not marry as early as previous generations. Instead, they postponed marriage until they established their careers. From the 1960s to the end of the twenty-first century, the median age of first marriage increased by nearly four years for men and four years for women.

Some of those who postponed marriage ended up postponing marriage indefinitely. An increasing proportion of the population adopted this "marriage is optional" perspective and never married. They may have had a number of live-in relationships, but they never joined the ranks of those who married. For them, singleness was not a transition but a lifestyle.

Over the last few decades, the U.S. Census Bureau has documented the increasing percentage of people who fit into the category of "adults living alone." These are often lumped into a larger category of "non-family households." Within this larger category are singles that are living alone as well as a growing number of unmarried, cohabiting couples who are "living together." The U.S. Census Bureau estimated that in 2000 there were nearly ten million Americans living with an unmarried opposite-sex partner and another 1.2 million Americans living with a same-sex partner.

These numbers are unprecedented. It is estimated that during most of the 1960s and 1970s, only about a half a million Americans were living together. And by 1980, that number was just 1.5 million.{13} Now that number is more than twelve

million.

Cohabiting couples are also changing the nature of marriage. Researchers estimate that half of Americans will cohabit at one time or another prior to marriage.{14}And this arrangement often includes children. The traditional stereotype of two young, childless people living together is not completely accurate; currently, some 40% of cohabiting relationships involve children.{15}

Couples often use cohabitation to delay or forego marriage. But not only are they postponing future marriage, they are increasing their chance of marriage failure. Sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, in their study for the National Marriage Project, wrote: “Cohabitation is replacing marriage as the first living together experience for young men and women.” They conclude that those who live together before they get married are putting their future marriage in danger.{16}

Finally, we should note the impact of cohabitation on divorce. When the divorce rate began to level off and even slightly decline in the 1980s, those concerned about the state of marriage in America began to cheer. But soon the cheers turned to groans when it became obvious that the leveling of the divorce rate was due primarily to an increase in cohabitation. Essentially the divorce rate was down because the marriage rate was down. Couples who break up before they marry don’t show up as divorce statistics.

Many marriages today are less permanent than in previous decades. There have always been divorces in this country, but what used to be rare has now become routine. Changing attitudes toward marriage and divorce in this country are reflected in the changing divorce rate.

A graph of the divorce rate shows two significant trends. One is a sharp increase in divorces in the late 1960s that

continued through the 1970s. The second is a leveling and even a slight decline in the 1980s. Both are related to the attitudes of the baby boom generation toward marriage and divorce.

The increasing divorce rate in the 1970s was due to both attitude and opportunity. Baby boomers did not stay married as long as their parents due to their different attitudes towards marriage and especially their attitude toward commitment in marriage. It is clear from the social research that the increase in the divorce rate in the 1970s did not come from empty nesters (e.g., builders) finally filing for divorce after sending their children into the world. Instead it came from young couples (e.g., baby boomers) divorcing even before they had children. {17}

The opportunity for divorce was also significant. When increasing numbers of couples began seeking divorce, state legislatures responded by passing no-fault divorce laws. Essentially a married person could get a divorce for any reason or no reason at all.

Economic opportunity was also a significant factor in divorce. During this same period, women enjoyed greater economic opportunities in the job market. Women with paychecks are less likely to stay in a marriage that was not fulfilling to them and have less incentive to stay in a marriage. Sociologist David Popenoe surveying a number of studies on divorce concluded that “nearly all have reached the same general conclusion. It has typically been found that the probability of divorce goes up the higher the wife’s income and the closer that income is to her husband’s.”{18}

The second part of a graph on divorce shows a leveling and even a slight decline. The divorce rate peaked in 1981 and has been in decline ever since. The reasons are twofold. Initially, the decline had to do with the aging of the baby boom generation who were entering into those years that have

traditionally had lower rates of divorce. But long term the reason is due to what we have already discussed in terms of the impact of cohabitation on divorce. Fewer couples are untying the knot because *fewer couples are tying the knot*.

Changing Trends in Family

We have already mentioned that starting with the baby boom generation and continuing on with subsequent generations, couples postponed marriage. But not only did these generations postpone marriage, they also postponed procreation. Unlike the generations that preceded them (e.g., the builder generation born before the end of World War II), these subsequent generations waited longer to have children and also had few children. Lifestyle choice was certainly one factor. Another important factor was cost. The estimated cost of raising a child during this period of time rose to over six figures. Parents of a baby born in 1979 could expect to pay $66,000 to rear a child to eighteen. For a baby born in 1988, parents could expect to pay $150,000, and that did not include additional costs of piano lessons, summer camp, or a college education.{19}

When these generations did have children, often the family structure was very different than in previous generations. Consider the impact of divorce. Children in homes where a divorce has occurred are cut off from one of the parents and they suffer emotionally, educationally, and economically.

Judith Wallerstein in her research discovered long-term psychological devastation to the children.{20} For example, three out of five children felt rejected by at least one parent. And five years after their parents' divorce, more than one-third of the children were doing markedly worse than they had been before the divorce. Essentially she found that these emotional tremors register on the psychological Richter scale many years after the divorce.

The middle class in this country has been rocked by the one-two punch of divorce and illegitimacy, creating what has been called the "feminization of poverty." U.S. Census Bureau statistics show that single moms are five times more likely to be poor than are their married sisters.{21}

An increasing percentage of women give birth to children out of wedlock. This increase is due in large part to changing attitudes toward marriage and family. In a society that is already changing traditional patterns (by postponing marriage, divorcing more frequently, etc.), it is not surprising that many women are avoiding marriage altogether. Essentially, the current generation disconnects having children and getting married. In their minds, they separate parenthood from marriage, thus creating an enormous increase in the number of single parent homes.

Greater social acceptance of out-of-wedlock births, divorce, and single parenting tends to reinforce the trends and suggests that these percentages will increase in the future. Young adults who contemplate marriage may be less inclined to do so because they were raised in a home where divorce occurred. A young woman raised by a single mom may be less inclined to marry when they are older, convinced that they can raise a child without the help of a husband. Better employment options for young women even encourage them to "go it alone."

These changes in attitudes and changes in the structure of marriage and family have created a very different family in the twenty-first century. One writer imagined the confusion that children would feel in this futuristic scenario:

> *On a spring afternoon, half a century from today, the Joneses are gathered to sing "Happy Birthday" to Junior. There's Dad and his third wife, Mom and her second husband, Junior's two half brothers from his father's first marriage, his six stepsisters from his mother's spouse's previous unions, 100-year-old Great Grandpa, all eight of Junior's current*

"grandparents," assorted aunts, uncles-in-law and stepcousins. While one robot scoops up the gift wrappings and another blows out the candles, Junior makes a wish . . . that he didn't have so many relatives.{22}

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Redeeming Darwin: The Intelligent Design Controversy

Dr. Bohlin, as a Christian scientist, looks at the unwarranted opposition to intelligent design and sees a group of neo-Darwinists struggling to maintain the orthodoxy of their position as the evidence stacks up against them. In this article, he summarizes what's happening in academia and the

lack of sound scientific basis for their attacks agains intelligent design proponents.

What's All the Fuss?

There's a strange phenomenon popping up around the country. Scientists are stepping out of their laboratories and speaking to the media about something that has them quite concerned. It's not the threat of a new flu pandemic; it's not the threat of nuclear weapons proliferation, or even the possible threat of global warming. It's something called Intelligent Design.

In this article we will explore what has so many people upset about Intelligent Design. To do that we will need to establish just what ID is and what the major complaints are about evolution that may be answered by a theory like ID. We will take a closer look at some of the most common examples of ID from astronomy and biology. Then we will take a closer look at the cultural confusion and reaction to this rather simple hypothesis.

So what are scientists and journalists saying? A *Baltimore Sun* reporter put it this way: "In the border war between science and faith, the doctrine of 'intelligent design' is a sly subterfuge—a marzipan confection of an idea presented in the shape of something more substantial."{1}

In other words, Intelligent Design is little more than a sugar cookie promising more than it can deliver.

A science journal editorial said this: "The attack on Darwinism by supporters of Intelligent Design is a straightforward attack on science itself. Intelligent Design is not science because it proposes a supernatural designer as explanation for evolutionary change."{2}

Uh-oh! Science and the supernatural indeed rarely go well together, at least over the last 150 years. But is that what ID actually says? We'll explore that a little later but for

now let's find out what's really at stake in this debate over evolution and Intelligent Design.

One college textbook said this: "Evolution is a scientific fact. That is, the descent of all species, with modification, from common ancestors is a hypothesis that in the last 150 years or so has been supported by so much evidence, and has so successfully resisted all challenges, that it has become a fact."{3}

Let's look at a few reasons why some scientists are skeptical of the confidence shown by so many other scientists about Darwinian evolution.{4}

Is There Scientific Proof for Evolution?

Evolution is always portrayed as a slow gradual process. Organisms are portrayed as so well adapted to their environment that they could only afford to change very slowly. But one of the most dramatic events in earth history is something called the Cambrian explosion. The Cambrian is a period of earth history that many earth scientists and paleontologists estimate to have begun over 540 million years ago.{5}

Instead of slow steady evolutionary change, we see a sudden burst of change. The subtitle to a *Time* magazine article put it this way: "New discoveries show that life as we know it began in an amazing biological frenzy that changed the planet almost overnight."{6}

For most of the previous 3 billion years of earth history only single-celled organisms were found. "For billions of years, simple creatures like plankton, bacteria and algae ruled the earth. Then, suddenly, life got very complicated."{7}

So the appearance of most of the major categories of animals happened in a very short period of time, some say less than five million years, when it should have taken tens and maybe

even hundreds of millions of years. One geologist who helped pinpoint the very short time frame of the Cambrian explosion expressed this challenge: “We now know how fast fast is. And what I like to ask my biologist friends is, how fast can evolution get before they start feeling uncomfortable?”{8}

The evolutionary process that biologists study in nature today is far slower than what is found in the Cambrian explosion. This is evidence that doesn’t fit the theory. Yet the Cambrian explosion is left out of most textbooks.

Another problem for evolution is its dependence on mutations to bring about major changes in organisms. But for all our studies of mutations we haven’t seen much change. The late French evolutionist, Pierre Paul Grasse, said, “What is the use of their unceasing mutations? . . . a swing to the right, a swing to the left, but no final evolutionary effect.”{9}

Mutations only produce alternate forms of what already exists. New functions don’t suddenly arise by mutations.

Evidence for Intelligent Design, Part One

Intelligent Design is an intellectual movement that challenges Darwinism and its dependence on random/chaotic processes coupled with selection. If people are not alerted to the fact that Darwinism is less than sufficient, then other theories are wasting their time. They will never get a fair hearing.

Intelligent Design is also a scientific research program that investigates the effects of intelligent causes, which are effects of high specificity coupled with extremely small probabilities.

Now that was a mouthful. What do I mean by high specificity coupled with small probability? Think of the lottery. Someone always wins the lottery despite the long odds. So improbable things do indeed happen.

But let’s make this specific. Let’s say your sister wins the lottery. Now that is someone you specifically know; but again someone always wins the lottery so the fact that it’s your sister doesn’t warrant any special attention.

Now let’s make things a bit *less* probable and much *more* specific. Let’s say your sister wins the lottery not once but three weeks in a row. Now what are you thinking? Like most people you’re thinking something is not right. The same person doesn’t win the lottery three weeks in a row.

You suspect cheating. You suspect Intelligent Design. Someone with a clever mind is somehow manipulating the lottery.

In astronomy, it has been assumed for several decades that our earth is not likely to be very special. As huge as the universe is, with billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars, surely there are thousands if not millions of planets like ours that are suitable for life.

But lately, more and more planetary astronomers, astrophysicists, cosmologists, and philosophers are realizing that earth is actually quite unique. The recipe for earth is more than just a planet plus mild temperatures plus water.

Our earth is 93,000,000 miles from the sun. Five percent closer and we would be a hothouse like Venus with no chance for life. If we were twenty percent farther away, we would be a frozen wasteland like Mars. We’re just right. Liquid water is necessary for life and our earth has an abundance all year long.

Evidence for Intelligent Design, Part Two

It’s really quite amazing to realize that biologists universally recognize the design of living things. Oxford biologist and atheist Richard Dawkins said on page one of his book *The Blind Watchmaker*: “Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been

designed for a purpose.”{10}

Now notice he said, “give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose.” Living things certainly look designed, but according to Dawkins, it’s an illusion. He spends the rest of his book trying to show how mutation and natural selection, the “blind watchmaker,” has created this illusion.

But he does admit things look designed. Well, if it looks designed, maybe it is.

Michael Behe introduced the concept of irreducible complexity in his book *Darwin’s Black Box*. Something is irreducibly complex if it is composed of two or more *necessary* parts. Remove one part and function is not just impaired but destroyed. His well-known example is a mousetrap.

A mousetrap is composed of five integral parts: the platform to which everything is attached, the hammer which does the dirty work, the spring which provides the force, the holding bar to keep the hammer in tension, and finally the catch to keep the holding bar in tenuous position. Remove any one of these parts and the mousetrap is not just less efficient; it ceases to function at all. All five parts are necessary. You can’t build a mousetrap by natural selection by adding one piece at a time because it has no function to select until all five parts are together.

Behe showed that the cell, Darwin’s “Black Box,” is filled with irreducibly complex molecular machines that could not be built by natural selection. In Darwin’s time, scientists could only see the cell under very low power microscopes that told little about what was going on inside. It was a black box. Over the last fifty to sixty years, the cell has been revealing its secrets. We have discovered a maze of complexity and information.

If it looks designed, maybe it is!

ID, Science, Education, and Creation

The legitimacy of Intelligent Design as science was at the heart of a recent federal court case, pitting a group of parents and students against the school board from Dover, Pennsylvania. The Dover School Board adopted a policy that mandated a statement be read before all biology classes, indicating that evolution was a theory that needed critical evaluation and that intelligent design was a rival theory that students could seek information about from the library.

Judge Jones not only struck down the policy as unconstitutional, he went further to declare that ID is not science and was motivated purely by religion since it was just a repackaged creationism. His written opinion was scathing. This of course delighted proponents of evolution and many have declared that ID now is dead.

Judge Jones claimed that ID simply is not science and is religiously motivated; therefore it should not even be mentioned in a high school science classroom.

The first question that should occur to you is, Why does a federal judge with no training in science use his courtroom as a means of determining what is and is not science? This problem has been referred to as the demarcation problem. How do we demarcate science from non-science? People putting down ID often refer to it as "pseudo-science" or simply "unscientific." But philosopher of science Larry Laudan writes, "If we would stand up and be counted on the side of reason, we ought to drop terms like 'pseudo-science' and 'unscientific' from our vocabulary; they are just hollow phrases which do only emotive work for us."{11}

Judge Jones claims that ID has been refuted by mainstream scientists. He cites the work of Kenneth Miller in particular. This is rather strange indeed. For ID to be refuted means that it has been tested by science and found wanting. If it is

testable scientifically to the degree that it can be refuted, then it is science after all. This logical contradiction does not seem to occur to Judge Jones.

ID uses empirical data to demonstrate the plausibility of a design inference. It's as scientific as Darwinism.

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Sex and Violence on Television – A Christian Worldview Perspective

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

The Extent of the Problem

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

A study by the Parents Television Council found that prime time network television is more violent than ever before. In addition, they found that this increasing violence is also of

a sexual nature. They found that portrayals of violence are up seventy-five percent since 1998.{3}

The study also provided expert commentary by Deborah Fisher, Ph.D. She states that children, on average, will be exposed to a thousand murders, rapes, and assaults per year through television. She goes on to warn that early exposure to television violence has "consistently emerged as a significant predictor of later aggression."{4}

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

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

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

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

Television’s Impact on Behavior

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

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

In 1992, the American Psychological Association concluded that forty years of research on the link between TV violence and real-life violence has been ignored, stating that “the ‘scientific debate is over’ and calling for federal policy to protect society.”{7}

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

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

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

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

Sex on Television

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

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

In a message given by Donnerstein, he concluded with this warning and observation: "If you take normal males and expose them to graphic violence against women in R-rated films, the research doesn't show that they'll commit acts of violence against women. It doesn't say they will go out and commit

rape. But it does demonstrate that they become less sensitized to violence against women, they have less sympathy for rape victims, and their perceptions and attitudes and values about violence change."{12}

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

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

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

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

Violence on Television

Children's greatest exposure to violence comes from television. TV shows, movies edited for television, and video games expose young children to a level of violence

unimaginable just a few years ago. The American Psychological Association says the average child watches eight thousand televised murders and one hundred thousand acts of violence before finishing elementary school.{14} That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age eighteen.

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

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

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

Twenty years later Eron and Rowell Huesmann found the pattern continued. He and his researchers found that children who watched significant amounts of TV violence at the age of eight

were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child or spouse abuse at thirty.{18} They concluded that "heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime and violence in society. Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence."{19}

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

Biblical Perspective

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

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

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

And if this is true of adults, imagine how television violence affects children's perceptions of the world. Gerbner and Gross say, "Imagine spending six hours a day at the local movie house when you were twelve years old. No parent would have permitted it. Yet, in our sample of children, nearly half of the twelve-year-olds watch an average of six or more hours of television per day." This would mean that a large portion of young people fit into the category of heavy viewers. Their view of the world must be profoundly shaped by TV. Gerbner and Gross therefore conclude, "If adults can be so accepting of the reality of television, imagine its effect on children. By the time the average American child reaches public school, he has already spent several years in an electronic nursery school."{21}

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

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Crime and Punishment – A Christian View of Dostoevsky's Classic Novel

Michael Gleghorn looks at the famous novel through a Christian worldview lens to see what truths Dostoevsky may have for us. We learn that this great novel records the fall of man into a degraded state but ends with the beginning of his restoration through the ministry of a selfless, Christian woman.

Introduction and Overview

In 1866 the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky published *Crime and Punishment*, one of his greatest novels. It's a penetrating study of the psychology of sin, guilt, and redemption, and it haunts the reader long after the final page has been read. It tells the story of an intelligent, but impoverished, young Russian intellectual named Raskolnikov. Under the unfortunate influence of a particularly pernicious theory of society and human nature, he exalts himself above the moral law, grievously transgresses it by committing two murders, "and plunges into a hell of persecution, madness and terror."{1}

Raskolnikov had conceived of himself as a great and extraordinary man, on the order of a Napoleon. He tried to convince himself that he wasn't bound by the same tired old moral code that the vast mass of humanity lives in recognition of, if not obedience to—the merely *ordinary* men and women who accomplish little and amount to less. Nevertheless, after committing his horrible crime, he finds that he cannot escape his punishment: he cannot silence his sensitive and overburdened conscience. In the end, when he can stand it no

longer, he decides to confess his crime and accept suffering as a means of atonement.

Joseph Frank observes that Dostoevsky, the author of this story, had "long been preoccupied with the question of crime and conscience."{2} In one of his letters, Dostoevsky describes his story as the "psychological report of a crime."{3} The crime is committed, he says, by "a young man, expelled from the university . . . and living in the midst of the direst poverty." Coming under the influence of "the strange, 'unfinished' ideas that float in the atmosphere," he decides to murder an old pawnbroker and steal her money. Dostoevsky describes the old woman as "stupid and ailing," "greedy" and "evil." Why, it would hardly be a crime at all to murder such a wretched person! What's more, with the money from his crime, the young man can "finish his studies, go abroad," and devote the rest of his life to the benefit of humanity!

Inspired by these thoughts, the young man goes through with the crime and murders the old woman. But, notes Dostoevsky, "here is where the entire psychological process of the crime is unfolded. Insoluble problems confront the murderer, unsuspected and unexpected feelings torment his heart . . . and he finishes by *being forced* to denounce himself."

This, in brief, is the story of *Crime and Punishment*. In what follows, we'll take a closer look at the theory which led Raskolnikov to commit his crime. Then we'll consider why the theory proved false when Raskolnikov actually attempted to put it into practice.

The Ordinary and Extraordinary

Raskolnikov committed two murders, in part simply to see if he really has the bravado to put his theories into practice. But what are these ideas? Where do they come from? And why do they

lead Raskolnikov to such heinous actions?

Essentially, Raskolnikov's theory, which was partially developed in an article on crime that he had written, holds that all men, by a kind of law of nature, are divided into two distinct classes: the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary*. This theory, which finds some of its philosophical roots in the writings of men like Hegel and Nietzsche, claims that ordinary men exist merely for the purpose of reproduction by which, at length, the occasional, extraordinary man might arise. Raskolnikov declares, "The vast mass of mankind is mere material, and only exists in order by some great effort, by some mysterious process, by means of some crossing of races and stocks, to bring into the world at last perhaps one man out of a thousand with a spark of independence." The man of genius is rarer still, "and the great geniuses, the crown of humanity, appear on earth perhaps one in many thousand millions."{4}

The distinctive features of the ordinary man are a conservative temperament and a law-abiding disposition. But extraordinary men "all transgress the law." Indeed, says Raskolnikov, "if such a one is forced for the sake of his idea to step over a corpse or wade through blood, he can . . . find . . . in his own conscience, a sanction for wading through blood."{5} So the extraordinary man has the right—indeed, depending on the value of his ideas, he may even have the duty—to destroy those who stand in his way. After all, Raskolnikov observes, such ideas may benefit "the whole of humanity."{6} But how can we know if we are merely ordinary men, or whether, perhaps, we are extraordinary? How can we know if we have the *right* to transgress the law to achieve our own ends?

Raskolnikov admits that confusion regarding one's class is indeed possible. But he thinks "the mistake can only arise . . . among the ordinary people" who sometimes like to imagine themselves more advanced than they really are. And we needn't

worry much about that, for such people are "very conscientious" and will impose "public acts of penitence upon themselves with a beautiful and edifying effect."{7}

But as we'll see, it's one of the ironies of this novel that Raskolnikov, who committed murder because he thought himself extraordinary, made precisely this tragic mistake.

A Walking Contradiction

James Roberts observes that Raskolnikov "is best seen as two characters. He sometimes acts in one manner and then suddenly in a manner completely contradictory."{8} Evidence for this can be seen throughout the novel. In this way, Dostoevsky makes clear, right from the beginning of his story, that Raskolnikov is *not* an extraordinary man, at least not in the sense in which Raskolnikov himself uses that term in his theory of human nature.

In the opening pages of the novel, we see Raskolnikov at war with himself as he debates his intention to murder an old pawnbroker. "I want to attempt a thing *like that*," he says to himself.{9} Then, after visiting the old woman's flat, ostensibly to pawn a watch, but in reality as a sort of "dress rehearsal" for the murder, he again questions himself: "How could such an atrocious thing come into my head? What filthy things my heart is capable of. Yes, filthy above all . . . loathsome!"{10}

This inner battle suggests that Raskolnikov has mistaken himself for an *extraordinary* man, a man bound neither by the rules of society, nor the higher moral law. But in fact, he's actually just a conscientious *ordinary* man. The portrait Dostoevsky paints of him is really quite complex. He often appears to be a sensitive, though confused, young intellectual, who's been led to entertain his wild ideas more as a result of dire poverty and self-imposed isolation from

his fellow man, rather than from sheer malice or selfish ambition.

In fear and trembling he commits two murders, partly out of a confused desire to thereby benefit the rest of humanity, and partly out of a seemingly genuine concern to really live in accordance with his theories. Ironically, while the murders are partly committed with the idea of taking the old pawnbroker's money to advance Raskolnikov's plans, he never attempts to use the money, but merely buries it under a stone. What's more, Raskolnikov is portrayed as one of the more generous characters in the novel. On more than one occasion, he literally gives away all the money he has to help meet the needs of others. Finally, while Raskolnikov is helped toward confessing his crime through the varied efforts of Porfiry Petrovich, the brilliant, yet compassionate, criminal investigator, and Sonia, the humble, selfless prostitute, nevertheless, it's primarily Raskolnikov's own tormented conscience that, at length, virtually forces him to confess to the murders.

So while Raskolnikov is guilty, he's not completely lost. He still retains a conscience, as well as some degree of genuine compassion toward others. Dostoevsky wants us to see that there's still hope for Raskolnikov!

The Hope of Restoration

After Raskolnikov commits the two murders, he finds himself confronted with the desperate need to be reconciled with God and his fellow man. From the beginning of the story, Raskolnikov is portrayed as somewhat alienated from his fellows. But once he commits the murders, he experiences a decisive break, both spiritually and psychologically, from the rest of humanity. Indeed, when he murders the old pawnbroker and her sister, something within Raskolnikov also dies. The bond that unites him with all other men in a common humanity

is destroyed—or "dies"—as a sort of poetic justice for murdering the two women.

This death, which separates Raskolnikov both from God and his fellow man, can only be reversed through a miracle of divine grace and power. In the novel, the biblical paradigm for this great miracle is the story of the raising of Lazarus. Just as Lazarus died, and was then restored to life through the miraculous power of God in Christ, so also, in Dostoevsky's story, Raskolnikov's "death" is neither permanent nor irreversible. He too can be "restored to life." He too can be reconciled with God and man.

While this theme of death and restoration to life is somewhat subtle, nevertheless, Dostoevsky probably intended it as one of the primary themes of the novel. In the first place, it is emphasized by Sonia, Porfiry Petrovich, and Raskolnikov's own sister, that only by confessing his crime and accepting his punishment can Raskolnikov again be *restored* to the rest of humanity. In this way, Dostoevsky repeatedly emphasizes the "death" of Raskolnikov.

In addition, the raising of Lazarus is mentioned at least three times in the novel. One time is when, in the midst of a heated discussion, Porfiry specifically asks Raskolnikov if he believes in the raising of Lazarus, to which Raskolnikov responds that he does.{11} This affirmation foreshadows some hope for Raskolnikov, for the fact that he believes in this miracle at least makes possible the belief that God can also work a miracle in his own life. Secondly, the only extended portion of Scripture cited in the novel relates the story of Lazarus. In fact, it's Raskolnikov himself, tormented by what he's done, who asks Sonia to read him the story.{12} Finally, at the end of the novel, the raising of Lazarus is mentioned yet again, this time as Raskolnikov recollects Sonia's previous reading of the story to him.{13} Interestingly, this final reference to the raising of Lazarus occurs in the context of Raskolnikov's own "restoration to life."

Restored to Life

Near the end of the novel, Raskolnikov at last goes to the police station and confesses to the murders: *"It was I killed the old pawnbroker woman and her sister Lizaveta with an axe and robbed them."*{14} He is sentenced to eight years in a Siberian labor prison. Sonia, true to her promise, selflessly follows him there. Early one morning she comes to visit Raskolnikov. Overcome with emotion, he begins weeping and throws himself at her feet. Sonia is terrified. "But at the same moment she understood . . . . She knew . . . that he loved her . . . and that at last the moment had come."{15} God's love, mediated through Sonia, had finally broken through to Raskolnikov: "He had risen again and he . . . felt in it all his being."{16}

Although Raskolnikov had previously been something of an outcast with his fellow inmates, nevertheless, on the day of his "restoration," his relations with them begin to improve. Dostoevsky writes:

> *He . . . fancied that day that all the convicts who had been his enemies looked at him differently; he had even entered into talk with them and they answered him in a friendly way. He remembered that now, and thought it was bound to be so. Wasn't everything now bound to be changed?{17}*

What's more, Dostoevsky also implies that Raskolnikov is being restored to relationship with God. Picking up the New Testament that Sonia had given him, "one thought passed through his mind: 'Can her convictions not be mine now? Her feelings, her aspirations at least . . .'"{18} And Dostoevsky then concludes his great novel by stating: "But that is the beginning of a new story—the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life."{19}

So by the end of the novel, Raskolnikov, as a type of Lazarus, has experienced his own “restoration to life.” He is ready to begin “his initiation into a new unknown life.” And interestingly, the grace which brings about Raskolnikov’s restoration is primarily mediated to him through the quiet, humble love of Sonia, a prostitute. Just as God was not ashamed to have his own Son, humanly speaking, descended from some who were murderers and some who were prostitutes—for it was just such people He came to save—so also, in Dostoevsky’s story, God is not ashamed to extend His forgiveness and grace to a prostitute, and through her to a murderer as well. *Crime and Punishment* thus ends on a note of hope, for the guilty can be forgiven and the dead restored to life!

Notes

1. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Bantam Books, 1987). Citation from cover blurb on back of book.
2. Joseph Frank, “Introduction” to Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, ix.
3. The citations from Dostoevsky’s letter come from Joseph Frank’s “Introduction” to Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment,* viii-ix.
4. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 229.
5. Ibid., 227.
6. Ibid., 226.
7. Ibid., 228.
8. James Roberts, *Cliffs Notes on Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment*, ed. Gary Carey (Lincoln, Nebraska: Cliffs Notes, Inc.), 70.
9. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 2.
10. Ibid., 7.
11. Ibid., 227.
12. Ibid., 283.
13. Ibid., 472.
14. Ibid., 458.

15. Ibid., 471.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., 472.
19. Ibid.

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Christianity: The Best Thing That Ever Happened to Women

Sue Bohlin examines the facts to show us that a Christian, biblical worldview of women lifted them from a status equivalent to dogs to a position a fellow heirs of the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Christianity, accurately applied, fundamentally changed the value and status of women.

The Low Status of Women in Jesus' Day

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

"What would be the status of women in the Western world today had Jesus Christ never entered the human arena? One way to answer this question," writes Dr. Schmidt, "is to look at the status of women in most present-day Islamic countries. Here

women are still denied many rights that are available to men, and when they appear in public, they must be veiled. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, women are even barred from driving an automobile. Whether in Saudi Arabia or in many other Arab countries where the Islamic religion is adhered to strongly, a man has the right to beat and sexually desert his wife, all with the full support of the Koran. . . .{2} This command is the polar opposite of what the New Testament says regarding a man's relationship with his wife. Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' And he added, 'He who loves his wife loves himself.'"{3}

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

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

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

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

Jesus and Women

Jesus' treatment of women was very different:

> *The extremely low status that the Greek, Roman, and Jewish woman had for centuries was radically affected by the appearance of Jesus Christ. His actions and teachings raised the status of women to new heights, often to the consternation and dismay of his friends and enemies. By word and deed, he went against the ancient, taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that defined woman as socially, intellectually, and spiritually inferior.*
>
> *The humane and respectful way Jesus treated and responded to the Samaritan woman [at the well] (recorded in John 4) may not appear unusual to readers in today's Western culture. Yet what he did was extremely unusual, even radical. He ignored the Jewish anti-Samaritan prejudices along with prevailing view that saw women as inferior beings.{6}*

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

Among Jesus' closest friends were Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who entertained him at their home. "Martha assumed the traditional female role of preparing a meal for Jesus, her

guest, while her sister Mary did what only men would do, namely, learn from Jesus' teachings. Mary was the cultural deviant, but so was Jesus, because he violated the rabbinic law of his day [about speaking to women]."{8} By teaching Mary spiritual truths, he violated another rabbinic law, which said, "Let the words of the Law [Torah] be burned rather than taught to women. . . . If a man teaches his daughter the law, it is as though he taught her lechery."{9}

When Lazarus died, Jesus comforted Martha with this promise containing the heart of the Christian gospel: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26) These remarkable words were spoken to a woman! "To teach a woman was bad enough, but Jesus did more than that. He called for a verbal response from Martha. Once more, he went against the socioreligious custom by teaching a woman and by having her publicly respond to him, a man."{10}

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

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

Paul, Peter, and Women

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

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

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

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

Christ loves the church. In a culture where a wife was property, and a disrespected piece of property at that, Paul elevates women to a position of honor previously unknown in the world.

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

Misogyny in the Church

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

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

She continues: "There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words of Jesus that there

was anything ‘funny’ about woman’s nature.”{12} And this is one of the unfortunate truths about Christianity we have to acknowledge: over the centuries, many Christ-followers have fallen far short of the standard Jesus set in showing the worth and dignity of women.

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

Some people mistakenly believe these contemptuous beliefs of the church fathers are rooted in an anti-female Bible, but that couldn’t be farther from the truth. People held these misogynistic beliefs *in spite of,* not because of, the biblical teachings. Those who dishonor God by dishonoring His good creation of woman allow themselves to be shaped by the beliefs of the surrounding pagan, anti-female culture instead of following Paul’s exhortation to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). The church in North America does the same thing today by allowing the secular culture to shape our thinking more than the Bible. Only nine percent of Americans claiming to be born-again have a biblical worldview.{14} The church in Africa and Asia does the same thing today by allowing animism, the traditional folk religion, to shape their thinking more than the Bible.

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

Effects of Christianity on Culture

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

The biblical view of husbands and wives as equal partners caused a sea change in marriage as well. Christian women started marrying later, and they married men of their own choosing. This eroded the ancient practice of men marrying child brides against their will, often as young as eleven or twelve years old. The greater marital freedom that Christianity gave women eventually gained wide appeal. Today, a Western woman is not compelled to marry someone she does not want, nor can she legally be married as a child bride. But the practice continues in parts of the world where Christianity has little or no presence.{16}

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

Two more cruel practices were abolished as Christianity gained

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

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

Notes

1. Schmidt, Alvin. *How Christianity Changed the World*. Originally published under the title *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), which is the copy I reference in these notes.

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

3. Schmidt, p. 97-98.

4. Ibid., p. 98-99.

5. Ibid., p. 101.

6. Ibid., p. 102-03.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p. 103-104.

10. Ibid., p. 104.

11. Ibid., p. 104-105.

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

13. Schmidt, p. 109.

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

15. Ibid., p. 111.

16. Ibid., pp. 111-112.

17. Ibid., p. 115.

18. Ibid., pp. 118-119.

19. Ibid., p. 115.

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The Continuing Controversy over Stem Cells: A Christian View

Dr. Ray Bohlin brings a biblical worldview to this intersection of ethics and science. From a Christian perspective, is it right to harvest and destroy embryonic stem cells for the hope of possible finding a treatment for some

diseases?

Different Kinds of Stem Cells

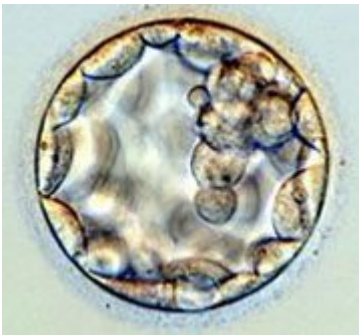
Stem cell research grew into a major issue in the 2004 election and will continue to be discussed and argued for years to come as research continues to make progress. Unfortunately, most people continue to be misinformed about the real issues in the discussion.

Most articles in the media fail to distinguish between the different kinds of stem cells and the different ethical questions each of them presents. Several states either already have or are working to get around federal restrictions on embryonic stem cell research in order to keep the research dollars at their state research universities.

So the controversy has far from abated. In order to think our way through this we will need some basic information. First, we need to understand some things about stem cells in general and the types of stem cells available for research.

What are stem cells? Stem cells are specialized cells that can produce several different kinds of cells in your body. Just like the stem of a plant will produce branches, leaves, and flowers, so stem cells can usually produce many different kinds of cells within a particular tissue.

There are over one trillion cells in your body. Most will only divide a few times. For instance, when you were born you basically already had all the brain and neural cells you would need. As you grew, those cells simply got bigger. However, other tissues need a constant renewing of cells. The lining of your intestines, stomach, skin, and lungs constantly slough old cells and need replacements. Your blood cells constantly need replacing. In these kinds of tissues, specialized stem cells continually produce new cells.



There are skin, bone marrow, liver, muscle, and other types of stem cells in your body. These are referred to as *adult* stem cells. Other common types of stem cells are those found in umbilical cord blood. Even though these are fetal tissues, they are referred to as adult stem cells because they are already differentiated to a large degree. There are no ethical difficulties in using these stem cells for research and therapy.

Now, what are *embryonic* stem cells? Embryonic stem cells exist only in the earliest embryo just a few days after fertilization. This is referred to as the *blastocyst*. The blastocyst contains a small cluster of identical cells called the inner cell mass. These cells eventually form the baby and therefore can produce all the cells of the body. These are embryonic stem cells (ESC). In order to retrieve them, the embryo is destroyed.

Here then is the problem. While adult stem cells offer no ethical difficulties—but are not likely to be as versatile as embryonic stem cells—embryonic stem cells can only be obtained by destroying the embryo.

The Promise of Adult Stem Cells

What is the overall hope for stem cells? Why are they so sought after?

Essentially, it is hoped that stem cells can be used to treat and even cure diseases like diabetes, Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, and brain and spinal injuries. These are primarily degenerative diseases where certain cells no longer function as designed due to genetic defects or injuries. Generally it has been believed that embryonic stem cells offer the most hope since we know they can become any cell in the body.

But embryonic stem cells require the destruction of the embryo where adult stem cells can be harvested from the individual that needs to be treated. First, this involves only informed consent and is ethically non-controversial. Second, since the person's own cells are used, there is no chance of rejection of the cells by the patient's immune system.

In the last few years important discoveries have been made concerning certain types of adult stem cells. Essentially, we have learned that adult stem cells can switch tissues. Bone marrow stem cells seem to be the most versatile. They have been coaxed to generate new muscle, neural, lung and other tissues.

Additionally, we have learned that adult stem cells migrate throughout the body in the blood. It appears that adult stem cells are somehow informed of injury in the cell and can migrate from their source to the injury and begin at least modest repairs.

In January 2002, a group from the University of Minnesota announced what they called the ultimate adult stem cell. In creating an
immortal cell line from bone marrow stem cells, early tests showed that these stem cells could become either of the three early tissues in an embryo that eventually lead to all the cell types of the body. This showed that adult stem cells are far more versatile then previously believed.

Last year the National Institutes of Health spent $190 million on adult stem cell research and $25 million on embryonic stem cell
research. Clinical trials are already underway using bone marrow (adult) stem cells for treatment of heart attacks, liver disease, diabetes, bone and cartilage disease, and brain disorders. Adult stem cells can even be injected intravenously in large quantities, and they will migrate to where the injury is located. With such promise coming from adult stem cells it

is hard to justify the use of problematic embryonic stem cells.

The Promise and Peril of Embryonic Stem Cells

Embryonic stem cells have always held the greatest promise for research and therapies because we know for certain that they can become any of the over 200 types of cells in the body. All we needed to do was learn how to control their destiny and their potential for unlimited growth.

As mentioned previously, the major ethical problem with embryonic stem cells is that the early embryo, the blastocyst, must be
destroyed in order to retrieve these cells. It is my firm conviction that this earliest embryo is human life worthy of protection. Once the nucleus from sperm and egg unite in the newly fertilized egg, a biochemical cascade begins that leads inevitably to a baby nine months later as long as the embryo is in the proper environment.

But there are other problems aside from the ethical barrier. The proper chemical signals to direct stem cells to turn into the cells you want are unknown. This is certainly the goal of research. Human embryonic stem cells have been coaxed to differentiate but since nearly all of the experimental work to date has been done with embryonic stem cells from embryos leftover in fertility clinics there are immune rejection problems. These foreign cells are treated like they were from an organ donation.

Additionally, these cells are programmed to undergo rapid cell division. In China a man with Parkinson’s was treated with human embryonic stem cells which turned into a tumor (teratoma) in his brain that killed him. The power of these cells is also a source of their peril.

In summary, embryonic stem cells possess uncertain promise. They require the death of the embryo. All therapies with any kind of stem cell are experimental and may not work. Right now, too much is being promised, and coverage in the media has been biased toward embryonic stem cells and is inaccurate.

When these difficulties and question marks are considered in the light of the exciting promise of adult stem cells, which are already producing positive results in human clinical trials, the pursuit of embryonic stem cell research is questionable at best. Just recently a major U.S. journal reported that bone marrow stem cells show great promise in treating the diseased lungs of cystic fibrosis patients.{1} CF is the most common fatal genetic disorder in the Caucasian population. Adult stem cells continue to outperform embryonic stem cells.

Stem Cells and the Last Election

The first human embryonic stem cells were isolated from embryos donated from fertility clinics in 1998. Prior to that, Congress had passed—and President Clinton had signed—legislation that prohibited the use of federal money for the destruction or use of human embryos for research purposes. This was seen as worthy even for pro-choice advocates because no one wanted to go down the road of using even the earliest human life for research purposes.

When President Bush took office in January 2001, pressure had already come from the medical research community to revise this restriction so federal grants could be used to explore this promising research avenue. Adult stem cells were still viewed as being too restricted for general research use in humans. In August 2001, President Bush issued his now famous compromise
of allowing federal funds to be used to research embryonic stem cells already isolated from human embryos, but keeping in place the restriction for using federal dollars for destroying

human embryos to obtain additional cell lines.

The National Institutes of Health estimated that there were already over sixty human embryonic stem cell lines isolated around the world that would be available for research purposes. The President was criticized by pro-life advocates for allowing any federal money for research on embryonic stem cell lines, and the medical research community criticized the President for not allowing federal research money for the creation of new embryonic stem cell lines. If everybody is unhappy, it sounds like a good compromise!

The events of September 11, 2001 quickly removed this controversy from the public's attention, but the 2004 presidential election
brought it back front and center. The Bush administration, supported by the President's Council for Bioethics, continued to argue against federal money for the destruction of embryos.

The Kerry campaign seized what they saw as an opening and began claiming that they would lift the ban on stem cell research. They enlisted Ron Reagan to deliver this message at the Democratic National Convention in July, 2004. Ronald Reagan had recently passed away from Alzheimer's, and many were claiming that embryonic stem cell research could bring a cure for Alzheimer's disease.

There were several problems with this message. First, President Bush never banned stem cell research. The Administration was funding adult stem cell research at about $190 million a year and embryonic stem cell research at about $25 million a year. Private money was always legal to use, but private investors were staying away because of the ethical problems and the
lack of progress.

Second, researchers had already testified on Capital Hill that Alzheimer's was likely not curable by treating the brain with

stem cells since it was considered a whole brain disease and cell replacement would not do much good. The media just couldn't get it right.

The Distortion and the Hype of Embryonic Stem Cells

Those of us who are opposed to the use of embryonic stem cells for research are routinely accused of being hard-hearted toward those whose maladies can be addressed with stem cell research. Of course, this is not the case. We fully support adult stem cell research, but even if adult stem cells prove problematic in some cases I would still not support embryonic stem cell research when the embryo must be destroyed to obtain them.

When we think about saving lives we must count the cost. Is relieving the symptoms of disease worth the cost of the lives of the weakest and most defenseless members of society? Treating embryos with careless disregard will lead to further abuses down the road.

One of the problems with embryonic stem cells was the possibility of immune rejection. To avoid this, many want to clone the affected individual and use the embryonic stem cells from the clone. But this treats the human embryo as a thing, a clump of cells. The basis of this ethic is strictly "the end justifies the means." Even the term "therapeutic" is problematic. The subject is destroyed.

Many try to get around the destruction of the embryo problem by claiming the blastocyst is just reproductive cells and not a person. Medical mystery writer Robin Cook gave us an example in his most recent thriller, *Seizure.*{2}. In the book a medical researcher appears before a Senate committee and says, "Blastocysts have a potential to form a viable embryo, but only if implanted in a uterus. In therapeutic cloning, they are never allowed to form embryos. . . . Embryos are not

involved in therapeutic cloning."{3} Hm!

Later in the epilogue, Cook, who is an MD, says, "Senator Butler, like other opponents of stem-cell and therapeutic cloning research, suggests that the procedure requires the dismemberment of embryos. As Daniel points out to no avail, this is false. The cloned stem-cells in therapeutic cloning are harvested from the blastocyst stage well before any embryo forms. The fact is that in therapeutic cloning, an embryo is never allowed to form and nothing is ever implanted into a uterus."{4}

Cook is greatly mistaken. A 1997 embryology text states plainly that "The study of animal development has traditionally been called embryology, referring to the fact that between fertilization and birth the developing organism is known as an embryo."{5} So let's be very careful and pay attention to what is said. Some are trying to manipulate the debate by changing the "facts." We must promote the incredible success and continued promise of adult stem cells while continuing to spell out the long term peril of embryonic stem cells.

Notes

1. Wang, Guoshun, Bruce A. Bunnell, Richard G. Painter, Blesilda C. Quiniones, Nicholas A. Lanson Jr., Jeffrey L. Spees, Daniel J. Weiss, Vincent G. Valentine, Darwin J. Prockop, "Adult stem cells from bone marrow stroma differentiate into airway epithelial cells: Potential therapy for cystic fibrosis" PNAS online, www.pnas.org (accessed December 22, 2004).

2. Robin Cook, *Seizure* (New York: Berkeley Books, 2003), 429.

3. Ibid, 32-33.

4. Ibid, 428.

5. Scott F. Gilbert, *Developmental Biology*, 5th ed. (Sunderland, Mass.: Sinauer Associates, Inc., 1997), 3. Later in the same text, Gilbert clearly equates the blastocyst and embryo when he says on page 185, "While the embryo is moving through the oviduct en route to the uterus, the blastocyst expands within the zona pellucida." Gilbert seems to have had a change of heart between his fifth edition and the sixth. In the sixth edition of his textbook Gilbert defines embryology differently. "The study of animal development has traditionally been called embryology, from that phase of organisms that exists between fertilization and birth." This is on page 4 of the new edition and curiously leaves the word embryo out of the definition of embryology. Perhaps Cook and Gilbert know each other!

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See Also:

- The Controversy Over Stem Cell Research [2001]
- Putting the Brakes on Human Genetic Engineering
- Stem Cells and the Controversy Over Therapeutic Cloning
- Probe Answers Our E-Mail: "Your Anti-Stem Cell Research Position Disregards Diabetics"

The Worldview of Star Wars – A Christian Evaluation

Dr. Zukeran takes a critical, balanced view of this popular movie series to help us understand the worldview it presents in light of a biblical worldview. From a Christian perspective, he points out the positive themes of the movies presented from a pantheistic worldview. We can use these

movies to generate conversations about the differences between the worldview of Star Wars and a genuinely Christian worldview.

George Lucas

The *Star Wars* series has come to a climatic finale. Many of us can still remember the year 1977 when people stood in long lines at theaters several blocks long. It was not uncommon to hear of individuals who returned to see the movie, some over a dozen times. Few movies have generated the same excitement and following as this series. Through its production, special effects, and cinematography, *Star Wars* had a tremendous impact on the arts, setting a new standard for the movie industry.

Not only did *Star Wars* have an impact on the entertainment industry, it also opened our eyes to the worldview of pantheism. Pantheism comes from the Greek word "pan" meaning all and "theism" meaning God. It is the belief that the impersonal God is one essence with the universe. God inhabits all things. The universe is God and God is the universe. In other words, God is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. This worldview lies at the foundation of most Hindu, Buddhist, and New Age religions. This worldview gained popularity in the sixties, at a time when Eastern ideas began to enter the West. It drew public attention through celebrities such as The Beatles and Shirley McClain who embraced the teachings of the Eastern religions. *Star Wars*, with its success, continues to stir interest in the ideas of pantheism.

George Lucas borrowed themes from several religions and ancient myths in creating the story line for *Star Wars*. Lucas was not intending to introduce or promote a particular religion in his movie. However, he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. He created his movies to ". . . make young people think about the mystery. Not to say, 'Here's the answer.' It's to say,

‘Think about this for a second. Is there a God? What does God look like? What does God sound like? What does God feel like? How do we relate to God?’ Just getting young people to think at that level is what I’ve been trying to do in the films. What eventual manifestation that takes place in terms of how they describe their God, what form their faith takes, is not the point of the movie.”{1}

George Lucas should be commended in his desire to inspire people to wrestle with such issues. This is a movie rich in theology and deep in philosophical ideas that are sure to generate some profitable discussions. C.S. Lewis, J.R. Tolkien, and Fydor Dostoevsky, in their classical fiction writings, presented answers to life’s questions from a theistic worldview. In *Star Wars*, Lucas has accomplished a similar classic work presenting answers to life’s questions from a pantheistic worldview. For this reason *Star Wars* is a fun movie that is full of theological ideas.

In the following sections, we will examine how Lucas’ pantheistic worldview is illustrated in *Star Wars,* and present a biblical critique of this fine movie series.

The Worldview of Pantheism

What are some of the major tenets of pantheism?

First, there is the concept of monism, the notion that all things are essentially of the same nature or essence. In other words, God is the universe; he is not separate from the universe but is contained within it. The universe is eternal and flows out of the divine. Therefore, creation is *ex deo* (out of God), meaning out of the hands of God. The Greek philosopher Plotinus stated that everything flows from God, be it life or flower from a seed. Good and evil, light and darkness all flow out of God.

Pantheists also believe in the absence of a divine personal

being who created the universe. Instead, they attest to a divine essence, an impersonal force, a cosmic energy that flows throughout all things in the universe. This energy is called “the One,” “the divine,” “Chi,” or “Brahma.” In *Star Wars*, it is called the Force.

Following their logic, if all is one in essence, all is divine. Hence, God and man are of the same essence, so man is essentially divine. Here is an illustration. God is the large ocean and we are all drops in that ocean. As a drop of water from a rain cloud must make its journey to unite with the ocean, so every individual must make their journey to become one with the divine. Spiritual guru Deepak Chopra writes, “Your body is not separate from the universe, because at quantum mechanical levels there are no well-defined edges. You are like a wiggle, a wave, a fluctuation, a convolution, a whirlpool, a localized disturbance in the larger quantum field. The larger quantum field – the universe – is your extended body.”{2} He also states, “In reality we are divinity in disguise, and gods and goddesses in embryo that are contained within us seek to be fully materialized. True success therefore is the experience of the miraculous. It is the unfolding of the divinity within us.”{3}

Since we are divine, true knowledge is attained by awakening the god within through an experience known as enlightenment. The One or the divine is not understood through the senses or rational thinking but by mystical union which is beyond the conscious self. This union comes through various means such as meditation, yoga, and channeling, among others. The process includes letting go of our conscious self and reaching out with our emotions.

The ultimate destiny of man is to become absorbed into the divine. All individuals are involved in an endless cycle of reincarnation until they attain enlightenment and eventually break the cycle of reincarnation to be absorbed into the divine. These are some of the basic teachings of pantheism

that are depicted in *Star Wars*.

God and The Force

George Lucas stated that he wanted *Star Wars* to inspire young people to ask spiritual questions about God. In *Star Wars*, the idea of God is found in the Force. Lucas states, "I put the Force into the movie in order to try to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people – more a belief in God than a belief in any particular religious system."{4} Master Jedi Obi Won Kenobi first introduces us to the Force in 1977. Sitting in his desert hut, Obi Won explains to Luke Skywalker the nature of the Force. He states, "The Force is what gives the Jedi his power. It is an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us, penetrates us, it binds the galaxy together." The Jedi Knights and their adversaries the Siths use this cosmic energy to perform supernatural feats.

The Force reflects one of the main tenets of the pantheistic worldview, the concept of monism, that all is in essence one. The Force is not a personal being. It is an impersonal energy that is made up of and resides in all living things. Therefore, all of life has the spark of divinity because all is essentially one unified entity.

George Lucas borrows a lot of his ideas from Eastern pantheistic religions. Chinese religions such as Taoism teach that this cosmic energy is called the Chi Force. Chi flows through all living things, and therefore the powers of the universe reside in each individual. Through meditation, yoga, and other techniques of altering one's consciousness, one can master this energy within and perform supernatural feats.

Some Christians have mistakenly equated the Force with the Holy Spirit; however, there are several major differences. First, the Force is an impersonal energy field while the Holy Spirit is a personal being, the third member of the Trinity.

He has a personality, intelligence, and will. Second, the Force is made up of all living things in the universe while the Holy Spirit is not contained in the universe. The Holy Spirit is an eternal being who was involved in creating the universe out of nothing (Genesis 1). Being God, the Holy Spirit is involved in the universe but He is not contained in the universe and exists independent of living things. Third, the Force can be manipulated by the Jedi who use it to accomplish their will, but the Holy Spirit cannot be manipulated by those He indwells. Instead He guides, teaches, and empowers them to do the will of God the Father. Christians do not master the Holy Spirit to accomplish their will, but rather the Holy Spirit guides them to do His will. Finally, the Force has a good side and a dark side which exist in a state of balance while the Holy Spirit has no dark or evil side but only the attributes consistent with a holy and good God.

Salvation

The story of *Star Wars* centers on one figure, Anakin Skywalker, who is identified by the master Jedi Qui Gon Gin as the "chosen one." Anakin's birth was miraculous in that he was born of a virgin and his body has a high level of metachlorines. Qui Gon states that as the chosen one, Anakin will restore the "balance of the Force," a hope anticipated throughout the entire series. What does Lucas mean by this statement?

As stated previously, Lucas illustrates the teachings of the pantheistic worldview throughout the movie series. He borrows several concepts from Taoism, one of them being the idea of restoring the balance of the force.

Taoism teaches that there are equal and opposing forces throughout the universe that balance one another. This is known as the yin/yang duality. Opposing forces such as

positive and negative energy, light and darkness, life and death, have always been in a state of opposition. Neither side has dominance over the other, but there is a balance of these opposing forces. These forces are mutually dependent, and one cannot be known apart from the other. When these forces are not in balance, there is disharmony. When they exist in a balance, there is harmony.

Every individual must accept and live in harmony with this balance of opposing forces. When there is an imbalance of one over the other in a person, there is disharmony in one's life. When disturbed, this balance must be restored in the individual and in the world. Once balance is restored, harmony and peace returns. Darkness, death, and evil, are never defeated; they are only to be brought into balance with the opposing forces of light, life, and goodness. In *Star Wars*, the Force has two sides, a good side and a dark side. Imbalance has occurred because one side, the dark side, has become too pervasive and must be brought into balance by the opposing force of good. The dark side is not to be defeated permanently by the good but balance is to be restored to the Force. This is the concept George Lucas presents throughout the series.

In the Bible, the universe is not eternal but was created by God from nothing. The original creation was good. Evil, death, and suffering came as the result of the fall, which marred creation. The conflict between light and darkness, life and death, good and evil has not been an eternal struggle. The two forces are also not equal and in a balance. The Bible teaches that God is light, holy, good, and the life. He is not locked in an eternal struggle with opposing forces. One day at His appointed time, He will not bring balance but restoration to the universe. This will occur when God judges the world, defeats evil permanently, and establishes a new heaven and earth where sin and its effects are no longer present.

The Jedi Masters

The heroes in the *Star Wars* are the Jedi Knights. These select few individuals have mastered the Force and are powerful warriors. They function as the guardians of peace in the galactic empire and use their powers only in times of danger. Where did Lucas get his idea for the Jedi?

In a Discovery Channel documentary entitled "The Science of *Star Wars*," Lucas reveals the source of his idea. Once again, he borrows concepts from the pantheistic religions. Lucas reveals that his idea came from studying the Shao-Lin monks of China. The Shao-Lin monks are priests known for originating and becoming the masters of the martial arts. Their fighting skills were legendary throughout the land of China.

Not only are the Shao-Lin monks skillful fighters, they were also men who mastered the use of the Chi force. As previously mentioned, Chi is believed to be the cosmic energy that flows through all things including individuals. The Shao-Lin monks teach that through altering one's consciousness in meditation and other exercises, one can tap into the power of the Chi resident in each individual and use it to perform superhuman feats.

Using the Chi force, Shao-Lin monks believe they can deliver punches and kicks with devastating force. They are also able to withstand punishing blows from opponents and objects. Some even believe a master can strike down an opponent without physical contact by simply utilizing Chi energy.

In Star Wars, we see this parallel. The Jedi are dressed in garments similar to the Shao-Lin monks, are headquartered at the Temple, and are masters of the Force. Using the Force, they are able to move objects, foresee future events, manipulate people's thoughts, and strike down opponents without any physical contact. For the Jedi, truth is ultimately found in their feelings. When questions arise, the

phrase among the Jedi is, “Search your feelings. What do they tell you?” True knowledge for the Jedi is beyond the rational and instead found in feelings and intuitions beyond the rational mind. The Jedi are another example of Lucas’ pantheistic worldview.

There is much to like regarding the Jedi. They are noble heroes who are self-sacrificing, disciplined, and courageous. However, Christians should reject the idea of the Force that is the power behind the Jedi. The Bible does not teach that there is a cosmic energy or Chi that flows through objects and individuals. Throughout their training, Jedi are taught to let go of the conscious mind and reach out with their feelings. Christians are taught to love God “with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). Christians do not abandon their mind but develop it to understand truth and God’s will (Romans 12:1-2). The mind and heart work together through prayer, study of the Word, and guidance of the Holy Spirit to discern truth and God’s will in situations.

What Happens After Death?

What happens after death? This is another question George Lucas hoped young people would ask as they viewed this series. *Star Wars* presents an answer that once again reflects the teaching of pantheism. Pantheism teaches that we are all in an endless cycle of reincarnation until we attain enlightenment. It is then that we escape this cycle and become one with the divine meaning and become absorbed into the cosmic energy of the universe.

In *The Revenge of the Sith*, Anakin Skywalker is haunted with nightmares of his wife Padme dying at the birth of their child. Tormented by this dream he seeks the counsel of Yoda, the master of the Jedi. Yoda imparts to Anakin that death is a natural part of the universe. In other words, we should accept

it without emotion. He adds that one should not grieve for those who have died and become part of the Force. Anakin must not become attached to things, including people, for attachment to objects leads to jealousy and the dark side of the Force. One must release all feelings from things, for it is only then that one's thinking will be clear.

Thus, in *Star Wars* those who die become absorbed into the Force. We also learn that the Jedi are able to delay this absorption and appear as spirit guides to aid those in the physical world. Those with special insight may learn how to communicate with these ascended masters.

This teaching is another fundamental tenet of pantheistic religions. Pantheism teaches that the material world is an illusion. Therefore, one should not grow attached to earthly things for they are merely an illusion and are not permanent. Several schools of Hinduism and Buddhism teach that this world is an illusion and, as such, we must rid ourselves of all desires. The most holy of followers will therefore live lives of celibacy and poverty, releasing themselves from any desire and spending their days in meditation and study. At death, some holy men will delay their union with the divine and remain as spirit guides to aid those on the journey to enlightenment.

The Bible teaches that at death, we will not be absorbed into an impersonal energy field but we will retain our personhood and stand before God in judgment. There is no reincarnation or second chance. Hebrews 9:7 states that "It is appointed for each person to die once and then comes the judgment." Those who know Jesus will spend eternity with the Lord and fellow believers for all eternity. Those who have rejected Christ will spend eternity separated from God in Hell. The Bible presents a destiny that is just, but also filled with hope for those who know Jesus.

The answer presented in *Star Wars*, the annihilation of one's

consciousness and absorption into a cosmic energy field, is a false one that even if true, would provide insufficient hope.

How to Watch *Star Wars*

When it comes to movies, there are three basic responses among Christians. Some choose to avoid any movie that may teach contrary beliefs for fear that they or their children may be negatively influenced. Others are consumers and watch any movie believing it is harmless fun and entertainment. A third option is to select appropriate movies and then view them with discernment. I take the third position. The arts are meant to be enjoyed and to glorify God. Creation itself reflects the creative mind of God who designed man with the capacity to produce art. Man, however, many times uses the arts for less than noble reasons. However, Christians can learn valuable lessons about other belief systems and use movies as great teaching tools to help younger believers become more discerning and understand other worldviews.

In *Star Wars* we have a great teaching and discussion topic. There is much we should commend George Lucas for in this series. *Star Wars* is creative, entertaining, and family-friendly. It also promotes several good themes such as friendship, courage, and the dangerous corrupting power of selfish ambition. We should furthermore commend Lucas on his desire to make a movie that would inspire young people to think about deeper issues in life.

In the *Time Magazine* interview, Lucas states that he wanted young people to think about spiritual issues and the big questions about life. I certainly agree with Lucas, and wish more movies were designed for such purposes.

Star Wars is a great discussion piece because it creatively reflects the tenets of pantheism. Christians can use this film to discuss spiritual lessons revealed in the series. I have had profitable discussions with teens and adults on the

spiritual principles illustrated in *Star Wars*. Questions such as “What do you think about the whole idea of the Force?”, “Is there such a thing as a cosmic energy field?”, “Can we master the power of this energy?”, “What did *Star Wars* teach regarding what happens after death?”, or “What do you think really happens after death?” have arisen in conversations.

Answers to these questions often lead to great discussions regarding worldviews, the nature of truth, and eternal life. *Star Wars* offers answers from a pantheistic worldview, which Christians can point out and explain why these answers are false. Movies like *Star Wars* can be a great teaching tool when Christians are equipped and informed to discern truth from error.

Notes

1. Bill Moyer, “Of Myth and Men,” *Time* Magazine, (26 April, 1999), 93.
2. Deepak Chopra, *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*, p.68, quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), 68.
3. Ibid., 96.
4. Ibid., 92.

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Making Moral Choices – From A Biblical Worldview

Perspective

Kerby Anderson addresses making moral choices using the Bible and biblical principles, using both philosophical and practical approaches.

Love and Biblical Morality

A Christian view of morality is based upon the assumption that God exists and has revealed Himself to the human race. He has chosen to reveal Himself in nature (Psalm 19, Romans 1) and in human conscience (Romans 2:14-15). He has also revealed Himself through the Bible (Psalm 119, 2 Timothy 3:16) and in the person of Jesus Christ (John 10:30, Hebrews 1:1-4).

God's character is the ultimate standard of right and wrong. And even though the Bible was written long before the development of genetic engineering or modern media, it nevertheless provides principles that can be used to evaluate the morality of social, scientific, and technological issues.

Biblical morality can be developed from learning to live God's way according to biblical principles. Though the Christian life is much more than a set of rules or principles, these principles do provide moral boundaries for behavior.

Biblical morality is also based upon love that has its source in God. Jesus was asked by the teachers of the law which was the most important commandment. "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

The two most important commandments are to love God and to

love your neighbor. Essentially all biblical principles rest upon this foundation. And these principles can be found in God's revelation in the Bible. God's character as expressed in God's Word should be diligently applied to every area of life.

Jesus also taught Christians to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44-45): "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." As his opening phrase suggests, this was not the common practice of the day. In fact, it was completely contrary to the concept of love practiced in that day or even in our day.

The apostle Paul teaches that love is "the law of Christ" and thereby supreme and sufficient (Galatians 5:14; 6:2). He also teaches that love is the foundation of Christian obedience. Even if we manifest the gifts of the Spirit and do good works, they do not profit us unless they are done in love (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

He also teaches that God shows His love to us in that Christ died for us (Romans 5:8) and that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 6:37-39). And this is not just a theological truth, but the "love of Christ controls us" (2 Corinthians 5:14) and provides us with an ability to live the Christian life.

Knowing God's Will

How do we make proper moral choices based upon biblical principles? The Bible does provide biblical guidelines on a vast array of issues. Christians also have the liberty to make individual moral choices in areas of moral neutrality. Ultimately, making moral choices involves discerning the will of God in one's life.

Whole books have been written on how we can know the will of God, but we can summarize a few key principles here.

First, we can know God’s will through the Bible. Before considering any other way to discern God’s will, one should ask whether the Bible has already provided guidance in this area. The Bible is full of God’s specific commands and principles.

A teenager doesn’t have to ask if he should get drunk; the Bible has already addressed that issue (Ephesians 5:18). An unmarried couple doesn’t need to ask if they should live together before they marry. Again, the Bible has addressed the topic (1 Corinthians 6:18).

The Bible provides boundaries and barriers to our moral actions. We are to stay within those moral boundaries. Paul, writing to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:6), told them “Do not go beyond what is written.”

A second way we discern God’s will is through prayer. We are commanded to bring our requests before God. In Philippians 4:6 we are told: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

If we are earnestly reading the Bible and seeking God’s will, He will reveal it to us, often through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We read in Romans 8:27 that “The Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.”

A third way we discern God’s will is through our conscience. If our conscience is troubling us about a particular action or behavior, then we should refrain from that activity. Paul says that each person “must be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5). He adds that “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

The opposite is not necessarily true. In other words, conscience is a good stop sign but not a green light. A troubled conscience is sufficient justification to refrain, and a guilty conscience is reason enough to stop a particular

action or behavior.

A clear conscience is no justification for proceeding. The Bible teaches that, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). We can easily deceive ourselves into sin.

Christians should strive to have a good conscience before God and man (Acts 24:16). A troubled conscience is reason to avoid an action, but a clear conscience may not be sufficient justification to proceed.

Christian Liberty

What about times when the Bible does not clearly seem to speak to a particular action? These areas of moral neutrality are still governed by biblical principles that guide our Christian liberty.

Even though a particular action may not be prohibited in Scripture, it still may be offensive to others because of their social, ethnic, or religious background. Another person’s family background or spiritual maturity is also a consideration Christians must make.

The Apostle Paul articulates the principles guiding our liberty in Romans 14-15. The specific example that he uses involves the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. While this issue is of no moral concern today, it does provide key biblical principles which we can apply in determining our response to issues not specifically addressed in the Bible.

The first principle is that Christians are not to have a judgmental attitude toward one another in regard to issues that are morally neutral. Paul says in Romans 14:3 that the “one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat” nor should the “one who does not eat . . . judge the one who eats.” In other words, whether you participate in or

refrain from a morally neutral activity, you should not be judgmental of the other person.

No one has the right to force their moral conclusions on others when the Bible does not provide clear principles on the matter. Paul asks in Romans 14:4, “Who are you to judge the servant of another?” Christians are instructed to decide these matters for themselves as they consult the Bible and their conscience.

Second, each Christian must decide what is right or wrong for him or her. Paul teaches that if you believe a particular action to be wrong for you, then it is wrong. He says in Romans 14:4, “I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.”

He taught that all things were clean. In other words, there was no sin in eating meat sacrificed to idols (it was morally neutral). But he also teaches that if a person believes it is sinful to indulge in a practice, then it is indeed sinful for them.

Each person “must be fully convinced in his own mind” (Romans 14:5). If there is doubt, then it is better to refrain from participating rather than engaging in what has become a sinful action for the person. Doubt or uncertainty is a sufficient reason to refrain from a particular activity or behavior.

A key test of Christian obedience is whether a person can do so “for the Lord” (Romans 14:6). Christians are to “live for the Lord” because “we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8). If one cannot participate in an activity while serving the Lord, then he or she should refrain. Paul says that “whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

A third principle is whether a morally neutral activity would be “an obstacle or a stumbling block” to another believer

(Romans 14:13). Christians should be aware of their actions on the Christian walk of others around them. While we may have liberty in Christ to participate in an action or behavior, another believer might be offended or adversely affected by what we do.

Paul teaches that we have a moral responsibility to other believers. He says, “we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength” (Romans 15:1). In order to do so we may have to limit our Christian liberty.

At the same time there is a balance between enjoying our liberty in Christ and trying not to give offense. If one believes he or she can participate in an activity, then one should do so with that firm “conviction before God” (Romans 14:22). But it would be wise not to participate publicly but privately for the sake of a believer who might be hurt by one’s actions (Romans 14:15).

A final principle is how a particular action or behavior will affect the individual believer’s walk with the Lord. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:12 that; “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be mastered by anything.”

Although these morally neutral practices are lawful, they may not be profitable and could actually master (or enslave) a person. There is nothing in the Bible about such things as poor nutrition, addiction to caffeine, or watching lots of television, yet most would agree that such behaviors are not profitable. In fact, they are frequently debilitating to the individual. Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 10:31 that whether “you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

Honesty and Biblical Morality

Although the Bible admonishes us to be honest and to tell the truth, honesty seems to be at an all-time low. One study of high school students found that 71 percent of them admitted to cheating on an exam at least once in the last twelve months. And 92 percent of them said they lied to their parents in the last twelve months while 79 percent said they did so two or more times. So what does the Bible say about honesty and truth?

The Old Testament calls upon the people of God to deal honestly with one another. Leviticus 9:35 says “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity.” Likewise, Proverbs 11:1 warns that “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord.” Believers are to use honest weights and be honest in their dealings with others.

A righteous person does not “take a bribe against the innocent” (Psalm 15:5). Isaiah (5:23) pronounces judgment on those “who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away the rights of the ones who are in the right.”

The New Testament admonishes Christians to “have a good conscience” and desire to conduct themselves “honorably in all things” (Hebrews. 13:18). Paul said he attempted to always maintain “a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men” (Acts 24:16). Christians should “have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Corinthians 8:21).

Honesty also requires telling the truth. The Ten Commandments forbids both the swearing of false oaths and the bearing of false testimony (Exodus 20:7, 16; Deuteronomy 5:11, 20; cf. Leviticus 19:12; Jeremiah 7:9). In the Old Testament, false witnesses were to suffer the same punishment that they had hoped to inflict upon the others (Deuteronomy 19:16-21).

Telling the truth also involved more than false testimony in a court. Believers are not to spread false reports (Proverbs 12:17; 14:5, 25) or report the truth maliciously or engage in slander (Leviticus 19:16; Proverbs 26:20).

Speaking evil is prohibited (Psalm 34:13; Proverbs 24:28; Ephesians 4:31; James 4:11; 1 Peter 3:10), and it disqualifies a person from God's favor (Psalm 15:3) and from a leadership position in the church (1 Timothy 3:8; Titus 2:3).

In the Old Testament, oaths and vows were used many times. Abraham (Genesis 21:22-34), Jacob (Genesis 25:33; 28:20), Joseph (Genesis 50:5), Joshua (Joshua 6:26), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:11), Saul (1 Samuel 14:24), David (1 Samuel 20:17), Ezra (Ezra 10:5), and Nehemiah (Nehemiah 13:25) all swore oaths or vows. The swearing of these oaths and vows underscores the seriousness of telling the truth and following up on one's commitment.

We need truth telling today like never before. Perhaps the greatest battle in society today is a battle over truth. Voters are skeptical of politicians. Proponents of various biomedical procedures (abortion, cloning) often redefine terms and mislead the public about the true nature of the procedures they advocate. We need Christians to set an example by being honest and telling the truth.

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