

# The Goddess and the Church – A New Age Deity

*Feminism has invaded the realm of theology, elevating the concept of The Goddess, or Great Mother, as a pantheistic and occultic paradigm for religion acceptable to feminists, who find traditional religions unacceptable because of their “male Gods.”*



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

The goddess, or Great Mother, has existed since the beginning of time...it is out of the primordial depths of her womb that the Universe and all life is born. *Morwyn, Secrets Of A Witch's Coven*

Reverence for the goddess is becoming more prevalent in our day. The goddess is embraced by witchcraft, feminism, the occult, and the liberal church. The New Age that is about to dawn upon us will be, according to the occult world, a feminine age. Likewise, those who hold this view believe that this current, masculine age has been an age of destruction and broken relationships among humanity. The New Age with its feminine energies will bring balance to the destructive aspects of the Piscean Age.

Rosemary Radford Ruether in her book, *Womanguides: Readings Toward A Feminist Theology*, states “It is to the women that we look for salvation in the healing and restorative waters of Aquarius. It is to such a New Age that we look now with hope as the present age of masculism succeeds in destroying itself.” According to Starhawk, a feminist and practicing witch, “the symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The Goddess does not rule the world; She is the world.”(1)

In order for this feminine age to come into full fruition a shift in consciousness must take place in the world. This shift in thinking and perception of reality will bring forth the goddess.(2)

As interest in the occult continues to rise and gain popularity in our culture, the goddess becomes more popular as a deity. The modern woman is at a crossroads in her spiritual quest. It is imperative that she realize her inherent deity, her god nature, for she is to be the salvation of humanity.

According to those who hold a belief in the Great Goddess, Europe was once ruled by a matriarchal egalitarian religion. Their belief dictates that Old Europe was a culture that worshiped a matrifocal (mother-focused), sedentary, peaceful, art-loving, goddess between 5,000 and 25,000 years before the rise of the first male-oriented religion. They maintain that this egalitarian culture was overrun and destroyed by a semi-nomadic, horse-riding, Indo-European group of invaders who were patrifocal (father-focused), mobile, warlike, and indifferent to art.(3) The ease with which the peaceful goddess worshipers were subdued confirmed to the war-like Indo-European invaders their feelings of natural superiority. The matriarchal religion of these early settlers was eventually assimilated into the more dominant patriarchal religion of the invaders. As these invaders imposed their patriarchal culture on the conquered peoples, rapes(4) and myths about male warriors killing serpents appeared for the first time in their history. The serpent was a symbol of the goddess worshipers. As the assimilation of cultures continued, the Great Mother Goddess became fragmented into many lesser goddesses.

According to Merlin Stone, author of *When God Was a Woman*, the disenthronement of the Great Goddess, begun by the Indo-European invaders, was finally accomplished by the Hebrew, Christian, and Moslem religions that arose later.(5) The male deity took the prominent place. The female goddesses faded

into the background, and women in society followed suit.(6)

## **The Goddess and Witchcraft**

In the world of witchcraft the goddess is the giver of life. Jean Shinoda Bolen, M.D., in her book, *Goddesses In Everywoman*, has this to say about the goddess:

The Great Goddess was worshiped as the feminine life force deeply connected to nature and fertility, responsible both for creating life and for destroying life.(7)

She also proclaims, "The Great Goddess was regarded as immortal, changeless, and omnipotent" prior to the coming of Christianity. For witchcraft, the goddess is the earth itself. Mother Earth or Gaia, as the goddess is known in occult circles, is an evolving being as is all of nature. In the New Age worldview, environmentalism and the ecological movement play an important part in restoring the goddess. In her best-selling book, *The Spiral Dance*, Starhawk says

The model of the Goddess, who is immanent in nature, fosters respect for the sacredness of all living things. Witchcraft can be seen as a religion of ecology. Its goal is harmony with nature, so that life may not just survive, but thrive.(8)

Witches think of Gaia, or Mother Earth, as a biosystem. They attribute consciousness to earth and believe it to be spiritual as well. In other words, Gaia is a living and evolving being that has a spiritual destiny. Those who practice witchcraft take responsibility for Mother Earth's evolutionary development.

The environmental movement of our day is greatly influenced by those who practice witchcraft or hold neopagan beliefs. Witchcraft is an attempt to reintroduce the sacred aspect of the earth that was, according to their belief, destroyed by the Christian world. The goddess is, therefore, a direct

affront against the male- dominated religion of the Hebrew God.

Christianity taught that God was transcendent, apart from nature, and was a masculine deity. Witchcraft holds a pantheistic view of God. God is nature. Therefore, God is in all things and all things are a part of God. However, this God is in actuality a goddess and predates the male God. The goddess is the giver of all life and is found in all of creation.

The importance of the Goddess symbol for women cannot be over stressed. The image of the Goddess inspires women to see ourselves as divine, our bodies as sacred, the changing phases of our lives as holy, our aggression as healthy, and our anger as purifying. Through the Goddess, we can discover our strength, enlighten our minds, own our bodies, and celebrate our emotions.(9)

For Betty Sue Flowers, a University of Texas English professor, the women's spirituality movement is the answer to the male-oriented religion of Christianity. She was a keynote speaker for the International Conference on Women's Spirituality in Austin, Texas, and addressed the conference on the return of the goddess. According to Flowers,

The goddess is a metaphor that reminds us of the female side of spirituality. Metaphors are important. You can't know God directly. You can only know images of God, and each image or metaphor is a door. Some doors are open and others are closed. A door that is only male is only half open.(10)

## **The Goddess and Feminism**

For many in the feminist world, the goddess is an expression of worship. A growing number within the feminist movement have bought into witchcraft as the central focus of their allegiance. Those who have become a part of the women's

spirituality movement reject what they call the patriarchal Judeo-Christian tradition, deploring sexist language, predominantly masculine imagery and largely male leadership.(11)

In a Wall Street Journal article, Sonia L. Nazario stated, "Women first wanted to apply feminism to political and economic realms, then to their families. Now, they want it in their spiritual lives."(12)

To fully understand the implications of the women's spirituality movement one only needs to read the current literature on the subject. The editors of the book *Radical Feminism* state that "Political institutions such as religion, because they are based on philosophies of hierarchical orders and reinforce male oppression of females, must be destroyed."

Radical feminists believe that the traditional church must be dismantled. For example, in her book *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions*, Naomi Goldenburg announced,

The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and Yahweh....It is likely that as we watch Christ and Yahweh tumble to the ground, we will completely outgrow the need for an external God.(13)

Many feminists are obviously moving away from an understanding of deity as an external "male" God who stands apart from Creation to a conception of deity as a goddess that is realized within one's inner self and is one with nature.

Some extreme feminists in the goddess movement "pray for the time when science will make men unnecessary for procreation."(14) The radical feminist see the goddess movement as a spiritual outlet for their long-held beliefs. According to Mark Muesse, an assistant professor of religious studies at Rhodes College,

some feminist Christians push for changes ranging from the ordination of women and the generic, non-sexual terms for God and humanity to overhauling the very theology.(15)

Perhaps the most descriptive word for the feminist movement is "transformation." Catherine Keller, Associate Professor of Theology at Xavier University, in her essay "Feminism and the New Paradigm," proclaims that the world-wide feminist movement is bringing about the end of patriarchy, the eclipse of the politics of separation, and the beginning of a new era modeled on the dynamic, holistic paradigm. Radical feminism envisions that era, and the long process leading toward it, as a comprehensive transformation.

Another aspect of this transformation is the blending of the sexes. The feminist movement seeks a common mold for all of humanity. Jungian Psychotherapist John Weir Perry believes that we must find our individuality by discovering androgyny. He states,

To reach a new consensus, we have to avoid falling back into stereotypes, and that requires truly developing our individuality. It is an ongoing work of self-realization and self-actualization. For men it means growing into their native maleness and balancing it with their femaleness. For women, it's the same growing into their full womanhood, and that includes their masculine side.(16)

This process sounds more like androgyny (or sameness) than individuality and it reflects a paradigm-shift involving nothing less than the reordering of man's understanding of God. A shift from thinking of God as male to seeing and experiencing God as a goddess: the Mother of Life.

## **The Goddess and the Occult**

In the world of the occult, popularly known as the New Age, the goddess is believed to be resident within the individual

and simply needs to be awakened. In other words, the individual is inherently divine. Starhawk, a witch who works with the Catholic priest Matthew Fox at his Institute of Creation Spirituality, says that an individual can awaken the goddess by invoking, or inviting, her presence. Starhawk tells us,

To invoke the Goddess is to awaken the Goddess within, to become ...that aspect we invoke. An invocation channels power through a visualized image of Divinity...We are already one with the Goddess—she has been with us from the beginning, so fulfillment becomes...a matter of self-awareness. For women, the Goddess is the symbol of the inmost self. She awakens the mind and spirit and emotions.(17)

Jean Shinoda Bolen, a Jungian analyst and Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California, when asked the question, What ails our society?, put it this way: “We suffer from the absence of one half of our spiritual potential—the Goddess.”(18) Individuals who follow New Age teaching believe that the male-dominated religion of this present age has been an injustice to humanity and the ecosystem. Therefore, there must be a balancing of energies. The male energies must diminish and the feminine energies must increase in order for the goddess to empower the individual.

The New Age of occultism promises to be an age of peace, harmony, and tranquility. Whereas the present dark age of brokenness and separation continues to bring war, conflict, and disharmony, so it is the goddess with her feminine aspects of unity, love, and peace that will offer a solution for mankind and circumvent his destruction. For many in our society this appears to be the answer to man’s dilemma. However, an occult solution that denies Christ’s atonement for sin cannot fully meet a holy God’s requirement for wholeness.

For the pagan, the goddess represents life and all it has to offer. “The Goddess religion is a conscious attempt to reshape

culture.”(19) This reshaping is nothing less than viewing man and his understanding of reality from a female-centered perspective which focuses on the Divine as being female. Therefore, considerable emphasis is placed initially on feminine attributes, but ultimately the focus is on eroticism and sexuality.

Women are clearly the catalyst for the formation of the new spirituality. It is women above all who are in the process of reversing Genesis...by validating and freeing their sexuality.(20)

A major part of this transformative process is the empowerment of women. The rise of the goddess is a direct assault on the patriarchal foundation of Christianity. This new feminist spirituality affirms bisexuality, lesbianism, homosexuality, and androgyny (through the expression of transvestitism).

As this revival of the goddess continues, a growing lack of distinction between male and female will become the norm. Jungian Psychotherapist John Weir Perry maintains,

Both current psychology and ancient history point to an emerging transformation in our sense of both society and self, a transformation that includes redefining the notion of what it means to be men and women.(21)

The Bible clearly indicates that men and women were created as distinctive beings, male and female. This rising occult influence in our society seeks to undermine the Biblical absolute that gives our culture stability. Once again the Bible rings true as it states,

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables (2 Tim. 4:3).



# The Goddess and the Liberal Church

The message of the goddess has gained a hearing in the church as well. The philosophy of the goddess is currently being taught in the classrooms of some of our seminaries. In a growing number of seminaries the student population is becoming increasingly female, and many of these women have a feminist outlook on life. Mary Daly, who considers herself to be a Christian feminist, says this about traditional Christianity: "To put it bluntly, I propose that Christianity itself should be castrated." (22) The primary focus of the "Christian" feminist is to bring an end to what they perceive as male-dominated religion by "castrating" the male influence from religion. Daly continued by saying,

I am suggesting that the idea of salvation uniquely by a male savior perpetuates the problem of patriarchal oppression. (23)

Reverend Susan Cady, co-author of *Sophia: The Future of Feminist Spirituality* and pastor of Emmanuel United Methodist Church in Philadelphia, is one example of the direction that Daly and others are taking the church. The authors of *Sophia* state that, "Sophia is a female, goddess-like figure appearing clearly in the Scriptures of the Hebrew tradition."

*Wisdom Feast*, the authors' latest book, clearly identifies Jesus with Sophia. Sophialogy presents Sophia as a separate goddess and Jesus as her prophet. The book takes liberty with Jesus by replacing the masculine deity with the feminine deity Sophia. Another example of how goddess "thealogy" (note feminist spelling for theology) is making its way into the liberal church is through seminars held on seminary campuses.

One such seminar was held at the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. "Wisdomweaving: Woman Embodied in Faiths" was held at the school in February of 1990. If one looks at the schedule of the seminar, it is obvious that the

emphasis was not on orthodoxy. Linda Finnell, a follower of Wicca and one of the speakers, spoke on the subject of "Returning to the Goddess Through Dianic Witchcraft." Two of the keynote speakers were of a New Age persuasion. In fact, one, Sr. Jose Hobday, works with Matthew Fox and Starhawk at the Institute for Creation Spirituality.

A growing number of churches in the United States and around the world are embracing the New Age lie. Many churches have introduced *A Course in Miracles*, Yoga, Silva Mind Control, Unity teachings, and metaphysics into their teaching material. Some churches have taken a further step into the New Age by hiring onto their staffs individuals who hold to a metaphysical worldview.

Along with the deception that is subtly gaining influence in the liberal church, there are a growing number of churches affiliated with the New Age. These churches, without apology, teach the Luciferian gospel. They are the seed-bed of the occult.

It is amazing that while the liberal church will not accept or believe in Satan, they are willing to embrace Lucifer as an angel of light. It is interesting to note that the New Age Church represents itself as the Church of Light.

Whether the individual seeks the goddess through witchcraft, the feminist movement, the New Age, or the liberal church, he or she is beginning a quest to understand and discover the "higher self." The higher self, often referred to as the "god self," is believed to be pure truth, deep wisdom. In actuality, this so-called "truth" or "wisdom" embodies the oldest lie in the Book, the lie of self-deification: "Ye shall become as Gods." As Christians we must learn to discern every spirit lest we too become deceived.

## **Notes**

1. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance* (New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row,

Publishers, 1989), 23.

2. Elinor W. Gadon, *The Once & Future Goddess* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), xiv.

3. Ibid., xii-xiii. See also Linnie Levy, *Of A Like Mind* (Madison, Wis.: OALM, 1991), vol. VIII, no. 3, pp. 2-3.

4. See also Zsuzsanna Emese Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (Oakland, Calif.: Susan B. Anthony Coven No. 1, 1986), 12.

5. See also Gadon, *The Once & Future Goddess*, xiii.

6. Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 21.

7. Ibid., 20.

8. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 25.

9. Ibid., 24.

10. Carlos Vidal Greth, "The Spirit of Women," *The Austin-American Statesman*, 5 March 1991, Sec D.

11. Ibid.

12. Sonia L. Nazario, "Is Goddess Worship Finally Going to Put Men in Their Place?," *The Wall Street Journal*, 7 June 1990, sec. A.

13. Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1979), 4, 25.

14. Nazario, "Goddess Worship."

15. Deirdre Donahue, "Dawn of The Goddesses,'" *USA Today*, 26 September 1990, sec. D.

16. John Weir Perry, "Myth, Ritual, and the Decline of

Patriarchy," *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992): 103.

17. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 99.

18. Jean Shinoda Bolen, "The Women's Movement in Transition: The Goddess & the Grail," *Magical Blend* 33 (January 1992), 8.

19. Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 11.

20. Donna Steichen, "The Goddess Goes to Washington," *Fidelity Magazine* (December 1986), 42.

21. Perry, "Decline of Patriarchy," *Magical Blend*, 62.

22. Alice Hageman, *Theology After the Demise of God the Father: A Call for the Castration of Sexist Religion* (New York: Association Press, 1974), 132.

23. Ibid., 138.

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## Freemasonry and the Christian Church – Are Masons Christian?

*Russ Wise intently examines the teaching and practices of freemasonry from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective. What he finds clearly shows distinct differences between Freemasonry and Christian doctrine and practice.*



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

# Freemasonry : Its Background and History

There are probably few subjects as shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding as that of Freemasonry. Known under a variety of names (the Craft, the Brotherhood, the Order, the Fraternal Order, the Lodge, etc.), Masonry has been aligned with both the Christian church and the occult. A major problem for many whether within the Order or without is the question of the Mason's ultimate allegiance. If, in fact, there is no appreciable theological difference between the church and Freemasonry, their antagonists have no basis on which to denounce them. However, if there are beliefs and practices in Masonry that are incompatible with biblical Christianity, then it becomes imperative for the non-Mason and Mason alike to understand the true teachings of the Lodge.

The history of the Lodge is not easily discernible. Along with those who believe that Freemasonry had Christian beginnings are a growing number of Masonic authors who espouse an occultic origin for the Craft. There are those who indicate that the Craft was an outgrowth of the Ancient Mystery Schools or that it was first associated with the Druids or the Illuminati. In order for the individual to make a correct decision regarding Freemasonry, he must first understand the motivation of the author.

Masonic authors Delmar Darrah, A. S. MacBride, and Melvin Johnson point out the unreliability of many of their fellow Masonic writers. Darrah, in his book titled *History And Evolution Of Freemasonry*, states that "Masons have believed the things concerning the origin of the institution that they wanted to believe and have gone forth and told them as facts. When links were missing, they have been supplied by drawing upon fertile imaginations."(1)

# **Christianity and the Craft**

Leading Masonic authorities in the 18th and 19th centuries held a distinctively Christian interpretation of Freemasonry. Such leaders as Rev. James Anderson, William J. Hughan, William Hutchinson, Rev. George Oliver, and others had a Christian view of their Craft.(2) Hutchinson, in particular, noted that Jesus Christ was the example for the Master Mason. He stated, "The Master Mason represents a man under the Christian doctrine saved from the grave of iniquity and raised to the faith of salvation. As the great testimonial that we are risen from the state of corruption, we bear the emblem of the Holy Trinity as the insignia of our vows and of the origin of the Master's order."(3)

## **The Anti-Masonic Movement**

The decade between 1826 and 1836 represented troublesome years for the Masonic Order. After several incidents that cast a negative light on Freemasonry,(4) a growing anti-Masonic sentiment began to emerge. As a result, there was a mass exodus of Christians from the Lodge, thereby creating a vacuum to be filled by those who held a non-Christian view of Masonry. During this time Albert Pike seized the opportunity to spread and entrench his pagan interpretation of the Craft. Pike and others began to reinterpret the symbols of the Craft.

The paganization of the Lodge took place over several decades, but it did not reach public awareness until the latter part of the 19th century. Even so, it was not until the 1920s, when a large number of books began appearing in print that claimed pagan origins for the Craft, that these efforts became widely known.

## **Masonic Universalism**

The anti-Masonic movement dealt Freemasonry a severe blow. However, the exodus of large numbers of Christians proved to

be a stabilizing factor(5) for the non-Christian forces of the Craft. Once the Christian majority had left the Craft, Pike was then able to redesign it in a way that would support his pagan views.

It is interesting to note that during the very time that Pike was heavily involved in his paganizing process, the Craft was experiencing a renewed growth in membership from Christians. The majority of these new Christian members represented church leadership and accepted the Christian interpretation of Hutchinson, Oliver, Hughan, and others. Their influence, however, wasn't enough to offset the growing paganization of the Lodge.

Manly P. Hall, a 33rd degree Mason, was one of the early authors who claimed a pagan origin for Freemasonry. In his book entitled *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, he says that Freemasonry is not a material thing: it is a universal expression of the Divine Wisdom. "The Masonic order is not a mere social organization, but is composed of all those who have banded themselves together to learn and apply the principles of mysticism and the occult rites."(6)

Hall (and a host of other writers including Pike) created a pagan history for Freemasonry that would later take root and grow to become the accepted understanding of Masonic origins. As this new interpretation took hold in the minds of the membership, Christianity was being all but eradicated from the Craft. It became unthinkable to mention the name of Christ or to pray in the name of Jesus. The Craft was set firmly on the ground of "universalism."

The primary standard for membership was, and continues to be, that the candidate believe in "God." This god could be Krishna, Buddha, Allah, or any other god, but Jesus Christ is not to be considered anything more than their equal.

This universalist, or inclusive, idea about God has opened the

door for every false deity to have a place within the Lodge. Hall makes his universalist orientation unmistakable by stating, "The true disciple of Masonry has given up forever the worship of personalities. With his greater insight, he realizes that all forms . . . are of no importance to him compared to the life which is evolving within."(7)

Hall adds to his belief in universalism by stating that "the true Mason is not creed-bound. He realizes with the divine illumination of his lodge that as a Mason his religion must be universal: Christ, Buddha, or Mohammed, the name means little, for he recognizes only the light and not the bearer."(8) So, for the Mason, God is not a personal being, but an impersonal force, an energy that has no substance.

The Mason who is a Christian is put in a very difficult position. Although his Fraternal Order supported his Christianity in its early years, it now no longer allows for it as there is no question about the pagan orientation of Freemasonry in our day. Therefore, the Mason must ask himself whether he can, in good faith, remain a part of an organization that devalues the God of Christianity.

## **Freemasonry as a Religion**

As the evolution of modern Freemasonry took place over a period of several hundred years, it continued to be influenced by those who held an occultic worldview. For them, the Craft was a revival of the ancient mysteries.

Albert Pike, the noted Masonic scholar, said that "it is the universal, eternal, immutable religion, such as God planted it in the heart of universal humanity."(9) Pike's statement is a good example of Masonic double speak. The Christian can interpret what is said as being in reference to the personal God of Christianity who created the universe. However, when one takes Pike's statement together with the balance of his worldview it becomes apparent that he is referring to the



impersonal god of Freemasonry as mentioned earlier.

Pike, in his book *Morals and Dogma*, says this about religion and Freemasonry: "Every Masonic Lodge is a temple of religion; and its teachings are instruction in religion." (10) According to the modern day interpreters of Masonry, it has now taken its logical place as the unifier of all religions. One such interpreter, Foster Bailey, an occultist and a 32nd degree Mason, said that "Masonry is the descendant of a divinely imparted religion" that antedates the prime date of creation. Bailey goes on to say that "Masonry is all that remains to us of the first world religion" which flourished in ancient times. "It was the first unified world religion. Today we are working again towards a world universal religion." (11)

In other words, Freemasonry has its roots in the same sources as the mystery religions of the world that brought on the wrath of the Hebrew God of the Old Testament. And the Craft is now preparing the way for the revival of the same religion of the ancients.

The Mason, however, may be unaware of much of what is taught by the Lodge. The Mason who is uninitiated in the higher degrees is deliberately deceived by his brethren. Pike says that "truth is not for those who are unworthy." He goes on to say that "Masonry jealously conceals its secrets, and intentionally leads conceited interpreters astray." (12)

Hall put it this way: "Spiritual qualities are necessary before the real Masonic secrets can be understood by the brethren themselves." (13) What Hall seems to be saying is that one must reach a certain spiritual level before he can rightly understand the deep symbolic teachings of Freemasonry. As an example, one of the most known symbols for Masonry is the letter "G." Depending on whose interpretation one chooses, this symbol may represent geometry, God, or gnosis. A Christian would obviously interpret the symbol as God, whereas the pagan would see it as knowledge or gnosis.

Albert Pike was even more direct when he stated, "The Blue Degrees are but the outer court of the Temple. Part of the symbols are displayed there to the initiate, but he is intentionally misled by false interpretations. It is not intended that he shall understand them; but it is intended that he shall imagine he understands them. Their true explication is reserved for the Adepts, the Princes of Masonry."(14)

The Mason may unwittingly be a part of the Lodge thinking that it is an extension of his Christian faith, when in fact it may be a "Trojan horse," allowing another god into his soul.

## **The Masonic God**

The god of Freemasonry and the God of the Bible are not one and the same. There is a great difference between the two concepts of God. The Masonic god, "The Great Architect of the Universe" (G.A.O.T.U), is believed to be above all other gods.

According to Albert Pike, all people, regardless of their spiritual orientation, can unite under the "Grand Artificer of the Universe." The Masonic god is all-inclusive and all-embracing. All potential Masons must acknowledge a "God" in order to gain membership in the Lodge, but there is no definite criteria regarding which "God" is implied or what "God" is acceptable.

Pike states that Masonry is the unifier of all religions and that "the Christian, the Hebrew, the Moslem, the Brahmin, the followers of Confucius and Zoroaster, can assemble as brethren and unite in prayer to the one God who is above all the Baalim."(15) In other words, the biblical God is reduced to the level of all the other gods and at the same time rendered as equal with the false gods of those religions. Therefore, Christianity is stripped of its uniqueness as the one true religion that offers humanity its only hope for salvation.

This universal god of Freemasonry is believed by many within the Lodge to be the God of the Bible, but this god is not the triune God of the Christian faith. Freemasonry purposefully diminishes the co-equal and co-eternal status of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. That is, the second and third Persons of the Trinity are placed below God the Father, disallowing the triune nature of the biblical God.

The Masonic god is clearly given a greater position among all other "gods." Albert Pike spoke of "God as being One; Unapproachable, Single, Eternal and Unchanging. . . . There is but one God, infinite and incomprehensible, to whom no human attribute can be properly assigned, even when imagined to be infinite." (16) Therefore, according to Pike, the god of Freemasonry is "Single" in nature and not the triune God of the Bible. Likewise, the Masonic god is unapproachable. He is not a personality that cares for his creation, he is a force a principle.

Manly P. Hall, a 33rd degree Mason, refers to God as being the "Life Principle" that lies within all living things. In a passage quoted earlier, Hall stated, "The true disciple of ancient Masonry has given up forever the worship of personalities. With his greater insight, he realizes that all forms . . . are of no importance to him compared to the life which is evolving within." (17) Hall reveals in this passage that

- The god of Freemasonry is a force resident within all living things, and
- The religion of the Craft is pantheism.

On the other hand, the God of Christianity is transcendent and only becomes resident within the human family, and then only when He is invited to do so. In Masonry, Jesus Christ is not accepted as being "One" with the Father and is not looked to for salvation.

Jesus made his Father's requirements very clear: "It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only'" (Luke 4:8). The Father says that "you shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him . . . you shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth" (Deut. 6:13-15).

The Mason who professes to be a Christian must decide whom he will serve: the God of the Bible or the god of Freemasonry. He cannot serve them both.

## **The Masonic Jesus**

The central question that every Christian Mason must ask himself is "Who is Jesus Christ according to the Lodge?" Earlier we saw that Albert Pike was greatly influenced by the occult and that he was responsible for the rewriting of the rituals for all the degree work beyond that of Master Mason.

Because of Pike's influence, Freemasonry has adopted a universalist approach toward divinity. According to Jim Shaw, a 33rd degree Mason who left the Lodge, Masonry teaches that "Jesus was just a man. He was one of the exemplars,' one of the great men of the past, but not divine and certainly not the only means of redemption of lost mankind. He was on a level with other great men of the past like Aristotle, Plato, Pythagoras and Mohammed. His life and legend were no different from that of Krishna, the Hindu god. He is the son of Joseph,' not the Son of God."(18)

Jesus Christ is not to be looked upon as God incarnate, or as the Savior of humanity, but He is to be considered as no different than any other great spiritual leader or guru. To follow through with this conclusion, the Lodge does not permit the name of Jesus or Christ to be used in any of its prayers

or rituals.

As an example, when Scripture is used in rituals the name of Jesus or Christ is omitted lest it offend someone. In essence, the Lodge has rewritten Scripture to suit its own end. The Bible is clear in its warning that God's Word is not to be changed or tampered with. Deuteronomy 4:2 says, "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it."

Masonic prayers are not to include the name of Jesus Christ, but they are to refer to the Great Architect of the Universe. The *Maryland Master Mason* magazine offered this statement concerning prayer in the Lodge: "All prayers in Mason lodges should be directed to the one deity to whom all Masons refer to as the Grand Architect of the Universe."(19)

For the Christian, this idea should cause some real concern. The Bible is clear regarding what Jesus says to those who are ashamed of the Son. "Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."(20)

The biblical Jesus does not allow for the bias of Freemasonry when it comes to receiving His proper place of reverence and worship. In short, Jesus does not seem to be as tolerant as the Mason when it comes to His divine authority.

The Bible gives us further instruction regarding our response to the Christian faith. "And Jesus came up to them, saying, All authority has been given me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you'" (Matt. 28: 18-20).

The Mason is thus faced with the choice of whom he will serve: Jesus, the Savior of his soul, or the tolerant god of

Freemasonry who leads him to destruction.

## **Masonic Light and Darkness**

“Freemasons are emphatically called the Sons of Light, because they are in possession of the true meaning of the symbol; while the profane or uninitiated who have not received this knowledge are said to be in darkness.”(21) In other words, the Mason has been delivered from the darkness into the light and is elevated above those who have not received the initiation into the degrees and mysteries of Freemasonry.

The “profane” individual, or the non-Mason, remains in darkness and is in need of light. The Mason, after being enlightened, continues to be in need of more light. It seems that the Mason never comes to fully understand his Craft and all that it means. However, as the Mason gains more light and understanding of the various symbols representing each degree, he becomes more aware of its different meanings. Albert Pike, the Masonic scholar, speaks of this deception, “Masonry conceals its secrets from all except Adepts and Sages, or the Elect, and uses false explanations and misinterpretations of its symbols to mislead those who deserve only to be misled; to conceal the Truth, which it calls Light, from them, and to draw them away from it. Truth is not for those who are unworthy or unable to receive it, or would pervert it. So Masonry jealously conceals its secrets, and intentionally leads conceited interpreters astray.”(22)

According to Pike, “Masonry is a search after light.”(23) The question that one must ask oneself is, What is the source of this “Light” that contemporary Freemasonry is based on? Pike goes on to tell us that the light of Masonry is based on the Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism. For the Christian this is indeed a difficulty, because the Christian cannot accept the occult beliefs of the mystics. The Bible tells us that “truth” or “light” can only be found in God’s Word.

The Mason is taught that as he receives more light he grows in perfection. As he grows in perfection, he believes that he actually increases his personal worthiness and, in the process, gains a deeper appreciation of Masonry. This in-depth understanding leads to a greater degree of enlightenment and enables the Mason to feel as if he has done all he must do for acceptance into the Grand Lodge above. This appeal to human pride is a deadly trap because we all have a sin nature and want to feel that we have "earned" salvation and "deserve" it.

However, the Mason who professes Jesus Christ as his Lord is left in a very difficult position by the Lodge. The Lodge considers the Christian as being profane or unworthy to receive the "Light" of the Craft. The Mason is faced with this dilemma: if the Lodge has the Light that mankind is looking for and if Jesus is that Light, how is it then that Jesus is not to be mentioned in the Lodge if He is indeed the Light of the world?(24) This idea becomes increasingly difficult when the Christian attempts to reconcile what the Bible says regarding Jesus and what the Craft says about the presence of Jesus in the Lodge.

Albert Pike speaks of Lucifer as the Light-bearer! "Lucifer, the Son of the Morning! Is it he who bears the Light, and with its splendors intolerable blinds feeble, sensual, or selfish Souls?"(25) The Bible identifies Lucifer as being Satan and an angel of light. According to Paganism, Lucifer is the bearer of the light that enlightens man's understanding of his Higher Self or his "God Self." Masonic author Foster Bailey says it this way, "Masonry therefore, is not only a system of morality, inculcating the highest ethics through which result, if followed, the conscious unfolding of divinity. . . . It portrays the recovery of man's hidden divinity and its bringing forth into the light . . . the power to achieve perfection latent in every man." Masonry purports to be the Light that awakens man's mind to his perfection and ultimate divinity.

The question that begs to be answered by each Mason is simply this: "Which Light' will he follow, the true Light of Christ or the dimly lit light of the Lodge?"

## **The Hidden Things of Freemasonry**

There is a great deal of secrecy in Freemasonry. From the very beginning the Entered Apprentice is kept in the shadows regarding the full meaning of the symbols of the Craft. He is not offered any further understanding until he has proven himself worthy to receive deeper truths.

Not only is the Mason to keep the secrets of the Lodge, but he is to swear oaths accompanied by severe penalties if he ever chooses to reveal them. According to Carl H. Claudy, a former Grand Master of Masons, the Masonic penalties are intended to inspire terror in the candidate. Claudy says that if a candidate breaks his oath, he will experience the abasement that any man would feel when he had broken a solemn pledge. But even more so, he would experience "the wrath of God blasphemed. The horror of a sin of which there is none greater." (26)

The above statement is an example of the misinformation that the Mason often labors under. The idea that God recognizes and upholds the Mason's oath to a pagan god is simply not biblical. However, the biblical mandate for the believer is to "swear not at all . . . But let your Yes' be Yes,' and your No, 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." (27) In other words, the Lord makes it very clear that anything sworn other than yes' or no' is from the mouth of the Devil.

The Christian God is not a god of fear and misery, but He is a God of compassion and mercy. Masonic author and 33rd Degree Mason Manly P. Hall identifies the nature of the cosmic force to which the Mason owes his allegiance. He states that "the average Mason, as well as the modern student of Masonic



ideals, little realizes the cosmic obligation he takes upon himself when he begins his search for the sacred truths of Nature. . . . Every Mason knows that a broken vow brings with it a terrible penalty. . . . When a Mason swears that he will devote his life to (Masonry) . . . and then defiles his living temple . . . he is breaking a vow which imposes not hours but ages of misery.”(28) The Mason is not offering his loyalty to the God of Christianity, but to the pantheistic god of Nature.

Albert Mackey, author of the *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, offers several reasons why non-Masons object to Masonic secrecy. However, there are only four which he accepts as being true. First, it is an oath. Second, it is administered before the secrets are communicated. Third, it is accompanied by certain superstitious ceremonies. And fourth, it is attended by a penalty.(29)

The candidate is led to believe that the penalties accompanying the oaths that he swears to are indeed carried out. At no time is he told that these penalties are simply symbolic. Mackey states that the penalties are not to be inflicted by the Lodge but by God. He says that “the ritualistic penalties of Freemasonry . . . are in the hands not of man, but of God, and are to be inflicted by God, and not by man.”(30) The Lodge is standing on thin ice when it presumes that God will safeguard its paganism by putting its detractors to death.

The greatest problem for the Christian Mason is that by taking the oaths of the Craft, and living his life according to them, he has opened the door to Lucifer to steal his relationship with the living God.

## **Symbolism and Freemasonry**

“In all time, truth has been hidden under symbols, and often under a succession of allegories: where veil after veil had to be penetrated before the true Light was reached, and the

essential truth stood revealed.”(31) These words of Albert Pike, the noted Masonic scholar, sound noble and true. However, the Christian must weigh Pike’s lofty words with the Scripture.

Our Lord was, at all times, eager to help his disciples recognize the truth of His teachings. The only problem they had to overcome was their lack of spiritual understanding. The gospel writer of Matthew 7 tells us that all we must do, is simply ask. “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”(32) The Lord desires to draw us near to Himself. We do not have to pass through veil after veil to reach divine understanding. He has readily given it to us in His Word. According to Dr. Robert A. Morey’s research, “there were no degrees in Masonry two hundred years ago; and that the Master’s degree is no more than 150 years of age.” He goes on to say that “most Masonic historians now admit that it was the Frenchmen Desaguilliers or Dr. Anderson who invented the first three degrees. The few symbols introduced by these two Christian clergymen came from the Bible and were Christian’ in every sense.”(33) Here again we see that the origins of the Craft were rooted in Christian belief.

However, as we have seen earlier, the Craft has undergone a paganization process by those who would subvert it to their own use. Whereas, in the early years of the Lodge, the symbols that were introduced revealed truth, in the present, those very same symbols and hundreds of others are used to mislead the candidate. Albert Pike made it clear when he stated, “part of the symbols are displayed . . . to the initiate, but he is

intentionally misled by false interpretations.”(34)

Jesus taught in parables and made use of symbols in His instruction. He freely offered understanding, and He was quick to help others recognize His Father. But when we look at Freemasonry we find secrecy and the “truth” concealed. A person must prove himself worthy in order for the “Light” to be shared with him. And when it is made known to the initiate, this “truth” is often hidden further in false interpretations.

Masonry has numerous symbols. For the Christian, Masonry utilizes the Bible as one of its symbols as it uses the Koran, the Vedas, the Gita, or any other “holy” book. When the Christian candidate sees the Bible on the Masonic altar and hears the Bible referenced to in the rituals, he assumes that Freemasonry is indeed Christian as he has, most likely, been told. However, the Bible is seen only as a symbol by the Lodge, as are all the other “holy” books of other religions.

This attitude toward the Bible makes it clear that, for Masonry, the Bible is not seen as being inspired by God, useable for reproof, correction, or training in righteousness. Rather, it “is only a symbol of Divine Will, Law, or Revelation.”(35)

## **Salvation in the Lodge**

“This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”(36)

The early Masons followed a biblical understanding of salvation and what it meant to be a Christian. However, the pagan writers who rewrote the Masonic rituals omitted the references to biblical salvation and wrote them in a way that would not offend anyone of another religion.

The early rituals for the Master Mason Degree were Christian

in their overall meaning. According to Dr. Morey, biblical phrases such as "regeneration," "redemption," and "heaven" were used without question.(37)

The greatest issue for the Mason, at present, is whether he will accept the life and work of Jesus Christ for his redemption or whether he will look to himself for personal salvation. Manly P. Hall says that "a Mason is evolved through ages of self- purification and spiritual transmutation."(38) So, the modern Mason, who follows the Fraternity's writings, looks to himself for purification and acceptance before a righteous God. Hall says elsewhere that the Master Mason's "spiritual light is greater because he has evolved a higher vehicle for its expression."(39)

Foster Bailey, the author of *The Spirit of Masonry*, says that "Masonry is one of many ways to God" and that Masonry "is not only a system of morality, inculcating the highest ethics through which result, if followed, the conscious unfolding of divinity, but it is also a dramatic presentation of regeneration."(40)

In other words, Bailey is saying that Masonry is a vehicle for mankind to discover his divinity and achieve personal regeneration. This idea is totally foreign to the Bible. The Christian cannot, in any way, get beyond the fact that Jesus Christ as the Light giver and redeemer of humanity is opposed to the teachings of the Lodge.

The Bible distinctly teaches that salvation only comes through the person of Jesus Christ. It cannot come by any other means. The Scripture is clear that if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we will receive salvation. It is not based upon our works or deeds; it is solely based upon what Jesus did on the cross.

Masonry does not accept the fact that man is born sinful and

is in need of redemption. The Craft does not have a grasp of the depth of man's rebellion against his Creator. Masonic author H. L. Haywood in his book, *The Great Teachings of Masonry*, states that "many think that man was once a perfect being but that through some unimaginable moral catastrophe he became corrupt unto the last moral fiber of his being, so that, without some kind of supernatural or miraculous help from outside him, he can never be saved."(41)

Because Masonry does not have an understanding of the serious nature of man's separation from God, it cannot offer a suitable solution to his problem. The Bible tells us that man is in a state of separation from God and that he is in need of a savior. The Gospel writer of Mark speaks of the fallen nature of humanity. The Scripture says that it is what comes out of man that defiles him. "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, adulteries, thefts, murders, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man."(42) Freemasonry cannot offer mankind an adequate solution to his problem of sin.

## **A Christian Response to Freemasonry**

I recall the words of my father when I first spoke to him about his involvement in Freemasonry. He told me that the Lodge taught that "once a Mason, always a Mason." Even as a senior citizen, that idea continued to have a definite hold on his thinking. My father, as a Christian, had not been able to see the vast difference between the teaching of the Church and that of the Lodge.

Once I was able to share the teaching of the Lodge with him, he was then able to make a clear decision regarding his future with the Fraternity. But, even after he had left the Lodge, he was unable to mentally sever the tie that bound him to the Lodge; he still felt the tug: "Once a Mason, always a Mason."

The Mason falls within one of four categories regarding his continued relationship with the Lodge.(43) First, there are some who do not have a clear knowledge of Christianity. They believe that religion and Christianity are the same and that if someone uses the Scriptures, that person must be a Christian. Such people are sincere but untaught. Because they do not know what Christianity teaches, they see nothing wrong with Freemasonry.

A second category would be those who do not know what Masonry is and what it teaches. They are not only uninformed about Christianity but are equally uninformed about the teachings of Freemasonry. These individuals are without any theological foundation on which to discern truth from error. Likewise, they are often ignorant of the occult direction the Lodge has taken over the past few decades.

A third group is made up of individuals who profess Christ, yet continue as Masons regardless of how much they know about Christianity and Freemasonry. They are indeed in a state of rebellion and have chosen not to follow the truth of Christ.

The final group are those who profess Christ and yet have abandoned the Christian faith. Those who have embraced this position are essentially Unitarian in their belief. They no longer hold to the absolute deity of Christ or His blood atonement.

For the most part, all Masons fall into one of these categories. In some cases, it may be that the blame is not to be laid on the individual but on the Christian church for not adequately teaching its truths. The Mason has a choice to make, but the church has a responsibility to equip its people with the truths of the faith.

Jesus made it quite clear in the Scripture. He said, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you

abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.”(44) It is difficult for the Mason to abide in Christ as long as he remains in the Lodge and follows its teachings. It is impossible to bear fruit apart from Jesus. He alone is the one who brings the fruit forth.

It is imperative for the Christian to deal with the question of obedience. It is impossible to serve two masters without loving one and despising the other. The root problem is often the fact that the individual has not been spiritually reborn. Once again Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God . . . unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God . . . you must be born again.”(45)

## Notes

1. Delmar D. Darrah, *History and Evolution of Freemasonry* (Chicago: Charles T. Powner, 1979), 207.
2. Albert G. Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (Chicago: The Masonic History Co., 1946), 734.
3. Albert A. Mackey, *History of Freemasonry*, vol. I (New York: The Masonic History Co. 1898): 136.
4. One such incident was the brutal murder of William Morgan in 1826. He had made it known that he intended to write a book exposing the secrets of the Lodge.
5. Albert Pike, *Morals And Dogma* (Charleston, S. C.: The Supreme Council of the 33rd Degree for the Southern Jurisdiction of the U.S.A., 1950), 814.
6. Manly P. Hall, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, (Richmond, Va.: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., 1976), 11-19.
7. Ibid., 64; Foster Bailey, *The Spirit of Masonry*, (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1979), 109.

8. Hall, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, 65.
9. Pike, *Morals And Dogma*, 219.
10. Ibid., 213.
11. Bailey, *The Spirit of Masonry*, 29.
12. Pike, *Morals And Dogma*, 105.
13. Hall, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, 69.
14. Pike, *Morals And Dogma*, 819.
15. Ibid., 226.
16. *Little Masonic Library*, vol. 5 (Richmond, Va.: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., 1977): 51.
17. Hall, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, 64.
18. Jim Shaw, *The Deadly Deception* (Lafayette, La.: Huntington House, Inc., 1988), 126-27.
19. *Maryland Master Mason* magazine (March 1973), vol. 2.
20. Matthew 10:32-33.
21. Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, 594.
22. Pike, *Morals And Dogma*, 104-5.
23. Ibid., 741.
24. See John 8:12 and 1 John 1:5.
25. Pike, *Morals And Dogma*, 321; 2 Corinthians 11:14.
26. Carl H. Claudy, *Foreign Countries: A Gateway to the Interpretation and Development of Certain Symbols of Freemasonry* (Richmond, Va.: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., 1971), 90.



27. See Matthew 5:34-37 and James 5:12.
28. Hall, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, 11,68.
29. Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, 760.
30. Ibid.
31. Pike, *Morals and Dogma*, 248.
32. Matthew 7:7-12.
33. Robert A. Morey, *The Origins and Teachings of Freemasonry* (Southbridge, Mass.: Crowne Publications, Inc., 1990), 76.
34. Pike, *Morals And Dogma*, 819.
35. Henry Wilson Coil, *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia* (New York: Macoy, 1961), 520.
36. Acts 4:11-12.
37. Morey, *The Origins And Teachings of Freemasonry*, 113.
38. Hall, *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry*, 71-72.
39. Ibid., 54.
40. Bailey, *The Spirit of Masonry*, 105,140.
41. H. L. Haywood, *The Great Teachings of Masonry* (Richmond, Va.: Macoy, 1971), 138.
42. Mark 7:20-23.
43. Alva J. McClain, *Freemasonry and Christianity* (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH Books, 1983), 32-35.
44. John 15:4-5.
45. John 3:5.

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# One Minute After Death – A Christian Understanding of What Happens at Death

*Rusty Wright examines the question of what happens to us after we die. Many Christians have questions about this and there is a lot of information floating around on the topic. Rusty applies a biblical worldview perspective to explain a distinctly Christian view of this topic we all have an interest in. When we examine the Bible, we can develop a clearer picture of God's answer to this question.*

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

“I was dying. I heard the doctor pronounce me dead. As I lay on the operating table of the large hospital, a loud, harsh buzzing began to reverberate in my head. At the same time, I sensed myself moving quickly through a long, dark tunnel. Then suddenly I found myself outside my own physical body! Like a spectator, I watched the doctor's desperate attempts to revive my corpse.

“Soon...I encountered a ‘being’ of light who showed me an instant replay of my life and helped me evaluate my past deeds.

“Finally I learned that my time to die had not yet come and that I had to return to my body. I resisted, for I had found my afterlife experience to be quite pleasant. Yet somehow I was reunited with my physical body and lived.”[\[1\]](#) Many people have reported near-death experiences (NDEs). What do they mean? What happens when we die?

While writing a book on this subject, I interviewed people with fascinating stories. A Kansas woman developed complications after major surgery. She sensed herself rising out of her body, soaring through space, and hearing heavenly voices before returning to her body.

An Arizona man in a coma five months after a motorcycle accident said he saw his deceased father, who spoke with him.

Various theories attempt to explain these NDEs. Physiological explanations suggest a physical cause—perhaps a blow to the head or lack of oxygen in the brain. Pharmacological explanations point to drugs or anesthetics. Psychological explanations propose mental causes such as defense mechanisms or wish fulfillment. Spiritual explanations cite NDEs as previews of the afterlife, either genuine (if divine) or distorted (if demonic). Applications of these theories can be complex.[\[2\]](#) During my sophomore year at Duke University, the student in the room next to mine was struck by lightning and killed instantly. For days our fraternity was in a state of shock. People were asking questions such as, “Where is Mike now?” “Is there life after death?” “If so, what is it like?”

## **LIFE AFTER DEATH?**

Can we know whether there is life after death? What method would we use to find out?

The experimental method, useful for scientific questions, is inadequate for evaluating NDEs. It is impossible in medical emergencies to establish the required controlled situations and repeatability. Scientists also have no mind-reading machines to evaluate mental/spiritual experiences. And finding volunteers for NDE experiments would be difficult.

The experiential method receives mixed reviews. NDEs can provide useful information, but the mind can trick us. Dreams, fantasies, hallucinations, drug trips, drunkenness, states of

shock—all can evoke mental images that seem real but aren't.

Some suggest a spiritual method for evaluating these phenomena. What if we could find a spiritual authority, someone with trustworthy credentials, to tell us the truth about afterlife issues?

Following Mike's death, I explained to the men in our fraternity that an increasing number of educated men and women believe that Jesus Christ is a trustworthy spiritual authority. Once I, myself, was skeptical of Christianity, but examining the evidences for Jesus' resurrection convinced me He could be trusted. I found the resurrection of Christ one of the best attested facts of history.[{3}](#) If Jesus died and came back from the dead, He could accurately tell us what death and the afterlife are like. The fact that He successfully predicted His own resurrection helps us believe that He will tell us the truth about the afterlife. What did Jesus and those He taught say about it?

## **WHAT IS THE AFTERLIFE LIKE?**

**Jesus indicated that the afterlife will be personal.**

Our personalities will not be annihilated. We won't blend into the great impersonal ocean of cosmic consciousness, as some propose. We will continue to exist. We will not become angels, as others suggest. Angels are "ministering spirits" sent out to serve believers in Christ.[{4}](#) They are already-created beings, distinct from humans.[{5}](#) At the moment Jesus died on the cross He cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

Earlier, a thief who hung on a cross next to His said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus responded, "I tell you the truth. today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:42-43).

Jesus believed that His own spirit was going to be with God.

He also believed that the thief (apparently the thief's soul or spirit) would be with Him in heaven that same day. Clearly, Jesus was not thinking of death as annihilation but as a separation from the physical body.

Elsewhere Jesus implied that our personalities somehow remain intact after death. He once said, "Many will come. . .and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11).

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the forefathers of the Jewish nation—had died centuries earlier. Yet Jesus, speaking about a future event, mentioned them by name. He implied that their personalities were maintained.

Did you ever wonder if you'll be able to see departed loved ones after you die? Apparently those who participate in eternal life will be able to recognize each other. King David, who reigned over the ancient nation of Israel around 1000 B.C., spoke of being with his dead son again.[{6}](#) Jesus' disciples once caught a glimpse of Moses and Elijah, two long-dead heroes of Israel, and recognized them. [{7}](#)

### **Jesus taught that eternal life will be relational.**

Life in heaven will focus on a personal relationship with Him and on meaningful relationships with each other. These will be the warmest and most enriching relationships we could ever have.

Before His death, Jesus promised His disciples that one day they would be with Him again: "I am going. . .to prepare a place for you. And. . .I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3).

Paul, a first-century believer in Jesus, wrote about his "desire to depart and be with Christ" (Philippians 1:23).

Jesus defined life in heaven when He said, "This is eternal

life: that they [people who believe in Him] may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). In other words, eternal life will involve getting to know God and the meaning of life better.

### **Eternal life will be enjoyable.**

Paul also wrote, "No mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

John, Jesus' disciple, wrote, "[God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4). Another New Testament writer encourages us to "fix our eyes on Jesus...who, for the joy set before him endured the cross...and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2). Eternal life with God will be joy that defies description and exceeds our imagination.

### **Life after death will be eternal.**

It will never end. Have you ever watched a movie so good you wished it would never end?

Have you ever savored a dessert so sweet, you wished it would last and last? Have you ever had a relationship so fulfilling you hoped it would go on forever? Eternal life will be that good, and better! It will never end. "God has given us eternal life," wrote John, "and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11).

Jesus taught that eternal life involves all of the positive and none of the negative. God loves us and desires only the best for us now and in eternity.

How sad that some people don't take advantage of all He has provided.

# DON'T STOP!

Chattanooga cardiologist Maurice Rawlings, M.D., tells of a patient who had a cardiac arrest in Dr. Rawlings' office. Throughout the attempted resuscitation, the patient faded in and out. Each time the doctor interrupted the heart massage, the patient appeared to die again.

When the man came to, he screamed, "I am in hell!" A look of sheer terror clouded his face. "Don't stop!" he begged. "Don't you understand? I am in hell. Each time you quit I go back to hell! Don't let me go back to hell!" The patient survived and put his faith in Christ to take away his sins and secure his place in heaven.[{8}](#) The place the Bible calls hell, or hades, is the current home of those who do not accept Jesus' gift of forgiveness. It is a place of constant, conscious torment.[{9}](#) Hades is not the final dwelling place of those who die without a personal relationship with Christ. John says these will be judged at the "great white throne" judgment. Since no one's deeds are sufficient to earn eternal life, those without Christ's pardon will be cast into the "lake of fire."[{10}](#) Jesus said that "the eternal fire...has been prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41).

Not a pleasant subject. But remember, God does not want you to perish in hell. He loves you and wants you to spend eternity with Him. Not without Him.[{11}](#) Paul wrote that God our Savior wants all people to be saved (or made safe from the consequences of sin, which is separation from God). He wants us to know Him because He is truth.[{12}](#) God sent Jesus Christ, His Son, to pay the penalty for our sins (attitudes and actions that fall short of God's perfection). Jesus literally went through hell for us. We simply need to receive His free gift of forgiveness—we can never earn it—to be guaranteed eternal life. "Whoever hears my word, Jesus says, "and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John

5:24).

## WHAT ABOUT YOU?

According to the latest figures, the death rate in this country is still 100 percent. Every day on this planet about 140,000 people die.

What most of us are interested in is not “What happens to people when they die?” but “What will happen to me when I die?”

Some seek to avoid the issue of death or to insulate themselves from concern through popularity, possessions, pursuits, or power. Many feel that whatever belief makes you feel comfortable is OK. Do any of these descriptions fit you?

A nightclub near Cincinnati was packed one evening. Suddenly a busboy stepped onto the stage, interrupted the program, and announced that the building was on fire. Perhaps because they saw no smoke, many of the guests remained seated. Maybe they thought it was a joke, a part of the show. When they finally saw the smoke, it was too late. More than 150 people died as the nightclub burned.

As you consider death, are you believing what you want to believe or what the evidence shows is true? Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies” (John 11:25).

Place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you, too, will live even if you die.

### Notes

1. Adapted from Raymond A. Moody, Jr., M.D., *Life After Life* (New York: Bantam, 1976), pp. 21-22.
2. For a more complete discussion, see the book from which this article is adapted: Rusty Wright, *The Other Side of Life*



(Singapore: Campus Crusade Asia Limited, 1979, 1994).

3. See, for example, Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972).

4. Hebrews 1:14.

5. Hebrews 2:16.

6. 2 Samuel 12:23.

7. Matthew 17:14.

8. Maurice Rawlings, M.D., *Beyond Death's Door* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), pp. 19-20.

9. Luke 16:23-24.

10. Revelation 20:11-15.

11. John 3:16.

12. I Timothy 2:3-4

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## Homosexual Myths – Exposed from a Biblical Perspective

*Sue Bohlin looks at common myths concerning homosexual behavior that are prevalent in our society. These myths prevent us from looking at homosexuality with a biblical worldview and from dealing with this sin in a loving and consistent manner.*



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

In this essay we'll be looking at some of the homosexual myths that have pervaded our culture, and hopefully answering their arguments. Much of this material is taken from Joe Dallas' excellent book, *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement*.[\[1\]](#) While the information in this essay

may prove helpful, it is our prayer that you will be able to share it calmly and compassionately, remembering that homosexuality isn't just a political and moral issue; it is also about people who are badly hurting.

## **10% of the Population Is Homosexual.**

In 1948, Dr. Alfred Kinsey released a study called *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*, claiming that between 10 and 47% of the male population was homosexual.[{2}](#) He got his figures from a pool of 5,300 male subject that he represented as your average "Joe College" student. Many of the men who gave him the data, though, actually consisted of sex offenders, prisoners, pimps, hold-up men, thieves, male prostitutes and other criminals, and hundreds of gay activists.[{3}](#) The 10% figure was widely circulated by Harry Hay, the father of the homosexual "civil rights" movement, urging that homosexuality be seen no longer as an act of sodomy but as a 10% minority class.[{4}](#)

Kinsey's figures were exposed as completely false immediately afterwards, and by many other scientists since. The actual figure is closer to 2-3%.[{5}](#) But the 10% number has been so often reported in the press that most people think it's valid. It's not.

## **People Are Born Gay.**

Ann Landers said it, and millions of people believe it. The problem is, the data's not there to support it. There are three ways to test for inborn traits: twin studies, brain dissections, and gene "linkage" studies.[{6}](#) Twin studies show that something other than genetics must account for homosexuality, because nearly half of the identical twin studied didn't have the same sexual preference. If homosexuality were inherited, identical twins should either be both straight or both gay. Besides, none of the twin studies have been replicated, and other twin studies have produced

completely different results.[{7}](#) Dr. Simon LeVay's famous study on the brains of dead subjects yielded questionable results regarding its accuracy. He wasn't sure of the sexual orientation of the people in the study, and Dr. LeVay even admits he doesn't know if the changes in the brain structures were the cause *of* homosexuality, or caused *by* homosexuality.[{8}](#) Finally, an early study attempting to show a link between homosexuality and the X-chromosome has yet to be replicated, and a second study actually contradicted the findings of the first.[{9}](#) Even if homosexuality were someday proven to be genetically related, *inborn* does not necessarily mean *normal*. Some children are born with cystic fibrosis, but that doesn't make it a normal condition.

Inborn tendencies toward certain behaviors (such as homosexuality) do not make those behaviors moral. Tendencies toward alcoholism, obesity, and violence are now thought to be genetically influenced, but they are not good behaviors. People born with tendencies toward these behaviors have to fight hard against their natural temptations to drunkenness, gluttony, and physical rage.

And since we are born as sinners into a fallen world, we have to deal with the consequences of the Fall. Just because we're born with something doesn't mean it's normal. It's not true that "God makes some people gay." All of us have effects of the Fall we need to deal with.

## **What's Wrong with Two Loving, Committed Men or Women Being Legally Married?**

There are two aspects to marriage: the legal and the spiritual. Marriage is more than a social convention, like being "best friends" with somebody, because heterosexual marriage usually results in the production of children. Marriage is a legal institution in order to offer protection for women and children. Women need to have the freedom to

devote their time and energies to be the primary nurturers and caretakers of children without being forced to be breadwinners as well. God's plan is that children grow up in families who provide for them, protect them, and wrap them in security.

Because gay or lesbian couples are by nature unable to reproduce, they do not need the legal protection of marriage to provide a safe place for the production and raising of children. Apart from the sexual aspect of a gay relationship, what they have is really "best friend" status, and that does not require legal protection.

Of course, a growing number of gay couples are seeking to have a child together, either by adoption, artificial insemination, or surrogate mothering. Despite the fact that they have to resort to an outside procedure in order to become parents, the presence of adults plus children in an ad hoc household should not automatically secure official recognition of their relationship as a family. There is a movement in our culture which seeks to redefine "family" any way we want, but with a profound lack of discernment about the long-term effects on the people involved. Gay parents are making a dangerous statement to their children: lesbian mothers are saying that fathers are not important, and homosexual fathers are saying that mothers are not important. More and more social observers see the importance of both fathers and mothers in children's lives; one of their roles is to teach boys what it means to be a boy and teach girls what it means to be a girl.

The other aspect of marriage is of a spiritual nature. Granted, this response to the gay marriage argument won't make any difference to people who are unconcerned about spiritual things, but there are a lot of gays who care very deeply about God and long for a relationship with Him. The marriage relationship, both its emotional and especially its sexual components, is designed to serve as an earthbound illustration of the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church.[{10}](#) Just as there is a mystical oneness between a man

and a woman, who are very different from each other, so there is a mystical unity between two very different, very “other” beings—the eternal Son of God and us mortal, creaturely humans. Marriage as God designed it is like the almost improbable union of butterfly and buffalo, or fire and water. But homosexual relationships are the coming together of two like individuals; the dynamic of unity and diversity in heterosexual marriage is completely missing, and therefore so is the spiritual dimension that is so intrinsic to the purpose of marriage. Both on an emotional and a physical level, the sameness of male and male, or female and female, demonstrates that homosexual relationships do not reflect the spiritual parable that marriage is meant to be. God wants marriage partners to complement, not to mirror, each other. The concept of gay marriage doesn’t work, whether we look at it on a social level or a spiritual one.

## **Jesus Said Nothing about Homosexuality.**

Whether from a pulpit or at a gay rights event, gay activists like to point out that Jesus never addressed the issue of homosexuality; instead, He was more interested in love. Their point is that if Jesus didn’t specifically forbid a behavior, then who are we to judge those who engage in it?

This argument assumes that the Gospels are more important than the rest of the books in the New Testament, that only the recorded sayings of Jesus matter. But John’s gospel itself assures us that it is not an exhaustive record of all that Jesus said and did, which means there was a lot left out![\[11\]](#) The gospels don’t record that Jesus condemned wife-beating or incest; does that make them OK? Furthermore, the remaining books of the New Testament are no less authoritative than the gospels. All scripture is inspired by God, not just the books with red letters in the text. Specific prohibitions against homosexual behavior in Romans 1:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 are every bit as God-ordained as what is recorded in the

gospels.

We do know, however, that Jesus spoke in specific terms about God's created intent for human sexuality: "From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; and the two shall be one flesh. . . What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:4-6). God's plan is holy heterosexuality, and Jesus spelled it out.

## **The Levitical laws against homosexual behavior are not valid today.**

Leviticus 18:22 says, "Thou shalt not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; it is an abomination." Gay theologians argue that the term "abomination" is generally associated with idolatry and the Canaanite religious practice of cult prostitution, and thus God did not prohibit the kind of homosexuality we see today.

Other sexual sins such as adultery and incest are also prohibited in the same chapters where the prohibitions against homosexuality are found. All sexual sin is forbidden by both Old and New Testament, completely apart from the Levitical codes, because it is a moral issue. It is true that we are not bound by the rules and rituals in Leviticus that marked Yahweh's people by their separation from the world; however, the nature of sexual sin has not changed because immorality is an affront to the holiness and purity of God Himself. Just because most of Leviticus doesn't apply to Christians today doesn't mean none of it does.

The argument that the word "abomination" is connected with idolatry is well answered by examining Proverbs 6:16-19, which describes what else the Lord considers abominations: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises evil imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaks lies, and a man who

sows discord among brothers. Idolatry plays no part in these abominations. The argument doesn't hold water.

If the practices in Leviticus 18 and 20 are condemned because of their association with idolatry, then it logically follows that they would be permissible if they were committed apart from idolatry. That would mean incest, adultery, bestiality, and child sacrifice (all of which are listed in these chapters) are only condemned when associated with idolatry; otherwise, they are allowable. No responsible reader of these passages would agree with such a premise.[{12}](#)

## **Calling Homosexuality a Sin Is Judging, and Judging Is a Sin.**

Josh McDowell says that the most often-quoted Bible verse used to be John 3:16, but now that tolerance has become the ultimate virtue, the verse we hear quoted the most is "Judge not, lest ye be judged" (Matt. 7:1). The person who calls homosexual activity wrong is called a bigot and a homophobe, and even those who don't believe in the Bible can be heard to quote the "Judge not" verse.

When Jesus said "Do not judge, or you too will be judged," the context makes it plain that He was talking about setting ourselves up as judge of another person, while blind to our own sinfulness as we point out another's sin. There's no doubt about it, there is a grievous amount of self-righteousness in the way the church treats those struggling with the temptations of homosexual longings. But there is a difference between agreeing with the standard of Scripture when it declares homosexuality wrong, and personally condemning an individual because of his sin. Agreeing with God about something isn't necessarily judging.

Imagine I'm speeding down the highway, and I get pulled over by a police officer. He approaches my car and, after checking my license and registration, he says, "You broke the speed

limit back there, ma'am." Can you imagine a citizen indignantly leveling a politically correct charge at the officer: "Hey, you're judging me! Judge not, lest ye be judged!" The policeman is simply pointing out that I broke the law. He's not judging my character, he's comparing my behavior to the standard of the law. It's not judging when we restate what God has said about His moral law, either. What is sin is to look down our noses at someone who falls into a different sin than we do. That's judging.

## **The Romans 1 Passage on Homosexuality Does Not Describe True Homosexuals, but Heterosexuals Who Indulge in Homosexual Behavior That Is Not Natural to *Them*.**

Romans 1:26-27 says, "God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion." Some gay theologians try to get around the clear prohibition against both gay and lesbian homosexuality by explaining that the real sin Paul is talking about here is straight people who indulge in homosexual acts, because it's not natural to them. Homosexuality, they maintain, is not a sin for *true* homosexuals.

But there is nothing in this passage that suggests a distinction between "true" homosexuals and "false" ones. Paul describes the homosexual behavior itself as unnatural, regardless of who commits it. In fact, he chooses unusual words for men and women, Greek words that most emphasize the biology of being a male and a female. The behavior described in this passage is unnatural for males and females; sexual orientation isn't the issue at all. He is saying that



homosexuality is biologically unnatural; not just unnatural to heterosexuals, but unnatural to anyone.

Furthermore, Romans 1 describes men “inflamed with lust” for one another. This would hardly seem to indicate men who were straight by nature but experimenting with gay sex.[{13}](#) You really have to do some mental gymnastics to make Romans 1 anything other than what a plain reading leads us to understand all homosexual activity is sin.

## **Preaching Against Homosexuality Causes Gay Teenagers to Commit Suicide.**

I received an e-mail from someone who assured me that the blood of gay teenagers was on my hands because saying that homosexuality is wrong makes people kill themselves. The belief that gay teenagers are at high risk for suicide is largely inspired by a 1989 report by a special federal task force on youth and suicide. This report stated three things; first, that gay and lesbian youths account for one third of all teenage suicides; second, that suicide is the leading cause of death among gay teenagers, and third, gay teens who commit suicide do so because of “internalized homophobia” and violence directed at them.[{14}](#) This report has been cited over and over in both gay and mainstream publications.

San Francisco gay activist Paul Gibson wrote this report based on research so shoddy that when it was submitted to Dr. Louis Sullivan, the former Secretary of Health and Human Services, Dr. Sullivan officially distanced himself and his department from it.[{15}](#) The report’s numbers, both its data and its conclusions, are extremely questionable. Part of the report cites an author claiming that as many as 3,000 gay youths kill themselves each year. But that’s over a thousand more than the total number of teen suicides in the first place! Gibson exaggerated his numbers when he said that one third of all teen suicides are committed by gay youth. He got this figure

by looking at gay surveys taken at drop-in centers for troubled teens, many of which were gay-oriented, which revealed that gay teens had two to four times the suicidal tendencies of straight kids. Gibson multiplied this higher figure by the disputed Kinsey figure of a 10% homosexual population to produce his figure that 30% of all youth suicides are gay. David Shaffer, a Columbia University psychiatrist who specializes in teen suicides, pored over this study and said, "I struggled for a long time over Gibson's mathematics, but in the end, it seemed more hocus-pocus than math."[\[16\]](#)

The report's conclusions are contradicted by other, more credible reports. Researchers at the University of California-San Diego interviewed the survivors of 283 suicides for a 1986 study. 133 of those who died were under 30, and only 7 percent were gay and they were all over 21. In another study at Columbia University of 107 teenage boy suicides, only three were known to be gay, and two of those died in a suicide pact. When the Gallup organization interviewed almost 700 teenagers who knew a teen who had committed suicide, not one mentioned sexuality as part of the problem. Those who had come close to killing themselves mainly cited boy-girl problems or low self-esteem.[\[17\]](#)

Gibson didn't use a heterosexual control group in his study. Conclusions and statistics are bound to be skewed without a control group. When psychiatrist David Shaffer examined the case histories of the gay teens who committed suicides in Gibson's report, he found the same issues that straight kids wrestle with before suicide: "The stories were the same: a court appearance scheduled for the day of the death; prolonged depression; drug and alcohol problems; etc."[\[18\]](#)

That any teenager experiences so much pain that he takes his life is a tragedy, regardless of the reason. But it's not fair to lay the responsibility for gay suicides, the few that there are, on those who agree with God that it's wrong and harmful

behavior.

## Notes

1. Dallas, Joe. *A Strong Delusion: Confronting the "Gay Christian" Movement*. Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1996.
2. Dr. Judith Reisman, "Kinsey and the Homosexual Revolution," *The Journal of Human Sexuality* (Carrollton, Tex.: Lewis and Stanley, 1996), 21.
3. Ibid., 26.
4. Ibid., 21.
5. Richard G. Howe, *Homosexuality in America: Exposing the Myths* (found on the American Family Association website at <http://www.afa.net>) gives this citation: "Knight lists the following sources in support of the 1%-3% figures: J. Gordon Muir, "Homosexuals and the 10% Fallacy," *Wall Street Journal*, March 31, 1993; Tom W. Smith, "Adult Sexual Behavior in 1989: Number of Partners, Frequency of Intercourse and Risk of AIDS," *Family Planning Perspectives* (May/June 1991): 102; John O.G. Billy, Koray Tanfer, William R. Grady, and Daniel H. Klepinger, "The Sexual Behavior of Men in the United States," *Family Planning Perspectives*, The Alan Guttmacher Institute, vol. 25, no. 2 (March/April 1993)."
6. Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, "The Gay Gene?", *The Journal of Human Sexuality*, 4.
7. Dallas, 114.
8. Ibid., 112-114.
9. Ibid., 116.
10. Ephesians 5:25-32
11. John 20:30
12. Dallas, 193.
13. Ibid., 195.
14. Peter LaBarbera, "The Gay Youth Suicide Myth," *The Journal of Human Sexuality*, 65.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 66.

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# A Course In Miracles – A Christian Worldview Evaluation

*Former Probe staffer Russ Wise looks at the religious movement started by A Course in Miracles from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective. As he examines its origins and its tenets, he finds that it departs from true Christianity in multiple areas and is clearly a false teaching.*

## **Historical Background**

In 1965 a Jewish atheistic psychologist from Columbia University began to channel messages from a spirit she believed to be Jesus. She ultimately produced, or she says Jesus revealed to her, well over a thousand pages of revelation during the next seven years.

According to her testimony, Helen Schucman had a difficult relationship with her department head at the university. In an attempt to move beyond their differences, they set out on a journey to find a base of common agreement. Schucman began having “highly symbolic dreams” and experiencing “strange images.” Her colleague encouraged her to transcribe the content of these phenomena so they might understand them better.

As she began to write, she was surprised to see “This is a course in miracles” appear on the paper. She went on to say that this was her introduction to the “Voice.” This voice began to give her rapid inner dictation that she took down in shorthand.

According to the dictated material, the voice of *The Course* was Jesus. As a result of the influence Christianity has had on humanity, *The Course* chose Christian terminology to convey its message. A 1977 pamphlet published by the *Foundation For Inner Peace* states, "its only purpose is to provide a way in which some people will be able to find their own Internal Teacher"—in other words, their personal "Spirit Guide."

## **Key Players**

There are several individuals who play key roles in spreading the message of *The Course*. Perhaps the most prominent is Marianne Williamson. A former lounge singer and now its most celebrated guru, she has become *The Course's* media star, appearing on numerous television programs. Her most-watched and persuasive appearance was on *Oprah*. She has been Oprah's guest on several occasions. Because of her personal interest in New Age philosophy, Oprah Winfrey purchased a thousand copies of *A Return To Love*, Williamson's book, to give to her television audiences.

Another high profile individual, well-known in New Age circles, is Gerald Jampolsky, M.D. He is a psychiatrist, formerly on the faculty of the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco and founder of the Center for Attitudinal Healing in 1975. He has written several books based on what he has gleaned from *The Course*.

In his influential book, *Good-Bye to Guilt*, Jampolsky describes his conversion to *The Course*.

I began to change my way of looking at the world in 1975. Until then I had considered myself a militant atheist, and the last thing I was consciously interested in was being on a spiritual pathway that would lead to God. In that year I was introduced to . . . *A Course in Miracles*. . . . My resistance was immediate. . . . Nevertheless, after reading just one page, I had a sudden and dramatic experience. There

was an instantaneous memory of God, a feeling of oneness with everyone in the world, and the belief that my only function on earth was to serve God.

As a result of the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of our society, namely the baby boomer generation, there is a ready-made market for the “feel good” spirituality of *The Course*. Through the influence of Williamson, Jampolsky, and others, a growing number of Christians are being sucked into this whirlpool of spiritual confusion in which they exchange the truth for a lie.

### **The Course and the Mainline Church**

We have already established that *The Course* uses Christian terminology and its followers believe it to be the revelation of Jesus. As a result, a number of denominations within Christendom have embraced *The Course* as being legitimate and introduced it into their churches.

Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians have used *The Course* in Sunday schools and special study groups within the church. Presently there are over 1,500 official study groups that have utilized *The Course* both inside and outside traditional Christian churches.

### **If It's Not Love—It Must Be Illusion**

Marianne Williamson, author of the best-selling book *A Return To Love*, says that we have “a natural tendency to focus on love.”

Only love is real. All that is negative is illusion. It simply does not exist. If anything negative is in your consciousness, it is real only because you give it reality by holding it in your mind. According to *The Course*, sickness, hate, pain, fear, guilt, and sin are all illusions. The *Cyclopedia In A Course In Miracles* states that “illusions are investments. They will last as long as you value them.” The *Cyclopedia*

continues, "The only way to dispel illusions is to withdraw all investment from them, and they will have no life for you because you will have put them out of your mind."

*The Course* sums it up this way, "There is no life outside of Heaven. Where God created life, there life must be. In any state apart from Heaven life is illusion." There you have it! It is perfectly clear—murder, rape, and other forms of evil do not exist because they do not come from "love." Try explaining to a mother who has lost a son or daughter that their loss is the result of an illusion.

### **The Problem of Evil**

You guessed it, *The Course* also teaches that evil does not exist. It is an illusion that must be overcome by right thinking. *The Text* (i.e., volume one of *The Course*) reads, "Innocence is wisdom because it is unaware of evil, and evil does not exist." In essence what is meant is that evil does not stand on its own, that it only has reality as the individual believes its existence. So, you might say that the rape victim created her own evil situation and thereby caused her own suffering. The victim is guilty; the perpetrator had no choice.

### **The Problem of Guilt and Sin**

A pamphlet published by the *Foundation For Inner Peace* states, "Sin is defined as a 'lack of love.' Since love is all there is, sin in the sight of the Holy Spirit is a mistake to be corrected, rather than an evil to be punished."

*The Course* further teaches that there is no need to feel guilt because there is no sin. Sin does not exist. The problems that man faces are a result of separation from God. This separation is only illusion because it likewise does not exist. It is only a reality for those who believe they are not part of the divine.

*The Text* makes this point clear where it declares that “no one is punished for sins, and the Sons of God are not sinners.” As you might anticipate, there is likewise no need for the cross because there was never a transgression that needed to be dealt with by God, only a mistake. If we are a part of God, how then can we become fragmented by sin since separation (i.e., sin) does not exist?

### **Thought-Reversal**

The stated goal of *The Course* is to change how one thinks, to change one’s belief system by subtle deception. The individual is for the most part unaware of the transformation he or she is undergoing because *The Course* utilizes Christian terminology. *The Manual for Teachers* (i.e., volume three of *The Course*) boldly says, “It cannot be too strongly emphasized that this course aims at a complete reversal of thought.”

### **Religious Recovery—The Thirteenth Step**

Many who become involved in studying *The Course* are active in self-help groups such as Twelve Step programs. They are seeking to make connections in their lives and discover who they truly are. They are willing participants in this transformation.

Many are desiring some form of “spirituality” and for those who see the Bible as being too harsh, *The Course* offers what they believe to be God’s correction of our misinterpretation of the original message of Jesus.

*The Course* becomes the “thirteenth step” in recovery for those who are attempting to escape the rigid fundamentalism that has smothered them in the past. For them, the recovery process becomes a spiritual transformation.

The integration of psychology and spirituality becomes a lure that pulls them deeper into the web of deception and ultimately suffocates them. The biblical teaching of original



sin is dismissed for the more palatable “original goodness.”

This “thirteenth step” regards all faiths as a part of the whole; they are one, and a psychological unity of sorts is achieved. *The Course* becomes whatever the individual desires it to be, it is “Christian,” but not if you don’t want it to be. It’s psychology, but more than psychology. It’s not New Age, but then again it is.

*The Course* claims to have all of life’s answers. It has become the “spiritually correct” solution to bring about peace and unity. However, in the end, this transformation brings spiritual death.

Helen Schucman’s new do-it-yourself psycho-spirituality is not new. The Hindus have been taught for centuries that the world and all that is in it is *Maya*, or illusion.

## **Sense and Sensibilities**

We must be clear that the message of *The Course in Miracles* is *not* the message of Jesus Christ. Schucman and her Course do not teach that Jesus is God incarnate yet fully human, but that He is an highly evolved being who became divine. The Bible does not allow for such an idea.

The Bible also leaves no room for the idea that evil does not exist, but instead that evil entered the world through disobedience. Likewise, the Bible does not allow for the idea that God is a universal oneness rather than a personal Being.

Kenneth Wapnick, a Jewish agnostic who later became a Catholic monk, founded the *Foundation for A Course in Miracles*. Wapnick states that *The Course* and biblical Christianity are not compatible. He gives three reasons why he holds such a view. First, *The Course* teaches that God did not create the world. Second, *The Course* teaches that we are all equally Christ. Jesus is not the *only* Son of God. And third, *The Course* is clear in its teaching that Jesus did not suffer and die for

man's sin.

The above differences clearly show why a Christian cannot in good faith consider *The Course* as a source for his or her spiritual understanding. It is unequivocally anti-biblical and is without doubt promoted by Satanic deception (2 Corinthians 11:14: 1 Timothy 4:1).

### **A Short Course in Doctrine**

*The Course* teaches that there are no absolutes; truth is relative and is determined by one's experience. According to the *Cyclopedia In A Course In Miracles*, "only what is loving is true." So truth is subjective.

Marianne Williamson, the author of *A Return To Love*, made this observation about truth in her book: "There's only one truth, spoken different ways, and the Course is just one path to it out of many." In other words, no one religious tradition has all the truth, but there are many avenues to the truth and the individual has the freedom to choose the path most suitable to him or her.

### **Who Is Jesus?**

According to Williamson, Jesus is one of many enlightened beings. In her text she makes this statement, "Jesus and other enlightened masters are our evolutionary elder brothers." She continues by saying that "the mutation, the enlightened ones, (including Jesus) show the rest of us our evolutionary potential. They point the way." So in reality Jesus is a way-shower.

Williamson makes a telling observation on page 41 of her book by saying that "*A Course In Miracles* does not push Jesus. Although the books come from him, it is made very clear that you can be an advanced student of the Course and not relate personally to him at all." This is an interesting comment regarding the lack of relationship one is to have with their

God. For Christians, faith is built on a personal relationship with Jesus. Without it, their salvation would be in question.

Williamson continues by saying, "Jesus reached total actualization of the Christ mind, and was then given by God the power to help the rest of us reach that place within ourselves." Such a statement brings to mind Matthew 7:23 where Jesus says, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

## **The Christ and Salvation**

*The Manual For Teachers* states that "Jesus became what all of you must be." It continues by declaring, "Is he the Christ? O yes, along with you."

*The Course* identifies with much of New Age thought in that it teaches false Christology. New Age proponents teach that *The Christ* is the one who is the most highly evolved being during a given age. This Christ, whether it be Buddha, Krishna, or Jesus, is the messiah for a given age. They believe, for example, that Jesus was *The Christ* for the Church or Piscean Age. According to their philosophy, Jesus achieved Christhood and by right-thinking we too can achieve Christhood.

*The Text* says that, "Christ waits for your acceptance of Him as yourself, and of His wholeness as yours." Keep in mind that these words you have just read are, according to *The Course*, the "spirit-dictated" words of Jesus. Now hear the true Word of God from the Bible where we read, "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (Matthew 24:4-5). The Scripture is crystal clear about the deception of multitudes by signs and wonders based in experience rather than His Word.

The Scripture teaches that Jesus alone is the Christ, the Son of the living God. John 1:20 and 20:31 indicate that we are not His equals.

## Abandoning Your Miracle

There are a growing number of people waking up to the fact that *The Course* cannot adequately meet their growing need to worship a being beyond themselves, much less defend them in spiritual warfare.

Warren and Joy Smith are examples of how *The Course* is totally inadequate when it comes to defending one's spirit from the evil one and his dominion. The Smiths were deeply involved in the study of *The Course*. Warren relates Joy's story in his book, *The Light That Was Dark*.

Joy was being spiritually harassed by a man who was highly proficient in astral projection (projecting his spirit for great distances). Warren relates how they faced the attacks. "We tried every metaphysical and spiritual technique we had ever learned—we repeated our *Course in Miracles* lessons, did visualizations, prayed as best we knew how, sent the spiritual intruder blessings, and kept the whole situation surrounded in white light—but none of it had any effect. We had to wait it out. The spiritual presence was calling the shots."

After an intense time of frustration, they went to their course study leaders for help. Joy explained that they "had repeatedly applied their *Course in Miracles* lessons, such as: 'There is nothing to fear,' 'In my defenselessness my safety lies,' and, 'I could see peace instead of this.'" After explaining that nothing had worked, Frank, their study leader, "made it clear that he agreed with the Course's metaphysical teaching that evil was only an illusion and that the experience was probably something that Joy was working out within herself."

Frank's wife, Trudy, was dazed when she heard herself say, "Put on the whole armor of God and stand fast against the wiles of the devil!" In amazement at herself she added, "Ephesians 6:10. It's in your Bible."

Trudy went on and said, "I'm sorry, Frank. There is a devil . . . read Ephesians!" In the days ahead Joy continued to undergo the harassing attacks. During this time of uncertainty Warren visited a bookstore and discovered a book entitled *The Beautiful Side of Evil* by Johanna Michaelsen. He read it through and decided its message of deliverance was worth a try.

It wasn't long before he had an opportunity to test his newly found discovery—biblical exorcism. Joy fell into a depression as she had on so many occasions, and Warren seized the opportunity to act.

He relates the incident in his book this way, "Reading from my notes the exact words that I had taken from Johanna's book, I firmly addressed the presence. 'Satan, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, I command you to be gone! I forbid your presence here. I claim the protection of the blood of Jesus upon us. Go where Jesus sends you!' Immediately Joy's face cleared and the oppression was gone.

Warren later remarked, "We were amazed that the presence left every time we called on his [Jesus Christ's] name. Nothing in *A Course in Miracles* or any other metaphysical teachings had ever talked about this aspect of Jesus."

Warren and Joy's encounter with personal evil ultimately convinced them that the Bible was the spiritual teaching that they could rely on. Warren said it best, "So far it hasn't let us down."

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# Education Beyond the Classroom

What comes to mind when you think of education? School buildings? Libraries? Textbooks? Curricula? Teachers? Most of us probably associate education with at least one of these things, and surely many more could be added. But does education take place outside of such formal settings? Can curricula be found beyond that of the normal course of study? And can teachers be found who are teaching outside of the classroom?

If we simply consider the amount of time students spend outside of class the answer to these questions would surely be a resounding “Yes!” And if we add the strong probability that many of the hours spent outside the class are consumed by various media, for example, we can see another strong reason to answer in the affirmative. Students are virtually suffocated with ideas when they leave the confines of the school building. For many their education has just begun when the last bell rings each day. In fact, many students use whatever mental energy they have to learn only those things that interest them outside of school.

## Educational Sources: Parents

What are some of the sources from which students learn? Let’s begin with parents. After years of ministry among youth I am convinced that students want to learn from their parents. In fact, some are desperate for their parents’ wisdom. Thankfully, I have seen the wonderful effects of respect between parents and children. The children are taught the most important truths of life in the home and those truths are accepted because there is a large measure of respect for the parents. Such an atmosphere is patiently developed through the parents’ concentrated, time-consuming dedication to their

children. And I hasten to add that I have observed this in single parent as well as blended families. The result is that children who are raised in such a home will usually compare what they are taught outside the home with what they are taught in the home. And the lessons they learn from parents outweigh other lessons.

Unfortunately, though, this situation is much too rare. Many students, including those raised in Christian homes, are left alone to discover what they can without the guidance of parents. When we realize that "true, meaningful communication between parent and child ... occupies only about two minutes each day"(1) there should be reason for concern. That amounts to slightly more than 12 hours per year. If that is compared to the amount of time spent in school, for example, what the parents teach in that brief time can be overwhelmed with contrary ideas. Students spend much more time learning at school per week than they do with parents per year! This situation should be seriously considered by Christians when evaluating the current educational climate. If Christian parents are not willing to educate their children there may not be much room for complaining about what is learned outside the home. Children have always needed parental guidance and they always will.

One of the most important directives for the ancient Jews applies to parental responsibility for the education of their children. Deuteronomy 6:4-7, the revered Shema, states that "(5) You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (6) And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; (7) and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." This strategic passage was reemphasized by the Lord Jesus (Mark 12:28-30). What a student learns outside of class should begin at home.

# Educational Sources: What is Heard, Read, and Seen

Where and by whom is a student educated outside the school and home? Actually the question should use both past and present tenses. Since we are concentrating on education outside the classroom, it's important to realize that students are constantly being educated, whether they are aware of it or not. Education does not just apply to some type of formal education; it is very much a part of daily life. The Christian student who is attempting to think God's thoughts after Him is profoundly aware of this. He lives in a world of ideas, and ideas have consequences. Those ideas are so much a part of life that it's as if they're a portion of the air we breathe. Students should be conscious of this, but the same is true for all of us. All of us are students.

So where do we find the teachers? There are at least three other sources: what is heard, what is read, and what is seen.

First, what is heard? One morning as I went to the front yard to get the newspaper I heard a loud, repetitive noise that sounded as if it were a woodpecker hammering on metal. When I located the source I realized to my amazement that indeed it was a woodpecker pecking on a metal light covering near our house. My curiosity was aroused so I pursued an answer to my crazy woodpecker question. It turns out that the bird could have heard his prey inside the covering, but couldn't distinguish for the moment the difference between wood and metal.

The point of this illustration is that the wondrous nature of nature had provided a teachable moment. God's creation abounds with such opportunities to observe the variety He has given us. And such moments are part of our daily lives.

But most students hear from more obvious sources: peers, radio, television, movies, music, etc. These sources provide a



profusion of ideas. They are teachers. And just as in the formal classroom, the student should be listening carefully to see if the lessons should be considered, discarded, or believed.

The second source focuses on what is read. Some studies indicate that people are not reading any longer. This is curious in light of the growth of enormous bookstores filled with many obscure and weighty titles. Be that as it may, the printed word still has an impact. Most students give some attention to reading. Words still have meaning, in spite of the efforts of those who would use words to say that words are meaningless. This is especially true for the Christian student. If he doesn't revere the Bible to the point of reading and understanding it as the foundation of his education, he is like a ship without a rudder. The ship is afloat but it's at the mercy of the sea and its currents.

The last of our sources concerns what we see. Since a large percentage of students spend an enormous amount of time viewing television, movies, magazines, and other media, this is a major educational element. Images abound in their lives. This challenges the Christian student to be especially alert to the multitude of ideas that come through her eyes and into her mind.

Educators beyond the classroom are continually vying for the minds of students. Let's do what we can to lead our students through this maze of ideas.

## **The Curriculum**

One of the major elements of a formal education is the curriculum. This curriculum is usually set for students in the primary grades, it contains some flexibility in middle school, more flexibility in high school, and significant flexibility in college. Regardless of the educational level a student attains, his formal education includes variety. The same is

true outside the classroom. The education he receives there includes a varied curriculum. And that curriculum can be found in varied places, from conversations with those with whom he works, to his magazine subscriptions, to the movies he rents. Let's consider several ideas that generally are found in the educational curriculum outside the classroom.

## **Man is the Measure of All Things**

First, man is the measure of all things. That is, man is the focus of what is taught. This course is called naturalism. God either doesn't exist, or He may as well not exist because He has nothing to say to us that has meaning. Thus man is left alone to create meaning, value, morality, religion, government, education, and all other aspects of life. This is probably the most influential way of thinking in this country.

Think, for example, of the television programs you may have seen lately. Now consider whether or not those programs included the presence and guidance of a deity, whether the God of the Bible or not. With rare exceptions, the education one receives through such sources doesn't include any concept of God. Instead, man deals with all problems in his own way, through his own ingenuity. Of course the student usually isn't able to see the long term results of such decisions. As wonderful as the resolution may appear at the end of a program, the ultimate consequences may be disastrous.

## **Pleasure is the Highest Good**

The second portion of the curriculum is based upon the idea that pleasure is the highest good. This course is called hedonism. Perhaps one of the more obvious places to find this is in your local grocery store. The "textbooks" that are found in the magazine rack near the checkout island contain this message in abundance. The articles, advertisements, and pictures emphasize the supremacy of pleasure above virtues such as self-control and sacrifice. Take a moment sometime just to scan the articles and emphases that are highlighted on

the front covers of these magazines. For example, the contents of a recent teen-oriented publication for girls include: "Look Hot Tonight," "Stud Shopping Tips," "Love Stories: Secrets of Girls Who Snagged Their Crush," "Hunky Holidays: Meet the 50 Most Beautiful Guys in the World," and "The Ultimate Party Guide." All these titles revolve around the idea that pleasure is the highest good.

## **True Spirituality Has Many Sources**

Third, true spirituality has many sources. This course is called syncretism. Current spiritual emphases have led many students to believe that it doesn't matter what path you take as long as you are on a path. A trip to a large book store will demonstrate this. For example, you can find many books that contain many ideas about angels, but most of them have nothing to do with biblical doctrine. Or you can find a section dedicated to an assortment of metaphysical teachings, none of which align with biblical teaching. When confronted with such variety the student can be tempted to believe that true spirituality can be found in many places. The Christian student must realize this isn't possible if his allegiance is to Christ as Lord of all.

## **What Works is Good**

The fourth idea is that what works is good. This course is called pragmatism. This is a particularly attractive part of the curriculum for Americans. And this certainly includes the American Christian student. But it's a deceptively attractive course. It may lead to results, but at what cost?

I think of a revealing scene in the disturbing Academy Award-winning movie *A Clockwork Orange*. A young British hoodlum in a futuristic England is programmed to abhor the violence that he continually practiced with his gang. This abhorrence is brought about by forcing him to watch scenes of horrible violence while his eyes are forced open. When he is brought before an audience to demonstrate the change, his programmer

tempts him with several opportunities to do violence while the audience watches. He resists the temptations. After the demonstration a clergyman protests by saying that the “boy has no moral choice.” He was manipulated. The programmer scoffs at this claim and states that the result of the experiment is good because “the point is that it works.” “It has relieved the ghastly congestion in our prisons.”

These first four parts of the curriculum are naively optimistic. They describe either present or future existence positively because of supreme confidence in man and his abilities. Other portions of the curriculum are not so optimistic. In fact, they can be frighteningly pessimistic at times.

## **There is No Meaning**

A fifth aspect of the curriculum denies meaning. This course is called existentialism, and sometimes nihilism. The “big” questions of life are asked, but no answers are found. Then the response is either total denial of hope, which should logically lead to suicide, or living by simply acting in the face of absurdity. These perspectives can be found, for example, in some contemporary music and movies. The songs of Nine Inch Nails, the moniker for a musician named Trent Reznor, sometimes contain ideas that are indicative of this. The movies of Woody Allen often contain characters and scenes that depict a search for meaning with no conclusions other than individual acts.

## **There is No Truth**

The last portion of the curriculum is closely connected to what we have just discussed. This course can be called postmodernism. We are living in a culture that increasingly denies an encompassing paradigm for truth. This can be demonstrated by considering what Francis Schaeffer meant by the phrase “true truth.” That is, there is no “big picture” to be seen and understood. We only have individuals and

communities who have their own “little truths.” And nothing connects those truths to something bigger than themselves and more lasting than what might work at the moment. This can be heard, seen, and read incessantly. There are too few teachers in the culture’s curriculum who are sharing ideas that are connected to or guided by “true truth.” The ultimate outcome of such thinking can be devastating. Chaos can reign. Then a sense of desperation can prompt us to accept the “truth” of whoever may claim to be able to lead us out of the confusion. Germany experienced this under the reign of Hitler. We should not be so smug as to think it could not happen to us.

## **Responding to the Curriculum**

Man is the measure of all things! Pleasure is the highest good! True spirituality has many sources! What works is good! There is no meaning! There is no truth! These are the ideas that permeate the education a student receives outside the classroom. How can a Christian deal with such a curriculum? Some suggestions are in order.

First, the student should be encouraged to understand that God is the measure of all things, not man. God is an eternal being who is the guide for our lives, both temporal and eternal. Thus we don’t first ask what man thinks, we ask what God thinks. So this means that the student must decide on his primary textbook. Is it the Bible, or some other text?

Second, the student should be led to realize that God’s will is the highest good, not pleasure. This is very important for the contemporary Christian to understand in light of the sensuous nature of our culture. A student easily can get the idea that God is a “kill joy” because it may seem that everyone is having a good time, but he can’t because of God’s restrictions. If he can understand that God’s ideas lead to true freedom and joy, the student can more readily deal with this part of the curriculum.

Third, the student should be challenged to realize that true spirituality is found only through a relationship with the risen Jesus. Jesus lives in us through the indwelling of His Spirit. And this indwelling is only true for the reborn Christian. Yes, there are many spiritual concepts alive in this culture. Many people are searching for something that will give meaning beyond man's ideas. There is a spiritual hunger. But if we try to relieve that hunger through ideas that come from man's perceptions of spirituality, we are back where we started: man is the measure of all things.

Fourth, the student should be taught that what works is not always good. Satan can make evil work for a time, but he is the father of lies, and lies lead to spiritual and moral decay.

Fifth, the student should be led to believe that life has meaning. The Christian can see the world around him with the eye of hope because God is in control. As chaotic as things may appear, there is a purpose, there is a plan. People have meaning, past events have meaning, present events have meaning, and future events will have meaning. Christ has died to give us salvation, and He has risen from the dead to give us hope for the present and the future. A student whose mind is infused with meaning will be able to handle the despair around him, and he can share his secure hope in the midst of such despair.

Sixth, the student should be guided to think in terms of the big picture. Imagine a puzzle with thousands of pieces. Now think of attempting to assemble the puzzle without having seen the picture on the box top. That would surely be a frustrating experience. You would have individual pieces but no guide to fit the pieces together. Many attempt to live this way. But the Christian student has the box top. He can begin to put the puzzle of life together with God's picture in mind.

So, does education take place beyond the classroom? Certainly!

May God guide us to help students learn the proper lessons.

## Notes

1. J. Kerby Anderson, *Signs of Warning, Signs of Hope* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), p. 136.

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# Why We Believe in Creation (and Not Unguided Evolution)

*Dr. Ray Bohlin explains why our understanding of the origins of life is directly related to our understanding of God. A Christian understands that God created us intentionally. We are not the result of some random, evolutionary accident. A consistent biblical worldview will be seen in how we consider the question of creation.*

## The Historical Nature of Genesis

I am often asked why the creation/evolution controversy is so important. Tempers flare, sometimes explosively, over this issue. Some people think, there are enough problems with the image of evangelicals without creating unnecessary controversies. Is it just a matter of interpreting Genesis? If so, then let the theologians debate the issues and leave me out. But let's not obscure the simple message of the gospel. Others wonder, is it just a scientific argument? If so, then why should I care about the controversy? I'm not a scientist. Well, I think much more is at stake than that. It has to do with the very nature and character of God!

We must realize that the book of Genesis is the foundation of the entire Bible. The word Genesis means "beginnings." Genesis tells the story of the beginning of the universe, solar system, earth, life, man, sin, Israel, nations, and salvation. An understanding of Genesis is crucial to our understanding of the rest of Scripture.

For example, Genesis chapters 1-11 are quoted or referred to more than 100 times in the New Testament alone. And it is over these chapters that the primary battle for the historicity of Genesis rages. All of the first eleven chapters are referred to in the New Testament. Every New Testament author refers somewhere to Genesis 1-11.

Jesus Himself, on six different occasions, refers to each one of the first seven chapters of Genesis, thus affirming His belief in their historical nature. He refers back to Adam and Eve to defend His position on marriage and divorce in Matthew 19:3-6. He makes His argument a historical one when He says that "from the beginning" God created them male and female. Jesus affirms that Adam and Eve were real people. Jesus' comments are in an historical context.

Jesus affirms the historicity of Cain and Abel in Matthew 23:29-36. In this passage, Jesus connects the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of the prophet Zechariah. The murder of Zechariah at the door of the Temple was within the last 400 years and was clearly historical. If this was historical, then so was the murder of Abel!

Jesus confirms the historical nature Noah and the Flood in Matthew 24:37-39. The time before Noah is related to the time that Christ returns. If the flood is just a story to communicate a pre-New Testament vision of the gospel, then is Jesus return just another story to communicate some other spiritual truth? The historicity of Genesis 1-11 is tied to many aspects of Jesus' teachings.



In many ways it is difficult to separate the book of Genesis, even the first eleven chapters, from the rest of Scripture, without literally rejecting the inspiration of Scripture and the divine nature of Jesus. It is hardly possible to assume that Jesus was knowingly deceiving these pre-modern people in order to communicate the gospel in a context they understood.

How can the first 11 chapters be separated from even the rest of Genesis? The time of Abraham has been verified by archaeology. The places, customs, and religions spoken in Genesis related to Abraham are accurate. The story of Abraham begins in Genesis 12. If Genesis 1 is mythology and Genesis 12 history, where does the allegory stop and the history begin in the first 11 chapters? It is all written in the same historical narrative style.

## **The Nature of the Evolutionary Process**

Many believers do indeed call Genesis 1-11 allegory or myth. They boldly declare that God simply used evolution as His method to create! The purpose of the creation account is only to promote God as a transcendent all-powerful God who is completely different from the gods of the surrounding Near East cultures of that time. This is called theistic evolution. Without question, God could create by any means He chose. But is the God of the Scriptures the god of evolution?

My simple answer to that question is **no!** At least not the evolution which is communicated in today's textbooks and university classrooms. The nature of the evolutionary process is contrary to the nature of God.

The principles behind evolution are ideas such as the selfish gene, and survival of the fittest. An offshoot of evolutionary thinking is the relatively new field of sociobiology. In another essay ([Sociobiology: Evolution, Genes and Morality](#)), I defined sociobiology as the biological basis for ALL social behavior. In other words, our behaviors are the result natural

selection as much as our physical characteristics.

For instance, if you ask a sociobiologist the question, why do we love our children, he or she will answer that “we love our children because it works.” It is an effective means to raise productive offspring, so it was “selected for” over time. Ultimately, then, from this perspective, all behavior is selfish. Everything we do is geared toward furthering our own survival and the production and the survival of our own offspring. Our behaviors have been selected over time to aid in our survival and reproduction and that’s all.

Evolution is a wasteful, inefficient process. Carl Sagan says that the fossil record is filled with the failed experiments of evolution. Evolutionary history is littered with dead-ends and false starts. Stephen Jay Gould characterizes the nature of the evolutionary process as one of contingency history. Organisms survive primarily by chance rather than some inherent superiority over other organisms. There is no purpose, no goal, no meaning at all.

The question has to be, would God use such a method? A person’s character is reflected in his or her work. Not just in what is produced, but the process also is indicative of the mind that is at work. For instance, the paintings of Vincent van Gogh reveal a troubled mind, not just in the subjects he painted but also in the colors he used and character of the brush strokes. And you don’t have to be an art critic to see this in his paintings, particularly those just before he took his own life.

God is a person and thus has character. We should see God’s character in His work as well as in His method. First, let’s take a brief look at the revelation of God’s character.

Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God’s character. Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9-11). Not only that, but Jesus is the Person of the

Godhead that brought about the creation. Colossians 1:16 reads, "All things were created by Him, for Him, and through Him." John 1:3—"Nothing came into being apart from Him." Hebrews 1:2—"By Whom and through Whom the worlds were created."

Since Jesus is a person and is also the creator, then if Jesus used evolution as his method to create, then we should see a correlation between the character of Jesus and the process of evolution.

## **The Personal Character of Jesus the Creator**

If Jesus used evolution as His method of creation, then His character must be reconcilable with the evolutionary process. We discussed above the nature of the evolutionary process. Now I want to take a brief look at the character of God. A detailed unveiling of Jesus' character is found in Matthew 5. This is not an ideal we are to strive for, but a picture of what can happen in the life of a believer who is fully yielded to Christ.

In Matthew 5:3, Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." This phrase describes one who allowed himself to be trodden down. Jesus exemplified a security in Himself that did not become offended when He was put down. An evolutionarily successful organism seeks its own interests, not the interests of others.

In verse 5, Jesus says, "Blessed are the gentle." The mild, patient and long-suffering are not likely to succeed in an evolutionary world. The meek are pushed aside by the self-assertive. Ultimately it is the strong, the fit and the selfish that are the ones who succeed!

In verse 7, Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful." The struggle for existence is never motivated by mercy. Mercy

could only be tolerated if shown towards a member of the same species that shares a significant proportion of their genes. To be merciful outside your immediate family unit may compromise your survival or the survival of your offspring, neither of which is productive in an evolutionary world.

In verse 9, Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Jesus also said we should love our enemies. In many mammals, such as lions and gorillas, the first act of a new dominant male following his ascent to power is to kill the younger offspring sired by the previous dominant male. This has the double effect of removing offspring from the group that are not his, and bringing their mothers into heat so he can mate with them to produce his own offspring. This is selfish natural selection at work. Where is the mercy, the gentleness, the peacemaking in these events?

The struggle for existence among living organisms today is a result of sin entering a perfect creation and is not the method of bringing that creation into existence.

Romans 8:19-22 reveals that nature is groaning in the pains of childbirth, because of being subjected to futility, for redemption from the curse. Nature is in turmoil. Organisms do struggle for survival. Competition is often fierce. While there are many examples of cooperation in nature, it can always be explained in terms of selfish gain and cooperation is the easiest way to obtain the desired end. Organisms do act selfishly. But ***to hear nature's groaning and interpret it as the song of creation is to be ignorant of both God and nature!***

Some Christians debate the effects of the fall and how far back into earth history the effects can be realized. But the point is that something happened at the fall. This passage makes clear that the creation does not function today as God intended it to and it is not the creation's fault. The creation was subjected to futility because of man's sin.

When we take the time to investigate whether the God revealed in the Scriptures is the same God who created through the evolutionary process as it is currently understood, the answer is clear. The God of the Scriptures is not the god of evolution.

## A Modern Twist on Theistic Evolution

In a modern formulation, some theistic evolutionists are declaring that not only **could** God use evolution, but He **must** use some form of evolution to create. These individuals indicate that there is a “functional integrity” to the universe that God created initially and for God to intervene in any way, is to admit that He made a mistake earlier. And of course, God does not make mistakes. Physics professor Howard van Till from Calvin College describes:

...a created world that has no functional deficiencies, no gaps in its economy of the sort that would require God to act immediately, temporarily assuming the role of creature to perform functions within the economy of the creation that other creatures have not been equipped to perform.” [ *Christian Scholars Review*, vol. XXI:I (September 1991), p. 38].

Diogenes Allen from Princeton Theological Seminary put it this way:

According to a Christian conception of God as creator of a universe that is rational through and through, there are no missing relations between the members of nature. If, in our study of nature, we run into what seems to be an instance of a connection missing between members of nature, the Christian doctrine of creation implies that we should keep looking for one” [ *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville: Westminster /John Knox Press, 1989), p. 53].

A loose paraphrase might be, “If you find evidence of a

miracle, you need to keep looking for a naturalistic explanation." This view of creation seems awfully close to deism or semi-deism. Theistic evolutionists deny this, of course, by reminding us that, unlike deism, they firmly believe that God continuously upholds the universe. If He were to completely withdraw as deism holds, the universe would come apart.

But the Bible, particularly the gospels, is full of miracles. The Lord Jesus was born as a human baby in a stable, He changed water into wine, healed blindness and leprosy, fed multitudes on scraps of food, raised people from the dead, died on a cross, and rose from the dead Himself. The response is that this is salvation history which is entirely different from natural history. Diogenes Allen put it this way:

In general we may say that God creates a consistent set of law-like behaviors. As part of that set there are the known physical laws. These laws apply to a wide variety of situations. But in certain unusual situations such as creating a chosen people, revealing divine intentions in Jesus, and revealing the nature of the kingdom of God, higher laws come into play that give a different outcome than normal physical laws which concern different situations. The normal physical laws do not apply because we are in a domain that extends beyond their competence.

It is true that we do not invoke God to account for repeatable observable events such as apples falling from trees. But what could be more unusual and beyond the competence of physical laws than the creation of life, the creation of coded information in DNA, the creation of a human being? Even in this framework, it seems reasonable to assume that these events could also be a part of salvation history. What we end up with, however, is a view that says that the activity of the Creator cannot be detected in any of the workings of nature. Once again, the God of the Scriptures is not the god of evolution.

# The Theology of Romans 1

The world of nature that is left to us by those who believe in theistic evolution is indistinguishable from that of the philosophical naturalist or even the pantheist. Whether you accept Genesis 1 and 2 as being historical or not, the clear tenor of the narrative is of a God who interacts with his creation, not one who just lets it unwind according to some preconceived plan. How is a scientist supposed to see God in the creation if all there is, from his perspective, is natural mechanisms?

The pantheist could see this perspective as compatible with his view of the natural world as well. The pantheist sees god as an impersonal force that is present all throughout nature. god is all and in all. All is one. Matter itself contains the inherent ability to bring about complexity according to the mind which permeates all of nature. Similarly, theistic evolution requires that matter contains within itself, by God's creative design, the full capacity to actualize all of the physical and biological complexities that exist. The distinctions of Christian theism become blurred.

Finally, if God created through evolution, what are we to do with Romans 1:18-20? Paul says:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

The fact that God exists, and even a few things about His power and nature, is clearly understood by observing the natural world, that which He created. If God's method of

creation is indistinguishable from that of a naturalist or a pantheist, where is this so-called evidence?

Princeton theologian, Diogenes Allen, says that “even though nature does not establish God’s existence, nature points to the possibility of God. That is, it raises questions which science cannot answer and which philosophy has been unable to answer” (*Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, p.180). But Romans declares that his invisible nature, eternal power, and deity are **clearly seen through what has been made!** This is more than raising questions! If God has created through naturalistic evolution then men and women have quite a few excuses. If natural processes are all that is needed, who needs God?

One final note. It has been interesting to me that, as I have observed theistic evolutionists throughout my academic career, I have found that evolutionists have little tolerance for theistic evolutionists because if you accept evolution, then why do you need God? Perhaps even more importantly, they are puzzled about why one would continue to believe in the God of the Bible if you have concluded that He used inefficient, chancey, contingent, and messy natural selection as His method. Even they see the incompatibility of the two.

In summary, Genesis and creation are central to Scripture and Jesus appears to have believed in an historical and interactive creation. Evolution is contrary to the nature and character of God. And, if natural processes are all that is needed for creation, then men are indeed full of excuses to the existence of God, contrary to Romans 1.

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# Angels: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly – The Range of Angelic Activity

*Sue Bohlin presents accounts of angelic activity in our world today consistent with the biblical account of angels and their actions. From a biblical worldview perspective, she considers both the involvement of good angels and bad angels in the circumstances of life. A good understanding of angelic activity will aid us in understanding the full world around us, both the seen and the unseen.*

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



I was about thirteen years old when I had my first encounter with an angel. I was going upstairs to my room, pulling my entire weight on the handrail, when it suddenly came off in my hand. I fell backwards, head first. Halfway into a terrible fall, I felt a strong hand on my back push me upright. There was nobody there—well, nobody *visible*!

Angel stories are always fascinating, and in this essay I address angels: the good, the bad, and the ugly. The good angels are the holy ones, the bad angels are the evil ones, which the Bible calls demons, and the ugly angels are demons disguising themselves as good angels. These ugly angels have deceived many people in a culture that has embraced “angel mania.”

## The Good Angels

The book of Hebrews calls angels “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). Angels minister in many ways to us, and I’d like to look at some of their ministries with examples from the scriptures as well as

some modern anecdotes.

## Provision

The Lord uses His angels to physically provide for His own. It was an angel who brought Elijah bread and water while fleeing from Jezebel after his victory on Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 19:5-6).

In 1944, the penniless wife of a pastor and evangelist in Switzerland, Susie Ware prayed, "God, I need five pounds of potatoes, two pounds of pastry flour, apples, pears, a cauliflower, carrots, veal cutlets for Saturday, and beef for Sunday." A few hours later, someone knocked on the door, and there was a young man carrying a basket, who said, "Mrs. Ware, I am bringing what you asked for." It was precisely what she'd prayed for—down to the exact brand of pastry flour she wanted. The young man slipped away, and even though Rev. and Mrs. Ware watched at the window to their building, the man never exited. He just disappeared.[{1}](#)

## Guidance

Sometimes, angels give guidance so God's people will know what He wants us to do. An angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and instructed him to take Mary as his wife and to name her baby Jesus. (Matthew 1:20-21)

And it was an angel who told Philip where to go in his travels so that he could meet the Ethiopian eunuch and lead him to Christ. (Acts 8:26)

My friend Lee experienced the comfort of guidance from an angel when the other men in his army unit were pressuring him to visit a red-light district. As he prayed for strength, an invisible messenger came to him and said, quite audibly from about ten feet away, "Have no fear of them. Do not succumb. I will sustain you and deliver you."

## Encouragement

Angelic ministry to us can include powerful encouragement. When Paul and his shipmates were caught in a horrible storm and faced shipwreck, an angel appeared to him, assured him that not a life would be lost, and that he would live to stand trial before Caesar. (Acts 27:23)

One mother of a young girl told me that the night after her daughter's cancer surgery, a very tall nurse with long braids, a real Amazon, ministered to her all night long. She was caring for the girl with a strong but gentle tenderness, and talking with the mom about how good God is. After they went home, the mother decided to write a thank-you note to the nurse, and called the hospital to ask for her name. Everyone—even the head of nursing—insisted that there was no nurse with that description working at the hospital. She believes God sent an angel to encourage her through that dark night.

## Protection

This world is a dangerous place, and angels can provide supernatural protection. Daniel 6 tells the story of how an angel shut the mouths of the lions when he was thrown into their den.

A young lady named Myra worked in the inner-city ministry of Teen Challenge in Philadelphia. One neighborhood gang liked to terrorize anyone who tried to enter the Teen Challenge building, and they harassed Myra as well. One night, when she was alone in the building with the gang banging on the door, she felt she should continue to try to reach out to them with the gospel of Jesus. As she opened the door, she breathed a prayer for protection. The boys suddenly stopped their shouting, looked at each other, turned and left quietly. Myra had no idea why.

Later on, as the staff people were able to build relationships with the gang members, the ministry director asked them why they dropped their threats against Myra and left her alone that night. One young man spoke up, saying, "We wouldn't dare touch her after her boyfriend showed up. That dude had to be seven feet tall." The director said, "I didn't know Myra had a boyfriend. But at any rate, she was here alone that night." Another gang member insisted, "No, we saw him. He was right behind her, big as life in his classy white suit." {2}

Another young woman walking home from work in Brooklyn had to go past a young man loitering against a building. She was fearful; there had been muggings in the area recently, and she prayed for protection. She had to go right by him, and although she could feel him watching her, he didn't move. A short time after she reached home, she heard sirens and saw police lights. The next day her neighbor told her someone had been raped, in the same place and just after she had passed by the young man.

She wondered if the man she'd passed was the rapist, because if it were, she could identify him. She called the police and discovered they had a suspect in custody. She identified him in a lineup and asked the policeman, "Why didn't he attack *me*? I was just as vulnerable as the next woman who came along." The policeman was curious too, so he described the woman and asked the suspect about her. He said, "I remember her. But why would I have bothered her? She was walking down the street with two big guys, one on either side of her." {3}

## Rescue

Sometimes, angels rescue people in danger. It was an angel—if not the Angel of the Lord, who is the pre-incarnate Christ—who joined Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego in the fiery furnace, rescuing them from the flames (Daniel 3).

My friend John told me that he and a friend were walking

through a rough neighborhood one night when 12 or 15 gang members jumped them. John took two punches and sank to the ground. He expected to be robbed and severely beaten, but he wasn't. Instead, he heard a voice from about six feet up: "It's okay, they're gone." He looked up and saw his friend who mysteriously was now about 25 feet away, leaning against a wall with his fists still clenched as if he were ready to fight. But there was no gang. They just disappeared. And there was nobody next to John.

## **Warrior Angels**

The ministry of warrior angels catches the imagination in a special way. The prophet Elisha prayed that the Lord would open the eyes of his servant so he could see the mighty angelic army of God protecting them.

In Nazi Germany, one mother took her little boy, who was unchurched, to a shelter run by nuns that had become known as a safe place because nothing bad ever seemed to happen there. His first night, while everyone else was praying that God would protect them, this little boy kept his eyes open. After the "amen," he told his mother, "It came up to here on them!" and pointed to his breastbone. When asked what he meant, he said, "The gutter came up to here on them!" A nurse asked, "What are you talking about?" and he told her that he saw men filled with light guarding each corner of the shelter, so tall that they towered above the roof. The shelter was protected by huge warrior angels that only a little boy could see.[\[4\]](#)

## **Guardian Angels**

Do we have guardian angels? The Bible doesn't give a definitive answer on that, although the Lord Jesus did say, "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." (Matthew 18:10) And Psalm 91:11 promises, "For He will command His angels concerning you to

guard you in all your ways.”

One day, when my son was a baby, I tripped while I was holding him, and he went flying headlong toward a brick wall. There was nothing I could do to protect him, but I watched as he inexplicably stopped an inch from the wall and fell gently to the carpet. I knew immediately that an angel’s hand had been his bumper pad.

These are only a few of the stories of thousands about angels who protected and rescued people, both Christians and non-Christians. But a nagging question continues to arise: where are the angels when girls are raped, and drunk drivers crash headlong into a car of teenagers, and evil people blow up buildings with hundreds of innocent people in them?

The angels are still there, continuing to minister in pain and death. We usually don’t realize the role of angels in the midst of horrible circumstances because their work is unseen and often unfelt.

Behind the question of, “Where are the angels?” is the very difficult problem of why a good God would allow pain and suffering. The book of Job gives us two important insights into the problem of pain: first, when disasters and suffering assail us in the physical realm, there may be something bigger and more important going on in the unseen spiritual realm.[\[5\]](#) Second, God never gives Job an answer to his demand to know the “why”: He just says, “I am the sovereign Lord, acting in ways you cannot understand. You just need to trust Me, that I know what I’m doing.” The fact that God is in control, that He allows all pain and suffering for a reason, is the great comfort that we need to remember when it seems like the angels have forsaken us. They haven’t, because God hasn’t.

## **The Bad Angels**

There are good angels, and there are bad angels. All of them

were created as holy angels, but about a third of them rebelled against God and fell from their sinless position. Satan, the leader of these demons or unholy angels, is a liar, a murderer, and a thief. (John 10:10) He hates God and he passionately hates God's people. The Bible tells us that he prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). We need to remember that Satan and all the demons are supernaturally brilliant, and Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).

It's this masquerade as a holy angel that is behind the current angel craze in our culture. While there are a number of wonderful Christian books available that relate stories of holy angels helping people, there are many books, publications, and seminars that are filled with demonic deception of the ugliest kind. Because when you start talking to angels, you end up dealing with demons.

## The Ugly Angels

The enemy of our souls is using a new twist on an old lie, exploiting the current interest in angels to attract the untaught and the undiscerning. Much of the current angel mania is simply New Age philosophy, which is actually old-fashioned pantheism. Pantheism is the belief that everything—an impersonal God as well as every part of the creation—is one big unity. All is one, God is one, we are God—and New Age philosophy throws reincarnation into the mix as well.

You know you're around "ugly angels," or demons masquerading as angels of light and holiness, when you see or hear these terms:

1. Contacting or communing with angels.

There are now books available with titles like *Ask Your Angels*[\[6\]](#) and *100 Ways to Attract Angels*[\[7\]](#). But the Bible gives neither permission nor precedent for contacting angels.

When people start calling on angels, it's not the holy angels who answer. They're demons, disguising themselves as good angels to people who don't know how to tell the difference.

## 2. Loving our angels, praying to our angels.

Some self-styled "angel experts" instruct their followers to love their angels and call upon them for health, healing, prosperity, and guidance. But angels are God's servants, and all this attention and emphasis and glory should go to God, not His servants. God says, "I will not share my glory with another" (Isaiah 42:8). Scripture makes no mention of loving angels—only God, His word, and people. And it never tells us to pray to angels, only to the Lord Himself.

## 3. Instruction, knowledge, or insight from angels, particularly ones with names.

Some angel teachers are proclaiming that angels are trying very hard to contact us, so they can give us deeper knowledge of the spiritual<sup>[8]</sup>. Invariably, this "angel knowledge" is a mixture of truth and lies, and never stands up to the absolute truth of Scripture.

There are four angel names that keep popping up in the angel literature: Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael. Michael and Gabriel are the only angels mentioned by name in the Bible. The other two show up in the apocryphal *First Book of Enoch*, which includes a fanciful account of the actions of these four beings. [Note: it has been brought to my attention that there are actually two other named angels in the Bible: Apollyon, the angel of the abyss in Revelation 9:11, and Satan, who is an evil, fallen angel.] Those who report modern day angel teachings are actually channeling information from demons.

## 4. Special knowledge or teachings from angels.

Naomi Albright distributes teachings about the deep meanings of colors, and numbers and letters of the alphabet which she



claims is “knowledge given from above and brought forth in more detail by the High Angelic Master Sheate, Lady Master Cassandra, and Angel Carpelpous, and the Master Angel, One on High.”{9} These same beings told Mrs. Albright to stress two main teachings: first, that God accepts all religions, and second, Reincarnation.{10} These two teachings keep showing up in much of the New Age angel literature, which shouldn’t be surprising since they are heretical lies that come from the pit of hell, which is where the demons feeding these lies to the teachers are from.

Other angel teachings are that all is a part of God (pantheism); the learner is set apart from others by the “deep” knowledge that the angels give (this is a basic draw to the occult); and that eventually, the one who pursues contact with these angels will be visited by an Ascended Master or a Shining Angel (which is a personal encounter with a demon).

We need to remember that God’s angels are not teachers. God’s word says they are messengers—that’s what “angel” means—and they minister to us. God has revealed to us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), so any hidden knowledge that spirit beings try to impart is by nature occultic and demonic.

## 5. Human divinity

The message of the ugly angels is that we need to recognize that we are one with the divine, we are divine . . . we are God. In Karen Goldman’s *The Angel Book: A Handbook for Aspiring Angels*, she says things like, “Angels don’t fall out of the sky; they emerge from within.”{11} And, “The whole purpose in life is to know your Angel Self, accept it and be it. In this way we finally experience true oneness.”{12}

The following bit of heretical garbage was channeled from a demon posing as an angel named Daephrenocles: “The wondrous light of the Angels, from the elohim to the Archangels to the

Devas and Nature Spirits, are all bringing to you the realization that you are magnificent—you are divine now and divine first.”[\[13\]](#)

Much of the angel literature refers to “the angel within.” But angels are a separate part of the creation. They were created before man as a different kind. They are not within us. The movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” notwithstanding, when we hear a bell ring it does not mean that an angel is getting his wings. Nor do good people, especially children, become angels when they die. We remain human beings—not angels, and certainly not God.

What our culture needs in response to the angel craze is strong discernment built on the foundation of God’s word. We need to remember, and share with others, three truths about angels:

1. The ministry of holy angels will never contradict the Bible.
2. The actions of holy angels will always be consistent with the character of Christ.
3. A genuine encounter with a holy angel will glorify God, not the angel. Holy angels never draw attention to themselves. They typically do their work and disappear.

It’s very true that many have “entertained angels unaware” (Hebrews 13:2). But we need to make sure we’re entertaining the right kind of angels!

## Notes

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11. Goldman, Karen, *The Angel Book—A Handbook for Aspiring Angels* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1988), p. 20.
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## Violence in Society

*Kerby Anderson helps us take a biblical perspective on a very scary and touchy issue: violence in America. Applying a Christian worldview, he shines the spotlight on areas of today's culture that should concern us all.*

### It's a scary world today!

Growing up used to be less traumatic just a few decades ago. Children back then worried about such things as a flat tire on their Schwinns and hoped that their teacher wouldn't give too much homework.

How life has changed. A 1994 poll found more than half the children questioned said they were afraid of violent crime against them or a family member. Are these kids just paranoid, or is there a real problem?

Well, it turns out this is not some irrational fear based upon a false perception of danger. Life has indeed become more violent and more dangerous for children. Consider the following statistics: One in six youths between the ages of 10 and 17 has seen or knows someone who has been shot. The estimated number of child abuse victims increased 40 percent between 1985 and 1991. Children under 18 were 244 percent more likely to be killed by guns in 1993 than they were in 1986. Violent crime has increased by more than 560 percent since 1960.

The innocence of childhood has been replaced by the very real threat of violence. Kids in school try to avoid fights in the hall, walk home in fear, and sometimes sleep in bathtubs in order to protect themselves from stray bullets fired during drive-by shootings.

Even families living in so-called "safe" neighborhoods are concerned. They may feel safe today, but there is always a reminder that violence can intrude at any moment. Polly Klaas and her family no doubt felt safe in Petaluma, California. But on October 1, 1993, she was abducted from her suburban home during a sleepover with two friends. If she can be abducted and murdered, so can nearly any other child.

A child's exposure to violence is pervasive. Children see violence in their schools, their neighborhoods, and their homes. The daily news is rife with reports of child molestations and abductions. War in foreign lands along with daily reports of murder, rape, and robberies also heighten a child's perception of potential violence.

Television in the home is the greatest source of visual

violence for children. The average child watches 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school. That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age 18.

And the latest scourge is MTV. Teenagers listen to more than 10,000 hours of rock music, and this impact is intensified as they spend countless hours in front of MTV watching violent and sensual images that go far beyond the images shown on commercial television.

It's a scary world, and children are exposed to more violence than any generation in recent memory. An article in *Newsweek* magazine concluded: "It gets dark early in the Midwest this time of year. Long before many parents are home from work, the shadows creep up the walls and gather in the corners, while on the carpet a little figure sprawls in the glow emanating from an anchorman's tan. There's been a murder in the Loop, a fire in a nightclub, an indictment of another priest. Red and white lights swirl in urgent pinwheels as the ambulances howl down the dark streets. And one more crime that never gets reported, because there's no one to arrest. Who killed childhood? We all did."

## **"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he."**

Violence has always been a part of the human condition because of our sin nature (Rom. 3:23). But modern families are exposed to even more violence than previous generations because of the media. Any night of the week, the average viewer can see levels of violence approaching and even exceeding the Roman Gladiator games.

Does this have an effect? Certainly it does. The Bible teaches that "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 23:7). What we view and what we think about affects our actions.

Defenders of television programs say that isn't true. They

contend that televised imagery doesn't make people violent nor does it make people callous to suffering. But if televised imagery doesn't affect human behavior, then the TV networks should refund billions of advertising dollars to TV sponsors.

In essence, TV executives are talking out of both sides of their mouths. On the one hand, they try to convince advertisers that a 30-second commercial can influence consumer behavior. On the other hand, they deny that a one-hour program wrapped around the commercials can influence social behavior.

So, how violent is the media? And what impact does media have on members of our family? First, we will look at violence in the movies, and then we'll take up the issue of violence on television.

Ezra Pound once said that artists are "the antennae of the race." If that is so, then we are a very sick society judging by the latest fare of violence in the movies. The body count is staggering: 32 people are killed in "RoboCop," while 81 are killed in the sequel; 264 are killed in "Die Hard 2," and the film "Silence of the Lambs" deals with a psychopath who murders women and skins them.

Who would have imagined just a few years ago that the top grossing films would be replete with blood, gore, and violence? No wonder some film critics now say that the most violent place on earth is the Hollywood set.

Violence has always been a part of movie-making, but until recently, really violent movies were only seen by the fringe of mass culture. Violence now has gone mainstream. Bloody films are being watched by more than just punk rockers. Family station wagons and vans pull up to movie theaters showing R-rated slasher films. And middle America watches these same programs a few months later on cable TV or on video. Many of the movies seen at home wouldn't have been shown in theaters 10-20 years ago.

Movie violence these days is louder, bloodier, and more anatomically precise than ever before. When a bad guy was shot in a black-and-white Western, the most we saw was a puff of smoke and a few drops of fake blood. Now the sights, sounds, and special effects often jar us more than the real thing. Slow motion, pyrotechnics, and a penchant for leaving nothing to the imagination all conspire to make movies and TV shows more gruesome than ever.

Children especially confront an increasingly violent world with few limits. As concerned parents and citizens we must do what we can to reduce the level of violence in our society through the wise use of discernment and public policy. We need to set limits both in our homes and in the community.

## **Does Media Violence Really Influence Human Behavior?**

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 average child watches 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school. That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age 18.

The violent content of TV includes more than just the 22 minute programs sent down by the networks. At a very young age, children are seeing a level of violence and mayhem that in the past may have only been witnessed 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

94-page report entitled, "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. 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."

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 through 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."

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 8 were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child or spouse abuse at 30.

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."

Since their report in the 1980s, MTV has come on the scene with even more troubling images. Adolescents already listen to an estimated 10,500 hours of rock music between the 7th and 12th grades. Now they also spend countless hours in front of MTV seeing the visual images of rock songs that depict violence, rebellion, sadomasochism, the occult, drug abuse, and promiscuity. MTV reaches 57 million cable households, and



its video images are even more lurid than the ones shown on regular TV. Music videos filled with sex, rape, murder, and other images of mayhem assault the senses. And MTV cartoons like Beavis and “the other guy” assault the sensibilities while enticing young people to start fires and commit other acts of violence. Critics count 18 acts of violence in each hour of MTV videos.

Violent images on television and in the movies do contribute to greater violence in society. Sociological studies along with common sense dictate that we do something to reduce the violence in the media before it further damages society.

## **Television Promotes Not Only Violence But Fear As Well.**

Children see thousands of TV murders every year. And the impact on behavior is predictable. Various reports by the Surgeon General 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 94-page report entitled, “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. In one five-year study of 732 children, “several kinds of aggression (such as conflicts with parents, fighting and delinquency) were all positively correlated with the total amount of television viewing.”

Confronted with such statistics, many parents respond that their children aren’t allowed to watch violent programs. Such action is commendable, but some of the greatest dangers of television are more subtle and insidious. It now appears that simply watching television for long periods can manipulate your view of the world— whether the content is particularly violent or not.

George Gerbner and Larry Gross working at the Annenberg School of Communications in the 1970s found that heavy TV 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."

So heavy viewers were less trustful and more fearful than the average citizen. But what constitutes a heavy viewer. Gerber and Gross 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.

They found that violence on prime-time TV exaggerated heavy viewers' fears about the threat of danger in the real world. Heavy viewers, for example, were less likely to trust someone than light viewers. Heavy viewers also tended to overestimate their likelihood of being involved in a violent crime.

And if this is true of adults, imagine how much TV violence affects children's perception of the world. Gerbner and Gross say, "Imagine spending six hours a day at the local movie house when you were 12 years old. No parent would have permitted it. Yet, in our sample of children, nearly half the 12-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."

Television violence affects both adults and children in subtle ways. While we may not personally feel or observe the effects

of TV violence, we should not ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perception and behavior.

Obviously something must be done. Parents, programmers, and general citizens must take responsible actions to prevent the increasing violence in our society. Violent homes, violence on television, violence in the movies, violence in the schools all contribute to the increasingly violent society we live in. We have a responsibility to make a difference and apply the appropriate principles in order to help stem the tide of violence in our society.

## **Some Suggestions for Dealing with Violence in the Media**

Christians must address this issue of violence in our society. Here are a number of specific suggestions for dealing with violence.

1. Learn about the impact of violence in our society. Share this material with your pastor, elders, deacons, and church members. Help them understand how important this issue is to them and their community.
2. Create a safe environment. Families live in the midst of violence. We must make our homes safe for our families. A child should feel that his or her world is safe. Providing care and protection are obvious first steps. But parents must also establish limits, provide emotional security, and teach values and virtue in the home.
3. Parents should limit the amount of media exposure in their homes. The average young person sees entirely too much violence on TV and at the movies. Set limits to what a child watches, and evaluate both the quantity and quality of their media input (Rom. 12:2). Focus on what is pure, beautiful, true, right, honorable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil.

4:8).

4. Watch TV with children. Obviously we should limit the amount of TV our children watch. But when they watch television, we should try to watch it with them. We can encourage discussion with children during the programs. The plots and actions of the programs provides a natural context for discussion and teach important principles about relationships and violence. The discussion could focus on how cartoon characters or TV actors could solve their problems without resorting to violence. TV often ignores the consequences of violence. What are the consequences in real life?

5. Develop children's faith and trust in God. Children at an early age instinctively trust their parents. As the children grow, parents should work to develop their child's trust in God. God is sovereign and omnipotent. Children should learn to trust Him in their lives and depend upon Him to watch over them and keep them safe.

6. Discuss the reasons for pain and suffering in the world. We live in the fallen world (Gen. 3), and even those who follow God will encounter pain, suffering, and violence. Bad things do happen to good people.

7. Teach vigilance without hysteria. By talking about the dangers in society, some parents have instilled fear—even terror—in their children. We need to balance our discussions with them and not make them hysterical. Kids have been known to become hysterical if a car comes down their street or if someone looks at them.

8. Work to establish broadcaster guidelines. No TV or movie producer wants to unilaterally disarm all the actors on their screens out of fear that viewers will watch other programs and movies. Yet many of these same TV and movie producers would like to tone down the violence, but they don't want to be the

first to do so. National standards would be able to achieve what individuals would not do by themselves in a competitive market.

Violence is the scourge of our society, but we can make a difference. We must educate ourselves about its influence and impact on our lives. Please feel free to write or call Probe Ministries for more information on this topic. And then take time to apply the principles developed here to make a difference in your home and community. You can help stem the tide of violence in our society.

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## **When Your Teen Rejects Your Values – A Christian Response**

*Rick Rood looks at a typical teenage rebellion and offers a plan based on a biblical worldview and Christian values to help lead them through rebellion to a strong Christian walk. By reacting from a truly Christian perspective and following a biblical plan of action, our chances of successfully making it through to adulthood and greatly increased.*

### **The Fact of Teenage Rebellion**

Mark Twain once advised parents that when their child turns 13 they should put them in a barrel, close the lid, and feed them through a hole in the side. When they turn 16, Twain suggested parents close the hole! Twain was a humorist, and we laugh about his counsel. But beneath the laughter is the recognition

that the teenage years are seldom easy...for the teen or their parents! And it's particularly challenging when we find that our teen is rejecting our values.

Admittedly, in tackling this issue we are taking on a real lion! If there is anything more humbling than being the parent of a rebelling teenager, it's attempting to pass on advice to others who are struggling with this same situation. But our prayer is that this pamphlet will offer some help and encouragement to parents of a challenging teen.

"Adolescence" is the label we attach to the time of life from the onset of puberty to maturity. It denotes the stage of life during which a young person moves from childhood to adulthood, from dependence upon parents to independence. It's a time of great change not only physically, but emotionally, mentally, spiritually and socially. It's a time when teens are asking questions like "Who am I?," "What do I believe?," "How do I fit into life in this world?"...when they're searching for their identity as individuals.

Adolescence is also a time when some degree of strain develops between teens and their parents. No longer do parents appear to be infallible and beyond contradiction. Our flaws are much more visible...and probably exaggerated by our teen. It's a time when the values of their peers generally appear much more attractive than their parents', and when acceptance by their friends will likely become much more important than that of their parents.

It is not uncommon in their quest for identity and independence for teens to reject some of the values of their parents, their church, and society. And to a degree this is not unhealthy. Young people need to develop their own convictions about life. And part of the process may involve challenging the values and convictions they have been taught. Some may challenge them more overtly, and others more covertly. Some may challenge them in relatively minor areas

such as dress, appearance, music, or the way they keep their room. Others may show total disregard for the moral and spiritual values of their family, their church, and even society. Parents who allow for no individuality in some of the more “minor” areas (such as dress and appearance), may be challenging their teen to test them in the areas that are of much greater consequence.

Several years back, a group that included Dr. James Dobson conducted a survey of some 35,000 parents. The survey concluded that while 25% of teens are of “average” temperament, 40% were considered to be more on the “compliant” side, and 35% on the “strong-willed” side. (More boys than girls fell in this latter category.) Among the strong-willed teens, 74% were found to be in some degree of rebellion during their teenage years, 26% of them to a severe degree. Furthermore, it was surprisingly found that the strong-willed were most susceptible to the influence of their peers! It was no surprise to find that 72% of parents of strong-willed teens characterized their relationship as “difficult” or “very stressful”! (*Parenting Isn’t for Cowards*, by Dr. James Dobson, chaps. 3 & 4).

If you identify with this group of parents, you are definitely not alone! And perhaps this realization is an important first step in responding to a teen who rejects our values!

## **The Sources of Teenage Rebellion**

Many a parent has wondered if the teen living in their home is really the same child that they played with and enjoyed just a few years before! And it is only natural for them to ask “Why?” “Why is this happening? And why is this happening to us?” Most parents are probably also asking themselves, “Where did we go wrong? What could we have done to prevent this from happening?” These questions are not only painful to ask, but are equally difficult to answer. And it’s important not to jump to simplistic conclusions in trying to do so.

It is very likely that there is more than one reason why our teen is rejecting our values. And there really are many possible reasons. One that we noted yesterday is that it is simply the nature of adolescents to search for their own identity and independence. We also noted the role that innate temperament plays in teenage rebellion. A survey conducted by a group including Dr. James Dobson concluded that nearly 3/4 of children born with a strong-willed temperament exhibited some degree of rebellion during their teen years. There are, however, a number of other possible reasons why our teen is rejecting our values. It's important to look beyond their behavior to the reasons behind it.

First, it's possible that there are physiological factors involved. Young people who have learning disabilities, or attention deficit/hyperactive disorder are going to be much more inclined to rebel, in part over the frustration they are experiencing in meeting the expectations of their parents, teachers and other authority figures. Any physical illness, or even imbalanced or insufficient diet can affect a teen's emotional and behavioral pattern. Even apart from such irregularities, the changes that are taking place in an adolescent's hormonal system are apt to result in more volatile emotions.

Second, it is possible that there are difficulties of a psychological nature, or even disorders of a more serious nature involved. In this latter category would fall young people who are manic-depressive or schizophrenic. It is important to realize that many of these disorders have genetic and biological sources, requiring the attention of a medical professional. It is more likely, however, that a teen may be struggling with low self-esteem or depression...and may be engaging in conduct that is aimed at obtaining the acceptance of his peers, or at gaining the attention of his parents or other authority figures (even if it's negative in nature!).

Third, it is not uncommon for a young person to express his



anger (and even guilt) over the tensions that may exist within the family at large or between his parents by acting in a rebellious fashion.

Traumatic experiences such as a death in the family, prolonged illness, or serious financial problems can be a source of rebellion. They may even result in a teen's questioning the existence or the goodness of God, and in rejecting of God's moral principles.

We must not fail to mention the negative influence of peers, and of the values portrayed and endorsed in today's movies, television, and by the lyrics of much of the music that young people listen to. All of these media are communicating a message that more often than not challenges the right of anyone (including parents) to limit their freedom or stifle their individuality.

Finally, it is not impossible that our own example as parents, or our parenting style has contributed to their rebellion to a greater or lesser degree. We will return to this issue later in the week, and tomorrow we will begin to look at the question of whether parents are always at fault when their teens reject their values.

## **A Parent's Reaction to His Teen's Rebellion**

In the previous two programs we have briefly examined some basic facts about the nature of teenage rebellion and some of its possible sources. We noted that there are many possible reasons why a teen might choose to reject his parents' values. It is not uncommon, however, for those of us who are Christian parents to feel that we bear the greater (if not exclusive) share of responsibility. After all, have we not been taught that if we train our children "in the way they should go, when they are old they will not depart from it"? (Prov. 22:6). If they do depart from the way they should go, certainly it is

our fault for not training them properly!

At the outset, we must affirm that parents are responsible before God to provide the training and instruction that will guide them in His way (Eph. 6:4b). The scriptures also warn us that it is possible for us to “provoke our children to anger” (Eph. 6:4a) and to “exasperate them so that they become discouraged” (Col. 3:21). When our teen is rebelling, it’s appropriate for us to evaluate the impact that our own parenting style has had in our child’s life.

We must just as emphatically, however, reject the notion that teenage rebellion is invariably the consequence of parental mismanagement. To believe that it is, is to accept the premise that all human behavior is caused by external influences. Behavior may be influenced (even very strongly) by genetic and environmental factors, but to say that there is no such thing as human will and choice is to deny a fundamental element of biblical teaching. In the final analysis, a young person’s rejection of godly values is a personal choice.

Many Christians, however, find themselves adopting an essentially behavioristic and deterministic philosophy in their acceptance of a common interpretation of the verse we alluded to a few moments ago, Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” Many a parent has concluded from this proverb that if his teen does “depart from the way he should go,” it is because he has failed to provide the training he needed. But that this proverb (as many proverbs) should be taken as general observation about life, rather than as an absolute divine promise, can be deduced from two facts. First, if we do take this proverb as an absolute promise, then other proverbs in the book must be also. Yet there are a number of proverbs for which exceptions can be found on a regular basis. For example, Proverbs 10:27 says that “The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be shortened.” This is a general truth. But there are innumerable examples of

the wicked who have lived long on the earth, and of the godly whose lives have been cut short. A second reason is that to take it as an absolute promise would contradict the teaching of many other proverbs that it is possible for a young person to reject the training his parents provide. Proverbs 15:5 says, "A fool rejects his father's discipline." The writer of Proverbs also appeals to sons to "receive" and "be attentive" to their parents' instruction (2:1-2), and warns against "neglecting" and "abandoning" their teaching (4:1-2). (Cf. also Deut. 21:18-21)

We must conclude, then, that when our teen rejects our values, we must prayerfully discern to what degree both we and they are responsible for what is happening, as well as what other influences are at work. In some cases, the parents may bear a great deal of responsibility; in others they may bear very little. The important thing, however, is not so much "who is to blame," but what ought we to do from this point on in our relationship with our teen.

## **A Plan for Parents**

We have looked at the nature of teenage rebellion. We've also addressed the question of whether it is always the parents' fault when their teen rejects their values. But today, we want to focus on how we should respond as parents of a challenging teen.

Our first response must be to look beyond the rebellious behavior to the sources that lie behind it. If we suspect there are factors of a physiological nature, we must not neglect to enlist the help of a qualified physician. Nor should we reject the aid of a godly counselor in addressing issues of depression or self image that may lie hidden in our teen's heart. But neither should we neglect to look to the Scriptures as our ultimate source of wisdom.

As we do, it will be tempting to look initially for ways in

which we can promote change in our teenager's behavior. But the one factor in our child's life over which we have the most influence is our own character and approach to parenting. And this is where we must begin—by reflecting on the model which God himself provides in his character and in his relationship with us as his children. In God as our Father we find that perfect balance of judgment and grace, of discipline and love, compassion and firmness. This is a standard from which all of us fall short, the one to which we will never fully attain in this life; but the one by which we must measure our lives, and toward which we must continually strive! Larry Crabb has said, "The key to becoming a more effective parent is to become an increasingly godly person." (*Parenting Adolescents* by Kevin Huggins, p. 258) Wise is the parent who makes this his primary goal!

Wise too is the parent who resists the impulse to project a perfect image to his teen, but who echoes the prayer of David: "Search me, O God, and know my heart...see if there be any hurtful way in me; and guide me in the everlasting way" (Ps. 139:23-24). Wise is the parent who is willing to offer a sincere apology to his child, and to seek forgiveness for ways he has genuinely fallen short as a parent. But wise also is the parent who refuses to brood over past failures, but who having learned from his mistakes sets out in a new direction! (Phil. 3:13-14). And wise is the parent, as well, who guards against trying to "atone" for past mistakes by becoming overly kind or permissive.

As we seek to allow God to shape our lives after his own model as the divine parent, we will do well to keep two primary qualities in view. The first is an unconditional love for our child. This is the kind of love God manifests toward us. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were yet sinners (while we were his enemies!), Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). This is the kind of love He seeks to instill in us for our teenager, regardless of how much anger or contempt he

or she has shown toward us—a love that asks not how they can meet our needs, but how God can use us to minister to their genuine needs.

But the second quality is an uncompromising commitment to help our teenager grow toward responsible maturity. “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines;...but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness” (Heb. 12:6,10). As God guides us in the path of righteousness, and establishes clear expectations for our lives, so must we for our teen. As God disciplines for rebellion through appropriate consequences, so also must we.

Above, we proposed that there are two primary qualities God seeks to instill in those of us who are parents of a teen who is rejecting our values: an unconditional love and an uncompromising commitment to guide them toward responsible maturity. But how do these qualities take shape in our day to day lives?

How do we show this kind of love toward our teenager? First, we love them when we praise and reward them for the good that we do see in their lives, as God does with us. We love them when we show respect for their feelings and opinions, though not always agreeing with them. We love them when we show interest in and participate with them in activities that are meaningful to them, and refrain from squeezing them into a mold for they were not designed. We love them when we restrain our anger from erupting in violent acts and hurtful words, when we relate as a “fellow struggler,” when we don’t try to be better than they are at everything, when we handle our own sin in the same way we expect them to, when we listen to their explanations before disciplining them, when we keep alive a sense of hope and excitement about discovering God’s purpose for their life!

But the love toward which we strive is also one that guides and disciplines (Prov.13:24). states that “he who loves (his

son) disciplines him diligently.” Researchers have found that teens are less likely to rebel who grow up in homes that are neither too permissive nor overly authoritarian, where parents gradually allow them more participation in decisions and relinquish more responsibility, while maintaining final authority (*Teen Shaping*, by Len Kageler, chaps. 3 & 12).

What are a few marks of a parent who has this kind of commitment? First, he provides instruction in the ways of the Lord. One teenager who refused to accompany his family to church, was willing to read a chapter of scripture with his father several times a week. By his senior year, they had read through the entire New Testament together! Second, he communicates clear expectations regarding personal conduct (even if parents of his child’s friends do not): expectations concerning the use of language in the home, honesty about whereabouts and activities, household chores, attendance at school, curfew, use of the car, payment for gas, insurance and traffic tickets, drinking, and sexual conduct. Finally, such a parent will enforce meaningful consequences for wilful rebellion. There are some things we are obliged to provide for our child no matter what: a place to live (though it need not be our own home in all situations), food, clothing, and personal respect. But many things that young people take for granted today are privileges that can and must be suspended as a result of irresponsible behavior: use of the phone or TV, tuition for school, use of our car, or even a driver’s license. Teenagers who engage in activities that are not only irresponsible but illegal, should have every expectation that their parents will notify the authorities. We do our children no favor when we shield them from the painful consequences of foolish choices. Some teens will become skilled at manipulating their parents through guilt or intimidation. But we must resolve to render such tactics ineffective by refusing to let them work.

God does not hold us responsible for all of our teenager’s

actions. But He does hold us accountable for the way in which we relate to them as parents—with unconditional love, but uncompromising commitment to responsible maturity.

Yet, even when we do, God provides no guarantee that they will always (or even ever) respond positively. But He does ask that we persist in doing what is right . . . praying for them, gradually relinquishing them to Him who knows them far better than we . . . remembering his exhortation that we “not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary” (Gal. 6:9).

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**Addendum from the author, after his teenagers finished growing up:**

It was over twelve years ago that I wrote the article you have just read. Since then, I’ve had a lot of time to reflect on the matter of parenting. If there is one thing I would add to the article, it is the statement in Psalm 127:1, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.”

I’m more convinced than ever that though I believe God’s word does give us guidance concerning what we as parents should and should not do in relating to our children, being a parent is much more than simply “doing all the right things.” It is at root a matter of trusting God to work in our children’s lives in his own way and time . . . to accomplish in their lives what only He can. And of course, to trust that He will do the same in our own hearts and lives as well. Sometimes His ways are far beyond our understanding. I have met some who came from very difficult homes, who nonetheless have turned out to be wonderful people. On the other hand, I have met others who grew up in wonderful families, who nonetheless have chosen to walk a very painful path in life. All of this should cause us to make prayer our first priority as parents. There is no greater responsibility or privilege we have as parents than to

pray for the children the Lord has entrusted to us. May we never cease to do so.

### **Resources on Parenting Teenagers**

*Emotionally Healthy Teenagers*, by Jay Kesler (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998)

*Bound by Honor*, by Gary and Greg Smalley (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1998)

*Parenting Today's Adolescent*, by Dennis and Barbara Rainey (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998)

*How to Really Love Your Teenager*, by Ross Campbell (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983)

*Parenting Adolescents*, by Kevin Huggins (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992)

*Teen-Shaping: Solving the Discipline Dilemma—What Works, What Doesn't*, by Len Kageler (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1990)

*Parents & Teenagers*, ed. by Jay Kesler (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1984)

*Parents in Pain*, by John White (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1979)

*Parenting Isn't for Cowards*, by Dr. James Dobson (Waco: Word Books, 1987)

*The Wounded Parent*, by Guy Greenfield (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991)