The Iran and Israel Conflict Crisis: 4 Insights Relating to the U.S., Israel, and the Middle East

Iran and Israel Conflict Crisis and Regional Security

Iran nuclear threat: Does it pose a threat to the U.S., Israel, and the Middle East? What can we learn about the Iran and Israel conflict?

Many Americans might wonder why the president has focused so much attention on Iran. After all, it is a country 6,000 miles away in the Middle East. Some may also conclude that military action against Iranian leadership might not be warranted since the previous administration did not deploy troops or significant military hardware to the region.

Two years ago, however, the Biden administration considered action after more than 160 attacks on U.S. troops took place in Iraq, Syria, and Jordan. There were also about 40 clashes with the Houthis in the Red Sea. Iran funded many of these attacks, either directly or indirectly. They were part of a mounting proxy battle between the U.S. and Iran.

At the time, reporters asked what President Biden would do. Some argued that the U.S. and Iran have essentially been at war for decades. Even the Pentagon press secretary

acknowledged that this was true if one considers the larger conflict. To understand why reporters were asking this question, we need to review some history.

Modern History of Iran

The conflict between Iran and the United States can be traced back to 1953, when the U.S. cooperated in overthrowing Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh. Afterward, the Shah of Iran (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi) was placed in power.

The U.S. viewed the Shah as a key ally and a pillar of security in the Middle East. His pro-Western government advanced Western interests and served as a Cold War counterbalance to Soviet influence. The United States supported Iran through significant arms sales and strong economic ties, despite concerns about the Shah's authoritarian rule.

The turning point came in 1979 when the Shah was overthrown by radical Islamic clerics led by Ayatollah Khomeini. The Iranian Revolution transformed the U.S. from an ally into "The Great Satan" in the eyes of the new regime.

This hostility became clear when the Iranian Revolutionary Guard seized the U.S. Embassy and took 52 American diplomats hostage. They were not released until President Reagan was sworn in on January 20, 1981. This crisis marked the beginning of what many view as a half-century-long undeclared conflict between Iran and the United States.

The U.S. strategy had been to promote stability in the Middle East. That effort became increasingly difficult because of Iran's growing influence. Complicating matters further, Saudi Arabia supported anti-Western Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, while Turkey—though a NATO member—began positioning itself as a leader of a renewed Islamic political

vision in the region.

Iran has engaged in a proxy war against the U.S. for decades. In April 1983, Iranian-backed Hezbollah forces bombed the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, killing 63 people. Later that year, Hezbollah bombed the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killing 241 service members.

Despite these attacks, decisive retaliation never fully materialized. Iranian influence continued to expand through proxy groups across the region.

During the Iraq War following 9/11, evidence showed that Iran was supplying weapons and support that contributed to American casualties. While the U.S. was focused on Iraq as the primary enemy, Iranian operatives and Iranian-manufactured munitions were also responsible for attacks on U.S. troops.

Iran is often described as the chief sponsor of terrorism in the Middle East. It funds groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, which regularly target Israel and U.S. interests. Israeli and American responses to these groups are now reshaping the balance of power in the region.

Missiles and Nuclear Weapons

Iran possesses the largest stockpile of ballistic missiles in the Middle East. Many of these missiles have a range of up to 2,000 kilometers, allowing them to strike Israel and other countries throughout the region.

Iran has also demonstrated its long-term intentions toward Western nations. Earlier this century, it launched ballistic missiles from ships in the Caspian Sea. Although the test missile did not carry a nuclear warhead, it demonstrated how such a weapon could be deployed.

A missile detonated high in the atmosphere could create an

electromagnetic pulse (EMP), potentially destroying the U.S. electrical grid and causing catastrophic damage.

If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, it would destabilize the Middle East and surrounding regions. However, the latest assessment from Tulsi Gabbard suggests that Iran is not currently building a nuclear weapon and that its supreme leader has not authorized such a program since it was suspended in 2003. Some officials, however, dispute this assessment.

The Donald Trump administration resumed talks with Iran after withdrawing from the nuclear accord several years earlier. Initial negotiations produced few concrete results. Meanwhile, a United Nations nuclear watchdog reported that Iran violated nuclear nonproliferation agreements.

Iran maintains that its nuclear development is intended for civilian energy. However, the discovery of secret nuclear sites has raised concerns that the program may have military ambitions.

Tensions escalated when Iran launched a massive ballistic missile attack on Israel following Israeli strikes on Iranian targets.

In June 2025, Israel launched **Operation Rising Lion**, targeting key nuclear and military facilities, including an enrichment site. The strike lacked the bunker-busting capability needed to fully destroy the facility.

Soon afterward, the United States launched **Operation Midnight Hammer**, striking several Iranian nuclear locations. The administration announced that the sites had been "obliterated." Yet satellite imagery later suggested Iran had begun rebuilding portions of its nuclear infrastructure.

Diplomatic talks between the United States and Iran have produced few breakthroughs. Negotiations aim to limit uranium

enrichment, restrict missile development, and address human rights concerns within Iran.

Since diplomacy failed, the Trump administration began military endeavors. However, many Americans remain wary of another prolonged conflict in the Middle East. Limited strikes might damage nuclear facilities, but meaningful regime change would likely require a large-scale ground invasion.

Religious Component

Another reason Iran's nuclear ambitions raise concern is the religious worldview of its leadership.

Most Iranians are Shia Muslims, and a significant branch follows the tradition known as the **"Twelvers."** This sect recognizes twelve divinely appointed leaders known as Imams.

According to their belief system, the twelfth Imam—often called the Mahdi or messianic figure—is currently in hiding and will return during a time of global conflict.

Just as Christianity has an eschatology, or doctrine of the end times, Shia Islam also holds an apocalyptic worldview. However, its narrative is essentially the reverse of what Christians read in the book of Revelation.

Twelver theology teaches that global conflict may precede the arrival of the Mahdi. Some analysts fear that extremist interpretations of this belief could view large-scale conflict—including potential attacks on Israel or the United States—as a way to usher in that messianic era.

During the Cold War, the United States relied on the doctrine of **Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD)** to deter nuclear war. The Soviet Union would not launch nuclear weapons because retaliation would guarantee its destruction.

Critics argue that radical religious interpretations might weaken this deterrence model. Some Twelver believers might assume divine intervention would protect them from destruction.

Author Joel C. Rosenberg explored this scenario in his political thriller *The Twelfth Imam*.

Yet there is another side to this story. Reports indicate that Christianity is growing rapidly in Iran, with some describing the Iranian church as the fastest-growing Christian movement in the world.

Christians should continue praying for Iranian believers who often face persecution. We should also pray for U.S. leaders and their allies as they navigate these complex challenges.

The Persian people are an ancient civilization that deserves peace and freedom. Unfortunately, many Iranians suffer under economic sanctions and harsh authoritarian leadership.

They deserve both our prayers and our compassion.

[For more articles by Kerby Anderson follow here: https://probe.org/author/kerbyanderson/]

Cohabitation and Living Together – A Biblical, Christian Worldview

Perspective

Kerby Anderson takes a hard look from a biblical perspective at a common practice among Americans, cohabitation. Not only does he find it counter to biblical instruction for Christians, he finds that living together in a sexual relationship reduces the probability of a long-lasting marriage later on.

The original version of this updated article is also available in Spanish.

More than twenty years ago, I did a week of radio programs on cohabitation and cited a study done by the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University. Sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead came to this conclusion: "Cohabitation is replacing marriage as the first living together experience for young men and women."{1}



What was true then is true today, but there is even more evidence of changing attitudes as well as additional social research on cohabitation. A survey by Pew Research asked American adults when it was acceptable to live together. Two thirds (69%) said it was acceptable "even if they don't plan to get married." Another 16 percent said it was acceptable "only if they planned to get married." Only 14 percent said it was "never acceptable."

That may explain why living together has gone from rare to routine in the secular world, but also explains why so many Christian couples also see living together as acceptable. In the 1960s and 1970s, only about a half million were living together. One study from a few years ago, estimated that over 18 million Americans were cohabiting, and nearly a quarter of them were people over the age of 50 years old.{2}

Another reason to revisit the social phenomenon of cohabitation is to remind couples that the "premarital cohabitation effect" still exists. The effect is the research finding from decades ago that living together before marriage increases your likelihood of marital struggles and even divorce. Scott Stanley with the Institute for Family Studies acknowledges that it may be counterintuitive "that living together would not improve one's odds for a successful marriage. And yet, whatever else is true, there is scant evidence to support this believe in a positive effect."{3} We will look at the latest research data below.

Since such a high percentage of American adults believe it is acceptable for an unmarried couple to live together, they have developed new legal documents to establish financial and medical obligations to one another. Several cohabiting couples will draft a cohabitation agreement.{4} Such an agreement supposedly ensures certain rights or obligations in the relationship that would typically be legally conferred upon marriage.

Although some people will say that a cohabiting couple is "married in the eyes of God," that is not true. They are not married in God's eyes because they are living contrary to biblical statements about marriage. And they are not married in their own eyes because they have specifically decided *not* to marry.

Cohabitation is without a doubt changing the cultural landscape of our society. That is why we look at the social, psychological, and biblical aspects of cohabitation in this article.

Test-drive Relationships and Other Myths

No doubt you have heard couples justify cohabitation by arguing that they need to live together before marriage to see if they were compatible. First, that argument does not justify

cohabitation. Second, it is fallacious since so many couples living together never plan to get married.

Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher wrote *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially*.{5} It not only makes the case for marriage; it also challenges contemporary assumptions about cohabitation.

The thesis of the book is simple. Back in the 1950s, the rules were clear: first love, next marriage, and only then the baby carriage. But the social tsunami of the 1960s changed everything. The Pill, the sexual revolution, feminism, mothers in the workplace, no-fault divorce, and the rise of illegitimate births changed our views of marriage and family. The authors marshal the evidence to show that marriage is a good thing. As the subtitle says, married people are happier, healthier, and better off financially.

Nevertheless, the conventional wisdom is that you should "try before you buy." In fact, one of the oft-repeated questions justifying living together is: "You wouldn't buy a car without a test-drive, would you?"

The problem with such questions and slogans is they dehumanize the other person. If I decide not to buy a car, the car doesn't feel rejected. When you test-drive your car, you don't pack your personal luggage in the trunk. And rejecting a car model doesn't bring emotional baggage into the next test-driving experience. The car doesn't need psychological counseling so that it can trust the next car buyer. Frankly, test-driving a relationship is only positive if you are the driver.

Research has shown that those who cohabit tend to view marriage negatively because it involved the assumption of new responsibilities that contrasted with their former freedoms. On the other hand, those marrying through the conventional route of dating and courtship did not feel constrained by

marriage but liberated by marriage.

Consider the contrast. A couple living together has nearly everything marriage has to offer (including sex) but few commitments or responsibilities. So, cohabiting people feel trapped when they enter marriage. They must assume huge new responsibilities while getting nothing they didn't already have.

Couples entering marriage through dating and courtship experience just the opposite, especially if they maintain their sexual purity. Marriage is the culmination of their relationship and provides the full depth of a relationship they have long anticipated.

This is not to say that cohabitation guarantees marital failure nor that marriage through the conventional route guarantees marital success. There are exceptions to this rule, but a couple who live together before marriage stack the odds against themselves and their future marriage.

Cohabitation and Perceptions

Although cohabitation is becoming popular in America, sociologists studying the phenomenon warned that living together before marriage, puts your future marriage in danger. That was the conclusion of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University done by sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead.{6}

They found that cohabiting appears to be so counterproductive to long-lasting marriage that unmarried couples should avoid living together, especially if it involves children. They argue that living together is "a fragile family form" that poses increased risk to women and children.

Part of the reason for the danger is the difference in perception. Men often enter the relationship with less intention to marry than do women. They may regard it more as a

sexual opportunity without the ties of long-term commitment. Women, however, often see the living arrangement as a step toward eventual marriage. While the women may believe they are headed for marriage, the man often has other ideas. Some men resent the women they live with and view them as easy. Such a woman is not his idea of a faithful marriage partner.

People who live together in uncommitted relationships may be unwilling to work out problems. Since there is no long-term commitment, often it is easy to leave the current living arrangement and seek less fractious relationships with a new partner.

In recent years, there has been the occasional study that suggests there are no significant problems for couples if they live together. But Scott Stanley of the Institute for Family Studies dismisses those few studies because they fail to consider long-term problems. And he points to another recent study that does show an increased risk for divorce among those living together before marriage.{7}

The significant increase in cohabitation in the last few decades is staggering. The reasons for the growth are many: fewer taboos against premarital sex, earlier sexual maturity, later marriage, adequate income to live apart from their families.

Whatever the reasons for cohabiting, this study documents the dangers. Couples who live together are more likely to divorce than those who don’t. They are less happy and score lower on well-being indices, including sexual satisfaction. And cohabiting couples are often poorer than married couples.

Even if millions are doing it, living together is a bad idea. As we will see below, there are clear biblical prohibitions against premarital sex. But apart from these biblical pronouncements are the ominous sociological predictions of failure when a couple considers cohabitation rather than

marriage. The latest research backs up what the Bible has said for millennia. If you want a good marriage, don't do what society says. Do what the Bible teaches us to do.

Consequences of Cohabitation

Contrary to conventional wisdom, cohabitation can be harmful to marriage as well as to the couples and their children. One study based on the National Survey of Families and Households found that marriages which had prior cohabitors were 46 percent more likely to divorce than marriages of non-cohabitors. The authors concluded from this study and from a review of previous studies that the risk of marital disruption following cohabitation "is beginning to take on the status of an empirical generalization."{8}

Some have tried to argue that the correlation between cohabitation and divorce is artificial since people willing to cohabit are more unconventional and less committed to marriage. In other words, cohabitation doesn't cause divorce but is merely associated with it because the same type of people are involved in both phenomena. Yet, even when this "selection effect" is carefully controlled statistically, a "cohabitation effect" remains.

Marriages are held together by a common commitment which is absent in most, if not all, cohabiting relationships. Partners who live together value autonomy over commitment and tend not to be as committed as married couples in their dedication to the continuation of the relationship.{9}

One study found that "living with a romantic partner prior to marriage was associated with more negative and less positive problem-solving support and behavior during marriage." The reason is simple. Since there is less certainty of a long-term commitment, "there may be less motivation for cohabiting partners to develop their conflict resolution and support skills."{10}

Couples living together, however, miss out on more than just the benefits of marriage. Annual rates of depression among cohabiting couples are more than three times higher than they are among married couples.{11} Those who cohabit are much more likely to be unhappy in marriage and much more likely to think about divorce.{12}

Cohabitation is especially harmful to children. First, several studies have found that children currently living with a mother and her unmarried partner have significantly more behavior problems and lower academic performance than children in intact families.{13} Second, there is the risk that the couple will break up, creating even more social and personal difficulties. Third, many of these children were not born in the present union but in a previous union of one of the adult partners (usually the mother). Living in a house with a mother and an unmarried boyfriend is tenuous at best.

These studies, along with others, suggest that cohabitation is less secure, less fulfilling, and even potentially more harmful than traditional marriage.

Cohabitation and the Bible

God designed sexual intimacy to occur exclusively within the sacred commitment of marriage (Genesis 2:21-24). When we trust God's design, we can honor marriage as we are commanded in Hebrews 13:4.

The Bible teaches that the act of sexual intercourse can have a strong bonding effect on two people. When done within the bounds of marriage, the man and the woman become one flesh. Ephesian 5:31 says: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh."

Sexual intercourse outside of marriage also has consequences. Writing to the church in Corinth, Paul said that when a man

joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her (1 Corinthians 6:16). The context of the discussion arose from a problem within the church. A man in the church was having sexual relations with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5:1-3). Paul calls this relationship sinful. In 1 Corinthians 6:18 he says we are to flee sexual immorality.

Sexual immorality is condemned in about 25 passages in the New Testament. The Greek word is *porneia*, a word which includes all forms of illicit sexual intercourse. Jesus taught in Mark 7:21-23: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man unclean."

Paul taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5: "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God."

Marriage is God's plan. Marriage provides intimate companionship for life (Genesis 2:18). It provides a context for the procreation and nurture of children (Ephesians 6:1-2). And finally, marriage provides a godly outlet for sexual desire (1 Corinthians 7:2).

In the New Testament, believers are warned against persistent sin, including sexual sin (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). The church is to keep believers accountable for their behavior. Believers are to judge themselves, lest they fall into God's hands (1 Corinthians11:31-32). Sexual sin should not even be named among believers (Ephesians 5:3).

Living together outside of marriage not only violates biblical commands but it puts a couple and their future marriage at risk. In this article, I have collected several sobering statistics about the impact cohabitation can have on you and

your relationship. If you want a good marriage, don't do what society says. Do what the Bible teaches us to do.

Notes

1. David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Should We Live Together? What Young Adults Need to Know about Cohabitation before Marriage," *The National Marriage Project*, the Next Generation Series, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, January 1999.
2. Patricia Reaney, "More Americans 50 Years and Over are Cohabiting, Research Shows," Reuters, April 6, 2017, www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-cohabitation/more-americans-50-years-and-over-are-cohabiting-research-shows-idUSKBN1782RI
3. Scott Stanley, "Premarital Cohabitation Is Still Associated with Greater Odds of Divorce, Institute for Family Studies, October 17, 2018, ifstudies.org/blog/premarital-cohabitation-is-still-associated-with-greater-odds-of-divorce
4. money.usnews.com/money/personal-finance/family-finance/articles/what-is-a-cohabitation-agreement
5. Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially* (New York: Random House, 2000).
6. David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The National Marriage Project*, January 1999.
7. Scott Stanley, "Premarital Cohabitation," *Institute for Family Studies*, October 17, 2018
8. Alfred DeMaris and K. Vaninadha Rao, "Premarital Cohabitation and Subsequent Marital Stability in the United States: A Reassessment," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 54(1992), 178-190.
9. Stephen Nock, "A Comparison of Marriages and Cohabiting Relationships," *Journal of Family Issues* 16(1995), 53-76.
10. Catherine L. Cohan and Stacey Kleinbaum, "Toward A Greater Understanding of the Cohabitation Effect: Premarital Cohabitation and Marital Communication," *Journal of Marriage*

and Family 64(2002), 180-192.
11. Lee Robins and Darrel Reiger, *Psychiatric Disorders in America* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 72.
12. Andrew Greeley, *Faithful Attraction* (New York: Tom Doherty, 1991), 206.
13. Elizabeth Thompson, T. L. Hanson, and S.S. McLanahan, "Family Structure and Child Well-Being: Economic Resources versus Parental Behaviors," *Social Forces* 71(1994), 221-242.

Additional Resources

Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005, chapter thirteen.

Jeff Van Goethem, *Living Together: A Guide to Counseling Unmarried Couples*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2004.

Glenn Stanton, *The Ring Makes All the Difference: The Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage*, Chicago: Moody Press, 2011.

Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier and Better Off Financially* (New York: Random House, 2000).

©2023 Probe Ministries

[This article is an updated version of Kerby's 2003 transcript titled "Cohabitation."]

The Value of Suffering: A

Christian Perspective

Sue Bohlin looks at suffering from a Christian perspective. Applying a biblical worldview to this difficult subject results in a distinctly different approach to suffering than our natural inclination of blame and self pity.

This article is also available in Spanish.

There is no such thing as pointless pain in the life of the child of God. How this has encouraged and strengthened me in the valleys of suffering and pain! In this essay I'll be discussing the value of suffering, an unhappy non-negotiable of life in a fallen world.

Suffering Prepares Us to Be the Bride of Christ



Among the many reasons God allows us to suffer, this is my personal favorite: it prepares us to be the radiant bride of Christ. The Lord Jesus has a big job to do, changing His ragamuffin church into a glorious bride worthy of the Lamb. Ephesians 5:26-27 tells us He is making us holy by washing us with the Word—presenting us to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. Suffering develops holiness in unholy people. But *getting there* is painful in the Lord's "laundry room." When you use bleach to get rid of stains, it's a harsh process. Getting rid of wrinkles is even more painful: ironing means a combination of heat plus pressure. Ouch! No wonder suffering hurts!

But developing holiness in us is a worthwhile, extremely important goal for the Holy One who is our divine Bridegroom. We learn in Hebrews 12:10 that we are enabled to share in His holiness through the discipline of enduring hardship. More ouch! Fortunately, the same book assures us that discipline is

a sign of God's love (Heb. 12:6). Oswald Chambers reminds us that "God has one destined end for mankind—holiness. His one aim is the production of saints."{1}

It's also important for all wives, but most especially the future wife of the Son of God, to have a submissive heart. Suffering makes us more determined to obey God; it teaches us to be submissive. The psalmist learned this lesson as he wrote in Psalm 119:67: "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees."

The Lord Jesus has His work cut out for Him in purifying us for Himself (Titus 2:14). Let's face it, left to ourselves we are a dirty, messy, fleshly people, and we desperately need to be made pure. As hurtful as it is, suffering can purify us if we submit to the One who has a loving plan for the pain.

Jesus wants not just a *pure* bride, but a mature one as well—and suffering produces growth and maturity in us. James 1:2-4 reminds us that trials produce perseverance, which makes us mature and complete. And Romans 5:3-4 tells us that we can actually rejoice in our sufferings, because, again, they produce perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope. The Lord is creating for Himself a bride with sterling character, but it's not much fun getting there. I like something else Oswald Chambers wrote: "Sorrow burns up a great amount of shallowness."{2}

We usually don't have much trouble understanding that our Divine Bridegroom loves us; but we can easily forget how much He longs for us to love Him back. Suffering scoops us out, making our hearts bigger so that we can hold more love for Him. It's all part of a well-planned courtship. He does know what He's doing . . . we just need to trust Him.

Suffering Allows Us to Minister Comfort to Others Who Suffer

One of the most rewarding reasons that suffering has value is experienced by those who can say with conviction, “I know how you feel. I’ve been in your shoes.” Suffering prepares us to minister comfort to others who suffer.

Feeling isolated is one of the hardest parts of suffering. It can feel like you’re all alone in your pain, and that makes it so much worse. The comfort of those who have known that same pain is inexpressible. It feels like a warm blanket being draped around your soul. But in order for someone to say those powerful words—”I know just how you feel because I’ve been there”—that person had to walk through the same difficult valley first.

Ray and I lost our first baby when she was born too prematurely to survive. It was the most horrible suffering we’ve ever known. But losing Becky has enabled me to weep with those who weep with the comforting tears of one who has experienced that deep and awful loss. It’s a wound that—by God’s grace—has never fully healed so that I can truly empathize with others out of the very real pain I still feel. Talking about my loss puts me in touch with the unhealed part of the grief and loss that will always hurt until I see my daughter again in heaven. One of the most incredibly comforting things we can ever experience is someone else’s tears for us. So when I say to a mother or father who has also lost a child, “I hurt with you, because I’ve lost a precious one too,” my tears bring warmth and comfort in a way that someone who has never known that pain cannot offer.

One of the most powerful words of comfort I received when we were grieving our baby’s loss was from a friend who said, “Your pain may not be about just you. It may well be about other people, preparing you to minister comfort and hope to

someone in your future who will need what you can give them because of what you're going through right now. And if you are faithful to cling to God now, I promise He will use you greatly to comfort others later." That perspective was like a sweet balm to my soul, because it showed me that my suffering was not pointless.

There's another aspect of bringing comfort to those in pain. Those who have suffered tend not to judge others experiencing similar suffering. Not being judged is a great comfort to those who hurt. When you're in pain, your world narrows down to mere survival, and it's easy for others to judge you for not "following the rules" that should only apply to those whose lives aren't being swallowed by the pain monster.

Suffering often develops compassion and mercy in us. Those who suffer tend to have tender hearts toward others who are in pain. We can comfort others with the comfort that we have received from God (2 Cor. 1:4) because we have experienced the reality of the Holy Spirit being there for us, walking alongside us in our pain. Then we can turn around and walk alongside others in their pain, showing the compassion that our own suffering has produced in us.

Suffering Develops Humble Dependence on God

Marine Corps recruiter Randy Norfleet survived the Oklahoma City bombing despite losing 40 percent of his blood and needing 250 stitches to close his wounds. He never lost consciousness in the ambulance because he was too busy praying prayers of thanksgiving for his survival. When doctors said he would probably lose the sight in his right eye, Mr. Norfleet said, "Losing an eye is a small thing. Whatever brings you closer to God is a blessing. Through all this I've been brought closer to God. I've become more dependent on Him and less on myself."{3}

Suffering is excellent at teaching us humble dependence on God, the only appropriate response to our Creator. Ever since the fall of Adam, we keep forgetting that God created us to depend on Him and not on ourselves. We keep wanting to go our own way, pretending that we are God. Suffering is powerfully able to get us back on track.

Sometimes we hurt so much we can't pray. We are forced to depend on the intercession of the Holy Spirit and the saints, needing them to go before the throne of God on our behalf. Instead of seeing that inability to pray as a personal failure, we can rejoice that our perception of being totally needy corresponds to the truth that we really are that needy. 2 Corinthians 1:9 tells us that hardships and sufferings happen "so that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead."

Suffering brings a "one day at a time-ness" to our survival. We get to the point of saying, "Lord, I can only make it through today if You help me . . . if You take me through today . . . or the next hour . . . or the next few minutes." One of my dearest friends shared with me the prayer from a heart burning with emotional pain: "Papa, I know I can make it through the next fifteen minutes if You hold me and walk me through it." Suffering has taught my friend the lesson of total, humble dependence on God.

As painful as it is, suffering strips away the distractions of life. It forces us to face the fact that we are powerless to change other people and most situations. The fear that accompanies suffering drives us to the Father like a little kid burying his face in his daddy's leg. Recognizing our own powerlessness is actually the key to experience real power because we have to acknowledge our dependence on God before His power can flow from His heart into our lives.

The disciples experienced two different storms out on the lake. The Lord's purpose in both storms was to train them to

stop relying on their physical eyes and use their spiritual eyes. He wanted them to grow in trust and dependence on the Father. He allows us to experience storms in our lives for the same purpose: to learn to depend on God.

I love this paraphrase of Romans 8:28: “The Lord may not have planned that this should overtake me, but He has most certainly permitted it. Therefore, though it were an attack of an enemy, by the time it reaches me, it has the Lord’s permission, and therefore all is well. He will make it work together with all life’s experiences for good.”

Suffering Displays God’s Strength Through Our Weakness

God never wastes suffering, not a scrap of it. He redeems all of it for His glory and our blessing. The classic Scripture for the concept that suffering displays God’s strength through our weakness is found in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, where we learn that God’s grace is sufficient for us, for His power is perfected in weakness. Paul said he delighted in weaknesses, hardships, and difficulties “for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Our culture disdains weakness, but our frailty is a sign of God’s workmanship in us. It gets us closer to what we were created to be—completely dependent on God. Several years ago I realized that instead of despising the fact that polio had left me with a body that was weakened and compromised, susceptible to pain and fatigue, I could choose to rejoice in it. My weakness made me more like a fragile, easily broken window than a solid brick wall. But just as sunlight pours through a window but is blocked by a wall, I discovered that other people could see God’s strength and beauty in me because of the window-like nature of my weakness! Consider how the Lord Jesus was the exact representation of the glory of the Father—I mean, He was all window and no walls! He was

completely dependent on the Father, choosing to become weak so that God's strength could shine through Him. And He was the strongest person the world has ever seen. Not His own strength; He displayed the Father's strength because of that very weakness.

The reason His strength can shine through us is because we know God better through suffering. One wise man I heard said, "I got theology in seminary, but I learned reality through trials. I got facts in Sunday School, but I learned faith through trusting God in difficult circumstances. I got truth from studying, but I got to know the Savior through suffering."

Sometimes our suffering isn't a consequence of our actions or even someone else's. God is teaching other beings about Himself and His loved ones—us—as He did with Job. The point of Job's trials was to enable heavenly beings to see God glorified in Job. Sometimes He trusts us with great pain in order to make a point, whether the intended audience is believers, unbelievers, or the spirit realm. Quadriplegic Joni Eareckson Tada, no stranger to great suffering, writes, "Whether a godly attitude shines from a brain-injured college student or from a lonely man relegated to a back bedroom, the response of patience and perseverance counts. God points to the peaceful attitude of suffering people to teach others about Himself. He not only teaches those we rub shoulders with every day, but He instructs the countless millions of angels and demons. The hosts in heaven stand amazed when they observe God sustain hurting people with His peace."{4}

I once heard Charles Stanley say that nothing attracts the unbeliever like a saint suffering successfully. Joni Tada said, "You were made for one purpose, and that is to make God real to those around you."{5} The reality of God's power, His love, and His character are made very, very real to a watching world when we trust Him in our pain.

Suffering Gets Us Ready for Heaven

Pain is inevitable because we live in a fallen world. 1 Thessalonians 3:3 reminds us that we are “destined for trials.” We don’t have a choice whether we will suffer—our choice is to go through it by ourselves or with God.

Suffering teaches us the difference between the important and the transient. It prepares us for heaven by teaching us how unfulfilling life on earth is and helping us develop an eternal perspective. Suffering makes us homesick for heaven.

Deep suffering of the soul is also a taste of hell. After many sleepless nights wracked by various kinds of pain, my friend Jan now knows what she was saved from. Many Christians only know they’re saved without grasping what it is Christ has delivered them from. Jan’s suffering has given her an appreciation of the reality of heaven, and she’s been changed forever.

I have an appreciation of heaven gained from a different experience. As my body weakens from the lifelong impact of polio, to be honest, I have a deep frustration with it that makes me grateful for the perfect, beautiful, completely working resurrection body waiting for me on the other side. My husband once told me that heaven is more real to me than anyone he knows. Suffering has done that for me. Paul explained what happens in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

> *“Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”*

One of the effects of suffering is to loosen our grasp on this life, because we shouldn’t be thinking that life in a fallen

world is as wonderful as we sometimes think it is. Pastor Dick Bacon once said, “If this life were easy, we’d just love it too much. If God didn’t make it painful, we’d never let go of it.” Suffering reminds us that we live in an abnormal world. Suffering is abnormal—our souls protest, “This isn’t right!” We need to be reminded that we are living in the post-fall “Phase 2.” The perfect Phase 1 of God’s beautiful, suffering-free creation was ruined when Adam and Eve fell. So often, people wonder what kind of cruel God would deliberately make a world so full of pain and suffering. They’ve lost track of history. The world God originally made isn’t the one we experience. Suffering can make us long for the new heaven and the new earth where God will set all things right again.

Sometimes suffering literally prepares us for heaven. Cheryl’s in-laws, both beset by lingering illnesses, couldn’t understand why they couldn’t just die and get it over with. But after three long years of holding on, during a visit from Cheryl’s pastor, the wife trusted Christ on her deathbed and the husband received assurance of his salvation. A week later the wife died, followed in six months by her husband. They had continued to suffer because of God’s mercy and patience, who did not let them go before they were ready for heaven.

Suffering dispels the cloaking mists of inconsequential distractions of this life and puts things in their proper perspective. My friend Pete buried his wife a few years ago after a battle with Lou Gehrig’s disease. One morning I learned that his car had died on the way to church, and I said something about what a bummer it was. Pete just shrugged and said, “This is nothing.” That’s what suffering will do for us. Trials are light and momentary afflictions . . . but God redeems them all.

Notes

1. Oswald Chambers, *Our Utmost for His Highest,* September 1.
2. Chambers, June 25.
3. *National and International Religion Report,* Vol. 9:10, May

1, 1995, 1
4. Joni Eareckson Tada, *When Is It Right to Die?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 122.
5. Tada, 118.

©2000 Probe Ministries, updated 2018

Helping Teens Understand Homosexuality – Facts to Help Youth Withstand the Current Culture

Sue Bohlin provides practical ways to communicate with teens about common misunderstandings and the truth concerning homosexuality. Recognizing that teens deal with peer pressure to experiment and feelings of same sex attraction, she provides real ways to help teens make their way through this maze of contradiction and confusion.



In this article we look at ways to communicate the truth about homosexuality to teens. We examine the lies they are told and the sexual pressure they are under. We also look at ways to help kids process their gender confusion, as well as address helpful ways to encourage teens who already identify themselves as gay or lesbian. And finally, we provide perspective on how to treat those who struggle with same-sex attraction in a compassionate and godly way. By looking at this topic, from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective, we can communicate the depth of God's love and His desire for us to experience the best life possible.

The Lies They Hear

In many schools and in the rest of the culture today, only one perspective is allowed to be heard. Consider four lies that are very familiar to teens today:

First, *"Homosexuality is normal and healthy."* It's neither. The fact that it simply occurs (in about 2% of the population) doesn't make it normal. When we look at the way males and females were designed to complement each other both emotionally and sexually, that tells us something about the nature of homosexuality, that something has gone wrong somewhere. This is not judging the people who experience same-sex attraction; it's like a red light on the dashboard of a car, denoting that something needs attention.

Acting physically on same-sex attractions is certainly not healthy. Those who do are at far greater risk for sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS; alcoholism and drug abuse; depression; emotionally exhausting relationships; and a shortened lifespan.{1} Please see the "Facts About Youth" website from the American College of Pediatricians, especially this article: Health Risks of the Homosexual Lifestyle.

Lie #2: *"If you're attracted to someone of the same sex, that means you're gay or lesbian."* Not so. It really means that there are unmet, God-given needs for love and attention that were supposed to be met earlier in life. Having crushes on other people, of both sexes, is also a normal part of adolescent development. It means teens are transitioning emotionally from child to adult.

The third lie is, *"Since you were born that way, you can't change."* First, there is no scientific evidence that anyone is born gay. It's a myth that has been repeated so often that people believe it. Second, thousands of people who were once gay have experienced significant changes in their attractions and behavior.{2} Change *is* possible.

The fourth lie is, "*Embrace and celebrate your gay identity, because gay life is cool.*" Those in ministry to those dealing with unwanted homosexuality have heard many heartbreaking stories of the truth: a dark side of intense and difficult relationships, relational patterns of disillusionment and breakups, physical and emotional unhealthiness.

Countless people have said they wished they never entered the gay community in the first place, but it's hard to leave.

Teens and Sexual Pressure

Adolescents are under an extraordinary amount of sexual pressure. They live in a sex-saturated culture, and the messages they receive from the media and, unfortunately, in school, clearly communicate an expectation that sex is just part of having a social life. Rarely do they hear about the heart-wrenching consequences of being sexually active, both physically and emotionally. The agenda pushing sexual freedom is also engaged in trying to normalize homosexuality as well.

Teens are pushed to decide early if they are gay, straight, or bisexual, as young as elementary school. But kids in their early teens, much less even younger than that, are no more equipped to "decide" their sexual orientation than they are to choose a college major and career track. A landmark study done by the University of Minnesota determined that at age twelve, one fourth of the students were unsure of their sexual orientation. Their bodies were just beginning to experience the changes that would turn them from children into adults, and they were being asked if they were gay, straight, or bisexual. No wonder so many were confused! But by age seventeen, that number of kids unsure of their sexual orientation had dropped to 5%.{3}

And psychiatrist Dr. Jeffrey Satinover says, "[W]ithout any intervention whatsoever, three out of four boys who think they're gay at age 16 aren't by 25. So if we're going to treat

homosexuality as a state, 75% of ‘gays’ become ‘non-gay’ spontaneously. That’s a statement which I consider ludicrous, but if you accept this tacit proposition—that being gay is an actual state, like being short or being tall, black or white—then in three out of four people that condition changes itself spontaneously. . . That’s with no outside intervention, just the natural processes of development.”{4}

We need to tell teens, “It’s too soon to ‘declare a major’ in your sexuality.”

Teens are also pressured to experiment with both sexes as the only way they can know their sexual orientation. It’s presented as nonchalantly as our cruise ship table partner suggesting we try escargot—”Hey, how can you know if you like it unless you try it out?”

Teenage sexual behavior can have lifelong consequences, but they are not in a position to recognize that. Their brains don’t finish developing until age twenty-five, and they tend to make decisions out of the region of the brain that controls emotion. So they are easily swayed to make dangerous and irresponsible choices, like engaging in any kind of sexual behavior.

Teens need to be encouraged to face the sexual pressures and stand against them.

Gender Insecurity

At a conference I attended, author and ministry leader Andy Comiskey{5} shared a painful experience in junior high where one day, out of the blue, the whole school was abuzz with the rumor that Andy was gay. There was even graffiti about it on the wall. He struggled with his sexual identity, but he had never acted out. He walked into a classroom on an errand and on his way out, two boys called “Faggot!” He was crushed and humiliated. Later on, he made it into a self-fulfilling

prophecy and immersed himself in the gay lifestyle.

I went up to him and asked, "If you could rewrite the script of that incident, knowing what you do today, what would it look like?" He said, "Oh, I wish there had been some sensitive adults, especially in the church, to talk freely with me and other kids about 'gender insecurity.' They wouldn't even have to talk about homosexuality or use the word—many kids can relate to the idea of 'gender insecurity.' It would have been so freeing for me to have someone acknowledge that it's a real thing, but it didn't mean I was gay. I wish there were people who could have spoken truth into my life at that point."

One kind of truth that kids should hear is that around age ten, attraction for the same sex begins. This attraction is emotional, non-sexual, and involuntary. It doesn't mean teens are gay or lesbian; it means they are transitioning through normal adolescent development. We have to learn to attach to people of our same sex before we can learn to attach to people of the opposite sex. But most teens don't know this.

Some kids don't feel secure in their masculinity or femininity for a variety of reasons, usually having to do with not being affirmed by parents and peers. God gives each of us needs for attention, approval and affection. When those needs are not met, the onset of hormones can sexualize this "hole in the heart." Some teens can find themselves longing for the attention, approval and affection of people of their same gender. When others put on them the false and hurtful labels of "homo," "fag," or "lez," they can easily find themselves believing the lies.

When teens are not secure in their gender, they *don't* need to be pointed to gay groups at school. They need to be affirmed and encouraged to develop their innate, God-given masculinity or femininity, to see their gender as good. They need to have other kids reach out to make them feel "one of the guys" or "one of the girls." They need time to finish growing up.

Teens Who Identify as Gay or Lesbian

Growing numbers of teens are self-identifying as gay or lesbian. In many circles, being gay—or claiming to be gay—is now considered cool, especially among girls.

Teenagers experiment with same-sex relationships for a variety of reasons. Some experience normal crushes on same-sex peers and think this means they are gay—or their friends *inform* them that's what it means. What it really means is that they are learning to form deep and intense attachments which is a necessary precursor to maintaining long-term adult relationships like marriage.

Others experiment with same-sex relationships out of a legitimate need to belong. Some kids are simply curious; they just want to try it out like a new shade of lipstick.

Some teens experiment with same-sex relationships because others have labeled them gay or lesbian, and they wonder, "Am I? Do they know something I don't know? Maybe I am and I need to go in that direction." This is one reason it's so important to impress on all kids the absolute unacceptability of name-calling and other cruelties. It's not only bullying behavior, it can have terrible emotional consequences.

Some adolescents pursue same-sex relationships because they are anxious about growing into adolescence and the responsibilities of adulthood. So they hide behind immature and emotionally volatile same-sex feelings and behaviors.

Often, what teens are attracted to in same-sex peers are the characteristics they wish they had in themselves: popularity, good looks, a winsome personality, a strong physique. This kind of jealousy doesn't mean they are gay or lesbian; it means there is an area they need to build confidence in!

Most girls who get involved in same-sex relationships start out in friendships that grow increasingly controlling and

needy. In these emotionally dependent relationships, girls can get so enmeshed with each other that their relationship turns physical.

Many people who later identify as gay or lesbian report feeling different from others, feeling like they don't fit in or belong. Girls can feel like they don't belong to the world of girls, and guys almost always feel like they can't measure up in the world of males. This is gender insecurity, not homosexuality, but teens usually don't hear this message. They need to.

Labels such as "gay" and "lesbian" and "homo" and "dyke" are incredibly hurtful, and it is easy for those who are slapped with those labels to believe them. But God doesn't call anyone homosexual or lesbian; those labels are man's invention, not biblical truth. It's essential for teens to know who they are in God's sight—beloved, precious, and stamped with the imprint of His acceptance and delight.

When Teens Struggle with Same-Sex Attraction

If you know teens who are struggling with feelings of same-sex attraction, or who seem to be experiencing gender insecurity, let me make some suggestions on how to minister to them.

First, don't address the issue of homosexuality head-on. Same-sex strugglers are always wrestling with feelings of inferiority, rejection, shame and fear, so it's extremely uncomfortable for anyone to bring up the subject. The heart of the issue for kids who find themselves attracted to others of the same sex are these dark and negative feelings. It's much better to ask indirect questions that encourage them to talk about the underlying feelings of disconnection with a parent, or the ridicule of their peers, or depression and sadness.

Second, don't use any labels. Teens who struggle with their

gender identity already have a huge struggle with feeling that the rest of the world has put an unwelcome label on them. The false, man-made labels of “gay” and “lesbian” are hurtful, false, and restricting.

Consider what it would be like if we created a label such as “angro” for people who are easily ticked off and walk around in a continual low-level state of hostility. What if people went around saying, “I’m an angry person. That’s just the way I am—that’s WHO I am. I’m an angro.” They might believe they were born angry, that they have an “angro gene.” Not only is the label of “angro” false and misleading, but it can lead people to believe the lie that it is a permanent state or condition rather than a description of one’s current feelings.

That’s what happened with the relatively recent labels of “gay” and “lesbian.” They can become like jail cells, making people feel hopelessly trapped in a state or condition. It’s much better to help teens deal with the fact that they are experiencing some attractions to their same gender, and those feelings are like the red light on the dashboard of a car. They mean there’s something going on inside that needs some attention. And that’s literally true: God creates all of us with the need for attention, affection and approval, and those are the things adolescents are craving when they have feelings for people of the same sex. The needs are legitimate; we need to help them be met in healthy ways. This is where the church and other Christian youth organizations can make all the difference in the world.

Third, communicate to kids who struggle that God did not make them gay. God doesn’t make anyone gay, and there is no scientific evidence that there is a biological basis for homosexual feelings or behavior. Even if they feel that they were born gay, this is the result of being told a fairy tale. Were American kids born English speakers? That’s all they ever knew, right? No, they weren’t *born* English speakers, they were born *language* speakers. Which language they speak is a matter

of the shaping influences of their upbringing. Kids who experience same-sex attraction were born to be relational creatures, but how those relationships shape their souls is a function of their temperaments, their home life, and how they relate to other kids.

Fourth, give them a safe place to process their feelings without being shamed or condemned. For many teens, this unfortunately rules out their home, school, or church. I'm sure it grieves God's heart that for many people, church is the most unsafe place on the planet for those who struggle with various life-controlling sins and urges. But there is a great free, online support group for struggling youth, moderated by an experienced and understanding youth pastor, at www.livehope.org. Kids can safely talk to others like themselves and learn how intimacy with Jesus Christ brings healing and change to broken and wounded hearts.

Fifth, many students who experience same sex attraction often feel fake if they don't choose to identify with or act on their feelings. They have believed the lie that gay or lesbian is what they are. They want to be real. But getting real is becoming who God created them to be, despite their feelings of what whose around them might say.{6} Finding out who God says they are is the true path to being real and not fake.

The Call to Understanding and Compassion

Many teens feel, "I just don't get this whole gay/lesbian thing." That's perfectly understandable. Only 2-3% of the population deals with same gender attraction. The fact that it's such a huge issue in our culture is completely out of proportion to the actual number of people experiencing it.

Kids need to know a few things about those who do struggle with same-sex attractions and feelings. First, they didn't choose it. It's something people *discover*, not something they *decide on*. And almost every single person who discovers they

have strong feelings and fantasies about the same sex is horrified and terrified by this discovery. It's a very painful part of their life, so it's important for others to be respectful and kind.

Second, having crushes and strong feelings for friends and teachers of the same sex is a normal part of adolescent development. It doesn't mean a teen is gay or lesbian. When other kids assure them that it does, it is slapping a false and hurtful label on them that they may find almost impossible to take off. If someone walked up to you and put a "Hi, My Name Is" nametag on you that had someone else's name on it, you probably wouldn't have any trouble taking it off and saying, "There's a mistake here—that's not who I am." But when kids do the same thing with the "nametag" of "gay" or "lesbian," they usually put it on kids who don't have the security and self-confidence to realize that's not who they are, and they can go through the rest of their lives believing a lie.

Third, be compassionate. People don't know who around them is struggling, either with their own same-sex desires and attractions, or the painful burden of knowing a family member or loved one has them. They only have to show contempt once for those who experience same-sex feelings to show that they're not a safe person.

Fourth, be respectful. That means cutting phrases like "Oh, that's so gay" out of their vocabulary. It means not throwing around words like "homo" or "fag" or "queer." Every gay joke or insult is like sticking a dagger in the heart of those who carry a painful secret.

The bottom line for helping teens understand homosexuality is to call them to see God's design as good, and show grace and compassion to those who don't see it. Be "Jesus with skin on" in both His holiness *and* His kindness.

Notes

1. Peter Freiberg, "Study: Alcohol Use More Prevalent for Lesbians," *The Washington Blade*, January 12, 2001, p. 21. Karen Paige Erickson, Karen F. Trocki, "Sex, Alcohol and Sexually Transmitted Diseases: A National Survey," *Family Planning Perspectives* 26 (December 1994): 261. Robert S. Hogg et al., "Modeling the Impact of HIV Disease on Mortality in Gay and Bisexual Men," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 26 (1997): 657. Also note this article by Dr. John R. Diggs, Jr.: The Health Risks of Gay Sex (catholiceducation.org).
2. Read a few of the testimonies at the Living Hope Ministries website, www.livehope.org.
3. www.freetobeme.com/yw_minn.htm
4. Homosexuality and Teens: An Interview with Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, Massachusetts Family Institute. www.mafamily.org/Marriage%20Hearing%202003/satinover2.htm
5. Founder and Director of Desert Stream Ministries, author of *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness and Strength in Weakness*.
6. www.becomingreal.org

© 2005 Probe Ministries, updated 2022

See also: answers to many questions in **"Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Homosexuality"**

What God Says About Sex – A Christian Perspective on Human Sexuality

Sue Bohlin provides us a succinct Christian perspective on human sexuality. She points out that God created sex and has a

purpose for it defined within the context of marriage. When we lose sight of God's perspective, sex can degrade into a pastime for pleasure that will ultimately hurt us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The Pickle Principle



It's not surprising that in a time of growing biblical illiteracy, so few people have any idea what God thinks and says about the extremely important subject of sex. The world holds the Christian view of sex in contempt, considering it prudish, naïve and repressive. But the Bible elevates sexuality as God's gift to us that is both sacred and mysterious. The world's perspective degrades it to just something that feels good—another form of recreation or socialization.

Counselor Waylon Ward offers an insightful way to understand the problem, which he calls "the Pickle Principle." In order to make pickles, we put cucumbers in a brine solution of vinegar, spices, and water. After a cucumber soaks in the brine long enough, it is changed into a pickle. Most of us are like pickles. We sit in the brine of a sex-saturated culture, absorbing its values and beliefs, and it changes the way we think. Even most Christians are pickled today, believing and acting exactly like everyone else who has been sitting in the brine of a culture hostile to God and His Word.

The world's sex-saturated brine includes the belief that sex is the ultimate pleasure. The message of much TV, movies, and music is that there is no greater pleasure available, and that it is the right of every individual, even teenagers, to have this pleasure.{1} Another aspect of this pickling process is the belief that no one has the right to deprive anyone else of this greatest of all human pleasures, that no one has the right to tell anyone else what is right or wrong about the expression of his or her sexuality.{2}

If the purpose and goal of sex is primarily pleasure, then other people are just objects to be used for sensual gratification. Since people are infinitely valuable because God made us in His image, that is a slap in the face whether we realize it or not. The Christian perspective is that the purpose of sex is relational, with pleasure as the by-product. The Bible teaches that sex welds two souls together.{3} It is so powerful that it is only safe within a committed, covenant marriage relationship. It's like the difference between the wild energy of lightning compared to the harnessed power of electricity. God knew what He was doing when He limited sex to within marriage!

God wants to get His "pickled people" out of the world's brine and into an intimate relationship with Him. He wants to change our thinking and beliefs to be in alignment with His.

Sex is God's Invention! The Purpose of Sex

Sex is God's idea. He made it not only efficient for making babies, but pleasurable and deeply satisfying. He designed men's and women's body parts to complement each other. He created hormones to make everything work right and make us want to be sexual. Unlike animals, whose mating behavior is purely instinctive for the purpose of reproducing, human sexuality has several wonderful purposes. God means for all of them to be contained within marriage.

In a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between husband and wife, we can express and enjoy God's two major purposes to sex: fruitfulness and intimacy. His first command to Adam and Eve was to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28); one very foundational purpose of sex is to create new living beings. Fruitfulness is not limited to having children, though. A mutually loving and serving sexual relationship between husband and wife can produce emotional and personal

fruitfulness as well. Both people are nurtured to grow, develop, and soar, becoming more of what God means them to be.

The other big purpose for sex, emotional and physical intimacy, is only possible within marriage. In his little gem of a book called What God Says About Sex,{4} Eric Elder says that intimacy really means "into-me-see." It is only safe to reveal the fullness of who we are, "warts and all," to someone who loves us and has committed to be faithful and supportive "till death do us part." The fullest experience and freedom of sex is found within the marriage bed, which God says to keep holy or set apart.{5} God says that we are to use self-control to keep all expressions of sexuality limited to marriage.{6}

Sex also builds oneness, a mystical union of two lives and souls into one life together. The one-flesh union of sex is a picture of the way two souls are joined together into a shared life. In fact, we could say that sex is like solder that is used to fuse two pieces of metal together. Once they are joined, it is a strong bond that helps keep marriages and families intact, which is God's intention for our lives. Another purpose of sex is the pleasure that comes from being safe in another's love. The entire book of Song of Solomon is gorgeous poetry that glorifies married sexual relations.

God also says that an important purpose of sex is to serve as an earthbound illustration of the mystical but real unity of Christ and the church, where two very different, very *other* beings are joined together as one. This spiritual component to sex is what helps us see more clearly why any and all sex outside of marriage falls far short of God's intention for it to be holy and sacred—and protected.

So . . . What Does God Actually Say?

A lot of people believe the Bible says, "Sex is fun and it feels good, so don't do it." Nothing could be farther from the truth! Sex was God's great idea in the first place! But God's

view of sex as a sacred and private gift to married couples, as well as a gift each spouse gives to the other, is at great odds with the world's perspective of sex as simply a pleasure no one should deny him- or herself.

The overarching statement God makes is that sex is to be completely contained within marriage.{7} As I said above, sex is so powerful that it's like the difference between the wild, uncontrollable power of lightning compared to the safety of harnessed electricity in our buildings. God wants us to harness the power of sex within marriage. This means that all other expressions of sexuality are off-limits, not because God is a cosmic killjoy, but because He loves us and knows what's best for us, namely, not playing with lightning! So God says not to engage in sex with anyone before marriage, with anyone else once we are married, with anyone of the same sex; or with prostitutes, or with family members, or with animals.

God says that sexual purity is a treasure to be guarded and valued. It is a reflection of God's own character, which is what makes it so valuable. In our culture, many people have been deceived into thinking that their virginity is worthless, something to get rid of. But God says it is special,{8} a gift that can we can only bestow on one person, one time. God calls us to purity after marriage as well by remaining faithful to our spouse. Purity before and during marriage prevents "ghosts" in the marriage bed; comparisons are nowhere as deadly as in the intensely intimate realm of sex. We glorify God in our sexuality by using self-control to stay pure if single, and by loving our spouse sexually if married.

The good news is that purity can be restored if we confess our sin and put our trust in Jesus to forgive us and give us a new, holy quality of life. The Bible promises, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."{9} God stands ready to forgive and cleanse us, and restore our purity the moment we ask.

God says that sex is to be reserved for adults only. Three times in the Song of Solomon, a beautiful book extolling the glory of married sex, it says, “Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires,” which means “until the time is right.”{10} As I minister to sexually broken people,{11} most of them bear the still-painful scars of childhood sexual abuse from people who never should have opened a door to sexual experience. Their entire view of sex has been warped and skewed. God never meant for children to be introduced to sex. It’s for adults. *Married* adults.

God wants us to actively fight sexual temptation. The battle is harder than it’s ever been because of our sex-saturated culture. He says to flee immorality.{12} In fact, God says to offer not even a *hint* of sexual immorality.{13} That means that it is a violation of His intentions to engage in phone sex with strangers, or virtual sex in chat rooms and porn sites. The fact that you’re not physically touching another person’s body doesn’t mean it’s not sin, because Jesus said that sexual sin happens in the mind first.{14}

Eric Elder suggests asking a powerful question to help clarify the battle against sexual temptation: will this lead to greater intimacy and fruitfulness with the husband or wife God has created for me?{15} This filter is helpful for both married people and singles. If an action doesn’t build intimacy or fruitfulness, it probably destroys them. Another question to ask is, Can I glorify God in what my flesh wants to do? Can I invite Jesus into what I’m about to do? If the answer is no, God invites us to meet the struggle with *His* supernatural energy instead of our own puny human strength.{16}

Outside of the safety of marriage, sex is wounding and hurtful, but God created it for our pleasure and delight. In the Song of Solomon, God enthusiastically invites the newlyweds to enjoy His good gift of sex, where He says, “Eat, friends, and drink, o lovers!”{17} In fact, God wants married

couples to bless each other by enjoying sex often and regularly.{18}

Are you surprised by what God says about sex?

Why Sexual Sin Hurts So Much

Pastors and counselors will tell you that there is a greater intensity of shame and pain in the people they counsel when the issues involve sexual sin.{19} Paul says that all other sins are outside our bodies,{20} but sexual sin touches you deep in your heart and soul.

As mentioned above, it may be helpful to think of sex like solder. God created it to make a strong, powerful bond that creates healthy, stable families into which children are welcomed. But when people fuse their souls through sexual sin without the safety and commitment of marriage, it causes tremendous pain when the relationship rips apart. (Have you ever seen a broken weld? It's pretty ugly.) When sex is disconnected from love and commitment, it also disconnects the body from the soul. This inflicts deep wounds of shame and guilt on a heart that has been used for gratification instead of love.

Waylon Ward says that sex sins expose and exploit our deepest emotional and spiritual vulnerabilities. He writes, "In the counseling office, individuals rarely if ever weep scalding tears about any other sense of loss like they do for a sexual relationship when it ends. There are soul ties that bind two partners together in unseen ways and there is a sense that part of you has been stolen. There is a hole in your soul where the connection was ripped from you."{21}

The pickling brine of our culture's increased sensuality says, "If it feels good, do it. You're entitled." But while this belief about sex may *feel* good, it is most definitely not good for us. Note the runaway epidemic of sexually transmitted

diseases, and the resulting increase in infertility. Note the number of broken hearts and broken families. Note the alarming amount of sexual abuse. Note the soaring rates of depression, especially in teens, much of which is related to sexual activity outside of marriage.

God invented sex for His glory and our benefit. His basic rule—keep sex inside marriage—isn't meant to be a killjoy, but to protect our hearts and bodies and relationships and families. He knows what He's doing, and we do well to follow.

Notes

1. Waylon Ward, *Sex Matters: Men Winning the Battle* (McKinney, Texas: Allison O'Neil Publishing Company, 2004), 7.

2. Ibid., 8.

3. Genesis 2:24;1 Corinthians 6:15-16.

4. Eric Elder, *What God Says About Sex* (Inspiringbooks.com, an imprint of Eric Elder, 2006). Contact theranch.org/2006/07/03/bookstore-what-god-says-about-sex/ for more information.

5. Hebrews 13:4.

6. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

7. There are 44 prohibitions of *porneia* (sexual expression outside of marriage, usually translated "sexual immorality"), just within the New Testament alone. This is where God draws the line between sex within marriage and sex outside of marriage, which determines what is sin and what is not.

8. Song of Solomon 4:12.

9. 1 John 1:9.

10. Song of Solomon 2:7, 3:5, 8:4.

11. I have the privilege of serving with Living Hope Ministries (www.livehope.org), a support group for those dealing with unwanted same-sex attractions, and the families of those who struggle. (Or who don't struggle because they are just fully immersed in a gay identity.) I mainly minister to women, for whom a history of sexual abuse has long been a common denominator.

12. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

13. Ephesians 5:3.

14. Matthew 5:28.

15. Elder, *What God Says About Sex*, 37.

16. Colossians 1:29, Ephesians 6:10.

17. Song of Solomon 5:1.

18. 1 Corinthians 7:5.

19. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 16.

20. 1 Corinthians 6:18.

21. Ward, *Sex Matters*, 17.

© 2007 Probe Ministries

Pornography – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at pornography from a biblical worldview perspective. He clearly chronicles the physical, emotional and spiritual harm created by pornography and lays out the

scriptural warnings to protect us from its degrading effects.

Pornography has been tearing apart the very fabric of modern society, but the problem has been made much worse with pornography's proliferation through the Internet. Studies show that 40 million adults regularly visit Internet pornography sites.{1} To put that in perspective, that is ten times the amount of people who regularly watch baseball.



When I first started writing about pornography in the 1980s, it was already a multi-billion dollar-a-year business mostly promoted through so-called "adult bookstores" and pornographic magazines. With the development of videos, DVDs, and the Internet, pornography has become ubiquitous.

The wages of sin are enormous when pornography is involved. Revenue from Internet porn exceeds by nearly a 2 to 1 ratio, the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC.{2} And sales of pornographic material on the Internet surpass the cumulative sales of all other products sold online.{3}

The current estimate is the there are over 4 million pornographic websites representing almost 400 million pages of pornographic material.{4}

Pornography is not just something a few men view in the late hours in the privacy of their homes. At least 70 percent of porn is downloaded during work hours (9 am to 5 pm). A percentage of those who do so admit to accessing pornography at work.

And pornography also affects those in church. According to *Leadership Journal*, 40 percent of pastors admit to visiting a pornographic website.{5} And at one Promise Keepers Convention, 53 percent of men admitted to visiting a porn site the week before.{6}

The impact pornography is having on young people is alarming.

It used to be that when you would ask someone when they first saw pornography they would tell you a story about seeing a porn magazine at a friend's house when they were in middle school or high school. Now a child in grade school has already seen images that were only available in an adult bookstore a few years ago. At one time these images were inaccessible to youth; now they are merely a mouse click away. The average age of first exposure to Internet pornography is 11 years old. And the largest consumer of Internet pornography is the 12-17 age group.{7}

How should we define pornography? What is the effect on individuals and society? And what is a biblical perspective on this? I deal with each of these questions in detail in my book, *Christians Ethics in Plain Language*.{8} In the next section, we address some of these questions.

Definition and Types of Pornography

How should we define pornography? Pornography has been defined as material that "is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal." Hard-core pornography "is sexually explicit in the extreme, and devoid of any other apparent content or purpose."{9}

Another important term is obscenity. In the 1973 Supreme Court case of *Miller v. California*, the justices set forth a three-part test to define obscenity:{10}

> (a) The average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest.
>
> (b) The work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and
>
> (c) The work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary,

artistic, political, or scientific value.

What are the types of pornography? The first type of pornography is adult magazines, which are primarily directed toward adult male readers. The magazines with the widest distribution (*Playboy* and *Penthouse*) do not violate the *Miller* standards of obscenity and thus can be legally distributed.

The second type of pornography is video. Videocassettes or DVDs are rented or sold in most adult bookstores and the Internet. They have become a growth industry for pornography.

The third type of pornography is motion pictures. Ratings standards are being relaxed, and many pornographic movies are being shown and distributed carrying R and NC-17 ratings. Many of these so-called "hard R" rated films would have been considered obscene just a few decades ago.

A fourth type of pornography is television. As in motion pictures, standards for commercial television have been continuously lowered. But cable television poses an even greater threat. The Federal Communications Commission does not regulate cable in the same way it does public access stations. Thus, many pornographic movies are shown on cable television.

A fifth type of pornography is audio porn, which includes "Dial-a-porn" telephone calls, the second fastest growth market of pornography. Although most of the messages are within the *Miller* definition of obscenity, these businesses continue to thrive and are often used by children.

A sixth type of pornography is "cyberporn," or Internet pornography. Virtually anyone can download and view hard-core pictures, movies, online chat, and even live sex acts through the Internet.

Addiction to Pornography

Victor Cline, a psychologist, documented how men become

addicted to pornographic materials, then begin to desire more explicit or deviant material, and finally act out what they have seen.{11} He maintained "that memories of experiences that occurred at times of emotional arousal (which could include sexual arousal) are imprinted on the brain by epinephrine, an adrenal gland hormone, and are difficult to erase. This may partly explain pornography's addicting effect."{12}

Other research showed that biochemical and neurological responses in individuals who are aroused release the adrenal hormone epinephrine in the brain, which is why one can remember pornographic images seen years before. In response to pleasure, nerve endings release chemicals that reinforce the body's own desire to repeat the process.{13} Kimberly Young, an authority on Internet addiction, found that 90 percent of those who became addicted to cyberporn became addicted to the two-way communication functions: chat rooms, newsgroups, and e-mail.{14}

Psychologists identified a five-step pattern in pornographic addiction. The first step is *exposure*. Addicts have been exposed to pornography in many ways, ranging from sexual abuse as children to looking at widely available pornographic magazines.

The second step is *addiction*. People who continually expose themselves to pornography "keep coming back for more and more" in order to get new sexual highs. James L. McCough of the University of California at Irvine said that "experiences at times of emotional or sexual arousal get locked in the brain by the chemical epinephrine and become virtually impossible to erase."{15}

A third step is *escalation.* Previous sexual highs become more difficult to attain; therefore users of pornography begin to look for more exotic forms of sexual behavior to bring them stimulation.

A fourth step is *desensitization*. What was initially shocking becomes routine. Shocking and disgusting sexual behavior is no longer avoided but is sought out for more intense stimulation. Concern about pain and degradation get lost in the pursuit of the next sexual experience.

A fifth step is *acting out fantasies*. People do what they have seen and find pleasurable. Not every pornography addict will become a serial murderer or a rapist. But many do look for ways to act out their sexual fantasies

In my book *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I discuss in further detail the issue of pornographic addiction as well as describe the social and psychological effects of pornography.

Social Effects

Defining the social effects of pornography has been difficult because of some of the prevailing theories of its impact. One theory was that pornography actually performs a positive function in society by acting like a "safety valve" for potential sexual offenders.

The most famous proponent of this theory was Berl Kutchinsky, a criminologist at the University of Copenhagen. His famous study on pornography found that when the Danish government lifted restrictions on pornography, the number of sex crimes decreased.{16} Therefore, he concluded that the availability of pornography siphons off dangerous sexual impulses. But when the data for his "safety-valve" theory was further evaluated, many of his research flaws began to show.

For example, Kutchinsky failed to distinguish between different kinds of sex crimes (such as rape and indecent exposure) and instead merely lumped them together, effectively masking an increase in rape statistics. He also failed to consider that increased tolerance for certain crimes (public nudity and sex with a minor) may have contributed to a drop in

the reported crimes.

Proving cause and effect in pornography is virtually impossible because, ethically, researchers cannot do certain kinds of research. As Dolf Zillman said, “Men cannot be placed at risk of developing sexually violent inclinations by extensive exposure to violent or nonviolent pornography, and women cannot be placed at risk of becoming victims of such inclinations.”{17}

Nevertheless, a number of compelling statistics suggest that pornography does have profound social consequences. For example, of the 1,400 child sexual molestation cases in Louisville, Kentucky, between July 1980 and February 1984, adult pornography was connected with each incident and child pornography with the majority of them.{18}

Extensive interviews with sex offenders (rapists, incest offenders, and child molesters) have uncovered a sizable percentage of offenders who use pornography to arouse themselves before and during their assaults.{19} Police officers have seen the impact pornography has had on serial murders. In fact, pornography consumption is one of the most common profile characteristics of serial murders and rapists.{20}

Professor Cass Sunstein, writing in the *Duke Law Journal*, said that some sexual violence against women “would not have occurred but for the massive circulation of pornography.” Citing cross-cultural data, he concluded, “The liberalization of pornography laws in the United States, Britain, Australia, and the Scandinavian countries has been accompanied by a rise in reported rape rates. In countries where pornography laws have not been liberalized, there has been a less steep rise in reported rapes. And in countries where restrictions have been adopted, reported rapes have decreased.”{21}

Biblical Perspective

God created men and women in His image (Gen. 1:27) as sexual beings. But because of sin in the world (Rom. 3:23), sex has been misused and abused (Rom. 1:24-25).

Pornography attacks the dignity of men and women created in the image of God. Pornography also distorts God's gift of sex which should be shared only within the bounds of marriage (1 Cor. 7:2-3). When the Bible refers to human sexual organs, it often employs euphemisms and indirect language. Although there are some exceptions (a woman's breasts and womb are sometimes mentioned), generally Scripture maintains a basic modesty towards a man's or woman's sexual organs.

Moreover, Scripture specifically condemns the practices that result from pornography such as sexual exposure (Gen. 9:21-23), adultery (Lev. 18:20), bestiality (Lev. 18:23), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13), incest (Lev. 18:6-18), and prostitution (Deut. 23:17-18).

A biblical perspective of human sexuality must recognize that sexual intercourse is exclusively reserved for marriage for the following purposes. First, it establishes the one-flesh union (Gen. 2:24-25; Matt. 19:4-6). Second, it provides for sexual intimacy within the marriage bond. The use of the word "know" indicates a profound meaning of sexual intercourse (Gen. 4:1). Third, sexual intercourse is for the mutual pleasure of husband and wife (Prov. 5:18-19). Fourth, sexual intercourse is for procreation (Gen. 1:28).

The Bible also warns against the misuse of sex. Premarital and extramarital sex is condemned (1 Cor. 6:13-18; 1 Thess. 4:3). Even thoughts of sexual immorality (often fed by pornographic material) are condemned (Matt. 5:27-28).

Moreover, Christians must realize that pornography can have significant harmful effects on the user. These include: a

comparison mentality, a performance-based sexuality, a feeling that only forbidden things are sexually satisfying, increased guilt, decreased self concept, and obsessive thinking.

Christians, therefore, must do two things. First, they must work to keep themselves pure by fleeing immorality (1 Cor. 6:18) and thinking on those things which are pure (Phil. 4:8). As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7). Christians must make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). Pornography will fuel the sexual desire in abnormal ways and can eventually lead to even more debase perversion. We, therefore, must "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Second, Christians must work to remove the sexual perversion of pornography from society.

Notes

1. Mark Penn, *Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes* (NY: Twelve, 2007), 276.
2. Ibid., 277.
3. George Barna, *Boiling Point: Monitoring Cultural Shifts in the 21st Century* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 223.
4. Truth in Porn, www.truthinporn.org.
5. The Leadership survey on Pastors and Internet Pornography, 1 January 2001, http://ctlibrary.com/9582.
6. *Today's Christian Woman*, September/October 2003.
7. Truth in Porn.
8. Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), chapter 11.
9. Michael McManus, ed., *Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill, 1986), 8.
10. *Miller v. California*, 413 US 15, 47 (1973).
11. Victor Cline, *Where Do You Draw the Line?* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974).
12. Victor B. Cline, *Pornography's Effects on Adults and Children* (New York: Morality in Media, 1990), 11.
13. J. L. McGaugh, "Preserving the Presence of the Past,"

American Psychologist, February 1983, 161.
14. Kimberley Young, Paper presented to 1997 convention of the American Psychological Association. A full treatment can be found in Kimberley Young, *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction-and a Winning Strategy for Recovery* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1998).
15.Quoted in Kenneth Kantzer, "The Power of Porn," *Christianity Today,* 7 February 1989, 18.
16. Berl Kutchinsky, "The Effect of Easy Availability of Pornography on the Incidence of Sex Crimes: The Danish Experience," *Journal of Social Issues* 29 (1973): 163-81.
17. Dolf Zillman, "Pornography Research and Public Policy," in *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*, ed. Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant (New York: Academic, 1989), 387-88.
18. Testimony by John B. Rabun, deputy director of the National Center for Missing and Exploited children, before the Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice of the Senate Judiciary Committee, 12 September 1984.
19. W. Marshall, "Pornography and Sex Offenders," in *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations.*
20. *The Men Who Murdered*, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, August 1985.
21. Cass R. Sunstein, "Pornography and the First Amendment," *Duke Law Journal,* September 1986, 595.

© 2008 Probe Ministries

Answering the New Atheists –

A Christian Addresses Their Arguments

Kerby Anderson counters the claim by popular new atheists that Christianity (along with other religions) is blind, irrational and without any evidence. Kerby demonstrates that contrary to the atheists' claims God is not an invention of mankind, that faith is not dangerous, and that science and Christianity support one another. From a Christian point of view, the new atheists are bringing out tired old arguments that don't stand up to rational scrutiny.

Is Faith Irrational?

Many of the best selling books over the last few years have been written by the New Atheists. I'd like to consider some of the criticisms brought by these individuals and provide brief answers. You may never meet one of these authors, but you are quite likely to encounter these arguments as you talk with people who are skeptical about Christianity.

For our discussion, we will be using the general outline of the book *Is God Just a Human Invention?* written by Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow.{1} I would encourage you to read the book for a fuller discussion not only of the topics considered here but of many others as well.

You cannot read a book by the New Atheists without encountering their claim that religion is blind, irrational, and without any evidence. Richard Dawkins makes his feelings known by the title of one of his books: *The God Delusion*.

Why does he say that? He says religions are not evidentially based: "In all areas except religion, we believe what we believe as a result of evidence."{2} In other words, religious faith is a blind faith not based upon evidence like other

academic disciplines. So he concludes that religion is a "nonsensical enterprise" that "poisons everything."{3}

Each of the New Atheists makes a similar statement. Dawkins states that faith is a delusion, a "persistent false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence."{4} Daniel Dennett claims Christians are addicted to blind faith.{5} And Sam Harris argues that "Faith is generally nothing more than the permission religious people give one another to believe things without evidence."{6}

Is this true? Do religious people have a blind faith? Certainly some religious people exercise blind faith. But is this true of all religions, including Christianity? Of course not. The enormous number of Christian books on topics ranging from apologetics to theology demonstrate that the Christian faith is based upon evidence.

But we might turn the question around on the New Atheists. You say that religious faith is not based upon evidence. What is your evidence for that broad, sweeping statement? Where is the evidence for your belief that faith is blind?

Orthodox Christianity has always emphasized that faith and reason go together. Biblical faith is based upon historical evidence. It is not belief in spite of the evidence, but it is belief because of the evidence.

The Bible, for example, says that Jesus appeared to the disciples and provided "many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of □□the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

Peter appealed to evidence and to eyewitnesses when he preached about Jesus as "a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22).

The Christian faith is not a blind faith. It is a faith based

upon evidence. In fact, some authors contend that it takes more faith to be an atheist than to believe in God.{7}

Is God a Human Invention?

Human beings are religious. We are not only talking about people in the past who believe in God. Billions of people today believe in God. Why? The New Atheists have a few explanations for why people believe in God even though they say God does not exist.

One explanation that goes all the way back to Sigmund Freud is projection. He wrote that religious beliefs are "illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest, and most urgent wishes of mankind."{8} In other words, we project the existence of God based on a human need. It is wish fulfillment. We wish there would be a God, so we assume that he exists.

As Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow point out in their book, there are five good reasons to reject this idea. One objection is that Freud's argument begs the question. In other words, it assumes that there is no God and then merely tries to find an explanation for why someone would believe in God anyway.

The projection theory can also cut both ways. If you argue that humans created God out of a need for security, then you could also just as easily argue that atheists believe there is no God because they want to be free and unencumbered by a Creator who might make moral demands on them.

Perhaps the reasons humans have a desire for the divine is because that is the only thing that will satisfy their spiritual hunger. C.S. Lewis argued that "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desires: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire, which no experience in this

world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. Probably earthly pleasures were never made to satisfy it, but only arouse it, to suggest the real thing."{9}

Some atheists suggest that perhaps we are genetically wired to believe in God. One example would be the book by Dean Hamer entitled *The God Gene: How Faith is Hardwired into Our Genes*. It is worth noting that even the author thought the title was overstated and at least admitted that there "probably is no single gene."{10} Since the publication of the book, its conclusions have been shown to be exaggerated. Francis Collins served as the director of the Human Genome Project and has plainly stated that there is no gene for spirituality.

Richard Dawkins believes that religious ideas might have survived natural selection as "units of cultural inheritance."{11} He calls these genetic replicators *memes*. Although he has coined the term, he is also quick to acknowledge that we don't know what memes are or where they might reside.

One critic said that "Memetics is no more than a cumbersome terminology for saying what everybody knows and that can be more usefully said in the dull terminology of information transfer."{12} Alister McGrath perceives a flaw: "Since the meme is not warranted scientifically, we are to conclude that there is a meme for belief in memes? The meme concept then dies the slow death of self-referentiality, in that, if taken seriously, the idea explains itself as much as anything else."{13}

There is another explanation that we can find in the Bible. Why do most people believe in a God? The writer of Ecclesiastes (3:11) observes that it is God who has "set eternity in the hearts of men."

Is Religion Dangerous?

The New Atheists contend that religion is not just false; it's also dangerous. Sam Harris believes it should be treated like slavery and eradicated.{14} Christopher Hitchens wants to rally his fellow atheists against religion: "It has become necessary to know the enemy, and to prepare to fight it."{15} Richard Dawkins is even more specific: "I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been invented."{16}

Much of the criticism against religion revolves around violence. We do live in a violent world, and religion has often been the reason (or at least the justification) for violent acts. But the New Atheists are kidding themselves if they think that a world without religion would usher in a utopia where there is no longer violence, oppression, or injustice.

Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow point out in their book on the New Atheists that details matter when you are examining religion. Injustices by the Taliban in Afghanistan ought not to be used as part of the cumulative cases against religion in general or Christianity in particular. The fact that there are Muslim terrorists in the world today does not mean that all Muslims are dangerous. And it certainly doesn't mean that Christianity is dangerous.

Alister McGrath reminds us that "all ideals—divine, transcendent, human or invented—are capable of being abused. That's just the way human nature is. And that happens to religion as well. Belief in God can be abused, and we need to be very clear, in the first place, that abuse happens, and in the second, that we need to confront and oppose this. But abuse of an ideal does not negate its validity."{17}

Religion is not the problem. People are the problem because they are sinful and live in a fallen world. Keith Ward puts

this in perspective:

> *No one would deny that there have been religious wars in human history. Catholics have fought Protestants, Sunni Muslims have fought Shi'a Muslims, and Hindus have fought Muslims. However, no one who has studied history could deny that most wars in human history have not been religious. And in the case of those that have been religious, the religious component has usually been associated with some non-religious, social, ethnic, or political component that has exerted a powerful influence on the conflicts.{18}*

The New Atheists, however, still want to contend that religion is dangerous while refusing to accept that atheism has been a major reason for death and destruction. If you were to merely look at body count, the three atheistic regimes of the twentieth century (Hitler in Nazi Germany, Stalin in Russia, and Mao in China) are responsible for more than 100 million deaths.

Dinesh D'Souza explains that "Religion-inspired killing simply cannot compete with the murders perpetrated by atheist regimes." Even when you take into account the differences in the world's population, he concludes that "death caused by Christian rulers over a five-hundred-year period amounts to only 1 percent of the deaths caused by Stalin, Hitler, and Mao in the space of a few decades."{19}

Religion is not the problem; people are the problem. And removing religion and God from a society doesn't make it less dangerous. The greatest death toll in history took place in the last century in atheistic societies.

Is the Universe Just Right for Life?

The New Atheists argue that even though the universe looks like it was designed, the laws of science can explain

everything in the universe without God. Richard Dawkins, for example, says that "A universe with a creative superintendent would be a very different kind of universe from one without."{20}

Scientists have been struck by how the laws that govern the universe are delicately balanced. One scientist used the analogy of a room full of dials (each representing a different physical constant). All of the dials are set perfectly. Move any dial to the left or to the right and you no longer have the universe. Some scientists have even called the universe a "Goldilocks universe" because all of the physical constants are "just right."

British astronomer Fred Hoyle remarked, "A commonsense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature."{21}

McDowell and Morrow provide a number of examples of the fine tuning of the universe. First is the expansion rate of the universe. "If the balance between gravity and the expansion rate were altered by one part in one million, billion, billion, billion, billion, billion, there would be no galaxies, stars, planets, or life."{22} Second is the fine tuning of ratio of the electromagnetic force to the gravitational force. That must be balanced to one part in 10 to the 40^{th} power. That is 1 with 40 zeroes following it.

Scientists also realize that planet Earth has extremely rare conditions that allow it to support life at a time when most of the universe is uninhabitable. Consider just these six conditions: (1) Life must be in the right type of galaxy, (2) life must be in the right location in the galaxy, (3) life must have the right type of star, (4) life must have the right relationship to the host star, (5) life needs surrounding planets for protection, and (6) life requires the right type

of moon.{23}

Scientists (including the New Atheists) are aware of the many fine tuned aspects of the universe. They respond by pointing out that since we could only exist in a fine-tuned universe, we shouldn't be surprised that it is fine tuned. But merely claiming that we could not observe ourselves except in such a universe doesn't really answer the question why we are in one in the first place.

Richard Dawkins admits that there is presently no naturalistic explanation for the find-tuning of the universe.<a href="#text24>{24} But he is quick to add that doesn't argue for the existence of God. And that is certainly true. We know about God and His character from revelation, not from scientific observation and experimentation. But we do see the evidence that the design of the universe implies a Designer.

Are Science and Christianity in Conflict?

The New Atheists believe that science and Christianity are in conflict with one another. They trust science and the scientific method, and therefore reject religion in general and Christianity in particular.

Sam Harris says, "The conflict between religion and science is unavoidable. The success of science often comes at the expense of religious dogma; the maintenance of religious dogma always comes at the expense of science."{25}

Richard Dawkins believes religion is anti-intellectual. He says: "I am hostile to fundamentalist religion because it actively debauches the scientific enterprise . . . . It subverts science and saps the intellect."{26}

Are science and Christianity at odds with one another? Certainly there have been times in the past when that has been the case. But to only focus on those conflicts is to miss the

larger point that modern science grew out of a Christian world view. In a previous radio program based upon the book *Origin Science* by Dr. Norman Geisler and me, I explain Christianity's contribution to the rise of modern science.{27}

Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow also point out in their book that most scientific pioneers were theists. This includes such notable as Nicolas Copernicus, Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal, Johannes Kepler, Louis Pasteur, Francis Bacon, and Max Planck. Many of these men actually pursued science because of their belief in the Christian God.

Alister McGrath challenges this idea that science and religion are in conflict with one another. He says, "Once upon a time, back in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was certainly possible to believe that science and religion were permanently at war. . . . This is now seen as a hopelessly outmoded historical stereotype that scholarship has totally discredited."{28}

The New Atheists believe they have an answer to this argument. Christopher Hitchens discounts the religious convictions of their scientific pioneers. He argues that belief in God was the only option for a scientist at the time.{29} But if religious believers get no credit for the positive contributions to science (e.g., developing modern science) because "everyone was religious," then why should their negative actions (e.g., atrocities done in the name of religion) discredit them? It is a double standard. The argument actually ignores how a biblical worldview shaped the scientific enterprise.{30}

The arguments of the New Atheists may sound convincing, but once you strip away the hyperbole and false charges, there isn't much left.

If you would like to know how to answer the arguments of the New Atheists, I suggest you visit the Probe Web page at

www.probe.org and also consider getting a copy of the book by Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow. You will be able to answer the objections of atheists and be better equipped to defend your faith.

Notes

Is God Just a Human Invention? (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010).
2. Richard Dawkins, "The Faith Trap," 20 March 2010, bit.ly/fFvLlJ.
3. Ibid.
4. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 28.
5. Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penquin, 2006), 230-231.
6. Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 110.
7. Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).
8. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of Illusion* (New York: Norton, 1989), 38.
9. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 119-122).
10. Quote of Dean Hamer in Barbara Bradley Hagerty, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 263.
11. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 316.
12. Victor Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2007), 257.
13. David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretension* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 26-27.
14. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 87.
15. Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), 283.
16. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 36.
17. Alister McGrath, "Challenges from Atheism," in *Beyond*

Opinion, ed. Ravi Zacharias (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 31.
18. Keith Ward, *Is Religion Dangerous?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 73.
19. Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great About Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2007), 215.
20. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 78.
21. Quoted in Paul Davies, *The Accidental Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 118.
22. Mark Whorton and Hill Roberts, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding Creation* ((Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008), 308.
23. Sean McDowell, "Is There Any Evidence for God? Physics and Astronomy," *The Apologetics Study Bible for Students*, gen. ed. Sean McDowell (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010).
24. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 188.
25. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 63.
26. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 321.
27. "Origin Science," www.probe.org/origin-science/.
28. Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 46.
29. "The Jewish God, the Christian God, or No God?" Debate between Christopher Hitchens, Dennis Prager, and Dinesh D'Souza, 1 May 2008.
30. Nancy Pearcey and Charles Thaxton, *The Soul of Science* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994).

© 2011 Probe Ministries

A Probe Mom Looks at

Halloween from a Christian Perspective

Sue Bohlin takes at hard look at Halloween celebrations, applying a biblical worldview. As Christians, we cannot shield our children from this popular cultural event, but Sue provides some ideas on bringing a Christian perspective to this time of year.

A number of articles are available advising Christians to have nothing to do with Halloween. And I do agree that Christians have no business *celebrating* a holiday that glorifies something that delights the enemy of our souls. And potentially opens us up to demonic harrassment, to boot!

But if we've got kids, especially kids in public school or who hang around other kids in the neighborhood, it's entirely possible that parents can feel pressured to do *something* about Halloween. After all, it's pretty hard to hide under a rock for the whole month of October. A number of houses on our street are more decorated for Halloween than for Christmas!

It seems that the costume manufacturers have really cranked up production of all sorts of costumes to a degree we've never seen before. Gone are the days of burning a cork to blacken a face, put on some thrift-shop oversized clothes and dressing up as a hobo. (There's probably some politically-correct term for "hobo" these days anyway. . .)

Is there anything intrinsically wrong with dressing up in a costume and getting a bunch of candy from consenting adults? I don't think so; hey, the Bible tells us that God instructed the children of Israel to ask their neighbors for silver and gold their last night in Egypt in a VERY early version of "Trick or Treat" (Exodus 11:2). But we can cooperate with the forces of darkness, however unwittingly, by participating

unwisely in Halloween festivities.

It is essential to exercise discernment in how we handle Halloween. If you can get away with ignoring it, wonderful! That would be the best solution. But you may find yourself in a place where you want to provide some way for your kids to have fun in a Halloween-immersed culture without compromising on our Christian values and beliefs. For instance, your child's school may invite all the students to dress up in a costume on October 31. I know a number of Christian schools that do this. May I make these suggestions:

Halloween Don'ts

God gave us some very strict guidelines for our own protection, commanding us to stay away from items and practices of witchcraft and divination in Deuteronomy 18. These "doorways to the occult" make us wide open to the influence of Satan and the demons. For more information on this, click here.

So stay away from anything that glorifies:

• **The occult**. Witches, warlocks, sorcerers and sorcery, casting spells, mediums, magic, ouija boards, crystal balls, tarot cards, and astrology are doors to the kingdom of darkness. Satan/Beelzebub masks and costumes have no place on a Christian or in a Christian family—not even "adorable"(??) little baby devil costumes complete with horns and pitchfork.

• **Darkness**. Satan and the demons are the rulers of darkness (Eph. 6:12). There's a reason so many people are afraid of the dark; it is a fearful thing both physically and spiritually.

• **Death**. Satan has had the power of death over people (Heb. 2:14) ever since the Fall, and he uses it to control people through fear. Death is an enemy of God (1 Cor. 15:26), not something to flirt with. Vampires, ghosts, goblins and gargoyles (concepts rooted in the reality of demons) are all

figures of death.

• **Fear**. Fear is both a feeling and a reality where Satan dwells. It is one of his most effective means of spiritual warfare against us. When we use Halloween events, decorations and costumes to cause and build fear in other people, we are cooperating with the sworn enemy of God and of God's people. This would include anything spooky, such as cemeteries, haunted houses, and scary stories. You can now buy "The Scream" masks that are as disturbing as Edvard Munch's original painting; their purpose is to make people afraid, even if they don't know why.

Anything gruesome falls in this category as well; you can buy special effects like fake slash wounds, hanging eyeballs, and stakes through the forehead. Blood and gore are neither funny nor godly. Needless to say, slasher movies and horror films that deliberately terrorize and stir up fear are a tool in Satan's hand. Scripture tells us that God does not give us a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7), nor does He want us to be a slave again to fear (Rom. 8:15). That's Satan's arena.

Note: there are a number of churches that use the legitimate fear of an eternity in hell, separated from God, as a platform for drawing people into a creative presentation of the gospel. Many young people have been saved as a result. This is a God-honoring use of fear, not glorifying fear for fear's sake.

• **Worldliness**. Costumes that glorify some of the world's heroes and heroines can shape our values in ungodly, unchristian ways. Little girls dressing like female pop stars, exposing their midriffs and looking as sexy as possible, is completely against biblical values. God calls girls and women to dress and act modestly, decently and with propriety (1 Tim. 2:9). Costumes of movie and TV characters that represent anti-biblical values are inappropriate for believers (and believers' children).

Halloween Do's

• If your church sponsors a Halloween alternative event such as a fall festival, that's a great idea to allow kids to have fun within pre-set boundaries. (Note: it's important to specify what kind of costumes are NOT welcome!)

• **Child Evangelism Fellowship** (www.cefonline.com) has reported that Halloween has been the best time of year for children to trust Christ, simply because the spirit of fear that pervades our culture at this time makes them more open than usual to hearing a good news of the gospel. Halloween is a great time to sponsor Good News Clubs and invite kids in your neighborhood to hear stories that will comfort, rather than terrorize, them.

• **American Tract Society** (www.crossway.org/group/ats) has some terrific kid-friendly tracts to include with the candy you give out. This year, ATS has introduced the most practical Halloween evangelism resource yet! The Halloween Rescue Kit includes candy, bags, stickers and tracts – everything you need to reach 31 kids this Halloween. They suggest (and I think it's a great idea!) that if you expect kids to actually read the tracts once they get home from Trick-or-Treating (instead of tossing them out unread with the empty candy wrappers), that you tape them to popular candy bars that kids actually want. (Find out what kids in your area consider "cool" candy.) Or make your own tract kit by putting a tract plus quality candy inside sandwich bags. Either way, it forces kids to handle the tract in order to get to the candy. Sounds like following the Lord Jesus' command to be "shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16) to me!

I know several families who have purchased tracts for the neighborhood ADULTS, and when their kids go trick-or-treating, when the adults give them candy the kids will hand them a tract (aimed at adults) and say, "Thank you for the candy. Here's a treat for you!" How often do people open their doors

and make themselves open to this kind of opportunity?

• **Let the Little Children Come** (www.letthelittlechildrencome.com) has a wonderful "Is anything better than candy?" Box-tract. Give out more than just candy this Halloween! This attractive pumpkin shaped Box-Tract is designed to contain children's favorite candies. More importantly, the pumpkin opens up to answer the question, "Is There Anything Better Than Candy?" Yes, there is something much, much better than candy. It's being God's friend!

• Look for teachable moments to relate the things of Halloween to spiritual truth. Talk to your kids about the way fear is glorified at Halloween, and teach them what Jesus said about it: "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27), and "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Talk to your kids about "God's no-no list" in Deuteronomy 18 and have them help you identify those things when they see them advertised or used as decorations. (You might keep a running total of all the witches you'll see just to quantify this concept.) This is probably the best way to prevent your children from getting desensitized to things of the occult. Help them identify all the Halloween items that strike fear in them, and encourage them to take a stand against their power by saying out loud, "God has not given me a spirit of fear!" Show them this verse in their Bibles (2 Timothy 1:7) so they know they are using the sword of the Spirit against one of the wiles of the enemy.

This story making its rounds on the internet is a good pumpkin-carving object lesson:

A lady had recently been baptized. One of her co-workers

> asked her what it was like to be a Christian. She was caught off guard and didn't know how to answer, but when she looked up she saw a jack-o-lantern on the desk and answered, "It's like being a pumpkin."
>
> The co-worker asked her to explain that one.
>
> "Well, God picks you from the patch and brings you in and washes off all the dirt on the outside that you got from being around all the other pumpkins. Then he cuts off the top and takes all the yucky stuff out from inside. He removes all those seeds of doubt, hate, greed, etc. Then he carves you a new smiling face and puts his light inside of you to shine for all to see. It is our choice to either stay outside and rot on the vine or come inside and be something new and bright."

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries Mom

© 2002, updated Sept. 2013

Adultery

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

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Adultery and Society

The seventh commandment says "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Nevertheless, this sin has been committed throughout history.

Today, though, adultery seems more rampant than ever. While tabloid stories report the affairs of politicians, millionaires, and movie stars, films like “The English Patient,” “The Prince of Tides,” or “The Bridges of Madison County” feature and even promote adultery.

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

Whatever the actual numbers, the point to be made is that adultery is much more common than we would like to admit. Family therapist and psychiatrist Frank Pittman believes “There may be as many acts of infidelity in our society as there are traffic accidents.”{3} He further argues that the fact that adultery has become commonplace has altered society’s perception of it. He says, “We won’t go back to the times when adulterers were put in the stocks and publicly humiliated, or become one of those societies and there are many in which adultery is punishable by death. Society in any case is unable to enforce a rule that the majority of people break, and infidelity is so common it is no longer deviant.”{4}

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

relationships with women other than their wives.{5}

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

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

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

Myths About Adultery

Marital infidelity destroys marriages and families and often leads to divorce. Public sentiment against adultery is actually very strong as approximately eight out of ten of Americans disapprove of adultery.{7}

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

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

partner is at least as attractive as the adulterous partner.

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

Frank Pittman, author of the book *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy*, found in his own personal study that many of his patients who had affairs had a good sex life, but came from marriages with little or no intimacy. He concluded that, "Affairs were thus three times more likely to be the pursuit of a buddy than the pursuit of a better orgasm."{8}

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

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

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

Myth #3: "Adultery is therapeutic." Some of the psychology books and women's magazines circulating through our culture promote extra-marital affairs as positive. This myth that an affair can revive a dull marriage is a devastating lie. Depending on which source you are reading, an affair will: make you a better lover, help you with your mid-life crisis, bring joy into your life, or even bring excitement back into your marriage. Nothing could be further from the truth. An affair might give you more sex, but it could also give you a sexually transmitted disease. It might bring your marriage more excitement, if you consider divorce court exciting. Remember that adultery results in divorce 65 percent of the time. "For most people and most marriages, infidelity is dangerous."{10}

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

Notice the euphemisms society has developed over the years to excuse or soften the perception of adultery. Many are not

repeatable, but ones that are include: *fooling around, sleeping around, flings, affairs*, and *dalliances*. These and many other phrases perpetuate the notion the adultery is guilt-free and hurts no one. Some have even suggested that it's just a recreational activity like playing softball or going to the movies. Well, don't pass the popcorn, please.

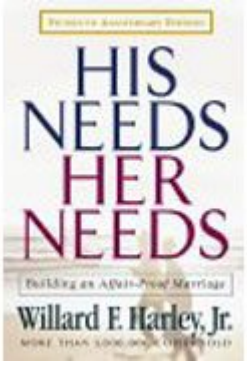
Forbidden sex is an addiction that can—and usually does—have devastating consequences to an individual and a family. Adultery shatters trust, intimacy, and self-esteem. It breaks up families, ruins careers, and leaves a trail of pain and destruction in its path. This potential legacy of emotional pain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

Even when affairs are never exposed, emotional costs are involved. For example,adulterous mates deprive their spouses of energy and intimacy that should go into the marriage. They deceive their marriage partners and become dishonest about their feelings and actions. As Frank Pittman says, "The infidelity is not in the sex, necessarily, but in the secrecy. It isn't whom you lie with. It's whom you lie to."{11} 1

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

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

Preventing Adultery: Her Needs



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

First, let's look at the five needs of a wife. The first need is for *affection*. To most women affection symbolizes security, protection, comfort, and approval. When a husband shows his wife affection, he sends the following messages: (1) I'll take care of you and protect you; (2) I'm concerned about the problems you face, and I am with you; (3) I think you've done a good job, and I'm so proud of you.

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

The second need is *conversation*. Wives need their husbands to talk to them and to listen to them; they need lots of two-way

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

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

Financial commitment is a fourth need a wife experiences. She needs enough money to live comfortably: she needs financial support. No matter how successful a career a woman might have, she usually wants her husband to earn enough money to allow her to feel supported and to feel cared for.

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

Preventing Adultery: His Needs

Now, let's look at the five needs husbands have. The first is *sexual fulfillment*. The typical wife doesn't understand her

husband’s deep need for sex anymore than the typical husband understands his wife’s deep need for affection. But these two ingredients can work very closely together in a happy, fulfilled marriage. Sex can come naturally and often, if there is enough affection.

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

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

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

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

The fantasy continues as his wife urges him to sit down and relax before taking part in a tasty dinner. Later the family goes out for an evening stroll, and he returns to put the

children to bed with no hassle or fuss. Then he and his wife relax, talk together, and perhaps watch a little television until they retire at a reasonable hour to love each other. Wives may chuckle at this scenario, but this vision is quite common in the fantasy lives of many men. The male need for his wife to "take care of things"—especially him—is widespread, persistent, and deep.

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

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

Notes

1. Samuel Janus and Cynthia Janus, *The Janus Report on Sexual Behavior* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1993), 169.
2. Joannie Schrof, "Adultery in America," *U.S. News and World Report*, 31 Aug. 1998, 31.
3. Frank Pittman, *Private Lies: Infidelity and the Betrayal of Intimacy* (New York: Norton, 1989), 117.
4. Ibid., 13.
5. Kenneth Woodward, "Sex, Morality and the Protestant Minister,"
Newsweek (28 July 1997), 62.
6. "How Common Is Pastoral Indiscretion?" *Leadership* (Winter 1988), 12.
7. In this poll Americans were asked: "What is your opinion about a married person having sexual relations with

someone
other than his or her spouse? Their answers: 79% answered "always
wrong" and another 11% answered "almost always wrong." Cited in
"Attitudes on Adultery," USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll, 1997.
8. Pittman, 122.
9. Bonnie Eaker Weil, *Adultery: The Forgivable Sin* (Norwalk, Conn.: Hastings House, 1994), 9.
10. Pittman, 37.
11. Ibid., 53.

© 2001 Probe Ministries

Can Homosexuals Change? – A Christian View of Homosexuality

Sue Bohlin looks at the real evidence showing people who have changed from homosexuality. From a Christian perspective, Sue presents some proven paths to recovery from homosexual thoughts and practice. When we let Christ begin to heal our underlying hurts and feelings of inadequacy, it is truly possible to experience a fundamental change.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Is It Possible for Homosexuals to Change?

Mike{1} was marching in a Gay Pride parade when God got a hold of him. He had been high for four days and his "buzz" suddenly evaporated as he heard a voice in his head say, "You don't

have to live like this.” He knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was God offering him a way out. He put down his Gay Pride sign, left the parade, sat down in a nearby stairwell, and repented of his rebellion. He gave his heart to Jesus Christ and starting walking out of homosexuality that day. Today, several years later, he is married with a child, and living a very different kind of life. Not just on the outside; his heart was changed from the inside out.

Paul was on a self-destructive path of drug and alcohol abuse and homosexual activity. When he told his mother he was gay, she threw him out of the house, and the only place he could find belonging, safety, and identity was the gay community. As he spent more and more time “escaping” the pain in his life through sex and alcohol, he began to realize how bad his life was. He wanted to die but God had something else in mind.

Paul was invited to a Bible study where he met a man who had left the gay lifestyle and was living a changed life. For the first time he honestly called out and said, “God, please help me.”

One of his friends became a Christian. He asked her about homosexuality and was angered by her initial response. She said, “I now believe it is a sin—but God wouldn’t call it a sin if there weren’t something better.” Paul eventually realized that he was a sinner who needed God’s love and grace, and in 1992 he trusted Christ as his Savior. Two months later, he was led to an organization that helps people deal with unwanted homosexuality through an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. He left his homosexual identity behind and embraced his true identity as a child of God, committed to holiness and purity. Paul is now director of that ministry and is helping others walk out of homosexuality. He’s not perfect, he’s still growing . . . just like me and every other Christian I know. But the “something better” God had in mind for him is an intimacy with Christ that is breathtaking.

Randy brings glory to God every day of his life by living out the abiding truth that change is possible.

Stories of Women

Carol grew up in a religious home with parents whose standards were too strict to allow her to please them. But she was smart, and a good student, and her teachers gave her the affirmation and encouragement her heart longed for. She developed very strong bonds with her teachers, some of which became profound emotional dependencies.

In graduate school, she was hit by the unexpected pain of loneliness and emptiness. Carol got into an intense relationship with a married woman, facing completely new temptations. She was totally unprepared to resist the strength of same-gender attraction, and quickly found herself emotionally and physically involved in a relationship she couldn’t believe was happening. Now she was not only emotionally needy, she was shackled by deep shame, woundedness, and guilt.

A friend told her about a ministry to those dealing with same-sex attraction, and it was like finding a door to another world. Through the support she found there, Carol was challenged to identify the lies of Satan which she had believed her whole life and replace them with the truth of Scripture. God is renewing her mind, meeting her deep heart-needs, and bringing her to a place of freedom and hope.

Diane’s story is different. She spent eighteen years in a committed lesbian relationship with another woman she believed to be her soul-mate. They went through a commitment ceremony in a gay church, and raised a daughter together. She enjoyed a position of leadership as a bright and articulate spokesperson for a gay church.

Through all those years, Diane’s mother was steadfast in three

things. She loved Diane unconditionally. She never backed down about her belief that her daughter's lifestyle was sinful because God says it's wrong. And third, she prayed faithfully for her daughter.

Diane and her partner sought the Lord about everything except their sexuality. At one point, they were praying together for wisdom and truth about a situation that had nothing to do with their relationship. God answered their prayer in an unexpected way; He showed them the truth about the sinful nature of their relationship. It was a terribly painful and unwelcome discovery to learn that they had been deceived. Together, they decided out of obedience to God to separate and break off their relationship. It's still painful, even as Diane experiences God's healing touch in the deepest parts of her wounded soul. He's changing Diane and Carol from the inside out.

Three Claims for Change

Some people deal with same-sex attraction by pretending it's not there. Denial is unfortunately the time-honored "Christian" response. But this is not the way God wants us to deal with problems; Psalm 51:6 says, "Surely you desire truth in my inmost parts." Acknowledging one has a homosexual orientation is like seeing the red light on your car's dashboard; it means something is wrong somewhere. A homosexual orientation isn't the actual problem; it's the symptom of a deeper issue—legitimate, God-given needs for relationship and intimacy that have been channeled in unhealthy and sinful directions.

But it is not a simple matter, and it would be disrespectful to imply that there is an easy solution to the complex issue of homosexuality. Among those who claim that change is possible, there are three main schools of thought on how to get there.

The first is the deliverance ministries. They say that homosexuality is caused by a demon, and if we can just cast out the demon, the problem is gone. Sounds like an easy fix, but it ends up causing even more problems because homosexuality isn't caused by a demon. The person who was "delivered" may experience a temporary emotional high, but the same temptations and thought patterns that plagued him before are going to return because the root issue wasn't dealt with. Only now, he's burdened by the false guilt of thinking he did something wrong or that he's not good enough for God to "fix" him.

A second and more effective treatment for homosexuality is reparative therapy. There is a lot of wisdom to be found here because many therapists believe that homosexuality has its roots in hurtful relationship patterns, especially with family members, and many homosexual men and women report exactly that. But reparative therapy is often just behavior modification, and it deals only with the flesh, that part of us independent of God. Reparative therapy can make people feel better, but it can't bring true inner healing.

The third, and I believe best, way to bring about real and lasting change is a redemptive approach. Ministries that disciple men and women in intimate relationship with Jesus Christ are able to lead them into inner healing because God transforms His people. It's excruciatingly difficult to leave homosexuality without support. Fortunately, even for people who do not live in an area where there is a ministry tailored for those dealing with unwanted homosexuality, there are online support forums that can be almost as powerful as face-to-face groups. I especially recommend Living Hope Ministries' online support groups at www.livehope.org. There are also some wonderful books available, particularly *Coming Out of Homosexuality* by Bob Davies, and *Someone I Love is Gay* by Anita Worthen and Bob Davies. Another excellent book is *You Don't Have to Be Gay* by Jeff Konrad for men and *Restoring*

Sexual Identity by Anne Paulk for women. My all-time favorite author on this topic is Joe Dallas; anything he writes is exceptionally good. But discipleship is hard work, and there is no simple and easy fix.

The Path to True Change

The most effective route to real, lasting change for those caught in same-gender attraction is a redemptive approach. This means discipleship, being taught and encouraged and held accountable to develop intimacy with Christ. Interestingly, it doesn't seem to matter what the particular stronghold is in a person's life—whether it be homosexuality, gluttony, drug dependency, compulsive gambling or shopping, alcoholism, sexual addiction, or any other stronghold—the most effective solution is the same: intimacy with Christ.

True discipleship is hard work. And God even gives us the energy for discipleship! But it takes tremendous self-discipline to choose to operate in the Spirit instead of in our own flesh, to depend on God's strength instead of our own. The real battle is in the mind.

The steps to overcoming homosexuality also apply to overcoming any stronghold.

First, the person has to stop the sinful behavior. It's best to ask for God's help. This is no different from the requirement for any drug or alcohol abuse treatment. You can't work on a problem when you're still totally controlled by it.

The second step is to work on learning what the Bible says about who you are in Christ. Just as people learning to identify counterfeit money examine real currency so they can spot the fakes, the struggler needs to fill their mind with God's Word so they can enter into their true identity as a beloved, valuable child of God.

The third step is working on the thought life, since this is

where the battle is. It’s important to identify Satan’s lies playing as tapes in one’s head, and stop the tape player! Then, deliberately replace the lies with the truth. Instead of “I’m never going to change,” repeat the truthful promise that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). Instead of obsessing over the aching and longing for the unhealthy and sinful behavior or relationship, fill your mind with praise and worship and Scripture.

Next, face the fact that it feels lousy! When we stop trying to meet our needs in our own ways, we start experiencing the emotional pain that our strongholds had covered up. When it feels really really bad, we are at that very point where God can make the biggest difference. Ask, *What is my true need?* What is it my heart is truly longing for? Go to Jesus and let Him meet your deepest heart-needs. Let Him direct you to get your divinely-designed needs for relationship with other people met in godly ways.

This is where powerful healing happens.

Ex-Ex-gays

For the last several years, people who had left homosexuality have slowly but surely gained a hearing in telling their stories. Word is getting out: change is possible!

And there are also the voices of the frustrated and disillusioned souls who tried to leave homosexuality, who tried to change, and gave up. There’s even a name for it: “Ex ex-gays.” Their stories are full of tremendous pain, and some have even lost their faith over it. What happened?

Well, I think the same thing that happened to people who tried AA but couldn’t stop drinking, or those who tried Weigh Down Workshop but couldn’t lose weight. I have a friend who was in Weigh Down Workshop, and it didn’t do a thing for her. The problem is, she never made the commitment to “die to self,” to

use an old spiritual term{2}. She never got to the point of saying, “Jesus, I choose You over food. I choose a holy relationship with You over an unhealthy relationship with my appetite. And I will do whatever it takes to allow You to change my heart.”

Many people who tried to change their homosexuality could win contests for praying and reading their Bibles. They really did try very very hard. But the prayers are often misdirected: “God, change me. Take away my desires. Let me start liking people of the opposite sex.” Unfortunately, as well-intentioned as this prayer is, it’s a lot like trying to get rid of dandelions in your back yard by mowing them. They keep coming back because you’re not dealing with their roots. The basic cause of a homosexual orientation isn’t genetics or choice; it’s a wrong response to being hurt. It’s about protecting oneself and trying to get legitimate needs met in ways God never intended. True change can only happen with the hard work of submitting to God, allowing Him to expose the deep hurts and needs of one’s heart, which means facing horrible pain, and inviting Him to bring healing to those wounded places. That’s why intimacy with Christ is the answer. A wise friend observed that homosexuality is the fruit of sinful ways of dealing with pain—sinful because they cut us off from the One who can heal and meet our needs, sinful because they place us at the center of our universe and we don’t belong there. Jesus does.

I hope you can see that real change is hard and it costs a great deal because it requires strong motivation, hard work, and perseverance. But hundreds of former homosexuals have found a large degree of change, attaining abstinence from homosexual behaviors, lessening of homosexual temptations, strengthening their sense of masculine or feminine identity, and correcting distorted styles of relating with members of the same and opposite gender. Some former homosexuals marry and some don’t, but marriage is not the measuring stick;

spiritual growth and obedience are.

The bottom line is, change is possible.

Notes

1. All names in this article are changed.

2. This term is not actually biblical, but the concept is. See Romans 6.

©2001 Probe Ministries

See Also: See also "Probe Answers Our E-Mail: Homosexuality"