

Welcome to the Machine: The Transhumanist God

Authorized Dreams Only Please!

Have you ever wondered if scientists could build a giant machine to solve all the world's problems? Or better yet, why not just become machines and get rid of people all together? Imagine it: no more worries, sickness, war, drug addiction, or poverty. We can solve the world's problems by simply getting rid of people. This sounds fantastic but is actually the goal of the new religion of Transhumanism, which wants to replace the human race with machines.

☒ The wisest man once said there is nothing new under the sun (Ecc. 1:9). Despite all our modern innovation and progress, the age-old desire of mankind to become God remains the same. This new religion is steadily gaining ground, perfectly fit for our hyper technological twenty-first century. Transhumanism's beliefs are simple, but their implications will be revolutionary. They want to transcend our mortal bodies and create a super intelligent godlike human and machine hybrid, called a cyborg, or something like the Borg from *Star Trek*. This super machine will solve all our material and spiritual problems by curing disease, extending life expectancy indefinitely, and providing for a meaningful existence through creating a continual sense of euphoria in the brain. There will be no limits to what this super man/machine will be able to do. *All we need to do* is surrender our wills to achieve universal peace and happiness.[\[1\]](#)

Pink Floyd used to sing, "Welcome to the machine. What did you dream? It's alright we told you what to dream."[\[2\]](#) In the brave new world ruled by the cyborg, dreams will all be programmed and peaceful so as not to upset the inhabitants of

utopia. With this hybrid technology, someone will make our decisions for us.

All technology expresses its creator's values and represents a certain view of the world, and how things should be. It is anything but value-free. The question for us is, who will decide what the future will be like in a technologically determined age?

You are What You Worship

Technology shapes the human conception of itself and its relation to the world, including our view of God. In a mechanical age, it is not surprising that people conceive of themselves and others as machines.^{3} Human relationships are reduced to efficiency and usefulness or to convenient arrangements. For example, marriage is already largely viewed as an economic contract between two people who may not have anything else in common, rather than as a sacrificial commitment.

Transhumanist philosophy takes the modern mechanistic view to its ultimate level of altering humanity to become a machine. The idea that we become the thing we worship finds greatest expression in the twenty-first century. Those who worship idols become like them (Ps. 115). Those who worship money become greedy. Those who worship drugs become addicted, and those who worship the machine will become a machine. In the past, philosophers and poets often used the machine as a metaphor of dehumanization and alienation from modern life; modern society was thought to function like a machine.^{4} This means in a machine culture, people feel like numbers or spare parts and therefore entirely expendable. Individual meaninglessness in a mechanistic society will be realized in the very near future, so that individuals will be spare parts and completely assimilated. The future super computer will offer humanity everything, except the freedom not to choose

assimilation.

The machine represents the ideal existence, even the ideal being. The idea of “salvation in the machine” derives from modern thought in a deistic and Unitarian God who created a clockwork universe.[\[5\]](#) Transhumanism has simply transposed that deity into the machine itself and removed the Clock Maker. Now it’s the clock they worship.

Transhumanism affirms artificial selection instead of natural selection. They believe that through science and technology, humanity can direct the cause of evolution. Humanity controls its own evolutionary process to reach a perfectible state. Instead of millions of years to evolve a new species, it will be done in decades, maybe even in one generation.

The Singularity Is Near

Transhumanists expect the merger of humanity and machine around 2045 in an event they call the Singularity. This means artificial intelligence (AI) will equal or exceed human intelligence and there will no longer be any discernible difference. Humanity will lose all distinct consciousness and consider itself as one being.[\[6\]](#)

Humanity then must change itself genetically to keep pace with AI. This will create a giant planetary super organism that knows no distinctions. Humanity will merge with the rest of nature through genetic engineering, and nature will become indistinguishable from the machine. We will no longer know the difference between organic and inorganic, or natural and artificial, something already prevalent today in cities, weather patterns, and food production.

A super organism looks something like a beehive, anthill, or termite mound; various individual cells work together as one. So by mid-century Transhumanism envisions total global unity, not at the political level between states, but ontologically

and biologically. We will have evolved into one massive planet—truly Spaceship Earth, completely interrelated and interdependent, like an anthill. This will be the technological version of the kingdom of God or the Transhumanist version of the millennium.

Ray Kurzweil and the Singularitarians believe people will eventually be able to upload their consciousness into a computer and live forever. [Note: for an intriguing Christian perspective on this idea in a compelling novel, Probe recommends [*The Last Christian*](#) by David Gregory.] The religious nature of this movement is obvious in its millennialism or belief in the coming perfect society, and also in its belief in progress and immortality. Critics call the Singularity “the rapture of the nerds,” indicating its close connection with religious belief and millennial expectations. The Singularity represents religious belief for computer geeks. The acceptance of progress and human perfection makes Transhumanism the heir of modernity, with its ideal of technological utopianism and its mechanistic view of the body. It’s modernism with a vengeance.

The Artilect War

The future may not bring the perfection of the Singularity, but the disaster of the Artilect War. An Artilect is an artificial intelligence or super computer. AI researcher Hugo de Garis predicts that the Transhumanist vision will be disastrous and will result in gigadeath (the death of billions of people). He hypothesizes that by the end of the century, Cosmists, or technically modified people, will want to build Artilects to join with humanity, but that Terrans, or unmodified people, will oppose their construction because it has no benefit to them. A nuclear war will ensue, probably initiated by Terrans as their only way to stop Cosmists.[\[7\]](#)

Jacques Ellul once remarked that “the technical society must

perfect the 'man-machine' complex or risk total collapse." {8} There is no other place to go but up. If the current human enhancement project fails it may prove to have devastating effects for the future of the human race, and if it succeeds the human race faces techno-enslavement or pseudo-extinction by being transformed into another species.

Will the Singularity really happen? It is very possible. Or maybe the Artilect War will happen instead. Perhaps technology will bring the apocalypse instead of utopia. It is all science fiction right now, but science fiction is often correct in the broadest terms. Recall Jules Verne's vision of space travel to the moon in the nineteenth century when people thought it was pure fantasy and laughed because there was no way to break earth's gravitational pull. But his work inspired a generation of rocket scientists to find a way to do it, and within a century man was walking on the moon. Something considered impossible was achieved. {9}

A basic principle of futurism states that anything is possible to achieve within twenty years given the resources to do it. And the Bible states that nothing is impossible for humanity in a unified technological society. Gen. 11:6 says "Now nothing that they imagined will be impossible for them." This of course is talking about Babel, but I think it demonstrates the fact that the discussion of a transhuman transformation should be taken as a credible threat and should be addressed by the church.

Ethic of Limits

The essence of Transhumanist philosophy revolves around the idea that there are no natural or divine limits to what technology can accomplish. It serves the basic technological imperative that says what can be done should be done! This view unleashes all restraint and frees us from all limits, and is one of the greatest examples of the church's cultural

captivity since we do not present a different view of technology from the rest of society.

This maxim is obviously dangerous because any limitless action leads to self-destruction as a natural corrective. Humanity cannot presume to be greater than the natural limits arrayed against it, such as death or the scarcity of resources. Humanity must learn to live within boundaries.

Christians are called to respect limits and the right balance in its use of technology, between its misuse and its non-use. In an age of limitless technology the church must present an ethic of limitation. This means finding limits to technology, such as limiting computer use, limiting driving, electricity, or even not upgrading. This may seem small, but in trying to discover a workable ethic of technology, it represents something we can do right now. The widow's mite (Mark 12:41-43) will not solve the church's budget deficit, but should be given anyway because it was something she could do, so an ethic of limitation remains a course of action open.

An ethic of limitation only becomes obvious when the situation appears desperate, such as with nuclear weapons, where not even one mishap can be afforded. Other examples consist of over-eating, drug addiction, over-fishing or hunting, or any activity that exhausts natural resources. Because people did not practice limits to begin with, they are now faced with a real possibility of collapse or catastrophe. We must discover the limits to any technology, if we are to use technology correctly and benefit from it. The history of the Tower of Babel teaches that if mankind does not practice self control, God will impose limits Himself in judgment (Gen 11:1-9).

Notes

1. Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York:Penguin, 1999); Gregory Stock, *Metaman:The Merging of Humans and Machines into a*

Global Superorganism (New York:Simon and Schuster, 1993); Lewis Mumford, *The Transformations of Man* (New York:Collier, 1956); Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, (New York:Vintage, 1964), 428-436. It was techno critics like Ellul and Mumford that saw the techno future more clearly and soberly than the previously noted Transhumanists. Ellul argued that information would eventually pass from the machine straight to the human brain electronically without being processed through consciousness and that breeding will all be done through artificial means, and natural procreation will be forbidden (432, 433). Whatever problems and disturbances the technology of the future will create will be solved through “a world-wide totalitarian dictatorship” (434). This is exactly what Transhumanist philosophy will bring. Mumford argued that modern technical society will eventually produce a machine replacement for man (100, 117-132).

2. Pink Floyd, “Welcome to the Machine” in *Wish You Were Here*, Capitol, 1975.

3. Cecelia Tichi, *Shifting Gears:Technology, Literature, Culture in Modernist America* (Chapel Hill, NC:The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 16; David F. Noble, *The Religion of Technology:The Divinity of Man and the Spirit of Invention* (New York; Knopf, 1997), 143-171.

4. Karl Jaspers, *Man in the Modern Age* (New York:Anchor Books, 1951); Nicols Fox, *Against the Machine:The Hidden Luddite Tradition in Literature, Art and Individual Lives* (Washington DC:Island Press, 2002).

5. Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine:The Pentagon of Power* (New York:Harvest, 1970), 33; Noble, *The Religion of Technology*, 146; Mary Midgley, *Science as Salvation:A Modern Myth and Its Meaning* (New York:Routledge, 1992).

6. Lev Grossman, “2045:The Year Man Becomes Immortal”, *Time* (February 21, 2011), 43-49.

7. Hugo De Garis, *The Artilect War:Cosmists vs. Terrans:A Bitter Controversy Concerning Whether Humanity Should Build Godlike Massively Intelligent Machines* (Palm Springs, CA:Etc Publications, 2005).

8. Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 414.

9. Howard E. McCurdy, *Space and the American Imagination* (Washington DC:Smithsonian Institute Press, 1997), 9-27.

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Critique of “The Shack” – A Christian Theologian’s Perspective

Dr. Zukeran commends the author on attempting to make the gospel accessible. However, from a Christian theologian’s perspective, he also warns us that the book presents confused pictures of the nature of God, the Son, and the way to salvation. The book can act as a great starting point for discussion, but do not rest your theology upon the pages of this fictional book.

The Shack by William Young has become a *New York Times* bestseller. Eugene Peterson, Professor Emeritus of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C. writes, “The book has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* did for his. It’s that good.” Many Christians say that the book has blessed them. However, others have said that this book presents false doctrines that are heretical and dangerous. The diversity of comments and questions about the book created a need to research and present a Biblical critique of this work.

William Young creatively writes a fiction story that seeks to answer the difficult question of why God allows evil. In this story the main character, Mackenzie Allen Philips, a father of

five children, experiences the unthinkably painful tragedy of losing his youngest daughter to a violent murder at the hands of a serial killer. Through his painful ordeal he asks the questions, "How could God allow something like this to happen?" and "Where was God in all this?"

One day he receives an invitation to meet God at the shack where his daughter was molested and killed. There he meets God the Father who appears as a large African-American woman named Papa, God the Son who appears as a Middle Eastern Man in a leather tool belt, and God the Holy Spirit who appears as an Asian woman named Sarayu. In this place over the course of a few days Mack asks each member of the triune God difficult questions about life, eternity, the nature of God, evil, and other significant issues with which every person struggles in their lifetime. Through several dialogues with each member of this "Trinity," Mack receives answers, and through these answers we learn about the nature of God and the problem of suffering and evil.

COMMENDABLE FEATURES

The Shack creatively addresses a relevant and difficult issue of God and the problem of evil. Young answers the problem of God and evil with the free will argument, which states that God created people with the free will to commit evil. Young also emphasizes that God has an ultimate plan for our lives which cannot be overcome, even by acts of evil. As humans, we are limited finite creatures who cannot see how all things can fit together or how even evil events might somehow fulfill God's ultimate plan. God is good, and God is love. Therefore, what He allows is filtered through His love and infinite wisdom. God permits individuals to exercise their free will even if they choose to go against His commands. In His love, He does not impose His will on us. When we choose to do evil, these actions hurt Him deeply. Often we cannot understand events that happen in our lives; however, we are asked to trust God even when we cannot see or comprehend why He allows

things to happen. In fact Young points out that taking away our freedom would not be the best thing for God to do. I believe Young does a decent job of tackling the difficult issue of evil. He does attempt to answer a very difficult question in a creative way that many will find engaging.

Young also emphasizes the intimate relationship we are to have with God. There is a danger that a believer's faith can become cerebral and neglect the emotional, heart aspect of one's walk with God. A faith that is only centered on knowing doctrine only can be a cold kind of faith (Rev. 2:4-5).

CRITICISMS OF *THE SHACK*

I commend Young for attempting to wrestle with a difficult issue in a creative manner. Young is not a trained theologian or Bible scholar. He wrote this book for the purpose of sharing his experience and insight as he worked through personal tragedy in his life. He does attempt to be orthodox in his theology but there are some apparent errors. I do not doubt his sincerity or his relationship with God. He is a brother in Christ and it is my goal to present an accurate critique of his work.

In seeking to address the issue of God and the problem of evil, the author presents flawed theological views that confuse the nature of God. One of my concerns is the emphasis on experience and how it is given emphasis equal to or stronger than the Bible. Young refers to the Bible superficially; however, his primary focus in this work is on experience. In fact, he unfortunately makes some critical remarks regarding the sole authority of the Word and the training needed to interpret it properly:

In seminary he had been taught that God had completely stopped any overt communication with moderns, preferring to have them only listen and follow sacred scripture, properly interpreted, of course. God's voice had been reduced to

paper, and even that paper had to be moderated and deciphered by the proper authorities and intellects. It seemed that direct communication with God was something exclusively for the ancients and uncivilized, while educated Westerners access to God was mediated and controlled by the intelligentsia. Nobody wanted God in a box, just in a book. (p. 65)

Throughout the book, he criticizes Biblical teachings as “religious conditioning” or “seminary teaching” (p. 93). Young’s intention may be to encourage the audience to break stereotypes in their thinking about God. This is commendable, for we must constantly examine our theology of God and evaluate whether we have adopted false stereotypes in our understanding of God. It may not have been the author’s intent to devalue the word of God or theological training. However, comments like these give that impression.

Our theology must be consistent with God’s Word. God will not reveal Himself or communicate in ways that are contrary to His Word. God is not limited to words on a page; He also communicates through His creation or general revelation (Rom. 1). However, God has given us special revelation and communicated specific truths about His character in His Word. If God reveals and communicates information that is contrary to His Word, then He could not be a God of truth. There are truths that are not mentioned in the Bible, but those facts should be consistent and not contrary to the Word of God. It was unfortunate that there were more critical remarks made on biblical training and not a stronger emphasis to study and exhort believers to be diligent students of the word (2 Tim. 2:15).

Confusion Regarding the Nature of God

Young presents several incorrect and confusing teachings regarding the nature of God and salvation. In this story, God

the Father appears as a large African-American woman. In contrast, the Bible teaches that the Father never takes on physical form. John 4:24 teaches that God is spirit. 1 Timothy 4:16 states, "God, the blessed and only ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light whom no one has seen or can see." To add to this, God appears as a woman named "Papa." It is true that God is neither male nor female as humans are, and both feminine and masculine attributes are found in God. However, in the Bible God has chosen to reveal Himself as Father and never in the feminine gender. This gender distortion confuses the nature of God.

In the story, God the Father has scars on His wrists (p. 95). This is contrary to Biblical teaching in which only Jesus became human and only Jesus died on the cross. It is true the Father shared in the pain of Christ's suffering, but God stood as the judge of sin, not the one who suffered on the cross. Christ bore the burden of our sins; God the Father was the judge who had to render His judgment on His Son.

God the Father says "When we three spoke ourselves into human existence as the Son of God, we became fully human" (p. 99). Young teaches that all three members of the Trinity became human. However, scripture teaches that only the Son, not all members of the Trinity, became human. This distorts the uniqueness and teaching of the incarnation.

Confusion Regarding the Son

In this story, Jesus appears as a Middle Eastern man with a plaid shirt, jeans, and a tool belt. In the Bible, Jesus appears as a humble servant veiling His glory (Phil. 2). After the resurrection, Jesus retains His human nature and body but is revealed in a glorified state. He appears in his glorified and resurrected body and His glory is unveiled (Revelation 1).

As the incarnate Son of God, Jesus retained His divine nature

and attributes. His incarnation involved the addition of humanity, but not by subtracting His deity. During His incarnation He chose to restrict His use of His divine attributes, but there were occasions in which He exercised His divine attributes to demonstrate His authority over creation. However, in *The Shack* God says:

Although he is also fully God, he has never drawn upon his nature as God to do anything. He has only lived out of his relationship with me, living in the very same manner that I desire to be in relationship with every human being. He is just the first to do it to the uttermost – the first to absolutely trust my life within him, the first to believe in my love and my goodness without regard for appearance or consequence. . . . So when He healed the blind? He did so as a dependent, limited human being trusting in my life and power to be at work within him and through him. Jesus as a human being had no power within himself to heal anyone (p. 99-100).

First, it is not true that Jesus “had no power within himself to heal anyone.” Jesus, as the incarnate Son of God, never ceased being God. He continued to possess full and complete deity before, during, and after the incarnation (Colossians 2:9). He did do miracles in the power of the Spirit, but He also exercised His own power (Lk. 22:51; Jn. 18:6). Young appears to be teaching the incorrect view of the incarnation that Christ gave up His deity, or aspects of it, when He became human.

Confusion Regarding the Holy Spirit

In this story, the Holy Spirit appears as an Asian woman named Sarayu. In contrast, the Holy Spirit never appears as a person in the Bible. There is one time when the Holy Spirit appears in physical form as a dove at the baptism of Jesus. Moreover, the Spirit is never addressed in the feminine but is always

addressed with the masculine pronoun.

Confusion Regarding the Trinity

The first inaccuracy regarding the Trinity is that in this story, all three members of the Trinity take on human form. This confuses the doctrine of the incarnation, for Scripture teaches that only Jesus takes on human form.

The second inaccuracy presented in *The Shack* is the idea that the relationship taught between the members of the Trinity is incorrect. In the book, "God" says, "So you think that God must relate inside a hierarchy like you do. But we do not" (p. 124). Young teaches that all three members of the Trinity do not relate in a hierarchical manner (p. 122-124).

In contrast, the Bible teaches that all three members of the Trinity are equal in nature while there also exists an economy, or hierarchy, in the Trinity. It describes the relationship of the members of the Godhead with each other, and this relationship serves as a model for us. The Father is the head. This is demonstrated in that the Father sent the Son. The Son did not send the Father, (Jn. 6:44, 8:18, 10:36). The Son also is the one who sends the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:7). Jesus came down from heaven, not to do his own will, but the will of the Father (John 6:38). The Father is the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). 1 Cor. 15:27-28 speaks of creation being in subjection to Jesus, and then in verse 28, Jesus will be subjected to the Father. The Greek word for "will be subjected" is *hupotagasetai* which is the future passive indicative. This means that it is a future event where Jesus will forever be subjected to the Father. These passages teach that there is indeed a hierarchy within the Trinity in which all three members are equal in nature, yet the principle of headship and submission is perfectly displayed in the Trinity. This critical theological principle is incorrectly taught in *The Shack*.

Confusion Regarding Salvation

In this story, Young appears to be teaching pluralism, which is the belief that there are other ways to salvation beside faith in Jesus Christ. In this story Papa states:

Those who love me come from every system that exists. They are Buddhists or Mormons, Baptists or Muslims, Democrats, Republicans and many who don't vote or are not part of any Sunday morning or religious institutions. I have followers who were murderers and many who were self-righteous. Some are bankers and bookies, Americans and Iraqis, Jews and Palestinians. I have no desire to make them Christian, but I do want to join them in their transformation into sons and daughters of my Papa, into my brothers and sisters, into my Beloved. (p. 182)

Young states that Jesus has no desire to make people of other faiths Christians, or disciples of Christ. One then wonders what this "transformation into sons and daughters of my Papa" entails. What does it mean to be a son or daughter of Papa?

Jesus commanded us in the Great Commission to "Go into all the world and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you." Being a disciple of Christ requires us to know and obey the teachings that God has revealed in His Word.

Mack asks Jesus, "Does that mean all roads will lead to you?" To this question, Jesus replies, "Not at all. . . . Most roads don't lead anywhere. What it does mean is that I will travel any road to find you" (p. 182). Although pluralism is denied here, there is confusion regarding salvation. It is a strange statement by Jesus to say, "Most roads don't lead anywhere." In actuality Jesus stated in the Gospels that most roads lead to destruction when in Mt. 7:13-14 He says, "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that

leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Young fails to mention eternal judgment for those who do not receive Jesus whereas Jesus makes it clear in John 14:6 that He is the only way to life; all other roads lead to destruction.

Things are further confused when the Jesus of *The Shack* states, "I will travel any road to find you." The message appears to teach that Jesus will reveal Himself to people no matter their road or religion. Jesus does not ask them to leave that road and follow the narrow path of salvation.

Moreover, in a later conversation on the atoning work of Christ on the cross, Mack asks, "What exactly did Jesus accomplish by dying?" Papa answers, "Through his death and resurrection, I am now fully reconciled to the world" (p. 191-2). Mack is confused and asks if the whole world has been reconciled or only those who believe. Papa responds by saying reconciliation is not dependent upon faith in Christ:

The whole world, Mack. All I am telling you is that reconciliation is a two-way street, and I have done my part, totally, completely, finally. It is not the nature of love to force a relationship but it is the nature of love to open the way" (p. 192).

Young appears to be saying all people are already reconciled to God. God is waiting on them to recognize it and enter into a relationship with Him. These dialogues appear to teach pluralism. Although it is denied on page 182, the ideas presented by Young that Jesus is not interested in people becoming Christians, that Jesus will find people on the many roads, and that the whole world is already reconciled to God presents the tone of a pluralistic message of salvation. Thus, the book presents a confusing message of salvation.

Emphasis on Relationship

Throughout the book, Young places an emphasis on relationships. He downplays theological doctrines and Biblical teaching and emphasizes that a relationship with God is what is most important. However, Jesus stated, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:23-24).

It is not possible to have a relationship with God that is not based in truth. In order to have a meaningful relationship with God, one must understand the nature and character of God. Truth is rooted in the very nature of God (John 14:6). A relationship with God comes through responding to the truths revealed in His Word. Thus, a believer must grow in his relationship with God through seeking emotional intimacy as well as growing in our understanding of the Word of God.

Throughout his book Young emphasizes the relational aspect of our walk with God and downplays the need for proper doctrinal beliefs about God. It is true that Christians are to have a vibrant relationship with God, but this relationship must be built on truth as God has revealed in His Word. Seeking a relationship and worship of God built on false ideas of God could lead one to discouragement and even false hope. As one grows in Christ, one's understanding of God should move toward a more accurate understanding of God's character that is revealed in His word.

An essential part of growing a deep intimate relationship with God involves the learning of Biblical and doctrinal truths about God. The Apostle Paul refers to this in Ephesians 4:13 when he says, "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Simply knowing doctrine without the involvement of the heart leads to a cold faith. I believe Young was trying to emphasize

this point. However, a heart religion without truth as its guide is only an emotional faith. We must have both heart and mind. In fact, Jesus commanded Christians in Matthew 22:37 to “Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

Conclusion

The Shack attempts to address one of life’s toughest issues: the problem of God and evil. Although this is a work of fiction, it addresses significant theological issues. However, in addressing the problem of evil, Young teaches key theological errors. This can lead the average reader into confusion regarding the nature of God and salvation. I found this to be an interesting story but I was disturbed by the theological errors. Readers who have not developed the skills to discern truth from error can be confused in the end. So although the novel tries to address a relevant question, it teaches theological errors in the process. One cannot take lightly erroneous teachings on the nature of God and salvation.

I believe this book would make a great subject for discussion groups. The topics presented in the book such as the problem of evil, the nature of God, and salvation are worthwhile topics for all believers to discuss. We can often learn and become more accurate in our beliefs when we analyze error, compare it with scripture, and articulate our position in light of the Bible. I do not believe Christians need to run from error as long as they read and study with discernment.

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As Long As it Doesn't Hurt Anyone Else – A Biblical Critique of Modern Ethics

Rick Wade considers a common idea behind the ethical thinking of many people. He identifies the inconsistencies in this approach and compares it to a biblically informed ethical system. As Christians, we should bring a Christ centered perspective to our ethical decisions.

What ethical principle guides our society these days? Clearly the Bible isn't the norm. What is?

As I see it, people generally don't try to justify their actions. We want to do something, so we do it. And if we're criticized by someone else, how do we respond? The one justification I hear over and over again is, "I can do whatever I want, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else."

Do a quick search on the Internet using the phrase "hurt anyone else." Here's a blog by a motorcycle rider who says it's no one else's business whether he wears a helmet because it doesn't hurt anyone else.[\[1\]](#) Here's another one where the topic is some kind of staph infection that seems to be spreading among gay men. The writer says he or she's a "big gay rights supporter and definitely [believes] that a person should be true to their own sexuality (as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else)." The writer goes on to raise a question about whether certain sexual activity is okay from a public health perspective.[\[2\]](#) Now there's a dilemma.

"As long as it doesn't hurt anyone else." On the surface, that looks like a pretty good rule. I can think of things we'd all agree are morally acceptable that we should avoid if others could be hurt. There's nothing wrong with swinging a baseball bat around, unless you're in a roomful of people. In Scripture

we're admonished to give up our freedoms if necessary to save the conscience of weaker believers (1 Corinthians 8).

Problems with the Rule

As a fundamental rule of life, "as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else" is a pretty skimpy ethical principle. There are several problems with it.

First, if there are no concrete ethical principles that apply across the board, how do we measure hurt? Some things are obvious. Swinging a bat in a roomful of people will have immediate and obvious negative consequences. But physical hurt isn't the only kind. We need to know what constitutes "hurt" in order to apply the "as long as" principle. So, one question to ask a person who touts this approach to life is, How do you decide whether something is hurtful or not? Without concrete ethical norms, the "as long as" rule is empty.

Second, this rule faces a problem similar to one faced by utilitarian ethics. *Utilitarianism* seeks to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number of people. But how can a person predict the outcome of an action? It's difficult to work out a greatest good calculus. The "as long as" rule doesn't even go as far as utilitarianism. The latter at least seeks the good of others (in principle, anyway). The former only seeks to avoid harming them. So the question becomes, How can you predict who will be hurt or how?

Here's another thought. Consider the influence others have had on *you*, including those who did what they wanted "as long as it didn't hurt someone else." What about the young man who was just enjoying his high school prom night with a little partying and wrecked his car, killing someone's daughter? Or how about the couple who had a sexual relationship apart from the responsibilities of marriage, and then parted over jealousy or a changed mind and carried the scars of that relationship into others? Maybe you've had to deal with the

ramifications of such experiences, yours or your spouse's. Maybe you've had to try to learn on your own how to behave like a grownup because your dad never buckled down in the serious business of life but just had fun, forgetting that he was teaching you by word and example how to live.

When hearing this rule espoused, I can't help wondering how many people even *try* to figure out the effects of their actions on others. I mean, we might give a moment's thought to whether something will hurt anyone in the immediate setting or within a short period of time. But do we think beyond the immediate? How do our actions as young people affect our children not yet born? Or what does it mean for parents if their teenage daughter engages in a hard night of partying and winds up in a coma because of what she's imbibed? Such things do happen, you know?

One more objection before giving a thumbnail sketch of biblical teaching on the matter. When a person speaks of not hurting others, what about that person him- or herself? Is it acceptable to hurt ourselves as long as we don't hurt others? I'm not talking about taking measurable risks that we are confident we can handle. I'm talking about the array of things people do and justify with the "as long as" principle: doing drugs, engaging in "safe" sex apart from marital commitment, cheating on taxes, spending years following childish dreams without giving serious thought to the future, even living a very shrunken life.

That last one is important to note because ethics isn't just a set of rules given to prevent harm; it also has to do with guiding us into fulfilled lives. The "as long as" rule can justify a seriously diminished life. Most of us have encountered people (maybe our own teenagers!) who could be doing so much better in life than they are, and when challenged they respond, "What does it matter? I'm not hurting anybody else." Maybe not, but they're sure hurting themselves.

A Biblical Ethic

What does the Bible say about these things? Scripture calls us to put others ahead of ourselves. We aren't to cause others harm. More than that, we're to seek others' good. We're given the ultimate example of sacrifice in Christ, "who, though he was in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing" for our benefit ([Philippians 2:6-8](#)). We're told to give up things we can legitimately enjoy if they hurt other people ([1 Corinthians 8](#)).

Furthermore, we're given real ethical content: Don't steal. Don't murder. Don't take someone else's wife. Do good to others. Feed the hungry. Practice justice grounded in the righteousness of God.

Then there's the matter of our own lives. Is the "as long as" principle sufficient to encourage us to develop and use the abilities God has given us? A couch potato might truly not be hurting anyone else, but he's living a small life. Just seeking to do good to others can be a motivation to get up and get busy and do ourselves some good as a result.

The "as long as" rule pushes personal liberty almost to the limit. It puts me at the center of the world. I can do whatever I want, and furthermore, you'd better not do anything that I find hurtful. I stated the rule in the first person in the opening paragraph ("I can do whatever I want") deliberately. For some reason we don't apply it as liberally to others as we do to ourselves!

Without ethical content, however, it gives no direction at all. It really has no place in the Christian life. Our lives are to be governed by an ethics grounded in the nature and will of God which takes into account a biblical view of human nature, a biblical call to protect others and seek their good, and the divine project of redemption that seeks to save and

build people up in the image of Christ, including ourselves.

This vision of life makes the “as long as” rule look rather paltry, doesn’t it? We can do better.

Notes

1. TheLedger.com, (see: tinyurl.com/34m9mf).
2. MyFolsom.com (see: tinyurl.com/2jp32o).

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See Also:

[“How Should I Respond to
‘It’s All Right to do Anything as Long as It Doesn’t Hurt
Anybody’?”](#)

Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed

Dr. Bohlin explores the key points from this documentary from a Christian perspective. He looks at three of the scientists featured on the film who were persecuted for their willingness to consider intelligent design as an option. The film may become dated but the issue of an intelligent creator versus an impersonal, random cause of creation will continue on for many years.

A film was released in April 2008 starring Ben Stein. Titled *EXPULSED: No Intelligence Allowed*,[\[1\]](#) this film documents the

dark underside of academia in America and around the world, exposing what happens when someone questions a ruling orthodoxy. In this case, that orthodoxy is Darwinian evolution.

Evolution is routinely trumpeted as the cornerstone of modern biology, indispensable even to modern medical research. Therefore, if someone questions Darwinian evolution and its reliance on unpredictable mutation and natural selection, you are questioning science itself. At least that's how the gatekeepers of science explain it.

Never mind that over seven hundred PhD trained scientists from around the world have openly signed a statement questioning the ability of Darwinism to account for the complexity of life. You'll find my name among them (www.dissentfromdarwin.org). We are usually dismissed as being misguided, uninformed or religiously motivated. We couldn't possibly have legitimate scientific objections to Darwinian evolution.

Many have refrained from signing that list because of the possible repercussions to their career. But isn't there academic freedom in this country? Doesn't science progress by always questioning and leaving even cherished theories open to reinterpretation? Isn't science all about following the evidence wherever it leads? Well, in theory, yes. Practically, scientists are human, too, and often don't like it when favorite ideas are reexamined.

The film *EXPULSED* explores the reality of what happens when evolutionary orthodoxy is questioned by vulnerable scientists who have yet to secure tenure.

In what follows, I will take a detailed look at just three of the scientists featured in the film. In each case I will reveal greater detail than the film is able to explore and provide resources for you to inquire further. Hopefully this

will inspire you to learn more about this important issue and attend the film when it opens.

Let me briefly introduce the three scientists.

Richard Sternberg has a double PhD in evolutionary biology. As editor of a scientific journal, he oversaw the publication of an article promoting Intelligent Design and critical of evolution. As a result, he was harassed and falsely accused of improper peer review. He has been blacklisted.

Caroline Crocker taught introductory biology and made the mistake of including questions about evolution contained in science journals. She was accused of teaching creationism and eventually lost her job, and has been unable to find work ever since.

Finally, Guillermo Gonzalez, a well published astronomer, has been denied tenure because he supports Intelligent Design. Trust me, you'll find it hard to believe what you read.

Richard von Sternberg

Richard von Sternberg was the managing editor of the biological journal, *The Proceedings of the Biological Society of Washington*, or *PBSW*. Sternberg was employed by the National Institutes of Health in their National Center for Biotechnology Information. He was also a research associate at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History when he served as the journal's managing editor.

Sternberg was considered a rising scientist and theorist. His multiple appointments demonstrated great confidence in his research ability. By 2004 he had accumulated thirty scientific publications in peer-reviewed science journals and books.

His fall from grace was not for something he said or did, but for what he didn't do. As managing editor for *PBSW*, he did not

reject outright an article submitted for publication that supported Intelligent Design as “perhaps the most causally adequate explanation” for the explosion of new, complex life forms during the Cambrian period. He “*mistakenly*” sent the paper out for peer review, and went along with reviewers recommendations for publication after extensive revisions were made.

When the article appeared in the journal’s August 2004 edition, the journal and Sternberg were assailed for allowing the publication of this heresy. He was accused of not following proper peer-review procedure. If he had, certainly the paper would have been rejected. He was accused of acting as the editor himself when normal procedure was for the paper to be referred to an associate editor. If he had, surely the article would have been rejected. He was accused of choosing reviewers predisposed to support the ID perspective of the article. If he had chosen true scientists, surely they would have rejected the article.

I think you get the point. Any scientist worth their salt would have rejected the article out of hand; Sternberg didn’t and therefore was guilty of academic sin. Eventually, Sternberg claimed he was harassed by the Smithsonian where he currently worked. He claimed his office was changed, that he was denied access to museum specimens and collections, that his key was confiscated, and that he was subjected to a hostile work environment, all intended to get him to leave.[\[2\]](#)

The White House Office of Special Counsel was eventually called in to investigate, and although they eventually did not take the case because Sternberg was not actually a Smithsonian employee, they did issue a preliminary report documenting the inaccuracy of the charges against him and the accuracy of Sternberg’s accusations.[\[3\]](#) He followed very standard and proper peer-review procedures and even got approval for the article from a member of the society’s ruling council. You can bet that the editors of other journals were paying attention.

Caroline Crocker

Caroline Crocker, a PhD with degrees in pharmacology and microbiology, is a research scientist and former lecturer at George Mason University.[\[4\]](#)

As Crocker tells her story, she was an instructor at George Mason University, teaching introductory biology. One lecture was devoted to evolution, and she decided it was important for students to hear not just the evidence favoring evolution but published research that questioned certain elements of evolutionary theory. Crocker had come to this conviction not from any religious motivation but from her own research and convictions as a scientist.

The lecture was received very well with spirited discussion and she considered it a success. Days later she was called to her supervisor's office who accused her of teaching creationism. She denied this and claimed she never even used the word and encouraged her supervisor to look up the lecture herself which was online, as were all her lecture notes. Later she was demoted to only teaching laboratories and eventually dismissed altogether.

Upon getting another teaching job at a local community college, she eventually learned she was targeted for dismissal again and left on her own. Eventually, she applied for other teaching positions and, though initially offered the job at one interview, she was later called and told there was no money for the position. Someone at the National Institutes of Health eventually told her to stop looking because she was blacklisted.[\[5\]](#)

A young lawyer at a local law firm eventually volunteered to take her case *pro bono* [without charge]. His firm agreed with his decision and filed an initial complaint with George Mason University. The complaint was later dropped and the lawyer mysteriously asked to clean out his office. He too has

struggled since, trying to find employment.

George Mason denies any wrongdoing, of course, and maintains that academic freedom is honored at their university, but they offer few specifics on just why Crocker was terminated.

Crocker always received high marks from her students and was qualified and effective wherever she went. Suddenly after questioning Darwinism, her scientific career is over. There is another viewpoint, of course. P. Z. Meyer's, for example, defends the decision to let Crocker go at the end of her contract because questioning evolution shows she was incompetent.[{6}](#)

Guillermo Gonzalez

Guillermo Gonzalez is a planetary astronomer and associate professor at Iowa State University. Gonzalez has done research and taught at Iowa State for five years and has accumulated an impressive record. He has accumulated over sixty peer-reviewed publications in various science and astronomy journals. In addition, he has presented over twenty papers at scientific conferences, and his work has been featured in such respected publications as *Science*, *Nature*, and *Scientific American*.[{7}](#)

Ordinarily, to become a tenured professor at a research institution there are specific requirements that must be met. The Astronomy Department at Iowa State requires a minimum of fifteen research papers. Gonzalez should have felt quite secure since he published nearly five times that many papers. He also co-authored an astronomy textbook through Cambridge University Press that he and others used at Iowa State. But his initial application for tenure was denied. The faculty senate indicated his application was denied because he didn't meet certain necessary requirements.

However, many suspected he was denied tenure for his support for Intelligent Design through his popular book and film *The*

Privileged Planet. While having nothing to do with biological evolution, Gonzalez and his co-author Jay Richards maintain that our earth is not only uniquely suited for complex life but is also amazingly well-suited for intelligent life to observe the cosmos. This dual purpose seems to suggest design.

In denying Gonzalez's initial appeal, the university president specifically stated the denial had nothing to do with Intelligent Design. Gonzalez further appealed to the University Board of Regents. In the meantime, the Discovery Institute obtained internal university emails clearly indicating that the sole reason Gonzalez was denied tenure was due to his support of ID, despite the university's public denials. These emails also indicated that some of these university professors knew what they were doing was wrong and conspired to keep their deliberations secret.

Amazingly, the ISU Board of Regents refused to see this information or provide Gonzalez an opportunity to defend himself before they voted. Not surprisingly, Gonzalez's final appeal was denied in early February 2008.

Be Prepared for *EXPELLED*

Probe Ministries highly recommends the film *EXPELLED: No Intelligence Allowed* as it highlights the harassment and persecution of PhD scientists at the highest levels of academia and exposes signs of ugly things to come in the culture at large.[\[8\]](#) Usually the scientific establishment tries to cover up these activities, but when exposed, they usually resort to saying that this level of harassment is deserved since a fundamental tenet of science is being challenged, and therefore these scientists don't deserve their positions. Academic freedom apparently only applies to disagreeing with details about evolution but not evolution itself.

These three stories are just the tip of the iceberg. These

scenes are being played out around the world, and publicity is an important step in seeing justice done.

Now, let's be clear about something. Just because a few scientists and scientific institutions have behaved badly on behalf of evolutionary orthodoxy doesn't mean that evolution itself is suspect. But as I stated earlier, over seven hundred scientists have now signed a statement declaring their skepticism about Darwinian evolution as a comprehensive explanation of the complexity of life and the list is growing. The scientific underpinnings of Darwinian evolution have been unraveling for over fifty years. I've been personally involved in this revolution for over thirty years, long before Intelligent Design was even a recognized movement.

The *EXPELLED* documentary will certainly raise the visibility of this debate even further in the general public and hopefully within the church. But I have been quite surprised how many in the church are really unfamiliar with the Intelligent Design movement and are even suspicious of the motives and beliefs of those involved.

In that light, Probe Ministries and EvanTell unveiled last summer, before *EXPELLED* was announced, a small group DVD based curriculum about the Intelligent Design movement, called *Redeeming Darwin*. Check out this material at [Redeeming Darwin](#).^{9} There are small group leader kits, self-study kits, and very inexpensive outreach kits meant to be handed out to people wanting to see for themselves. We are thrilled to have Josh McDowell's endorsement, and our curriculum is being recommended to church youth leaders by those promoting *EXPELLED*.

This spring and through the summer the rhetoric will be escalating, and many just won't understand what all the fuss is about. First, make plans to attend *EXPELLED* in a few weeks and take some skeptical friends with you. Then give your friends a copy of our *Discovering the Designer* DVD and invite

them to join your small group in studying Redeeming Darwin to help answer the inevitable questions about ID and evolution. In addition, Redeeming Darwin will show you how to take a conversation about ID and evolution and use it to share the gospel. That's how you can "redeem Darwin."

Notes

1. streamingmoviesright.com/us/movie/expelled-no-intelligence-allowed/.
2. www.rsternberg.net/ (last accessed 2/12/08).
3. www.rsternberg.net/OSC_ltr.htm (last accessed 2/12/08). Sternberg used well-qualified reviewers for this paper and has steadfastly refused to identify them, which is normal protocol despite repeated attempts by evolutionists to find out who they were. None of them were "creationists" as has been suggested.
4. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/03/AR2006020300822.html (last accessed 5/18/20).
5. www.christianpost.com/news/expelled-exposes-plight-of-darwin-doubters-30277 (last accessed 5/18/20).
6. scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2006/02/05/heck-yeahcaroline-crocker-shou (last accessed 5/18/20). Also be advised that PZ Meyers is not shy about using vulgar language.
7. To view a full list of online and print articles and to view Gonzalez's academic record, visit the Discovery Institute's section on Gonzalez at www.discovery.org/a/2939 (last accessed 5/18/20). See also post-darwinist.blogspot.com
8. streamingmoviesright.com/us/movie/expelled-no-intelligence-allowed/.
9. Also see www.probe.org and streamingmoviesright.com/us/movie/expelled-no-intelligence-allowed/.

The Changing American Family

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

Introduction

Are we headed toward a post-marital society where marriage is rare and the traditional family is all but extinct? One would certainly think so by reading some of the stories that have appeared lately. A *New York Times* headline in 2003 warned of “marriage’s stormy future” and documented the rise in the number of nontraditional unions as well as the rising percentage of people living alone.[\[1\]](#) A 2006 *New York Times* article documented the declining percentage of married couples as a proportion of American households and thus declared that married households are now a minority.[\[2\]](#) And a 2007 headline proclaimed that “51% of women are now living without a spouse.”[\[3\]](#)

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

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

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

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

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

“husbands are working out of town, are in the military, or are institutionalized.”[{7}](#)

Conflicting Attitudes about Marriage and Family

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

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

Americans are not exactly sure what to think about these dramatic changes in marriage and family. On the one hand, they believe that marriage and family are very important. A *Better Homes and Garden* survey found that their readers rated their relationship to their spouse as the single most important factor in their personal happiness.[{8}](#) And a MassMutual study on family values (taken many years ago) reported that eight out of ten Americans reported that their families were the greatest source of pleasure in their lives—more than friends, religion, recreation, or work.[{9}](#)

On the other hand, Americans are much less sanguine about other people’s marriages and families. I call this the “Lake Wobegon effect” where “all the women are strong, all the men are good looking, and all the children are about average.” In other words, *their* marriage and family are fine, but the rest of the marriages and families are *not*. While the MassMutual Family Values Study found that a majority (81%) pointed to

their family as the greatest source of pleasure, it also found that a majority (56%) rated the family in the U.S. “only fair” or “poor.” And almost six in ten expected it to get worse in the next ten years. The survey concluded that “Americans seem to see the family in decline everywhere but in their own home.”[\[10\]](#)

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

Changing Trends in Marriage

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

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

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

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

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

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

Couples often use cohabitation to delay or forego marriage. But not only are they postponing future marriage, they are increasing their chance of marriage failure. Sociologists David Popenoe and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, in their study for the National Marriage Project, wrote: “Cohabitation is

replacing marriage as the first living together experience for young men and women.” They conclude that those who live together before they get married are putting their future marriage in danger.[{16}](#)

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

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

A graph of the divorce rate shows two significant trends. One is a sharp increase in divorces in the late 1960s that continued through the 1970s. The second is a leveling and even a slight decline in the 1980s. Both are related to the attitudes of the baby boom generation toward marriage and divorce.

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

they had children. {17}

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

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

The second part of a graph on divorce shows a leveling and even a slight decline. The divorce rate peaked in 1981 and has been in decline ever since. The reasons are twofold. Initially, the decline had to do with the aging of the baby boom generation who were entering into those years that have traditionally had lower rates of divorce. But long term the reason is due to what we have already discussed in terms of the impact of cohabitation on divorce. Fewer couples are untying the knot because *fewer couples are tying the knot*.

Changing Trends in Family

We have already mentioned that starting with the baby boom generation and continuing on with subsequent generations, couples postponed marriage. But not only did these generations postpone marriage, they also postponed procreation. Unlike the generations that preceded them (e.g., the builder generation born before the end of World War II), these subsequent

generations waited longer to have children and also had few children. Lifestyle choice was certainly one factor. Another important factor was cost. The estimated cost of raising a child during this period of time rose to over six figures. Parents of a baby born in 1979 could expect to pay \$66,000 to rear a child to eighteen. For a baby born in 1988, parents could expect to pay \$150,000, and that did not include additional costs of piano lessons, summer camp, or a college education.[{19}](#)

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

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

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

An increasing percentage of women give birth to children out of wedlock. This increase is due in large part to changing attitudes toward marriage and family. In a society that is already changing traditional patterns (by postponing marriage, divorcing more frequently, etc.), it is not surprising that many women are avoiding marriage altogether. Essentially, the current generation disconnects having children and getting

married. In their minds, they separate parenthood from marriage, thus creating an enormous increase in the number of single parent homes.

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

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

On a spring afternoon, half a century from today, the Joneses are gathered to sing “Happy Birthday” to Junior. There’s Dad and his third wife, Mom and her second husband, Junior’s two half brothers from his father’s first marriage, his six stepsisters from his mother’s spouse’s previous unions, 100-year-old Great Grandpa, all eight of Junior’s current “grandparents,” assorted aunts, uncles-in-law and stepcousins. While one robot scoops up the gift wrappings and another blows out the candles, Junior makes a wish . . . that he didn’t have so many relatives.[{22}](#)

Notes

1. Tamar Lewin, “Ideas & Trends: Untying the Knot: For Better or Worse: Marriage’s Stormy Future,” *New York Times*, 23 November 2003, 1.
2. Sam Roberts, “It’s Official: To be Married means to be Outnumbered,” *New York Times*, 15 October 2006, 22.
3. Sam Roberts, “51% of Women are now Living Without Spouse,”

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4. Michael Medved, "Journalistic Malpractice in 'Marriage is Dead' Report, 17 January 2007, www.townhall.com.

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19. Karen Peters, "\$150,000 to raise a kid," *USA Today*, 17 January 1990, 1A.

20. Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children A Decade after Divorce* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989).

21. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, 1992 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), Table 719.

22. "When the Family Will Have a New Definition," *What the Next 50 Years Will Bring*, a special edition of *U.S. News and World Report*, 9 May 1983, A3.

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Michael Moore's Sicko Healthcare Perspective

June 29, 2007 marked the official opening of Michael Moore's newest mockumentary, *Sicko*. And in true Moore form, it is controversial and in-your-face. The subject this time is a critique on the American Healthcare system, and as before, Moore takes a liberal stance on a pet cause: healthcare reform. Here is a summary of his proposal:[\[1\]](#)

- 1. Every American must have full, uninterrupted healthcare coverage for life.*
- 2. Private, for-profit health insurance companies must be abolished.*
- 3. Profits of pharmaceutical companies must be strictly regulated like a public utility.*

After researching several movie reviews from every part of the political spectrum, I am concerned about Moore's use and misuse of statistics and convolution of facts that are taken out of context. However, I think this provides an excellent opportunity to open the discussion on the Christian perspective on healthcare. I will mainly address the idea of

universal healthcare coverage (Moore's point 1) and offer a slightly different perspective on private health insurance companies (Point 2). I'll save pharmaceutical company regulation for another article.

The Biblical Perspective

Before we can apply biblical truth to today's cultural issues, let's make sure we know what is biblically clear about healthcare. Several places in the Bible, God admonishes his people to care for the orphans and widows.[{2}](#) Orphans and widows are the vulnerable in society. In today's society, that status falls mainly to the elderly, the chronically ill, the poor, etc. The Bible is quite clear about the need to care for these people as well as an individual's responsibility in the matter:

When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. When you gather grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing.[{3}](#)

This principle is exemplified when Boaz allows Ruth to glean from his field, drink from his water vessels and eat at his table.[{4}](#)

The biblical model seems to be that those with plenty are to take responsibility for those that are vulnerable. While government intervention is not explicitly mentioned, the mention of orphan- and widow-care in the Law implies a

universal understanding of a duty to care for the least of these. It also seems to indicate that those who are healthy (i.e. who can work in the field, harvest their own crops, etc.) are to be held accountable and responsible for themselves. In practical terms, how do we apply this to our own culture and healthcare systems?

Modern-Day Applications

In Kerby Anderson's [article on National Healthcare](#),^{5} he suggests three needs in today's healthcare structure, each related in such a way that one would perpetuate the others:

The Need for Personal Responsibility

He brings to light an important point about human nature: when someone else pays, we are less likely to consider the quality and cost before buying. When the government subsidizes healthcare or health insurance, people tend to be less thoughtful on cost, and the result is the high prices of healthcare. If there were more personal accountability, people would comparison shop and bring market pressures to bear on some of the healthcare costs.

I find it fascinating that health insurance requires so little personal responsibility, while car insurance demands so much. When I buy car insurance, it is only used in the event of an accident, either caused by nature or another driver. I have my own account that I use for my basic car care needs (gas, oil change, registration, tires, cleaning, brakes, etc.). I shop for the cheapest gas prices, the best bang for my buck on oil changes, and will go out of my way for a cheaper car wash. Why? Because it is coming out of my pocket. When I was in an accident, the insurance company was paying, so my car went to the body shop they specified and the company paid the price the shop requested. Honestly, I was less concerned about how much the insurance company paid than whether I got my car back in one piece.

Why is it that most people want insurance to pay for their basic check-ups that occur annually or biannually? If individuals paid for their regular maintenance, this would not only decrease the cost of health insurance, but it would also free up some resources for the orphans and widows of our society so that they, too, might have regular, preventative healthcare.

The Need for Portability

Anderson continues:

Americans usually cannot take their health insurance with them if they change jobs. A fair tax system would offer no tax subsidy to the employer unless the policy was personal and portable. If it belongs to the employee, then it would be able to go with the employee when he or she changed jobs. Health insurance should be personal and portable. After all, employers don't own their employees' auto insurance or homeowners insurance. Health insurance should be no different. [\[6\]](#)

This is a critique on the requirement of employers to provide health insurance, and also argues for private companies to be made available to individuals. My husband and I are young, healthy individuals, and were paying \$450 per month on his prior health insurance, until he changed jobs. The problem is that \$450 counted as part of his earnings, and when he left his job, we lost the amount paid into the insurance. Our car insurance and renters insurance was unaffected by his job change, but our health insurance ceased. We now see that it would have been more valuable to have a portable insurance option, such as a private company or a tax-deductible health account into which we would deposit money directly. This would also tie into the idea of individual responsibility for one's health finances, and, again, applies to those that can afford it while the vulnerable are provided for.

The Need for Price Fairness

Anderson writes:

Price fairness is another issue. Proponents of socialized medicine would force people with healthy lifestyles into a one-tier system with people who smoke, drink too much, use drugs, drive irresponsibly, and are sexually promiscuous. A better system would be one that rewards responsibility and penalizes irresponsibility. Obviously we should provide for the very young, the very old, the chronically ill, etc., but we shouldn't be forced into a universal risk pool and effectively subsidize the destructive behavior of those who voluntarily choose sin over righteousness. [{7}](#)

Going back to our car insurance/health insurance comparison, my husband and I have been with our car insurance company with a clean record for so long that our rates went down. Also, our rates decreased when he turned twenty-five because he was no longer a high-risk driver. This encourages cautious driving and places the responsibility on the driver. The universal healthcare model does just the opposite, because no matter your lifestyle, the government will take care of it. I think if we're honest with ourselves about human nature, a monetary compensation or savings for maintaining proper health would be one effective way to combat behavioral diseases such as obesity and type II diabetes.

Problems with Universal Healthcare, or Why Michael Moore May Not Know What is Best for the Country

Business Costs

I am no economist or a business analyst, so I will defer to Anderson's example of Herman Cain, president and CEO of Godfathers Pizza. Mr. Cain confronted President Clinton about

many of the hidden costs of healthcare reform that affect businesses. He came with spreadsheets that pointed out just how much it would cost his business if employer mandates were put in place, and it also pointed out how President Clinton had vastly underestimated the cost on businesses.

Or what about Michael Moore's suggestion of having totally socialized healthcare? He gives several countries as an example, including France, but never mentions that all of these countries pay significantly higher tax rates than we do. This would place a burdensome cost on individuals and companies.

As Kerby warns in his article, Healthcare reform may cost much more than we think it will. The direct costs may not seem like much, but don't forget to count the indirect costs to you and to American business.

Moral Costs

There are several issues to consider here, but let us focus on the one that is already taking place in many other countries with socialized healthcare: rationing. Universal coverage of healthcare increases overall demand, which means that you will have to decrease the supply of health care benefits provided to each individual citizen, especially since there is less profit and hence less reason to increase overall supply. This is inevitable in a universal healthcare system, and, as recently reported in the *Scotsman*, is already happening in countries with socialized healthcare:

It is no longer possible to provide all the latest [medical technology] to absolutely everybody without notable detriment to others. Rationing is reduction in choice. Rationing has become a necessary evil. We need to formulize rationing to prevent an unregulated, widening, post code lottery of care. Government no longer has a choice. When it comes to the list of conditions, it's all about quality of life. It would be

about the prioritization of clinical need. {8}

A utilitarian approach to a person's quality of life is definitely not within the Christian worldview, {9} but that is precisely and inevitably the direction of a socialized healthcare system.

Our current healthcare system does have some flaws, but I do not think throwing government money at the problem is the best solution. Looking at the biblical model of individual responsibility, we can glean from the text how God's timeless truths can be effective when applied to our culture today.

Notes

1. www.michaelmoore.com
2. Exodus 22:22, Jeremiah 7:6,7, Isaiah 1:17, 1 Timothy 5:3, James 1:27, English Standard Version (ESV).
3. Deuteronomy 24:19-22 (ESV).
4. Ruth 2:8,9,14-16 (ESV).
5. Kerby Anderson, "National Health Care," Probe, 1994, www.probe.org/national-health-care/.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Moss, Lyndsay "NHS rationing is 'necessary evil,' say doctors" *Scotsman*, June 26, 2007, news.scotsman.com.
9. See Kerby Anderson, "Utilitarianism: The Greatest Good for the Greatest Number," 2004, www.probe.org/utilitarianism-the-greatest-good-for-the-greatest-number/

The Myth of Happily Ever After vs. A Biblical Worldview Perspective on Marriage

Sue Bohlin examines unrealistic expectations that can torpedo a marriage that should be based on biblical worldview principles. As she examines these expectations from a Christian perspective, one begins to understand how they run counter to the marriage principles contained in the Bible.

Happily Ever After

The wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana was one of the most-watched romantic real-life events of the twentieth century. Between the legitimate longings of our hearts, and the way the Disney empire has fed our romantic fantasies for fairy tales, we are captivated by storybook romance.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, who presided at the royal wedding, gave a marvelous sermon that day. In it he said, "Here is the stuff of which fairy tales are made, the prince and princess on their wedding day. But fairy tales usually end at this point with the simple phrase, 'They lived happily ever after.' This may be because fairy tales regard marriage as an anticlimax after the romance of courtship. This is not the Christian view. Our faith sees the wedding day not as a place of arrival but the place where the adventure begins."[\[1\]](#)

The divorce rate in our culture is at an all-time high. Whatever happened to "happily ever after"? Why is it so hard to maintain the hopes and dreams that surround a beautiful

wedding with all its promises of love and fidelity, sacrifice and service?

Marriage counselors Les and Leslie Parrott have an idea.

In their excellent book *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*, they suggest four myths that have torpedoed many marriages because of unrealistic expectations and misconceptions about what marriage should be. In what follows, we'll look at four marriage myths that are the most harmful and most common:

- We expect exactly the same things from marriage.
- Everything good in our marriage will get better.
- Everything bad in my life will disappear.
- My spouse will make me whole.

"For too long," the Parrotts write, "marriage has been saddled with unrealistic expectation and misguided assumptions. Liberated from these four myths, couples can settle into the real world of marriage—with all its joys and sorrows, passion and pain."[\[2\]](#)

Many people know that something is wrong but they don't know what; and you can't fix or change something if you don't know what's wrong in the first place. Many of our marriage problems are due to harmful expectations and beliefs that fly in the face of "real reality." One divorce lawyer told the Parrotts that the number-one reason people split up is that they "refuse to accept the fact that they are married to a *human being*."[\[3\]](#) In this article we bust the myth of "happily ever after."

Myth #1: "We Expect Exactly the Same Things From Marriage"

When people are in love, it's easy to assume that the other person has the same values and expectations as we do. But every family has its own culture, so to speak, and we tend to

expect life will continue the same way once we're adults as it was while we were growing up. One way these differing expectations play out is in the unspoken rules of each family.

We are usually not aware of our unspoken rules and expectations until the other person violates them. I recently heard a great word of wisdom: "Expectations are the mother of resentments." How true is that?! When our spouse doesn't live up to our unspoken expectations, we can feel frustrated and irritated, and often we don't even know why we're upset because we don't know what's wrong. It's helpful to think through "the rules" of one's family so that unspoken rules and expectations are brought out into the light of examination. Here are some rules from various families:

- Don't ask for help unless you're desperate.
- Downplay your successes.
- Be invisible.
- Get someone else to do the hard or dirty work.
- Don't get sick.
- Never get angry.
- Don't talk about your body.
- Don't go to bed without cleaning the kitchen.
- Don't talk about your feelings.
- Never order dessert at a restaurant.
- Don't ever upset Daddy.

Can you see how these unspoken rules can cause havoc if a spouse doesn't know about them?

Another source of mismatched expectations is the unconscious roles that spouses fall into, the way an actor follows a script. We inherit expectations about how wives and husbands act by watching our parents and other adults, and we often play out those roles the same way unless we choose to change it. For example, one new husband surprised his wife at dinner by picking up his empty iced tea glass and tinkling the ice cubes. His father had always signaled this way to his mother

that he was ready for more tea. The bride was not pleased to learn that her husband expected to play the role of pampered king whose every whim was gladly granted!

The myth that “we expect exactly the same things from marriage” is busted by identifying and talking about unspoken expectations and unconscious roles. The more openly couples discuss their differing expectations, the more likely they are to create a vision of marriage that they can agree on.

Myth #2: “Everything Good in Our Relationship Will Get Better”

Most people, when they fall in love, really believe their love will last forever because it’s so intense and intoxicating. It’s hard not to believe that everything good about the relationship will just continue to get better and better as time goes on. But reality “is that not *everything* gets better. Many things improve in relationships, but some things become more difficult. Every successful marriage requires necessary losses, and in choosing to marry, you inevitably go through a mourning process.”[\[4\]](#)

For some, marriage means giving up childhood. It means giving up the safety and security of being your parents’ child, and becoming a full-fledged adult. God makes this statement in Genesis 2:24 when He says, “ For this reason a man *will leave his father and mother* and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” Marriage means the end of childhood, and that can feel like a loss to be mourned.

Marriage also “means giving up a carefree lifestyle and coming to terms with new limits. It means unexpected inconveniences.”[\[5\]](#) Marriage means always passing one’s plans and choices through the filter of “us.” Since “the two become one,” many of our even mundane life choices impact someone else. That can feel like a loss to be faced, as well.

The Parrotts write, "By far the most dramatic loss experienced in a new marriage is the idealized image you have of your partner. This was the toughest myth we encountered in our marriage. Each of us had an airbrushed mental picture of who the other was. But eventually, married life asked us to look reality square in the face and reckon with the fact that we did not marry the person we thought we did." [\[6\]](#)

It is an illusion that the intense romantic thrill of the beginning of a relationship will last forever. "Debunking the myth of eternal romance will do more than just about anything to help . . . build a lifelong happy marriage." [\[7\]](#) When we get past the myth of continual bliss with a perfect partner, we can embrace the reality that we married another flawed and fallen human being. This is good news, because God only gives grace for reality, nor for illusion or temporary enchantment. And this is good news because intimacy is only available with a real person, not with an idealized image.

Myth #3: "Everything Bad in My Life Will Disappear"

Remember the story of Cinderella? A poor, mistreated stepchild who is forced to serve her wicked stepfamily is magically turned into a beautiful princess. She is rescued by her Prince Charming and they live . . . all together now . . . "happily ever after." And don't we all long for a Prince Charming or a beautiful princess to make us happy and wipe away every tear from our eyes?

The myth of a "happily ever after" life is a legitimate longing of our hearts. We ache to return to Eden where everything bad in our lives *will* disappear. God promises that He will eventually make all things right again, but it doesn't happen in marriage between two fallen human beings living in a fallen world.

Marriage is a glorious institution invented by God, but it

“does not erase personal pain or eliminate loneliness. Why? Because people get married primarily to further their own well-being, not to take care of their partners’ needs. The bad traits and feelings you carried around before you were married remain with you as you leave the wedding chapel. A marriage certificate is not a magical glass slipper.”[\[8\]](#)

The Parrotts write, “Getting married cannot instantly cure all our ills, but marriage *can* become a powerful healing agent over time. If you are patient, marriage can help you overcome even some of the toughest of tribulations.”[\[9\]](#) Perhaps the biggest reason for this is the amazing *power* of love. I believe God’s love is the strongest healing agent in the universe. In marriage, He can love us through our spouses; He can be “Jesus with skin on” to each of us.

A healthy marriage can become a place to wrap up unfinished business from childhood and deal with unresolved hurts. God showed me this truth personally. I had experienced a great deal of rejection in relationships before I met my husband. He told me that we were married ten years before he could say the words, “I need to talk to you about something” and I wouldn’t automatically wince and pull back in fear. Over time, Ray’s faithful love and acceptance of me healed the rejection wounds.

It’s a myth that everything bad in our lives will disappear when we say “I do,” but God’s grace is bigger than the myth. We still live in a fallen world with a fallen spouse, but God can bring much grace through mutual love.

Myth #4: “My Spouse Will Make Me Whole”

One of the greatest lines in all of movie history belongs to Tom Cruise in *Jerry Maguire* where he tells his wife, “You complete me.” It is romantic and feels emotionally satisfying—but in reality, it’s just not true.

Couples who swallow the myth that their spouse will make them whole are in danger of going to one of two extremes. One is an unhealthy dependence on the other that the Parrotts term an *enmeshed* relationship. They unconsciously make their partner completely responsible for their well-being. They are like ticks that constantly attempt to suck life and love and meaning from their spouse. It is a form of idolatry, because they are looking to their partner to provide emotional “living water” that only God can give.

The other extreme is a *disengaged* relationship of what the Parrotts call “rugged self-reliance.” These spouses are so isolated and independent from each other that they function more like neighbors or business associates than a God-created union of two souls. The first kind of couple is looking for wholeness from their partner; the second kind of couple is looking for wholeness from within. It is also a form of idolatry, because they are looking to themselves instead of God to provide meaning for life.

Neither enmeshed nor disengaged relationships are healthy, and neither will allow the people in them to experience wholeness. A sense of wholeness is found in an *interdependent* relationship where two people with self-respect and dignity make a commitment to nurture their own spiritual and emotional growth as well as their partner’s.

Enmeshed relationships are like the capital letter A. They lean on each other so much that if one moves, the whole structure falls down. Their security is in another person instead of in God. Disengaged relationships are like the letter H. Partners stand virtually alone. If one lets go, the other hardly feels a thing. Interdependent relationships are like the letter M. They could stand on their own, but they choose to stay connected to the other out of their fullness, not out of their emptiness. If one lets go, the other feels a loss but can recover.

Every marriage is between two broken and fallen people who cannot make each other whole. We are called to love and respect each other, serve and celebrate each other—but only God can make us whole.

“Happily ever after” may be for fairy tales, but that doesn’t mean there is no such thing as a happy, rich, fulfilling marriage. But it’s only possible for those who live in reality, not in the fantasy of make-believe myths. May God give us grace to trust Him to walk in truth and not illusion.

Notes

1. Les and Leslie Parrott. *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 26.
2. Ibid., 16.
3. Ibid., 23.
4. Ibid., 21.
5. Ibid., 22.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., 24.
9. Ibid., 25.

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Video Games – Evaluating Them From a Christian Perspective

Grand Theft Auto

The best-selling video game in America last year was “Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.” The recent controversy over this

popular video game is just another reminder of the deception of ratings and the need for parental direction and discernment when it comes to buying video games.

The game in question already has a bad reputation. The National Institute on Media and the Family described it this way: "Raunchy, violent and portraying just about every deviant act that a criminal could think of in full, living 3D graphics. Grand Theft Auto takes the cake again as one of the year's worst games for kids. The premise—restore respect to your neighborhood as you take on equally corrupt San Andreas police."[{1}](#)

Ironically what caused the controversy over the game was not its overt violence and sexuality. What caused a national stir was what was hidden within the game. Those playing the game (known as gamers) could download a modification of "Grand Theft Auto" that would allow them to see graphic sex scenes on screen.

Initially the distributor distanced itself from what hackers could do with their product once it was on the market. But that argument fell flat when it was found that the downloaded modification merely unlocked pornographic material already within the game. It now turns out that skilled players can unlock the pornographic content without downloading the key from the Internet. The game initially had a "Mature" rating. The Entertainment Software Ratings Board now requires that it be labeled "Adults Only."

"Grand Theft Auto" has already been a lightning rod for controversy because it rewards players for committing crimes and engaging in dangerous and immoral behavior. Gamers can buy and sell drugs, steal cars, run down pedestrians, even feed people into a wood chipper. Nevertheless, the game has sold more than five million copies in the United States.

Who is buying this game? Some are adults buying the game for

themselves, but a large percentage of the people buying this game are parents or grandparents buying the game for their kids or grandkids.

Columnist Mona Charen points out that the original concerns about this game surfaced when a Manhattan grandmother bought the game for her fourteen-year-old grandson. Then she was shocked to find out that he could modify the game by downloading material from the Internet. Charen asks, "So, a kindly eighty-five-year-old lady has no qualms about purchasing a gang-glorifying, violence-soaked, sick entertainment for her teenage grandson, but is shocked when it turns out to contain explicit sex? Wasn't the rest enough?"[\[2\]](#)

In most cases, parents and grandparents are buying these games and need to exercise discernment. Many games are harmless and even can help stimulate the mind. Some are questionable. And others are violent and sexually explicit. We need to use discernment in selecting these games.

Benefits of Video Games

A recent article in *Discover* magazine talked about the perception most people have of video game players. It said this is "the classic stereotype of gamers as attention-deficit-crazed stimulus junkies, easily distracted by flashy graphics and on-screen carnage."[\[3\]](#) Yet new research shows that gaming can be mentally enriching with such cognitive benefits as: pattern recognition, system thinking, and even patience.[\[4\]](#)

One of the best-known studies (done by Shawn Green and Daphne Bavelier) found that playing an action video game markedly improved performance on a range of visual skills related to detecting objects in briefly flashed displays. They found that gamers exhibit superior performance relative to non-gamers on a set of benchmark visual tasks.[\[5\]](#)

What they found was the action video gamers tend to be more attuned to their surroundings. While this occurs while performing within the video game, it also transfers to such things as driving down a residential street where they are more likely than a non-gamer to pick out a child running into the street after a ball.

They found that gamers can process visual information more quickly and can track 30 percent more objects than non-gamers. These conclusions came from testing both gamers and non-gamers with a series of three tests.

The first test flashed a small object on a screen for 1/160 of a second and the participant would indicate where it flashed. Gamers tended to notice the object far more often than non-gamers.

The second test flashed a number of small objects on a screen at once. The subjects had to type the number of objects they saw. Gamers saw the correct number more often than non-gamers.

The third test flashed black letters and one white letter on a screen in fast succession. The one white letter was sometimes followed by a black "X." Gamers were able to pick out the white letter more often than non-gamers and could more accurately say whether it was followed by a black "X."

The researchers also wanted to know whether the superior performance of gamers was acquired or self-selected. In other words, do video games actually improve visual attention skills or is it possible that visually attentive people choose to play video games?

Green and Bavelier trained a selection of non-gamers on one of two video games. One group played the World War II action video game "Medal of Honor." The other group served as the control group and played the puzzle game "Tetris." The researchers found that after two weeks, the group trained on the World War II game showed a marked increase in performance

over the control group.

The researchers therefore concluded: “By forcing players to simultaneously juggle a number of varied tasks (detect new enemies, track existing enemies and avoid getting hurt, among others), action-video-game playing pushed the limits of three rather different aspects of visual attention.”[\[6\]](#)

Video games can also train our brain to be more efficient. In the early 1990s, Richard Haier (University of California at Irving’s Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior), scanned the brains of “Tetris” players. He found that in first-time users, the brain requires lots of energy. In fact, cerebral glucose metabolic rates actually soar. But after a few weeks, these rates sink to normal as performance increases seven-fold.[\[7\]](#) In essence, “Tetris” trains your brain to stop using inefficient gray matter.

Types of Video Games

Let’s now focus on the rating of video games and the major video game categories. As we mentioned earlier, the video game industry is self-regulated, so we need to exercise discernment.

EC – Early Childhood (age 3 and older) – These games are appropriate for anyone who can play a video game and contains no inappropriate material.

E – Everyone (age 6 and older) – These games are designed for younger players and are the equivalent of a PG movie.

T – Teen (age 13 and older) – Generally these games are not appropriate for younger ages and are equivalent of a PG-13 movie.

M – Mature (age 17 and older) – These games are not appropriate for children. They may be rated as such because of

overt violence, sexual content, and profanity.

A0 – Adults Only (ages 18 and older) – These games involve excessive violence, sexual content, and explicit language.

There are a number of different types of video games.

Puzzles – Puzzle games are usually acceptable for all ages and generally are rated “E.” These games involve logic and spatial arrangements. The best known puzzle game is “Tetris.”

Strategy – These games may be as straightforward as “Chessmaster” or involve the use of tactical moves of troops or players such as “Advanced Wars.”

Simulation games – Some games like “SimCity” require creativity and advanced problem-solving skills. Others involve driving or flying simulations that can be relatively tame or highly offensive such as the “Grand Theft Auto” series of video games.

Arcade games – The classic arcade games include such favorites as “Pacman” or “Frogger.” However, the newer arcade games may include games like the violent “Street Fighter.”

Role playing games – This is a type of game where players assume the roles of via role-playing. Although these games may be less graphic, they often involve fantasy and even the occult.

Action games – These games most often have an “M” rating. Many of these action games involve point-and-shoot games that are especially dangerous.

Violent Video Games

There is cause for concern about violent video games. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, playing violent video games increases the likelihood of adolescent

violent behavior by as much as 13 percent to 22 percent.[{8}](#)

A 2005 meta-analysis of over thirty-five research studies (that included 4000 participants) found that “playing violent video games significantly increases physiological arousal and feelings of anger or hostility, and significantly decreases pro-social helping behavior.”[{9}](#) Another study has shown a relationship between playing violent video games and being involved in violent acts.[{10}](#)

Testimony before the United States Senate documents the following: (1) that violent video games increase violent adolescent behavior, (2) that heavy game players become desensitized to aggression and violence, (3) that nearly 90 percent of all African-American females in these games are victims of violence, and (4) that the most common role for women in violent video games is as prostitutes.[{11}](#)

One of the people speaking out against violent video games is Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, whom I have interviewed on a number of occasions. He is a former West Point professor and has written books on the subject of killing.[{12}](#) He has also testified that these violent video games are essentially “killing simulators.”

Grossman testified on the shooting in Paducah, Kentucky. Michael Carneal, a fourteen-year-old boy who had never fired a handgun before, stole a pistol and fired a few practice shots the night before. The next morning he fired eight shots and had eight hits (four of them head shots, one neck, and three upper torso). This is unprecedented marksmanship for a boy who only fired a .22 caliber rifle once at a summer camp.

The typical response in firing a gun is to fire at the target until it drops. Carneal instead moved from victim to victim just like he had learned in the violent video games he played.

The goal in these games is to rack up the “highest score” by moving quickly. Grossman points out that many of the games

(such as “House of the Dead” or “Goldeneye” or “Turok”) give bonus points for head shots.[{13}](#)

Does that mean that anyone who plays these games will be a killer? Of course not. But Grossman says that the kind of training we give to soldiers (operant conditioning, desensitization, etc.) is what we are also giving to our kids through many of these violent video games.

Ironically, the U.S. Marine Corps licensed one of these popular video games (“Doom”) to train their combat fire teams in tactics and to rehearse combat actions of killing.[{14}](#) The video game manufacturers certainly know these are killing simulators. In fact the advertising for one game (“Quake II” that is produced by the same manufacturer as “Doom”), says: “We took what was killer, and made it mass murder.”

Biblical Discernment

If we look back at the list of different types of video games, it is pretty easy to see that it is possible to find acceptable games as well as questionable and even dangerous video games in just about any category. That is why parental direction and discernment are so important.

The latest controversy over “Grand Theft Auto” demonstrates that the video game industry has not been effective at self-regulation. And children cannot be expected to exercise good judgment unless parents use discernment and teach it to their kids.

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” We should focus on what is positive and helpful to our Christian walk.

As Christians, we should develop discernment in our lives. See

my article on “Media and Discernment” (www.probe.org/faith-and-culture/culture/media-and-discernment.html) for suggestions on how to develop discernment in your life and the life of your child.

Parents need to determine the possible benefits to playing videos and whether those benefits outweigh the negatives. Many of the games available today raise little or no concern. As one commentator put it, “The majority of video games on the best-seller list contain no more bloodshed than a game of Risk.”^{15}

But even good, constructive games played for long periods of time can be detrimental. Over the last few years I have been compiling statistics for my teen talk on media use. The number of hours young people spend watching TV, listening to music, surfing the Internet, going to movies, etc. is huge and increasing every year. Young people spend entirely too much time in front of a screen (TV screen, computer screen, movie screen).

So even good video games can be bad if young people are staying indoors and not going outdoors for exercise. Obesity is already a problem among many young people. And good video games can be bad if they take priority over responsibilities at home and schoolwork.

Parents should understand the potential dangers of video games and make sure they approve of the video games that come into their home. They may conclude that the drawbacks outweigh the benefits. If their children do play video games, they should also set time limits and monitor attitudes and behaviors that appear. They should also watch for signs of addiction. The dangers of video games are real, and parents need to exercise discernment.

Notes

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2. Mona Charen, "Grand Theft Auto and us," 5 August 2005, www.townhall.com/columnists/monacharen/mc20050805.shtml.

3. Steven Johnson, "Your Brain on Video Games," *Discover*, July 2005, 40.

4. Ibid.

5. C. Shawn Green and Daphne Bavelier, "Action video game modifies visual selective attention," *Nature* 423 (2003), 534-537.

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7. Jeffrey Goldsmith, "This is Your Brain on Tetris," *Wired*, Issue 2.05, May 1994, 2.

8. Lori O'Keefe, "Media Exposure Feeding Children's Violent Acts," *American Academy of Pediatrics News*, January 2002.

9. Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, "Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year Olds," *A Kaiser Family Foundation Study*, March 2005.

10. Jeanne B. Funk, et. al. "An Evidence-Based Approach to Examining the Impact of Playing Violent Video and Computer Games," *Studies in Media and Information Literacy Education*, Vol. 2, Issue 4 (November 2002), University of Toronto Press.

11. Craig Anderson, "Violent Video Games Increase Aggression and Violence," U.S. Senate Testimony, Hearing on The Impact of Interactive Violence on Children, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, 106th Congress, 1st Session.

12. David Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Little, Brown and Co, 1995) and David Grossman and G. DeGaetano, *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill: A Call to Action Against TV, Movie and Video Game Violence* (New York: Crown Books, 1999).

13. Statement of Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, given before the New York State Legislature, October 1999, www.fradical.com/statement_of_lieutenant_colonel_dave_Grossman.htm.

14. Ibid.

15. Johnson, *Discover*, 41.

Judaism Viewed from a Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran provides an overview of Judaism from an orthodox Christian perspective, including basic beliefs and practices and some suggestions for sharing one's faith with a Jewish friend.

Judaism Today

Throughout the last several decades, the eyes of the world have frequently focused on the tiny nation of Israel. What is the significance of this nation and her religion?

The focus of this article is the religion of the Jews. When studying Judaism, however, we must understand that there is a distinction between the Jewish people and the religion of Judaism. Many Jews do not embrace Judaism, but consider themselves to be secular, atheistic, or agnostic.



The term *Judaism* is often used to identify the faith of modern Jews as well as Old Testament Jews. For our purposes, the term is used to refer to the religion of the rabbis established around 200 B.C. and crystallized in A.D. 70. At this time, developments in rabbinic Judaism took place that distinguished it from the Old Testament faith. New institutions arose such as the synagogue (the house of worship and study), the office of rabbi (a leader holding religious authority), and the *yeshivot* (religious academies for training rabbis). One of the greatest changes came with the destruction of the Temple in

A.D. 70. Sacrifices and the priesthood came to an end, and the rabbis became the authorities on spiritual and legal matters.

Since the eighteenth century, three main branches of Judaism developed: Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative. Orthodox Judaism upholds the divine inspiration of the Old Testament—giving greater authority to the first five books—and recognizes the Talmud as authoritative for interpreting the Jewish law. This branch continues to observe the traditional Jewish laws as practiced for centuries. An ultra orthodox sect within this branch is the Hasidic movement. This sect adheres strictly to the Law of Moses, and is a separatist group.

Reform Judaism is the liberal wing. It was founded by Abraham Geiger in Germany in the eighteenth century (1810-1874). Geiger was influenced by the Enlightenment, and so viewed reason and science as authoritative. He rejected belief in revelation, messianic hope, and the promise of land. This branch seeks to modernize what are considered outmoded ways of thinking. The primary focus of Reform Judaism is the ethical teachings of the Jewish Law.

Conservative Judaism is considered the intermediate position between Orthodox and Reform. It was founded in the nineteenth century in Germany by Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875). Conservatives seek to practice the Law and the traditions, but cautiously reinterpret the Law and adapt their practices to contemporary culture.

The existence of these and numerous other sects means a wide variety of beliefs within Judaism. In addition, as a result of the Enlightenment and the Holocaust, secularization among the Jews is increasing rapidly. Because of the wide variety of beliefs within Judaism, it is difficult today to define what makes a person Jewish.

Nonetheless, according to the Old Testament, Jews are the descendants of Abraham. It is these people to whom God has

made special promises and who will have a prominent role in redeeming the world.

Basic Beliefs of Judaism

Do Christians and followers of Judaism worship the same God? What is Judaism's understanding of Jesus? Let's take a look at some basic Jewish beliefs as compared with Christian ones.

Both religions believe in the Old Testament, the ethical teachings of the Law, and a hope in the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, they differ on some important fundamental doctrines.

Judaism rejects the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and teaches a unified monotheism based on Deuteronomy 6:4.

The main Scripture in Judaism is the Old Testament. Views of divine inspiration vary between the different branches. Orthodox and Conservative schools view the Pentateuch as the most inspired part, the Prophets and Writings less so. Another important book is the Talmud which includes the Mishnah and Gemara. The Mishnah consists of legal rulings, and was compiled around A.D. 200. The Gemara elaborates on the discussions of the Mishnah, and was compiled around A.D. 550. Most Jews, especially Orthodox Jews, consider the Talmud useful for giving instruction for life but not divinely inspired.

Judaism teaches that man is created in the image of God but without original sin. Study of the Torah can overcome our inclination to evil.

A proper relationship with God comes through repentance, prayer, and obedience to the Law. Jews do not feel they need "salvation" but assume a standing with God through their heritage. Conservative and Reform Jews view salvation as the betterment of self and society.

The Orthodox school holds to a bodily resurrection at death. The Conservative school teaches the immortality of the soul. The Reform school generally has no teaching regarding life after death.

Central to Jewish hope is the Messiah. Orthodox Jews anticipate a personal Messiah, while Reform and Conservative Jews view the messianic concept as the ideal of establishing justice by human effort. A key dividing point between Judaism and Christianity, of course, is their views of Jesus. Judaism recognizes Jesus as a moral teacher, but rejects His claims to deity as a creation of the early church. The New Testament teaches that without accepting Christ, even the sons and daughters of Abraham cannot inherit eternal life.

From our brief survey, then, it is clear that Judaism and Christianity differ significantly on major doctrines. The two do not worship the same God. They also differ in salvation theology. Judaism is works-oriented and rejects the atoning work of Christ and His divine nature. Christianity proclaims faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus on the cross. The New Testament teaches that without accepting Christ, even the sons and daughters of Abraham cannot inherit the hope of eternal life.

The Practices of Judaism

Jewish festivals and holidays are an integral part of Judaism. They memorialize key events in the history of the Jewish people and honor their unique heritage. Here are some important Jewish festivals.

The most significant is Passover, the first observance of which is recorded in Exodus 12. Jews continue to commemorate God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt in the fourteenth century B.C. Passover is observed in March or April and lasts a week.

Seven weeks after Passover comes Pentecost, which observes the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai.

The festival of Tabernacles occurs in the fall. This festival commemorates the forty years of wandering in the desert when the Israelites lived in tabernacles or booths. The ceremony includes prayer for rain and the reading of the Torah.

Rosh ha-Shanah is the celebration of the Jewish New Year. This joyful festival occurs in September or October and marks the beginning of a ten-day period known as the High Holy Days. Rosh ha-Shanah climaxes on the tenth day which is called Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is a solemn day when Jews fast, attend the synagogue, and recite prayers asking God for forgiveness of their sins.

Hannukah is celebrated in November or December and lasts eight days. It honors the victory of the Maccabees over the Syrian armies of Antiochus Epiphanes and the rededication of the second Jerusalem Temple in 165 B.C. The lighting of the eight-branched menorah is the main feature of this celebration. When Israel was reestablished as a nation in 1948, the menorah became a national symbol.

Purim is a minor holiday celebrated in February or March and commemorates the deliverance of the Jews by God told in the story of Esther.

Not only are the holidays important, but the celebration of events in the life cycle are as well. Circumcision on the eighth day for boys is one. Another is the Bar Mitzvah for boys and Bat Mitzvah for girls which celebrates the thirteenth birthday. Third is the Jewish wedding. Finally, there is the funeral service and mourning for seven days.

These Jewish practices, especially those surrounding the holidays, not only play a key role in the life of the Jewish people, but are significant to the church as well. Major events in the life of Christ and the church in Acts occurred

on these days. Christ died on the Passover, and the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost. Also, the symbolisms and rituals enacted at these festivals foreshadow what was fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ.

Witnessing to the Jews

How do we share Christ with our Jewish neighbors? Before preaching the gospel, it would be wise to first build friendships with Jews and learn from them. Second, we should understand the Jewish perception of Christians and Christianity. For a Jewish person to become a Christian means to reject his or her heritage and distinctiveness; in other words, many equate it to becoming a gentile. This is difficult, for many harbor resentment for mistreatment by Christians and gentile nations.

After building trust, encourage them to read their own Scriptures. Many grow up reciting passages of the Old Testament but not *studying* the Old Testament or the messianic prophecies.

There are many messianic passages to which one could refer. One frequently used passage is Isaiah 53 which describes the suffering servant who takes on the sins of the people. Most Jews have been taught that this is the nation of Israel. However, the context and content of the passage make it clear it is not. A careful study soon reveals that Jesus Christ fits the description of this servant.

Another passage is the prophecy of the seventy sevens in Daniel 9. When properly calculated, the prophecy predicts the Messiah to enter Jerusalem and be crucified in AD 33. Put this date together with Isaiah 53, and who else fits the description but Jesus? Here are two passages that can open the mind of a Jewish friend to begin investigating further the prophecies and the life of Jesus. As you continue to talk,

encourage them to read the Gospel of Matthew which was written for the Jews.

There are also many images in the Old Testament and in Jewish festivals that point to Jesus Christ. The Passover lamb is a good example. The lamb was sacrificed and its blood was painted on the doorframe to identify and protect the Israelites from the Angel of Death. In Numbers 9, the Passover lamb was to be without blemish, and none of its bones were to be broken when sacrificed (Numbers 9:12). This is a foreshadowing of Christ, the unblemished Lamb of God who lived a sinless life. His blood was shed and covers the believer delivering us from sin and death. John 19:33 records that the Romans were about to break the legs of the criminals, but finding Christ already dead, they did not break his bones. In every way, Christ meets the requirements for the perfect sacrifice.

These passages and symbols reveal that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Be sure to explain that not only must one acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, but that one must put all one's faith in His atoning work of sacrifice to be brought into a right relationship with God.

Promises for the Chosen

Are the Jews God's chosen people? What is their role in God's plan for the world? To answer these questions, we must first look at the covenants God established with Israel which are the foundation of His redemption plan.

The first is the Abrahamic Covenant found in Genesis 12. This pledge includes the promises that Abraham will be a father of a great nation; that his descendants will own the land of Canaan forever; that those who bless Israel will be blessed, and whoever curses it will be cursed; and that the world would be blessed through Israel. Israel was to be a light to the

world. Through their special relationship with God, and as they lived in obedience to His law, the nations would take notice of this people and come to learn about their God. However, Israel was not able to live in obedience to God and did not fulfill this call.

The second pledge is the Land Covenant in Deuteronomy 30. In this covenant, the promise of the land of Palestine is reaffirmed to Israel. Added to this is a warning that if the Israelites do not obey God's law, they will be scattered from the land and regathered when they return to the Lord.

The third covenant is the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:11. This promise states that a descendant of David would establish an eternal rule of peace and righteousness. This forms the basis of Israel's hope in a future messiah who will deliver Israel from the rule of the gentiles and bring the Abrahamic Covenant to completion.

Finally, there is the New Covenant found in Jeremiah 31:31-34: "The time is coming," declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel. . . . It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Israel was unable to obey God's law because they depended on their strength to live the law. What was needed was a new heart and empowerment to live the law. This pledge provides this, and guarantees that there will be a time when Israel as a nation will turn to her Messiah.

Several aspects of these covenants have been fulfilled. Abraham's descendants have become a nation. Christ was a descendant of David and fulfilled the old law making it possible for all men to know God. However, other promises are yet to be fulfilled. Israel doesn't yet possess the promised land in peace, and a Davidic Kingdom hasn't been established

in Jerusalem.

Despite Israel's failure and rejection of their Messiah, however, God is faithful, and He will fulfill His promises at the appointed time.

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What Happens After Death? A Christian Perspective

Dr. Pat Zukeran brings a biblical perspective to a question we all would like to know: what happens to me after I die? He looks to the Bible to determine what we can and cannot know about our life after we pass out of our present bodies.



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

Differing Perspectives on Death

For the entire existence of mankind, we have struggled with the question, “What happens after death?” Our answer to this dilemma has great implications for our life here on earth. Although many avoid the issue, we must sooner or later address the question. There are many competing answers to this question.

Atheists believe that at death one ceases to exist. There is no afterlife or eternal soul that continues in eternity. All there is to look forward to is our inevitable death, the future death of mankind, and the universe. It is in the face of this future that the atheist must seek to find meaning and purpose for his own existence.

The Eastern and New Age religions that hold to a pantheistic worldview teach that one goes through an endless cycle of reincarnation until the cycle is broken and the person becomes one with the divine. What form a person becomes in the next life depends on the quality of life lived in the previous life. When one unites with the divine, he ceases to exist as an individual, but becomes part of the divine life force, like a drop of water returning to the ocean.

Those who hold to the animistic or tribal religions believe that after death the human soul remains on the earth or travels to join the departed spirits of the ancestors in the underworld, also called the realm of the shadows. For eternity they wander in darkness, experiencing neither joy nor sorrow. Some of the spirits of the deceased may be called upon to aid or torment those on earth.

Islam teaches that at the end of history, God will judge the works of all men. Those whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds will enter into paradise. The rest will be consigned to hell. The Koran teaches that in paradise men will be drinking wine and entertained by heavenly maidens and that they may take several of these maidens for their wives.

Most worldviews must accept their belief in the afterlife on *untested* faith, but the Christian hope is sure for two reasons; the resurrection of Christ and the testimony of God's Word. The Bible gives us the true view of what happens after death. However, many Christians have a misunderstanding of the afterlife. Some believe that they become one of the angels, others believe they go into a state of "soul sleep," while others believe they will be floating on clouds playing harps. In this article, we will examine some popular misconceptions of what lies beyond the grave and perceive what the Bible teaches.

Christians can be assured that death is not something to be feared. Instead, at death we arrive home in heaven. To live means we exist in a foreign country. Death has lost its sting and now is a victory through the resurrection of Jesus our Lord.

Near Death Experiences

For the past thirty years, thousands of people have reported experiencing what are called near death experiences (NDEs). NDEs are encounters where a person, being in full awareness,

leaves the body and enters another world. Such experiences have resulted in life transformation in many individuals. What are we to make of these accounts?

Let us understand that NDEs come from those who have been *clinically* dead, not *biologically* dead. In clinical death, external life signs such as consciousness, pulse, and breathing cease. In such cases, biological death results if no steps are taken to reverse the process. Biological death, on the other hand, is not affected by any amount of attention, for it is physically irreversible.^[1]

The NDE accounts occur at various stages of clinical death. Some occur when the patient is comatose, very close to death, or pronounced clinically dead. Other accounts occur when the patient's heart stops beating. Others occur while the patient's brain ceases to register any activity on the EEG monitor. There have not been any cases of biological or irreversible death for a significant amount of time followed by a resurrection.

What has intrigued scientists and theologians in their study of NDEs is that many of the patients have similar experiences. These include leaving the body and watching from above as doctors work on it, entering a dark tunnel, seeing light, seeing others, meeting a spirit being, experiencing peace, and then returning to the body.

Scientists and doctors from various worldviews have sought to explain this phenomenon. Those from an atheistic worldview have sought to give naturalistic explanations. Their explanations range from hallucination induced by medication, chemical reactions the brain experiences in near death crises, previous encounters long forgotten, and others. These fall short of explaining NDE events.

Many NDEs have occurred without medication. Drowning victims are one example. Also, thousands of NDE victims were able to

clearly describe places and people with exact detail while they were clinically dead. One girl, while near dead, was able to describe what her family did that night at home, what was made for dinner, where everyone sat and even what was said. Others were able to describe in detail objects in rooms nearby and far away from them. One patient described a shoe on the rooftop of a hospital. When the nurses looked, they found the shoe exactly as described. A boy in an accident involving his brother and mother told those around him moments before he died, "They are waiting for me now." The doctor discovered that at that exact time in another hospital the boy's mother and brother had just died. Dr. Gary Habermas and J.P. Moreland provide a comprehensive discussion of NDEs in their book *Beyond Death*, arguing that naturalistic explanations cannot satisfactorily explain the events that occur in NDEs.

NDEs may not conclusively prove there is a heaven or hell, but they do indicate that at death the soul separates from the body, and that a person's spirit is conscious and coherent at death.

However, NDEs do not accurately reflect what lies beyond the grave. NDEs deal with accounts that give a short glimpse behind the curtain of death and therefore they give us an incomplete picture. Colossians 1:18 tells us that Jesus "is the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." Christ overcame biological death and lives forevermore as ruler over all creation. His supremacy over everything was established through His resurrection. Also, we know that Satan masquerades as an angel of light and can produce counterfeit appearances. It is imperative that we evaluate all experiences in light of Scripture.

Can We Communicate with the Dead?

Do the spirits of the dead have the ability to communicate with the living? One of the most popular current TV shows is

"Crossing Over," with psychic John Edward. He, like other psychics, claims to have the ability to communicate with the spirits of the deceased. He amazes spectators with his ability to reveal details about which only the deceased loved one may have known. From this communication, people attempt to receive comfort, advice, and encouragement.

The Bible teaches that communication with the dead is not possible. Throughout the Bible God commands His people not to indulge in the practice of necromancy, the art of communicating with the dead.

Deuteronomy 18:10-11 states,

Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead . . .

The Canaanites consulted spirits and the dead in hopes of gaining power and predicting future events. This practice is an abomination to God and it is for this reason the Canaanites were ejected from the land. Israel was warned not to imitate the Canaanites or they too would suffer a similar fate.

Contacting the dead is forbidden because the spirits of the dead cannot contact the living. In Luke 16, the rich man who was suffering in hell sought a way to communicate with his living family to warn them of their fate. However, he was not able to communicate in any way nor could the living communicate with him.

Who, then, are mediums and spiritists contacting? If they are indeed contacting a spiritual being, it is most likely a demonic counterfeit. Although the demonic spirit may communicate some truths, the ultimate intention of the spirit is to deceive and take one away from the Lord. This practice can ultimately lead to demonic possession and injury to the person.

In Acts 16:16 Paul encountered girl who could predict the future because a spirit possessed her. Knowing this, Paul eventually cast the spirit out of the girl. Throughout the Bible the practice of necromancy is forbidden.

Some will try to defend necromancy by pointing to 1 Samuel 28. Here Saul requests the Witch of Endor to call up Samuel from the grave. The spirit of Samuel arises and delivers a prophetic message to Saul. Bible scholars take two views on this. Some believe it was a demonic counterfeit masquerading as Samuel. I believe since the prophecy given came to pass, this was indeed Samuel the prophet. Despite Saul's disobedience to God, God made an exception here.

Whichever view you take, it is clear this verse does not encourage one to consult mediums. Saul at this point in his life was out of God's will and because the Spirit of God had left him, he could not receive any word from God. In desperation, he disobeyed God as was the pattern of his life and suffered the consequence. His story teaches us a lesson and is not an example to follow.

One Minute After Death

What happens when we breathe our final breath? The Bible teaches what will occur.

First our immaterial soul and spirit will be separated from our physical body. Second, we will immediately receive the judgment that will determine our eternal destiny. Those who have trusted in Christ's payment on the cross for our sins will enter into eternal life in the presence of God. 2 Corinthians 5:8 states, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." There will be no delay in a state of unconsciousness many call "soul sleep." We will immediately be in God's presence.

Second, the soul in heaven is made perfect in holiness and our

old sin nature is eradicated. Hebrews 12:23 mentions "the spirits of righteous men made perfect." The spirits of the saints are in heaven and they have been made perfect. The struggle with sin that Paul described and all Christians fight comes to an end forever when we, after death, enter our glorified state.

Those who reject this gift, will receive what they have chosen, eternity separated from God in Hell. Hebrews 9:27 states, "Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." There is no second chance and there is no cycle of reincarnation. Our eternal destiny is determined by the decision we make for Christ here on earth.

Many assume that after receiving Christ all that remains is a joyful entrance into heaven. Scripture teaches that Jesus will reward us according to how we lived our life on earth. He taught this principle in the parable of the talents in Luke 19. Each servant was entrusted to administer the talents the master gave him. Upon the return of the master, each servant had to give an account for his stewardship. The wise servants were rewarded doubly while the wicked servant was removed.

The lesson for the Christian is that each of us will give an account for our time here on earth. This is not the same as being judged on our salvation status. Christ's death on the cross allows all who believe to enter God's kingdom. We will be judged on our works done since the time of our salvation. This judgment of believers is called the *Bema Seat judgment*. This event is described in 1 Corinthians 3:11-15:

No man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds upon the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work, which he has built upon it, remains, he shall

receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

Paul states that Christ is our foundation. Our works are the building on this foundation. The materials of gold, silver, and precious stones refer to works done with pure motives for the glory of God. The works of wood, hay, and straw are works done with the wrong motives to glorify self.

At the Bema Seat, our works will be tested with divine fire. Those works that were done for the glory of God will endure the flames and will be our reward. Some will regretfully see all their works on earth burned up before their eyes and enter heaven with little or no reward.

The unbeliever will be judged and sentenced to hell. At the end of the age, he faces the Great White Throne judgment. Here, all the unrighteous dead from the beginning of time are judged based on their rejection of the Savior. They are then thrown into the lake of fire for eternity. Revelation 20:11-15 says:

And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened; . . . and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. . . . And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Knowing that as Christians we will one day give an account for our lives, we should live as wise stewards over what God has given us. Knowing the fate of the unsaved should fill us with boldness to share Christ unashamedly, with urgency to all. Knowing what lies beyond the grave should motivate us to live life on earth with a mission.

What Will We Be Like in Heaven?

Upon our physical death, the soul is separated from the body and enters immediately into the presence of the Lord. Looking again at Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:8, he says, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." The soul in heaven is made perfect in holiness and our old sin nature is eradicated. As discussed above, Hebrews 12:23 mentions "the spirits of righteous men made perfect." The spirits of the saints are in heaven and they have been made perfect. The struggle that Paul and all Christians fight with sin comes to an end forever when we, after death, enter our glorified state.

We will not remain in heaven as a soul without a body. At God's appointed time, there will be a final resurrection where the spirit will be unified with the resurrected body. Although Christians have various views on when this resurrection will take place, we all agree on the resurrection of the body. What will the resurrected body look like?

Philippians 3:20-21 says, "And we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." 1 John 3:2 promises, "But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

From these two passages we know that our glorified bodies will be like that of Christ. We will not be deified, but we will have the same qualities of His resurrection body. First, our heavenly bodies will be our glorified earthly bodies. Christ's body that died on the cross was the same one that was resurrected. His glorified body was able to travel through walls, appear suddenly, and ascend to heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:1 reads, "[W]e have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." The hands

of God will make the resurrected body. 1 Corinthians 15:39-40, 42b-43 tells us:

All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. . . . The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

In answering the mockers of the resurrection, Paul explains that our heavenly bodies will possess flesh that is of a different variety than our earthly ones. They will be bodies of flesh, but as different from our earthly bodies as humans are from animals.

We further conclude that, like a seed, the body will be sown or buried and then one day be raised to life. It is buried in death, decay, weakness, and dishonor. When it is resurrected, it will be changed in every way. It is raised imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. We will then have eternal, permanent, and perfected bodies.

We will also maintain our identities. In Luke 16:23, Lazarus, the rich man, and Abraham all retained their identity. Imagine, one day we will no longer struggle with the weakness of sin, sickness, and aging. A great future is in store for those in Christ.

What Will We Do in Heaven?

What will we do in heaven for all eternity? Some envision playing golf for eternity, while others envision saints floating on clouds strumming harps of gold. Although great thoughts, they fall short of the glorious future that actually

awaits those in Christ. We are told relatively little about what activities will occur in heaven. We are only given a brief glimpse of our life to come.

First, the moment that saints of all the ages anticipate is seeing the Lord they served face to face. This will be the first and greatest moment after physical death. From then on we will have fellowship in His presence for all eternity.

Second, our life in heaven involves worship. A vivid picture is found in Revelation 19:1-5:

After this I heard what seemed to be the mighty voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. . . ." And again they shouted, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah." Then a voice came from the throne saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him both small and great."

Like the sound of roaring waters comes the praise from the saints of all ages. Recently the men from our church described the experience of singing the hymn How Great Thou Art at a Promise Keepers conference. Nothing they said could accurately describe that majestic experience. The closest they could come to putting it into words was, "Awesome! Just awesome!" Can you imagine what it will be like when we sing "Holy, Holy, Holy" along with the saints of all ages in the presence of God? Our worship here is preparation for our future, grand worship in heaven.

Third is the aspect of rest. Heavenly rest here does not mean a cessation from activity, but the experience of reaching a goal of crucial importance. In Hebrews 4:9-11 the writer, addressing the people of God states, "There remains, then, a

Sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his." Heaven is the final goal reached after our pilgrimage here on earth. We will rest from our sufferings and struggles against sickness, the flesh, the world, and the devil.

Fourth, we will serve the Lord. Luke 19:11-27 teaches a parable about stewardship. The wise servants who multiplied their master's talents were given rule over ten and five cities. Revelation 22:3 tells us, "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him." In 1 Corinthians 6:3 Paul rebukes the carnal Christians who cannot settle their own disputes and asks them, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" In Revelation 3:21 the Lord Jesus promises, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne." Apparently we will be given authority over a sphere in God's eternal kingdom. How much we are given depends on our faithfulness to Him on this earth.

Fifth, we will experience fellowship with God and with one another. One of the most painful experiences in life is to say goodbye. Whether it is to see loved ones move to another residence or because of death, farewells are a painful time. For the Christian, there is hope in knowing, our goodbyes are not permanent. One day we will meet again and this time we will never say goodbye again. What awaits the believer after death is a glorious future that cannot truly be imagined!

Notes

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