

# God and the Canaanites: A Biblical Perspective

*Rick Wade provides a biblically informed perspective of these Old Testament events, looking back at them with a Christian view of history and its significance.*

## The Charge of Genocide

A common attack today on Christianity has to do with the character of the God of the Old Testament{1}. Moses' instructions to the Israelites as they were about to move into Canaan included this:

In the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes, but you shall devote them to complete destruction, the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites, as the LORD your God has commanded (Deut. 20:16-17).

Because of such things, biologist and prominent atheist Richard Dawkins describes God as “a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser . . . genocidal . . . [a] capriciously malevolent bully.”{2}



Can the actions of the Israelites legitimately be called genocide?

The term “genocide” means a major action “committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group.” {3} Some twentieth-century examples are the extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis and the slaughter of 800,000 Tutsis by the Hutus in Rwanda in 1994. Going by this definition alone, the destruction of the Canaanites would seem to have been

genocide.

But there is a major difference. These twentieth-century examples were basically people killing people simply because they hated them and/or wanted their land. The Canaanites, by contrast, were destroyed at the direction of God and primarily because of their sin. Because of this, I think the term should be avoided. The completely negative connotations of “genocide” make it hard to look at the biblical events without a jaundiced eye.

One’s background theological beliefs make a big difference in how one sees this. If God was not behind the conquest of Canaan, then the Israelites were no different than the Nazis and the Hutus. However, once the biblical doctrines of God and of sin are taken into consideration, the background scenery changes and the picture looks very different. There is only one true God, and that God deserves all honor and worship. Furthermore, justice must respond to the moral failure of sin. The Canaanites were grossly sinful people who were given plenty of time by God to change their ways. They had passed the point of redeemability, and were ripe for judgment.

## Yahweh War

To understand what God was doing in Canaan, one must see it within the larger context of redemptive history.

The category scholars use for such events as the battles in the conquest of Canaan is *Yahweh war*. Yahweh wars are battles recorded in Scripture that are prompted by God for His purposes and won by His power.[\[4\]](#)

Old Testament scholar Tremper Longman sees five phases of Yahweh war in the Bible. In phase one, God fought the flesh-and-blood enemies of Israel. In phase two, God fought against Israel when it broke its side of its covenant with God (cf. Dt. 28:7. 25). In phase three, when Israel and Judah were in

exile, God promised to come in the future as a warrior to rescue them from their oppressors (cf. Dan. 7).

In phase four there was a major change. When Jesus came, He shifted the battle to the *spiritual* realm; He fought spiritual powers and authorities. Jesus' power was shown in His healings and exorcisms and preeminently in His victory in the heavenlies by His death and resurrection (see Col. 2:13-15). Christians today are engaged in warfare on this level. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (6:12).

Phase five of Yahweh war will be the final battle of history when Jesus returns and will once again be military in nature.

Thus, Longman says, "The war against the Canaanites was simply an earlier phase of the battle that comes to its climax on the cross and its completion at the final judgment."[\[5\]](#)

There are several aspects of Yahweh war. The part that concerns us here—the real culmination of Yahweh war—is called *herem*. *Herem* literally means "ban" or "banned." It means to ban from human use and to give over completely to God. The ESV and NIV give a fuller understanding of the term by translating it "devote to destruction" (the NASB renders it "set apart").

Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitsch write that "there can be no doubt that the idea which lay at the foundation of the ban was that of a compulsory dedication of something which resisted or impeded sanctification; . . . it was an act of the judicial holiness of God manifesting itself in righteousness and judgment."[\[6\]](#)

Canaan, because of its sin, was to be *herem*—devoted to destruction.

# The Conquest of Canaan

In the conquest of Canaan, three goals were being accomplished.

First, the movement of the Israelites into Canaan was the fruition of God's promise to Abram that He would give that land to his children (Gen. 12:7). When Joshua led the people across the Jordan River into Canaan, he was fulfilling this promise. Since the land wasn't empty, this could only be accomplished by driving the Canaanites out.

The second goal of the conquest was the judgment of the Canaanites. Driving them out wasn't simply a way of making room for Israel. The Canaanites were an evil, depraved people who had to be judged to fulfill the demands of justice. What about these people prompted such a harsh judgment?

For one thing, the Canaanites worshipped other gods. In our pluralistic age, it's easy to forget what an offense that is to the true God.

In the worship of their gods, the Canaanites committed other evils. They engaged in temple prostitution which was thought to be a re-enactment of the sexual unions of the gods and goddesses.

An even more detestable practice was that of child sacrifice. Under the sanctuary in the ancient city of Gezer, urns containing the burnt bones of children have been found. They are dated to somewhere between 2000 and 1500 BC, between the time of Abraham and the Exodus.[\[7\]](#)

The third goal of the conquest was the protection of Israel. God was concerned that, if the Canaanites remained in the land, they would draw the Israelites into their evil practices.

How could the Canaanites have that much influence over the

Israelites? For one thing, the Israelites would intermarry with them, and their spouses would bring their gods into the marriage with all that entailed.[{8}](#) In addition, the Israelites would be tempted to imitate Canaanite religious rituals because of their close connection to agricultural rhythms. The fertility of the land was believed to be directly connected to the sexual relations of the gods and goddesses. The people believed that re-enacting these unions themselves played a part in the fertility of the land.[{9}](#)

At first, the Israelites tried to compromise and worship God the way the Canaanites worshiped their gods. God had warned them against that (Deut. 12:4, 30, 31). Then they would simply abandon worship of the true God. As a result, they eventually received the same judgment the Canaanites experienced (Deut. 4:26; 7:4).

## **The Dispossession and Destruction of the Canaanites**

In Deuteronomy 20:16, Moses said the Israelites were to “save alive nothing that breathes” in the cities in their new land. The question has been raised whether God really intended the Israelites to kill *all* the people. It has been suggested that such “obliteration language” was “hyperbolic.”[{10}](#) Commands to destroy everyone are sometimes followed by commands not to intermarry, such as in Deut. 7:2-3. How could the Israelites intermarry with the Canaanites if they killed them all? Maybe this was just an example of Ancient Near Eastern military language.[{11}](#)

I think God meant it quite literally. Here’s why. Leviticus 24:17 says very plainly that every person devoted to destruction was to be killed. Further, in Deuteronomy 20, Moses said they were only to kill the adult males in far away cities (vv. 13-14), but in nearby cities they were to “save nothing alive that breathes” (v. 16). If God *didn’t* mean to

kill everyone in nearby cities, then what distinction was being made? And how else would God have said it if He *did* mean that? That being said, I do not think God had the Israelites comb the land to find and destroy every person; they were to devote to destruction the people who remained in the cities when they attacked.

Another observation is that the instruction is frequently to *dispossess* the Canaanites or move them out rather than to *destroy* them. Scholar Glen Miller points out that “dispossession” words are used by a three-to-one margin over “destruction” words.[{12}](#)

Can these be put together? With Miller, I think they can. The people of the land had heard about all that had happened with the Israelites from the time they escaped Egypt. “As soon as we heard it,” Rahab of Jericho said, “our hearts melted, and there was no spirit left in any man because of you, for the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath” (Josh. 2:11). Because of that advance warning, it is possible that some people abandoned their cities. Thus, the Israelites could possibly have married people who weren’t in the cities when they were attacked.

A more obvious reason for the possibility of intermarriage is the fact that the Israelites didn’t fully obey God’s commands. In Jdg. 1:27-2:5, we read that tribe after tribe of Israelites did not drive out all the inhabitants of the cities they conquered. The Israelites intermarried with them which eventually drew God’s judgment on them as well.

## Final Comments

The most disturbing part of the conquest of Canaan for most people is the killing of children. After the defeats of both Heshbon and Bashan, Moses noted that they had “devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children” (Deut. 2:34; 3:3, 6).

No matter what explanation of the death of children is given, no one except the most cold hearted will find joy in it. God didn't. He gets no pleasure in the death of anyone. In Ezekiel 18:23 we read, "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?" (see also Ezek. 33:11). When God told Abraham He was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham pleaded for them, and God agreed in his mercy that if but only ten righteous people were found, He wouldn't do it. Long after the conquest of the land, when God decided He would have to destroy Moab, according to Isaiah God "wept bitterly" over her cities (Isa. 16:9; cf. 15:5).

But what about Deuteronomy 24:16 which says that children shall not be put to death because of their fathers' sins? Isn't there an inconsistency here?

The law given in Deuteronomy provided regulations for the people of Israel. On an individual basis, when a father sinned, his son wasn't to be punished for it. The situation with Canaan was different. Generation after generation of Canaanites continued in the same evil practices. What was to stop it? God knew it would take the destruction of the nations.

Here are a few factors to take into consideration:

First, the sins of parents, *just like their successes*, have an impact on their children.

Second, if the Canaanite children were allowed to live and remain in the land, they could very well act to avenge their parents when they grew up, or at least to pick up again the practices of their parents.

Third, if one holds that there is an age of accountability for children, and that those younger than that are received into heaven with God at their death, although the means of death were frightful and harsh, the Canaanite children's experience

after death would be better than if they'd continued to live among such a sinful people.{13} How persuasive this thought is will depend on how seriously we take biblical teaching about our future after the grave. [Ed. note: please see Probe's article "[Do Babies Go to Hell?](#)" by Probe's founder Jimmy Williams.]

These ideas may provide little consolation. But we must keep in mind that God is not subject to our contemporary sensibilities.{14} The only test we can put to God is consistency with His own nature and word. Yahweh is a God of justice as well as mercy. He is also a God who takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

## Notes

1. This article is a slightly adapted version of the program that aired on the Probe radio program. A more detailed version is also available on our Web site with the title "[Yahweh War and the Conquest of Canaan.](#)"
2. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008), 51.
3. "Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide," Article II, University of the West of England, at: [www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/](http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/).
4. The phrase "the Lord's battles" or "battles of the Lord" are found in 1 Sam. 18:17 and 25:28.
5. Tremper Longman III, "The Case for Spiritual Continuity," in C. S. Cowles, Eugene H. Merrill, Daniel L. Gard, and Tremper Longman III, *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 185.
6. C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, trans., James Martin, *Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1: The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 484-485. Emphasis added.
7. M.G. Kyle, "Canaan," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 550.
8. The atheism of today wasn't an option. If the Israelites started to get a little slack in their obligations



to Yahweh, they would turn to other gods.

9. Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1957), 93-94; 96-103.

10. Paul Copan, "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?", *Philosophia Christi* 10, no. 1 (2008): 7-37; [www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=45](http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=45). In his article "Yahweh Wars" which was written after "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?," Copan presents two scenarios, one in which everyone was put to death, and the other in which the targets were military leaders and soldiers. He believes the latter is the correct interpretation. See Paul Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites," *Philosophia Christi* 11, no. 1 (2009): 73-92; [www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=63](http://www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=63).

In his discussion in "Moral Monster," Copan refers specifically to Deut. 23:12-13 where Joshua also warns the people against intermarrying. One should note that Joshua's commands in Deuteronomy 23 are given before the Israelites have completed their sweep through the land, so of course there are Canaanites there to marry. The Deut. 7 passage provides better support for his position.

11. Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."

12. Glenn M. Miller, "How could a God of Love order the massacre/annihilation of the Canaanites?" on the web site A Christian Thinktank,

13. Cf. Paul Copan, "How Could a Loving God Command Genocide," in *That's Just Your Interpretation* (Grand Rapid: Baker, 2001), 165.

14. And I say "contemporary" because children weren't regarded as highly in the Ancient Near East as they are today.

# The Darkness of Twilight: A Christian Perspective

*Sue Bohlin examines the message of Twilight from a biblically informed, Christian perspective, helping Christians understand how they should approach such popular fare.*

## Demonic Origin of *Twilight*?

The *Twilight* saga is a publishing and movie phenomenon that sweeps tween and teen girls (and a whole lot of other people) off their feet with an obsessive kind of following. Millions of Christian girls are huge fans of this series about love between a teenage girl and her vampire boyfriend-then-husband. But it's not just a love story made exciting by the danger of vampires' blood-lust. I believe the *Twilight* saga, all four books and their corresponding movies, is spiritually dangerous. I believe there is a demonic origin to the series, and the occult themes that permeate the books are a dangerous open door to Satan and his hordes of unholy angels.

I was stunned to learn about how the idea for *Twilight* came to the author, Stephenie Meyer. She tells this story:

I woke up . . . from a very vivid dream. In my dream, two people were having an intense conversation in a meadow in the woods. One of these people was just your average girl. The other person was fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire. They were discussing the difficulties inherent in the facts that A) they were falling in love with each other while B) the vampire was particularly attracted to the scent of her blood, and was having a difficult time restraining himself from killing her immediately.[\[1\]](#)



“Fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire”? Consider what vampires are, in the vampire genre that arose in the 1800s: demon-possessed, undead, former human beings who suck blood from their victims to sustain themselves. A vampire is evil. And the vampire who came to Stephenie Meyer in a dream is not only supernaturally beautiful and sparkly, but when she awoke she was deeply in love with this being who virtually moved into her head, creating conversations for months that she typed out until *Twilight* was written.

When I heard this part of the story, it gave me chills. Scripture tells us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, which is a perfect description of the Edward Cullen character.

Then I learned that “Edward” came to Meyer in a second dream that frightened her. She said, “I had this dream that Edward actually showed up and told me that I got it all wrong and like he exists and everything but he couldn’t live off animals . . . and I kind of got the sense he was going to kill me. It was really terrifying and bizarrely different from every other time I’ve thought about his character.”[\[2\]](#)

I suggest that if the *Twilight* saga is demonic in origin, it is dangerous, to Christians and non-Christians alike.

# Vampires, Blood, and Salvation

I explained above how the *Twilight* saga was birthed in an unusually vivid dream that I believe was demonic in origin. So it's really no surprise that the books are permeated with the occult.

The *Twilight* vampires all have various kinds of powers that don't come from God. They are supernaturally fast, supernaturally strong, able to read others' minds and control others' feelings. Some can tell the future, others can see things at great distances. These aspects of the occult are an important part of what makes *Twilight* so successful.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God strongly warns us not to have anything to do with the occult, which is part of the "domain of darkness" (Col. 1:13) where demons reign. He calls occult practices "detestable," which tells us that He is passionate about protecting us. One of the reasons *Twilight* is so dangerous is that readers can long for these kinds of supernatural but ungodly powers; if not in real life, then in their imagination. And this is a doorway to the demonic, which is all about gaining power from a source other than God. *Twilight* glorifies the occult, the very thing God calls detestable (Deut. 18:9). This is reason enough for Christ-followers to stay away from it!

For a growing number of people, vampirism is not make-believe. In a special report on the Fox News Channel, Sean Hannity reported, "there's actually a vampire subculture that exists in the United States right now and spreads into almost every community in this country."[\[3\]](#) Joseph Laylock, the author of a book on modern vampires, explains that there are three general categories of people who "believe they have an 'energy deficit,' and need to feed on blood or energy to maintain their wellbeing."[\[4\]](#) Some drink real blood, others feed only on "energy" they draw from other humans, and "hybrids" who are a bit of both.[\[5\]](#)

My Probe colleague Todd Kappelman, a philosopher and literature critic, observed that Stephenie Meyer took unwarranted liberties with the genre. Vampires are evil, and you can't just turn them "good" by writing them that way.

You can't have vampires strolling around in the daytime. You can't make evil good and good evil, putting light for darkness and darkness for light [Is. 5:20]. It's a law of physics: light always dispels the darkness. You can't have the bad guys win. There is no system in the world where evil is rewarded with "happily ever after"; it violates our sensibilities too much. Either the extremely ignorant or the extremely childish would fall for it. And apart from the moral aspect, it's doing violence to the genre—like putting Darth Vader in a Jane Austen novel.[{6}](#)

Writer Michael O'Brien comments,

In the *Twilight* series we have a cultural work that converts a traditional archetype of evil into a morally neutral one. Vampires are no longer the "un-dead," no longer possessed by demons. There are "good" vampires and "bad" vampires, and because the good vampire is incredibly handsome and possesses all the other qualities of an adolescent girl's idealized dreamboat, everything is forgivable.[{7}](#)

Closely connected to the occult is drinking blood, which is a focus of the vampire literary genre; vampires feed on the blood of humans. In *Twilight*, we are supposed to embrace the "good" vampires who have learned to feed on the blood of animals, calling themselves vegetarians (which is an insult to all vegetarians!). Interestingly, in Lev. 19:26 God connected the occult with ingesting blood 3200 years before the vampire genre was invented.

God understands the importance of blood; in both the Old and New Testaments, He forbids eating or drinking it. Not only did this separate His followers from the surrounding pagan

cultures, but it also separated out the importance of blood because it atones for sin. In the Old Testament, animals were sacrificed as a picture of how the spotless Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, would pour out His sacred blood to pay for our sins. God doesn't want people to focus on the wrong blood![{8}](#)

*Twilight* is also spiritually dangerous in the way it presents salvation. When Daddy Vampire Carlisle turns Edward into a vampire, it is described as saving him.[{9}](#) He ended a 17-year-old boy's physical life and turned him into an undead, stone cold superbeing, which Edward describes as a "new birth."[{10}](#) Vampire Alice describes the process as the venom spreading through the body, healing it, changing it, until the heart stops and the conversion is finished.[{11}](#) Poison heals, and changes, and converts to lifelessness? Healing poison? This is spiritually dangerous thinking. Isaiah warns us (5:20), "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

This upside-down, inside-out way of thinking is rooted in Stephenie Meyer's strong Mormon beliefs. *Twilight's* cover photo of a woman's hands offering an apple is an intentional reference to the way Mormonism reinvents the Genesis story of the Fall. LDS (Latter Day Saints) doctrine makes the Fall a necessary step, called a "fall up."[{12}](#) At the beginning of the book you will find, alone on a page, Genesis 2: 17—"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Stephenie Meyer explains:

The apple on the cover of *Twilight* represents "forbidden fruit." I used the scripture from Genesis (located just after the table of contents) because I loved the phrase "the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil." Isn't this exactly

what Bella ends up with? A working knowledge of what good is, and what evil is. . . . In the end, I love the beautiful simplicity of the picture. To me it says: choice.{13}

Echoing Satan's deception of Eve with the temptation to become like God on her own terms, the heroine Bella eventually becomes a god-like vampire, glorying in her perfection, her beauty, her infallibility. She transcends her detested humanity and becomes a goddess. This is basic Mormon doctrine, not surprising since the author is a Mormon.{14}

One of the messages of *Twilight* is that there is a way to have immortal life, eternal life, apart from a relationship with God through Jesus Christ; that there is a way to live forever without dealing with the obstacle of our sin problem by confessing that we are sinners and we need the forgiveness and grace of a loving Savior.

This is a spiritually dangerous series.

## **A Love Story on Steroids: Emotional Dependency**

Why are girls of all ages, but especially tweens and teens, so passionately and obsessively in love with Edward, the vampire in *Twilight*?

Edward is very different from the vast majority of young men today. He is chivalrous, sensitive, self-sacrificing and honorable. He wants the best for Bella, his teenage girlfriend and eventual wife. He is able to keep his impulses in check, which is a good thing since he lusts after her scent and wants to kill her so he can drain her blood. No wonder girls and women declare they're in love with Edward Cullen!

But one of the troubling aspects of the *Twilight* saga is Edward and Bella's unhealthy and dysfunctional relationship. Yet millions of female readers can't stop thinking about this

“love story on steroids,” which means it is shaping their hopes and expectations for their own relationships. That’s scary.

The best way to describe their relationship is emotional dependency. This is when you have to have a constant connection to another person in order for you to be okay. Emotional dependency is characterized by a desperate neediness. You put all your relational eggs in one basket, engaging in an intense one-on-one relationship that renders other relationships unnecessary. In fact, there is often a resentment of not only the people that used to be your friends, but you resent anyone in the other person’s world who could pull their attention and devotion away from you.

When things are going well, it’s like emotional crack cocaine. The intensity is addictive and exhilarating. When things aren’t going well, it’s an absolute nightmare. Emotionally dependent relationships strap people into an emotional roller coaster full of drama, manipulation, and a constant need for reassurance from the other.

When Edward leaves Bella for a time, she becomes an emotional zombie. The book *New Moon* is full of descriptions of the pain of the hole in her chest because when he left, he took her heart with him. She had withdrawn from all her friends to make Edward into her whole world, so she had no support network in place when he left. All of her emotional eggs were in his basket. Many readers see this as highly romantic rather than breathtakingly dysfunctional.

One or both people are looking to another to meet their basic needs for love and security, instead of to God. So emotional dependency is a form of relational idolatry. People put their loved one or the relationship on a pedestal and worship them or it as a false god. When you look to another person to give you worth and make you feel loved and valued, they become inordinately essential. When we worship the creature rather



than the Creator as in Romans 1, what results is a desperate neediness that puts us and keeps us at the mercy of the one we worship. They have a lot of power over us, which is one reason why God wants to protect us from idolatry.

*Twilight* is like an emotional dependency how-to manual. At one point, Bella's mother tells her, "The way you move—you orient yourself around him without even thinking about it. When he moves, even a little bit, you adjust your position at the same time—like magnets . . . or gravity. You're like a . . . satellite, or something."[\[15\]](#) The power of story, especially this story, is that it can set up readers to mistake emotional dependency and relational idolatry for what a love story should look and feel like.

On the Credenda blog, Douglas Wilson makes a powerful case for *Twilight* also serving as a manual for how to become an abused girlfriend and then an abused wife. Edward's moods are mercurial and unpredictable, and Bella just goes along with it, making excuses and justifying his actions.[\[16\]](#)

*Twilight* is spiritually dangerous because of its demonic origin and its occult themes, both of which God commands us to stay away from. But it's emotionally dangerous too.

## Emotional Pornography

The *Twilight* series is touted as pro-abstinence and pro-chastity because the main characters don't "go all the way" before they get married. A lot of parents hear that and give a green light for their daughters to read the books and see the movies. But the *Twilight* books are a lust-filled series, so embedded with writing intended to arouse the emotions, that it is legitimately considered emotional pornography.

Marcia Montenegro writes,

Much has been made of the alleged message of *Twilight*, that

it is one of abstinence and shows control over desire. In truth, Edward is controlling himself because he does not want to kill Bella; her life is truly in danger from a ferocious vampire attack from the one who loves her. Aside from that, a vibrant sensuality of attraction lies just beneath the surface. A TIME reporter who interviewed Meyer wrote, "It's never quite clear whether Edward wants to sleep with Bella or rip her throat out or both, but he wants something, and he wants it bad, and you feel it all the more because he never gets it. That's the power of the *Twilight* books: they're squeaky, geeky clean on the surface, but right below it, they are absolutely, deliciously filthy."[\[17\]](#)

The struggle with self-control is saturated with eroticism and lust. It's so sensual that teenage boys and young men will read it simply for that reason. The protest, "They don't have sex" is lame; the relationship is extremely sensual. One very insightful blogger writes,

To claim that the *Twilight* saga is based on the virtue of chastity is like calling the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Edition pro-chastity because the girls are clothed.

Bella gives detailed first person accounts of her "make out" encounters with Edward—everything from trying to unbutton clothing, to how loud her breathing is and how this or that feels . . . these detailed first person descriptions are designed to arouse young girls—like a gateway drug to full blown romance novels or vampire lore. How can books in which the author has written detailed first person descriptions of actions leading to arousal help readers to be chaste? The words on the page defy chastity. Anyone who claims that the books promote chastity has to explain how a young girl can read detailed first-person descriptions of "making out" as a tool to preserving her innocence.[\[18\]](#)

The sensuality of *Twilight* is not lost on even the youngest

readers and movie-goers. Robert Pattinson, the actor who plays Edward Cullen in the *Twilight* movies, was asked in a *Rolling Stone* interview, "Is it weird to have girls that are so young have this incredibly sexualized thing around you?" He answered, "It's weird that you get 8-year-old girls coming up to you saying, 'Can you just bite me? I want you to bite me.' It is really strange how young the girls are, considering the book is based on the virtues of chastity, but I think it has the opposite effect on its readers though. [Laughs]"[\[19\]](#)

God's word says, "Flee youthful lusts" (2 Tim. 2:22). Without a strong discernment filter in place, and without a strong determination to guard one's heart (Prov. 4:23), it will be very hard to obey that protective command when reading the *Twilight* books or watching the movies.

Recently at a youth discipleship camp, I asked the young men how they felt about *Twilight*. They booed. Real men don't stand a chance to be *enough* compared to the too-good-to-be-true Edward Cullen. When girls use the emotional porn of romance novels or movies, they are setting up impossible expectations that have no hope of being fulfilled by limited, fallible, all-too-human beings. It's a cruel twist on the way men can sabotage their relationships with real women by their use of internet porn. Is there much of a difference between using sexual porn or emotional porn? In both cases, fantasy creates unrealistic expectations that reality cannot satisfy.

Apart from the problem of unrealistic expectations, it is unhealthy to make such an intense heart connection with a fictional character. Some people choose getting lost in reading and re-reading the books over having connections with real human beings in community. One lady told me that she called a friend about going out to a movie, but her friend begged off: "Oh, I'm going to stay in with Edward tonight." A nail technician had one 60-year-old client who confided, "Don't tell my husband, but I'm in love with Edward."

In the first *Twilight* book, Edward sweeps Bella off her feet with the intoxicating description of his intense desire for her and why she desires him: “I’m the world’s most dangerous predator. Everything about me invites you in. My voice, my face, even my smell. . . I’m designed to kill. . . I’ve wanted to kill you. I’ve never wanted a human’s blood so much in my life. . . Your scent, it’s like a drug to me. You’re like my own personal brand of heroin.”[\[20\]](#)

I believe there is a spirit of seduction in the *Twilight* saga. Something supernatural draws millions of readers to fantasize about being desired, pursued and falling in love with a character that I believe has a deeply demonic component. It’s dangerous on several levels.

## **The (Rotten) Fruit of *Twilight***

*Twilight* is one of the most successful series ever published. Readers don’t just read the books; many of them re-read them, multiple times. In order to be discerning, we need to examine the fruit of this series to see its effect on readers. I believe that there is a spiritual reality of evil behind *Twilight* that explains three kinds of fruit I see.

First is the fruit of obsession. Literally millions of fans can’t stop thinking and talking about the books, the characters, the minutia of the *Twilight* world. There is an addictive element of the series for many people. Addiction is bondage; why willingly submit yourself to bondage?

Some girls talk about their daily reading and study of “The Book,” and they’re talking about the whole saga—not the Bible.[\[21\]](#) With social networking and digital media, fans have access to an ever-growing community of other *Twilight*-obsessed people, which allows them to connect with their God-given desire to be part of something bigger than themselves. But the transcendence of connecting to the *Twilight* world is so much

less than God intends for us to experience!

The second fruit is the spiritual warfare reported by Christians, especially those who disobeyed God's leading to get rid of the books—night sweats, hearing voices and other unusual noises, being gripped by a spirit of fear, loss of intimacy with God. Some thoughtful people have reported what one woman called “a stronghold I didn't want and couldn't seem to overcome. I became uncontrollably obsessed over this make-believe world. And fell into a pit of manic-depressive-suicidal state.”[\[22\]](#)

One Christian teenager, clearly under conviction, wrote this comment on a blog:

As a 15-year-old, reading those books was a . . . strange experience for me.

I didn't think they were too bad or morally lacking until I heard my old high-school chaplain [a thirty-something woman, I think. Never dared to ask ☐ ] praise them. And then something inside me clicked, because it struck me as wrong that a Godly woman would find this series good. . . .

Another problem with *Twilight* that I had is that it drives girls to think of love before they are emotionally and mentally ready for the idea. It pretty much skews their ideas of love up. I know it's done that to me. Because what this series has done is stick Edward Cullen in one category (i.e. “pure perfection”) and “everyone else” lumped together in another as a portrayal of pure “ocker”ness. I am now not sure to what percentage \*gentlemanliness\* exists in a normal, TANNED boy. So it's not really fair to guys, or girls, because of skewed expectations. . . .

Otherwise, I enjoyed the *Twilight* series, but I don't feel that I should have, so I'm going to pray about that one.[\[23\]](#)

The third fruit is a spirit of divisiveness. Some Christians

are inordinately defensive about *Twilight*, choosing the books over relationships with other believers who take a negative view of the series. One Christian speaker who shared her deep concerns over *Twilight* at a church conference was verbally attacked at the break by supposedly mature women. Some of them still refuse to speak to her.

Of course, we hear the refrain, "Oh come on. It's just a book. It's just fiction." But all forms of entertainment are a wrapper for values and a message, and we need to be aware of what it is. Remember, what we take into our imaginations is really like food for our souls. If something has poison in it, it shouldn't be eaten. Saying "It's just a book, who cares what it is as long as we're reading," is equivalent to saying, "If you can put it in your mouth and swallow it, it must be food." What are you feeding your soul? Goodness or poison?

Readers resonate with the important themes of life and literature: romantic love, family love and loyalty, beauty, sacrifice, fear, danger, overcoming, conflict, resolution. But these themes are laced with spiritual deception: "You, too, can be like God." You hear that *Twilight* is a love story on steroids, and people—especially young girls—are drawn to God's design for a woman to be cherished, protected, and provided for. They are drawn to the way Bella responds to Edward with love, respect and submission, which is also God's design. So it is especially devious that the elements that resonate with our God-given desires for love are poisoned as occult principles are interwoven with the story. [{24}](#)

One teenage girl made this comment on a blog: "I never thought of [the books] as arousing or erotic in any way. Like many other girls, I found myself falling for Edward as I delved into the story. Before I knew it, my heart was beating faster during the mushier scenes." Like millions of others, she is unable to discern the line between emotional and sexual arousal. Swooning because you are in love with a fictional character, when you long for this character when you're not

reading the book, means you've been taken captive (Col. 2:8). And God does not want us in bondage to anything except Him!

*Twilight* is dangerous because it subtly stretches us into accommodating that which God calls sin. People don't leap from embracing good to embracing evil in one giant step; it's a series of small, incremental allowances. Readers easily accept unthinkingly an unmarried couple spending every single night together when the Word says to avoid every form of evil and to flee temptation, not lie there cuddling with it! Readers are led to accept as heroes and friends vampires who murder human beings to drink their blood.

Commentator Michael O'Brien makes a stunning analysis of *Twilight*:

In the *Twilight* series, vampirism is not identified as the root cause of all the carnage; instead the evil is attributed to the way a person lives out his vampirism. Though Bella is at first shocked by the truth about the family's old ways (murder, dismemberment, sucking the blood from victims), she is nevertheless overwhelmed by her "feelings" for Edward, and her yearning to believe that he is truly capable of noble self-sacrifice. So much so that her natural feminine instinct for submission to the masculine suitor increases to the degree that she desires to offer her life to her conqueror. She trusts that he will not kill her; she wants him to drink her essence and infect her. This will give her a magnificent unending romance and an historical role in creating with her lover a new kind of human being. They will have superhuman powers. They will be *moral* vampires—and they will be *immortal*.

Here, then, is the embedded spiritual narrative (probably invisible to the author and her audience alike): You shall be as gods. You will overcome death on your own terms. You will be master over death. Good and evil are not necessarily what Western civilization has, until now, called good and

evil. *You* will define the meaning of symbols and morals and human identity. And all of this is subsumed in the ultimate message: The image and likeness of God in you can be the image and likeness of a god whose characteristics are satanic, as long as you are a “basically good person.”

In this way, coasting on a tsunami of intoxicating visuals and emotions, the image of supernatural evil is transformed into an image of supernatural good.[\[25\]](#)

*Twilight* is not dangerous because people will literally want to become vampires. *Twilight* is dangerous because, through the powerful medium of storytelling, dangerous ideas and messages go straight to the heart like a poisoned-tipped arrow, without being passed through a biblical filter. Beware the darkness of *Twilight*.

## **Addendum: Should I Let My Children/Grandchildren/Students Read *Twilight*?**

I have read all four books in the *Twilight* series. I strongly recommend against reading these books.

But I also understand that it's a cultural phenomenon, and lots of people are going to read the books no matter what anyone says. So allow me to attempt to redeem the cultural pressure inherent in these books' popularity by suggesting how you can help the tender, untaught minds of your loved ones to think critically as they read.

If your teen or tween expresses a desire to read the books, give an explanation for why you think they shouldn't. (“Just say no” just doesn't work with most kids. They need to know why, and that's fair.) I would suggest something along the lines of, “I love you and I want what is best for you, and that means protecting you from dangers you are not aware of. This series is steeped in the occult and in demonic influence,



both of which God strongly warns us against in His word. There is also a powerful emotional draw into unhealthy fantasy which could sabotage future relationships with real people. There are spiritual dangers and emotional dangers that I want to protect you from.”

If you receive pushback, then you might respond by saying, “If you want to read the books, then I’ll read them with you. We’ll talk about them, a chapter or a scene at a time. The choice is yours.” This gives your loved one the power of choice, but you remain involved in the process. What would be especially powerful for young girls is for Dad to read the books as well and talk to his daughter(s) about what’s in them. Men would have a very different take on the emotional lust in these books, as well as a sensitivity to the unfair expectations of a lover that would be formed in their daughters’ hearts. Girls need their father’s input in this adolescent time of emotional and sexual confusion, and *Twilight* is almost guaranteed to add to the confusion.

Talk about the books’ content frankly and openly; if they are embarrassed for you to know what they are reading, their well-placed shame will make a powerful statement about the wisdom of reading this kind of book. Make sure they know that you are completely aware of what they are taking into their minds and spirits, just as you would want to know if they were taking drugs into their bodies. Reframe the book’s content in terms of what the Bible says, and ask questions: Does this agree with the Bible’s explanation of life and reality? Does this help you draw near to God, or does it make you want to avoid Him and His Word? How do the descriptions of Bella’s, Edward’s and Jacob’s thoughts and feelings make you think about the people in your real life? Are you tempted to look down your nose at the “mere humans” you do life with?

Even though this work is fiction, it is still making statements about reality. What is it saying about life on earth? About God? About sin? About love? About the soul? About

heaven and hell? About biblical truth?

How does the book compare to what the Bible says? For example, look together at the Ephesians 5 passage about marriage and why it is important. (Marriage is an earthbound illustration of the union of Christ and the church.) And what Jesus said about the nature of the marriage relationship in heaven in Matthew 22:30. (The marriage relationship is ended by death.) How does it compare with the ideas about marriage in *Twilight*? Look for the ways Bella relates to her father. Is it according to God's command to children to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20)? Does she get away with her deceptions and repeated acts of disobedience? (Yes.) Is this consistent with the Bible's teaching on the consequences of sin (Gal. 6:7)?

Talk about the gold standard for what God wants us to expose ourselves to: "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" (Phil. 4:8). Look for what is true and not true, noble and not noble, right and not right, etc. The books are not without statements and ideas that are true, noble, and right; the problem is that they are mixed in with even more compelling ideas that are false, ignoble, wrong, impure, unlovely, and shameful.

"As a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Prov. 7:23). The things we think about by filling our minds and hearts will shape us. What are you filling your mind and heart with? Longing for the perfect lover that no human being can fulfill? Discontent with being human and wishing you could have supernatural powers? Will that serve you well?

Lia Carlile, a teacher at a Christian school in Washington State, offered these excellent critical thinking questions to help students think through *Twilight* or any other cultural phenomenon. Lia cites many Scriptures in her notes, which I highly recommend. [\[26\]](#)

## **Question 1 – Me and God**

- *How is this thing building my relationship with the Lord?*
- *How does my interest in this area compare with my time invested in my relationship with the Lord?*

## **Question 2 – Me and the People Around Me**

- *Is this creating conflict in my family or with others?*
- *Does it offend other believers or is it confusing them in their faith?*
- *What am I saying to my non-Christian friends or what example am I setting for others?*

## **Question 3 – The Bible**

- *What does the Bible have to say about this? Who does it glorify—God or Satan? Jesus or the things of the World?*

## **Question 4 – Me and *Twilight* (or whatever applies)**

- *How is this affecting what I think about; my attitude, heart, and mind?*
- *Does it help me to do what is right according to God? Or, does it promote things of the world?*
- *Does it distract me from the Lord and my relationships with others? Serving, praying, reading Bible, ministry, etc.*
- *Does it cause me to say, think, or do things that are contrary to Jesus and his life?*

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# Avatar and the Longing for Eden

*Dr. Patrick Zukeran examines the blockbuster movie from a biblical perspective, identifying reasons for why this movie resonated with so many people despite its false worldview of pantheism.*

## Introduction

James Cameron's hit movie *Avatar* ranks as a ground-breaking epoch. This movie features new technology and special effects that make it landmark fantasy film, joining the elite group of movies which include *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Star Wars*, and *Lord of the Rings*.



What accounts for the tremendous popularity of this movie? I believe the cutting edge technology, combined with the strong environmental message, stirred the hearts of people throughout the world. I believe the movie also awakened a deep longing in all of us for Eden.

In *Avatar* we are projected into the twenty-second century and enter the alien world of Pandora, a spectacular tropical paradise inhabited by the ten foot tall, blue skinned Na'vi. Through innovative 3-D technology, we are immersed into experiencing this stunning paradise in vivid detail as never before encountered in cinema.

CNN news reported that after the movie, numerous fans

experienced depression and even suicidal thoughts as they reflected on the present state of our planet and longed for the paradise of Pandora. Several websites included hundreds of entries from individuals who expressed their sense of loss and regret. In Pandora many saw a paradise that was lost, or one that can never be attained on this earth.

An individual identified as Ivar Hill wrote on one of the Avatar forum sites: "When I woke up this morning after watching *Avatar* for the first time yesterday, the world seemed . . . gray. It was like my whole life, everything I've done and worked for, lost its meaning," Hill wrote on the forum. "It just seems so . . . meaningless. I still don't really see any reason to keep . . . doing things at all. I live in a dying world." [\[1\]](#)

What accounts for this deep longing that was aroused by this movie? I believe within all people there is a longing for Eden, a pristine paradise where mankind and nature live in perfect harmony. Where does this longing of Eden derive from?

In Genesis God created a perfect world in which sin was not present. Man and woman lived in a beautiful and perfect world free from the effects and decay of sin. After the fall, this paradise was lost and the effects of sin began to tear apart God's good creation. Since then, man has sought to recover what was lost. However, can we ever regain what was lost? How should we view our environment now in this fallen world? Should we resign ourselves to living in a dying world or is there a message of hope? Can we attain Eden or is it forever lost?

In this article I will discuss the pantheist and biblical environmental message and the future hope of Eden restored.

# Paradise Lost

In the movie *Avatar*, we are projected into the twenty-second century and arrive on the planet Pandora, a beautiful tropical paradise of glimmering trees and psychedelic colored flowers. There are crystal rivers and breathtaking floating mountains in the clouds. Here the Na'vi live in harmony with the animals and nature.

What made *Avatar* special was that through cutting edge 3-D technology, we could encounter this world in a deeper and richer way. The movie awakened in many the longing for a paradise. I believe this longing is rooted in the Genesis account of creation. Man had a paradise but it was lost through a great tragedy. What was Eden and what was lost in the beginning?

In Genesis 1, God creates the universe out of nothing. The length of time or age of the universe is not the issue in this article. Whichever position you may hold on the age of the earth, we should all agree that the Genesis account explains how the sovereign God brings order out of the chaos and creates a masterpiece. He sets the stars and galaxies in place. He produces plant life and vegetation. He then creates animal life on land and in the oceans. The pinnacle of creation is man and woman whom He creates in His image. At the end of chapter one, God reflects upon His creation and states that “ . . . it was very good.”

In chapter 2:8-9 the text reads, “Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.” The text reveals that Eden was a beautiful and lush paradise which was untarnished by sin or its effects. Man lived in harmony with nature and the animals in garden.

The text also states that the trees of Eden were pleasing to



the eye and good for food. Eden was a place of wonder and tremendous beauty. What was most significant is that man lived in a perfect fellowship with his companion, woman, and they both lived in a perfect relationship with their creator.

In Genesis 3, the greatest tragedy in history takes place. Through man's disobedience, sin enters into the created order. From Genesis 3 on, we witness the effects of sin infiltrate God's good creation. Sin disrupts the harmony in all aspects of God's creation. The perfect relationship between God and man is disrupted. The perfect relationship between man and woman is broken and now they live in distrust of one another. The harmony between man and the created order also comes to an end. The power of sin and death have taken its toll on creation but will these forces ever be defeated? Will the curse of sin ever be ended?

## **Stewardship Over the Earth**

The appeal of the hit movie *Avatar* was not only its technology but its strong environmentalist message. In the story, the blue skinned Na'vi live in perfect harmony with their environment. This harmony is made possible when the Na'vi become one with Eywa, the "all mother." Eywa is not a personal being but the impersonal force of nature made up of all things. Eywa is ever present in all things and all things are a part of Eywa. At death, the life energy in all things returns to Eywa. Her energy is concentrated in a large sacred tree located in the middle of the forest. The Na'vi attain enlightenment when they attach their ponytails to one of her vines. The Na'vi also achieve oneness with the animals as well when they attach their pony tails to similar features on the creatures they seek to domesticate.

*Avatar* presents the worldview of pantheism, and the environmentalist message is wrapped up in this worldview. In pantheistic religions, "salvation" and restoration comes when

man attains oneness with the universe. This oneness is achieved through meditation and the altering of one's consciousness. Harmony with the environment and healing to mankind will come when mankind attains oneness with Mother Earth. Many have responded to the pantheistic religions such as the New Age movement because of their environmentalist message. Today, there is a heightened awareness and attention being paid to our environment. Pantheists care for the environment because they view man and nature as one, therefore man is of equal value to the animals and the plants. In pantheism, man worships nature or Mother Earth. Nature is valuable because all the universe and mankind are one in essence.

Does the Christian worldview present an environmentalist message? It certainly does, but very few are aware of or hear the Christian environmentalist message. At a time when so much attention is on the environment, it is unfortunate that the Christian message is not being promoted effectively. The Bible teaches a great deal about the relationship between man and the environment.

Unlike pantheism, the Bible teaches that God created the universe but is independent of it and not dependent on it. He rules and sustains the universe. God created man alone in his image and delegated to man stewardship over the earth. Man is to guard and care for God's creation. Having dominion over the earth does not give us the freedom to misuse the earth's resources or be careless in managing the environment.

We are not to exploit the earth as the humans portrayed in *Avatar* sought to, nor are we to worship the earth as the Na'vi worshipped their "all mother." Instead, the Bible teaches that we rule over the earth, but as wise stewards who exercise care and guardianship over what God has created. The Bible does indeed offer the best environmentalist message.

# Paradise Restored

Can paradise be restored? In the movie *Avatar*, the Na'vi lived in a tropical paradise on the planet Pandora. Many who saw the movie were awed by the beauty of the planet Pandora but disgusted when they reflected on the state of our planet today. On an Avatar blog site Ivar Hill wrote, "One can say my depression was twofold: I was depressed because I really wanted to live in Pandora, which seemed like such a perfect place, but I was also depressed and disgusted with the sight of our world, what we have done to Earth. I so much wanted to escape reality."[\[2\]](#)

The pantheists' hope is reflected in *Avatar*. Pantheist religions like the New Age teach that when enough of mankind is enlightened, the forces of the universe will respond and restore paradise on earth. In Genesis 1 and 2, man once lived in paradise in Eden, but this was lost in Genesis 3. Will paradise ever be restored or have we lost Eden forever?

The Bible teaches that we all look forward to that day when creation will be restored. In Romans 8:18-22 Paul states,

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

In this passage Paul exhorts Christians to patiently endure the suffering they presently face for there is a glorious future awaiting the believer. One day not only the Christian, but creation also will be transformed and delivered from the present state which is in subjection to decay as a result of sin. At this time all creation experiences frustration and

incompleteness as we await this coming transformation.[{3}](#)

The Bible promises that paradise will be restored—not by the work of man or an enlightened mind, but through the return of the King of Creation. When Christ returns, He will defeat evil and then Revelation 21:1 promises that there will be a new heaven and a new earth, for the old earth which was under the curse of sin is done away.

The message of hope presented by the Bible is not limited to an individual hope of one's eternal salvation. It is a message of hope for all mankind and for all of creation.

## **Until Creation is Restored**

The new 3-D experience of the pristine paradise of Pandora and the strong environmentalist message of the movie Avatar, stirred the hearts of many people to appreciate and preserve the natural beauty that we have on earth. Avatar wrapped its environmentalist message in the worldview of pantheism. The solution to the environmental problem is enlightenment to true reality. Man is one with all of nature, thus lowering the value of man, making him equal to the plants and animals. When enough people attain enlightenment, there is hope that restoration will come to our planet.

The Bible teaches that one day the world will be transformed and paradise will one day be restored when the king of creation returns. Until that day comes, what are Christians called to do in regards to the environment?

As mentioned previously, man was given dominion over the earth. We are to use the resources of the earth to improve our lives in our struggle against the curse of sin and death. However, we are stewards of God's creation and we are commanded to exercise great care over the earth. Throughout the Bible, God commands believers to care for the land. Here are a few examples.

In Leviticus 25, God commands His people to sow the fields for six years but in the seventh year, they must not sow but to give the land rest. In Deuteronomy 22:1-12, God commands His people to care for the animals, both domesticated and the wild animals that live in the land. Therefore, if anyone should have a strong environmentalist message, it should be the Christian.

The Christian must address the environmental problem. The problem is rooted in human sinfulness. This sinfulness manifests itself in two primary ways, greed and haste. Christians must stand against the exploitation, wasteful destruction, and abuse of land by companies seeking maximum profits with no regard for their surroundings. Francis Schaeffer rightfully stated that the Christian community must “refuse men the right to ravish the land, just as we refuse them the right to ravish our women.”[\[4\]](#)

Few churches and schools preach or teach on the Christian view of the environment. This message must be taught once again in our churches and schools. Christians must also practice sound ecological principles such as recycling, using cleaner energy sources, and the conservation of energy. Christians should also be involved in environmental causes that seek to preserve the beauty of the land and promote responsible mining and use of our natural resources.

Although nature is affected by the fall, we must be involved in the healing process from the fall. Christians must restore the relationship between God and man which is done through the ministry of the gospel. We must also seek to restore the proper view of our role in caring for the environment.

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# How to Talk to Your Kids About Evolution and Creation – What Kids Should Know About Evolution

*Sue and Dr. Ray Bohlin bring decades of Christian worldview thinking and a PhD in science to the important topic of communicating a balanced rational position to our children and teenagers on questions that they will encounter in our society.*

*This article is the transcript of a Probe radio program the Bohlins recorded. Sue's questions and comments are in italics, followed by Ray's answers.*

## Problems with Evolutionary Theory

*Why is there a problem with evolution in the first place? Someone once asked you, "What should I believe?" Remember what you told them?*

Basically I said you should only believe what there is

evidence for. After spending years studying evolution in bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs, I can tell you that, first of all, there **is** evidence for small changes in organisms as they adapt to small environmental fluctuations.

Second, there **is** evidence that new species do arise. We see new species of fruit flies, rodents, and even birds. But when the original species is a fruit fly, the new species is still a fruit fly. These processes do not tell us how we get horses and wasps and woodpeckers.

Third, in the fossil record, there are only a few transitions between major groups of organisms, like between reptiles and birds, and these are controversial, even among evolutionists. If evolutionary theory is correct, the fossil record should be full of them.

Fourth, there are no real evolutionary answers for the origin of complex adaptations like the tongue of the woodpecker; or flight in birds, mammals, insects, and reptiles; or the swimming adaptations in fish, mammals, reptiles, and the marine invertebrates. These adaptations appear in the fossil record with no transitions. And fifth, there is no genetic mechanism for these large-scale evolutionary changes. The theory of evolution from amoeba to man is an extrapolation from very meager data.

*So the problem with evolution is that it is a mechanistic theory without a mechanism, and there is no evidence for the big changes from amoeba to man.*

## **The Evolution of the Horse**

*I have our son's eighth-grade biology textbook here. Every textbook, including this one, has a story about the evolution of the horse. It is always offered as proof of evolution. What do you say?*

It does not prove much about evolution at all. David Raup,

with the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, says:

*"Well, we are now about 120 years after Darwin and the knowledge of the fossil record has been greatly expanded. We now have a quarter of a million fossil species but the situation hasn't changed much. The record of evolution is still surprisingly jerky and, ironically, we have even fewer examples of evolutionary transitions than we had in Darwin's time. By this I mean that some of the classic cases of darwinian change in the fossil record, such as the evolution of the horse in North America, have had to be discarded or modified as a result of more detailed information—what appeared to be a nice simple progression when relatively few data were available now appear to be much more complex and much less gradualistic. So Darwin's problem has not been alleviated in the last 120 years and we still have a record which does show change but one that can hardly be looked upon as the most reasonable consequence of natural selection."*[\[1\]](#)

There is no chronological sequence of horse-like fossils. The story of the gradual reduction from the four-toed horse of 60 million years ago to the one-toed horse of today has been called pure fiction. All that can be shown is the transition from a little horse to a big one. This is not significant evolutionary change, and it still took some 60 million years. It does not say anything about how the horse evolved from a shrew-like mammal.

## **Homologous and Vestigial Organs**

*Homologous organs: What are they?*

Homologous organs are organs or structures from different organisms that have the same or similar function. Evolutionists say this similarity is due to common ancestry. The important question is, Do these organs look and function the same because of common ancestry or because of a simple



common design? In other words, do they look this way because they are related to one another, or were they designed to perform a similar function? Homology is not a problem for creationists; we have a different but reasonable explanation. It is the result of common design, not common ancestry.

*What about vestigial organs, the ones that are supposedly left over from the evolutionary past? I remember being taught that the coccyx, the tailbone, is left over from when we were monkeys. And the appendix, same thing—we needed it when we were evolving, but we do not need it now. Vestigial organs are unused leftovers from our evolutionary past. Since we do not use them, they have diminished; they have become vestiges of their past function—according to evolutionary theory.*

Yes, according to evolution. But we have discovered that these structures do have a function. The prime example is the one you mentioned, the tailbone. The coccyx serves as a point of attachment for several pelvic muscles. You would not be able to sit very well or comfortably without a tailbone.

The appendix was also long thought to be a vestigial organ, having absolutely no function within our bodies, but now we find it is involved in the immune system. It does have a function. It is true that you can live without it. However, as we learn more about the appendix, we realize that if it remains uninfected, it may be serving a very useful purpose.

*So in other words, “vestigial organs” are not necessarily useless; we just may not have discovered what their role is.*

Yes, very often we have called these things “vestigial” because we never bothered to investigate their function because of their reduced stature. Now we find that things like the coccyx and the appendix really do have a function. And if they have a function, then we cannot call them vestigial; they are not leftovers from our evolutionary past.

*I am looking at pictures of embryos in this textbook that are*

*very similar. The explanation given in the book is that they are similar because they have a common evolutionary ancestor. Obviously, this is being advanced as evidence of evolution. Is that what it is?*

Definitely not. Embryological development does not follow the history of our evolutionary past. [That idea was proven wrong 50 or 60 years ago.](#) It is unfortunate that this error is still in the textbooks. Obviously, there are some similarities among species very early in embryological development; for instance, among mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds. That is because they all start from a single cell. As development progresses, they become less similar. That is exactly what you would expect from an evolutionist **or** creationist perspective.

## **The Early Atmosphere of the Earth**

*You know, I was pretty happy with how this particular textbook treated evolution. It does not even use the word evolution, and it treats it strictly as a matter of theory, not fact. But you came across another, newer high-school textbook that is stridently pro-evolution. I am concerned about some things I see in this chapter on the origin of life. It is talking about the earth's early atmosphere, and this statement is in bold print (so the students know it's going to be on the test, don't you know!) <smile>*

*"The earth's first atmosphere most likely contained water vapor, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, nitrogen, hydrogen sulfide, and hydrogen cyanide."*

*Then in the very next section it talks about Stanley Miller's famous experiments in 1953. It says the atmosphere he was trying to recreate was made of ammonia, water, hydrogen, and methane. What is going on here?*

This particular section is confusing at best and misleading at worst. Clearly they have described [Miller's classic](#)

[experiment](#), but researchers today agree that the atmosphere used for that simulation did not exist. But yet Miller's experiment produced results. If you use the atmosphere that the textbook describes as the real one, the results are much less significant. The textbook gives the impression that chemical evolution is easy to simulate. But this is far from the truth. One experimenter says:

*At present, all discussions on principles and theories in the field [meaning the origin of life] either end in stalemate or in a confession of ignorance.*[{2}](#)

But you would definitely not get that impression from reading this section of the book.

## Phylogenetic Trees

*I have another question. Here is this beautiful, tidy chart that shows how neatly different animals evolved from one common ancestor. This evolutionary tree has a crocodile-like animal at the bottom, and all these branches coming out from him, and we end up with turtles and snakes and reptiles and birds and mammals all descended from this one animal. Are we talking science fantasy here, or is there a problem with this evolutionary tree?*

Evolutionary trees, or phylogenetic trees, are regularly misrepresented in high-school textbooks. The nice solid lines give the impression that there is plenty of evidence, plenty of fossils to document these transitions—but the transitions are not there. If we were to look at this same type of diagram in a college textbook, all those connecting lines—the transitions—would be dotted lines, indicating that we do not have the evidence to prove that these organisms are related. The transition is an assumption. They assume these organisms are related to each other, but the evidence is lacking. Stephen Gould, a paleontologist and evolutionist from Harvard,

says,

*"The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology. The evolutionary trees that adorn our textbooks have data only at the tips and nodes of their branches. The rest is inference, however reasonable: not the evidence of fossils."*[\[3\]](#)

*In other words, these charts make pretty pictures, but they're not pictures of reality.*

That's correct.

## Natural Selection and Speciation

*In this same high-school biology text, I am looking at the chapter on evolution called "How Change Occurs." The big heading for this section is "Evolution by Natural Selection." Natural selection always seems to be linked inseparably to evolution. What is it?*

Natural selection is a process where the organisms that are fit to survive and reproduce, do so at a greater rate than those that are less fit. It sounds circular, but it is a simple process, something you can easily observe in nature.

*There are some pictures here of England's famous peppered moths. Why do they keep showing up in science textbooks?*

They keep showing up because the [peppered moth](#) was the first documented example of Darwin's natural selection at work. There were two different color varieties of the same moth: a peppered variety and a dark black variety. The peppered variety was camouflaged on the bark of trees, but the black variety was conspicuous. As a result, the birds ate a lot of black moths. The most common variety, therefore, was the peppered variety. But then the bark of the trees turned dark or black because of pollution. Now the dark form was hidden,

but the peppered variety stood out, so the birds ate up the peppered variety. The proportion of peppered moths to black moths shifted in response to the change in the environment.

So here was a change of frequency. At one time we had more peppered moths, and now we have more dark ones. A clear example of natural selection taking place. But the question is, Is this really evolution? I don't think so. It just shows variety within a form. This does not tell me anything as a biologist and a geneticist about how we have come to have horses and wasps and woodpeckers.

*When we are looking at peppered moths, we are dealing with natural selection within the same species. What about a whole new species; for example, Darwin's [Galapagos finches](#) off the coast of Ecuador. Isn't that an evidence of evolution?*

Here is another area where we need to be careful. Speciation is indeed a real process, but speciation only means that two populations of a particular species can no longer interbreed. The two populations get separated by a geographical barrier such as a mountain range, and after a time they are no longer able to interbreed or to reproduce between themselves.

But all we have really done is split up the gene pool into two different, separate populations; if you want to call them different species, that's fine. But even Darwin's finches, although there are some changes in the shape and size of the bill, are clearly related to one another. Drosophila fruit flies on the Hawaiian Islands—there are over 300 species—probably originated from one initial species. But they look very much the same. The primary way to distinguish them is by their mating behavior.

There is a lot of variety within the organisms God created, and species can adapt to small changes in the environment. But there is [a limit to how far that change can go](#). And the examples we have, like peppered moths and Darwin's finches,

show that very clearly.

## Responding to Evolutionary Theory

*You have given a creationist's response to evolution in textbooks, but apart from the books there is a personal issue to deal with. How do you think Christian students ought to react when they get to evolution in a science curriculum in school?*

First, don't panic. This should not be a surprise; you knew it was going to come eventually. Second, understand that evolution is a very important idea in society today. It is important to know about it and to understand it. Try to explain it to your kids in that way. You do not have to believe it or accept it, but you need to understand it, know what people mean when they talk about evolution.

*What about answering a question on a test?*

Here it can get a little sticky. You may feel that you have to lie in order to give the answer the teacher wants. But I do not think that is the case at all. What you are doing is simply addressing the issue of evolution; you are showing that you understand it. You do not have to phrase your answer in such a way that says, "I believe this is the way it is." It may come down to how you state your answer. But you are simply demonstrating your knowledge about evolution, not your acceptance of it.

*It seems to me that when you show you understand the concept of evolution, you are demonstrating respect for the teacher and really for the theory too, as the prevalent theory of our day, without having to make a statement of, "Yes, I believe this!"*

Sure. The concept of respect, I think, is extremely important, because you have to realize that as a middle-school or high-school student, you are dealing with teachers who have studied

or taught evolutionary theory for many years. Their level of understanding is much deeper than yours. You cannot simply go in there and try to convince the class that the teacher is wrong, or that evolution is wrong; you need to play the role of a student. And the role of a student is to learn, to try to understand and comprehend the ideas being discussed. But you do not have to communicate in such a way that you appear to believe evolutionary theory.

*I found this page in the textbook we have been looking at, right after the chapters on evolution. It is a message from the authors to the students. It says,*

*“Evolutionary theory unites all living things into one enormous family—from the tallest redwoods to the tiniest bacteria to each and every human on Earth. And, most importantly, the evolutionary history of life makes it clear that all living things—all of us—share a common destiny on this planet. If you remember nothing else from this course ten years from now, remember this, and your year will have been well spent.”[{4}](#)*

*I have never seen a message like this before, from the authors to the student. This textbook obviously has a very strong evolution bias.*

Here we have to realize that what is being taught is not science anymore; this is a worldview. This is a statement of naturalism. Obviously, evolution is extremely important to the naturalistic worldview, and the authors are trying to communicate its significance. We are going to see [more and more of this bias in textbooks.](#)

Before Christian parents can talk to our kids about evolution, we first must have an understanding of evolution itself, as well as an understanding of the problems with it. We don't need to be afraid of this powerful theory; we do, however, need discernment, in sifting through the rhetoric and

distinguishing it from the truth about God's world.

## Genesis 1

*Typically, if a child spends any time at all in Sunday school, he gets to the point where he realizes, "Hey, this doesn't relate at all to what I'm learning in school!" Our hope is that we can help parents integrate the truth of Scripture with what is known about origins in the world. As Christians, our starting point for thinking about origins is Genesis 1: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." From that point on, though, there are a lot of different perspectives explaining the rest of the chapter.*

That is true, and unfortunately it not only gets confusing for many of us, but it gets very confusing for many of the academics and the scholars as well. There are a number of different ways to interpret Genesis 1. Let me just run through [three of the most prominent views](#) among evangelicals today.

The first is the **literal** or the **very recent** creation account. Some people would call the proponents of this view "young earth creationists." They believe that each of the six days of creation was a twenty-four hour period similar to our days today. These days were consecutive and in the recent past, probably ten to thirty thousand years ago. They hold that the flood was a world-wide and catastrophic event and that all the sedimentary layers were a result of Noah's flood. All the fossils, therefore, are a result of the flood of Noah.

The second way of looking at Genesis 1 is the **Day Age Theory**, sometimes called **Progressive Creation**. Here, each of the six days of creation is a very long period of time, perhaps hundreds of millions of years. God would have created progressively through time, not all at once. The flood was a local event in Mesopotamia or perhaps even a world-wide, but tranquil flood. Therefore, the flood did not leave any great scars or sediments across the earth.



The third view understands Genesis 1 as a **Literary Framework**. This view suggests that Genesis 1 was not meant to communicate history. Peoples of the Ancient Near East used a similar literary device to describe a complete or perfect work; in this case, a perfect creation. God could have created using evolution or progressive creation; the point is that there is really no concordance between earth history and the days of Genesis 1.

We need to explain to our children the view that makes the most sense to us, but at the same time let them know that there is some disagreement between evangelicals. You may even be confused yourself, and it is okay to communicate to your children that you do not know, either, and that not knowing is all right. We need to give direction but leave the doors open for other options.

*Can we know which one is the correct interpretation?*

Creation is a mystery. We need to show respect, not only for the mystery, but also for those people holding different views. Evangelicals with backgrounds in Hebrew and Greek differ on their understanding of Genesis 1. So how can we expect a ten-year-old to grasp the problem and make an actual decision?

When we explain the creation account in Genesis 1, we need to communicate to our children that different scholars, all committed to the Bible as God's Word, interpret Scripture differently. The important thing is that we stress that God created the earth, the universe, and every living thing, especially humans.

## **Early Human History**

*Now we are going to look at some specific issues that arise from Genesis in terms of early human history. Let's start with Adam and Eve. Were they real people?*

This is a very important question, and I think it is one that most evangelical scholars can agree on. Adam and Eve were real people, and almost all evangelical scholars agree that they were created by God. The reason is that this is the one creation event where God gives us details as to how He went about it. When He created the other mammals and the sea creatures and the birds, He *made* them or He *created* them or He *formed* them, but we are given details about Adam and Eve's creation. We are told how God did it. Adam was formed from dust, and Eve was created from a rib taken out of Adam's side. It is clear that humans do not have an evolutionary origin.

*What about australopithecines, those supposed ape-like human ancestors?*

Australopithecines most likely are simply extinct apes. Some quibble as to whether they walked upright and therefore may have been on their way to developing into human beings, but even if they did walk upright, that is not a real problem. They are still extinct apes, and they really had no human qualities whatsoever. There is a very good book that you may want to look at called *Bones of Contention*. There are a couple of books called *Bones of Contention*, but this is a recent one by Marvin Lubenow. Lubenow goes into great detail about the actual fossil finds—what they mean, where they fit—all from a creationist's perspective, and he does a very good job. He talks about the fact that human remains seem to span the whole era of supposed human evolution from four million years ago to the present, and that even the one particular type of fossil called *homo erectus* covers a very broad range. *Homo erectus* does not really fit where he is supposed to, and the fossils seem to contradict evolutionary theory rather than support it.

*There is one more question that keeps coming up again and again. Where did Cain's wife come from?*

In some ways it is surprising that this question seems to be so perplexing to people, but in another way I really

understand it. Clearly, Cain married a sister. We react against that idea today because of the many laws we have today concerning incestuous relationships. We have laws against incest because the children that result from that type of relationship are often afflicted with a genetic disease. This is because all of us carry detrimental recessive genes within our chromosomes. Closely related family members may carry similar if not the same set of recessive genes. When we marry within the family, those recessives can pair up and result in a child who is genetically handicapped. But in the original creation, there was no such problem. These were the originally created beings, there were no genetic mutations to worry about.

When it comes to human origins, the Bible gives no room for anything other than God's personal fashioning of Adam and Eve. It is the fact that God personally created mankind that gives us such intrinsic value.

## **Noah's Flood**

*The flood of Noah is extremely important because several New Testament teachings depend on it. The Lord Jesus told us that the time right before He returns will be just like it was in the days before the flood. Peter reminds us that God's judgment fell once on the earth and He has promised to do it again. If the first judgment was not real, what are we to think of the second one?*

*But all too often what comes to mind when we think of Noah's flood is the image of a cute little round boat with the heads of fluffy sheep and tall giraffes and friendly elephants sticking out of it. We think of it as a harmless bedtime story like Cinderella or Scuffy the Tugboat, a remnant of childhood Bible lessons and storybook times. Did the flood of Noah really happen?*

We are talking about an historical event and one that is very

serious. It is spoken of in Genesis in a historical narrative. But evangelicals do disagree as to just how it happened. There are basically three different views.

One is the universal catastrophic flood account, where the flood was a world-wide event. It did indeed cover all the high mountains at that time, and it was catastrophic—lots of tidal waves and breaking up of the fountains of the great deep.

The other view is that the flood was universal—it covered the whole earth—but it was a tranquil event and probably did not leave any scars or sediments on the earth.

And the third view is that the flood was just in the Mesopotamian area. Since its intent was to destroy mankind, and mankind had not spread very far, the flood only had to cover the Mesopotamian area. Again, as with the creation account, we need to tell our kids what our conviction is. What do we think about it? And again, if you are not certain, if you are not sure about your view, go ahead and communicate your uncertainty as well. It is okay to be uncertain about some of these things; scholars do not really know everything about them, either. And we have to be ready to realize that the kids might not even like our particular interpretation, or they may have heard things in school, Sunday school, or church that may differ with our view. But it is okay to give our kids a little bit of room on these kinds of issues.

*With all of these different interpretations of the flood, what can we feel safe telling our children? What is the point of the flood? What is the bottom line of this event?*

The purpose of the flood of Noah was to destroy mankind as it existed at that time. Where scholars differ is just how far mankind had spread. Some suggest that the human population may only have been a couple hundred thousand, so they may have been contained in the Mesopotamian area. But if humans had been around for four or five thousand years, and they had a

chance to multiply and grow, there may have been several millions or tens of millions of people spread across the earth. That may be why some suggest that, in order to destroy mankind, the flood had to be universal. But we still do not know whether the flood was a catastrophic or a tranquil event, and so there is some room for discussion. I think all these different theories are helpful because they allow us to investigate God's Word to the best of our ability and try to determine what it really means.

*There is one view of the flood—the universal catastrophic flood model—that has really captured the attention of much of the Christian community. Several organizations propose this model. In fact, you spent a couple of weeks in the [Grand Canyon](#) with one of these organizations investigating the flood model for the formation of the canyon. We want to address a few specifics about this catastrophic model of the flood of Noah. Would you give just a brief outline of this model?*

This catastrophic model definitely suggests a very different scenario than the cute animals or the little round boat. We are talking about the breaking up of the fountains of the great deep and huge amounts of water rocking back and forth across the earth. The young earth creationists suggest that most of the sedimentary layers were formed during the flood. Most of the fossils that we find in those sedimentary layers, therefore, would have been laid down as a result of the flood of Noah. There should also be evidence around the earth of the catastrophic formation of all these sedimentary layers.

*How close to the truth is this model? Does it explain everything?*

There are a lot of things that it does explain. There is evidence for catastrophic origin for most, if not all, sedimentary layers. Organisms seem to require a very rapid burial in order for them to be formed as fossils. But there are problems with this model as well, and I think it is

important that we recognize what those are. For instance, all the different types of sediment would have to be the result of just one event, a catastrophic flood. When we look at these sedimentary layers, we have sandstone, limestone, mudstone, shale—all different types of rocks—but they all would have had to come from the same event, and that is a bit of a problem. The majority of Christian geologists believe that the strata are due to other events like river floods, deposits from big storms or hurricanes that occurred periodically or, in some cases regarding the sandstones, even desert sand dunes. While the catastrophic model is a captivating idea, I do not see a need to force ourselves to accept it or reject it at this time.

There is a lot of work to be done concerning this model. If you have a curious, science-oriented child, why not encourage him or her to pursue a career in science and become a part of the group that tries to investigate it?

## **Cavemen**

*Another question the kids are often curious about: Where do cavemen fit into the Bible?*

Most creationists believe cavemen were the early survivors of the flood. Remember, if the purpose of the flood was to destroy mankind, then most of these fossils would be individuals who survived the flood or lived soon afterwards. Cro-Magnon man and Neanderthal man, and probably even fossils described as *homo erectus*, are all post-flood humans, descendants of Noah's three sons. The so-called primitive characteristics could be due to genetic in-breeding, faulty diets, and life in a harsh environment.

## **Racial Differences**

*Where do the different races come from? If we are all*

*descended from one couple, Adam and Eve, why are there different colors of skin?*

Races would have originated with Noah's three sons and their wives. Several sets of genes produce the wide variety of skin color present in the current population. It is not difficult at all to envision genetically-similar populations becoming isolated after the flood and being the progenitors of the different races. Much of this genetic variability may have been contained in Noah's sons' wives, arising from genetic segregation that took place since the creation of Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve were probably people of intermediate skin color with most, if not all, of the genetic variability present in their genes.

## **Dinosaurs**

*We cannot talk about explaining creation to our kids without addressing the inevitable question of the dinosaurs. Where do dinosaurs fit into the Bible?*

There is no question that kids today, particularly boys, are really enamored of dinosaurs. The answer depends on what your approach is.

If you are approaching creation from an old earth perspective, then the dinosaurs have been extinct for seventy or so million years and there is no reason to expect them to be mentioned in the Bible at all. Men and dinosaurs never existed together.

If, however, you are approaching creation from a young earth model, where everything was created in the fairly recent past, then dinosaurs must have existed at the same time as man because they were created on the same day, only ten to thirty thousand years ago. And that raises the question as to whether Noah took dinosaurs on the ark.

It is difficult to imagine a brontosaurus getting on the ark, and most creationists answer that by suggesting he probably

did not take adult dinosaurs on the ark, just juveniles or small babies. The extinction of the dinosaurs then was probably due to the flood. Even if Noah did take some on the ark, apparently the climate and ecology of the earth had changed dramatically as the result of the flood and they were not able to survive following the flood.

But it also raises the very distinct possibility that some dinosaurs may still exist in small, isolated pockets around the world. I do not want to add too much credence to this, but there are very intriguing stories—and I just want to call them stories for right now, not fact—from the Congo of different kinds of dinosaurs being reported by villagers and even some missionaries seeing very large reptile-like creatures out in the swamps. We have cave paintings from South America of dinosaur-like creatures. We have legends from all over the world about dragons, in China and the East and in Europe during the Middle Ages. We seem to have it in our heads that big reptiles are out there somewhere. It is a lot easier to think of them as being left-overs from the flood rather than having existed in small pockets for sixty or so million years since they became extinct in an evolutionary perspective. It is also feasible that dinosaurs could be mentioned in the Bible.

*You mean under a different name?*

Yes. For instance, Job 40 talks of a creature called “behemoth” in verses 15 to 24. He feeds on grass, he has strength in his loins,

What we have tried to do in this discussion is help parents understand the biblical accounts of creation in the early earth so that they can explain it to their children. Although we have presented a few options instead of absolutes, we can still tell our kids that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and that the flood was a real event, although some of the details of how these things happened may escape us at



this time. This approach allows us to communicate clear biblical truth while at the same time encouraging a child's curiosity and desire to investigate God's world. This is our Father's world, and it delights Him when His children want to discover it and search out the mysteries of the past, of history, of His story.

## Notes

1. David Raup, "Conflicts Between Darwin and Palentology," *Field Museum of Natural History Bulletin*, vol. 30, no. 1 (1979): 25.
2. Kraus Dose, "The Origin of Life: More Questions Than Answers," *Interdisciplinary Science Review* 13 (1988): 348-56.
3. Stephen J. Gould, *The Panda's Thumb* (New York: Norton, 1980), 181.
4. Kenneth Miller and Joseph Levine, *Biology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1991), 335.

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### See Also:

- [Pictures and Account of Ray and Sue Bohlin's Visit to the Galapagos Islands](#)
- [All the Probe articles on Origins](#)

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# What Do We Make of the Stem Cell Debate? A Biblical Perspective

*Heather Zieger looks at the stem cell debate from a biblical worldview perspective. This Christian perspective recognizes*

*the true source of life and the difficulties with destroying many young lives for the hope of being able to save a few older lives.*

## **What Are Stem Cells?**

If science had a tabloid magazine, then stem cells would grace the cover. And much like the Hollywood celebrities, stem cells are at the center of controversy. How is a Christian to respond to conflicting reports and confusing science? In this article we will discuss the differences between adult and embryonic stem cells, look at some media myths, and evaluate the worldview issues behind the controversy.

First, let's define stem cells. Stem cells are cells that serve as the body's carpenters and mechanics to other cells. Their name comes from the stem of a plant. Think of a rose. From the stem grow the leaves, the thorns, and the flower. The flower does not produce leaves, nor do the thorns produce a flower, but the stem produces all of these things. However, the stem of the rose is still part of the plant. In the same way, stem cells are themselves cells and they produce other cells.

Stem cells can be found throughout our body. Think about when you give blood. Your body will resupply the blood that you lost. It does this by using blood stem cells. When your body needs more blood, signals tell the blood stem cells to make red blood cells, white blood cells and plasma cells. Another example is our skin. We lose skin every day, but our body has very active skin stem cells that grow new layers. Keep skin stem cells in mind, because scientists have been able to do some amazing things with skin stem cells.

Blood and skin stem cells are examples of adult stem cells, which are different from another type of stem cell called embryonic stem cells. Embryonic stem cells are only found in the inner cell mass of a 5- to 8-day-old embryo. These cells

end up making every cell in the human body and can divide indefinitely. They are believed to be much more versatile than adult stem cells. Because of this ability, scientists describe embryonic stem cells as *pluripotent*. Adult stem cells are programmed to only make certain types of cells (like our example of blood stem cells), and adult stem cells have a limited number of cell divisions. Because of this, they are described as *multipotent*.

As we look at some of the scientific research on stem cells, we will find that adult stem cells are more versatile than we once thought, and embryonic stem cells have limitations that scientists still need to overcome.[{1}](#)

## **Adult Stem Cells: The Underreported Medical Successes**

One of the two main types of stem cells is adult stem cells. Adult stem cells are named for their abilities, not for their source. We find very helpful adult stem cells in umbilical cord blood and the placenta even though these sources are not from adults. One of the most studied adult stem cell sources is bone marrow. The first bone marrow transplant was performed in 1968. But it wasn't until 1988 that scientists identified the stem cells within bone marrow that caused the transplants to work.[{2}](#)

Bone marrow transplants demonstrate one of the biggest advantages of adult stem cells. Scientists did not know what a stem cell was, let alone how they worked, but the bone marrow transplants were still successful. The stem cells knew where to go in the body to repair the right tissues. This ability to automatically go to the location of repair is characteristic of all adult stem cells.

Bone marrow transplants also demonstrate one disadvantage to adult stem cell therapy. Just like an organ transplant, the

stem cell donor must be an exact match to the patient. And the patient will need to take immuno-suppressant drugs for the rest of his life.

However, recent findings with umbilical cord blood have shown that the donor does not have to be an exact match when cord blood is used, meaning that a patient has a better chance of finding a donor. One of the first umbilical cord treatments was for sickle cell disease in a twelve-year-old boy.<sup>{3}</sup> He responded so well to treatment that a year later doctors declared him cured of sickle cell disease. He does have to take immune suppressant drugs, but does not display sickle cell symptoms.

One way around the donor problem is to use the patient's own healthy stem cells to repair other damaged cells. Parents now have the choice to bank their child's umbilical cord blood in the event that the child may need it. This technique was successfully used to help a child with her cerebral palsy symptoms.<sup>{4}</sup> Other adult stem cell successes include rebuilding bone, alleviating some cancers and auto-immune diseases, relieving Parkinson's symptoms, and treatments for Type I diabetes.<sup>{5}</sup>

All of these therapies have happened in real people using stem cells that do not involve the destruction of an embryo, and would be perfectly ethical within a Christian worldview.

## **What is the Promise of Embryonic Stem Cells?**

The second type of stem cell is embryonic stem cells. Embryonic stem cells come from the inner cell mass of a 5- to 8-day-old embryo. Embryos are formed after the egg and sperm have united, which initiates a directional process that, given proper conditions, can eventually form a baby. At the 5- to 8-day stage, there are only a few cells within the embryo, but

these cells are capable of making all of the cells in the human body. To obtain these cells, scientists penetrate the outer protective layer of the embryo and remove the cells. This procedure destroys the embryo.

It is still only a theoretical possibility that human embryonic stem cells can cure diseases. There is one FDA approved human trial that was announced in January 2009 for patients with a recent spinal cord injury.[\[6\]](#) We will have to wait to find out the results of this treatment. In other parts of the world, people have sought embryonic stem cell therapy as a desperate measure. One man in China had embryonic stem cells injected into his brain to relieve his Parkinson's symptoms. Unfortunately, the cells spun out of control and continued to make new cells of varying cell types. They eventually formed a large brain tumor consisting of different kinds of cells [a teratoma], such as skin cells, hair cells, and blood cells.[\[7\]](#) Another boy in Israel had a disease that attacked his spinal cord. His parents took him to Russia for several treatments with embryonic stem cells. Four years later, doctors found tumors in his spine that they confirmed came from the embryonic stem cell therapy.[\[8\]](#)

One of the most difficult hurdles for embryonic stem cell research is trying to program the stem cell to become the particular cell type that they need. The second hurdle is then telling the cell to stop multiplying before it forms a tumor. The signals and mechanisms for this are still being researched; however, one recent study involving the rebuilding of mouse muscles using embryonic stem cells shows some progress in this area.[\[9\]](#)

While embryonic stem cells may theoretically have promise, they have not shown this in reality. Time will tell if they actually deliver. However, the ethical issue from a Christian perspective is not whether this research has a practical use, but whether we want to go down the path of using the parts of one human being, deemed less worthy of life, for another.

# Media Myths

Unfortunately, the stem cell debate has turned into a media poster child for the next big scientific miracle. And stem cells have been hot science topics in the political realm. What is striking in all of this are the misconceptions that are repeated in the media.

Let's go over three media myths in the stem cell debate.

The first myth is that President Bush restricted stem cell research. Actually, President Bush was the first president to specifically allow federal funding for embryonic stem cell research.[{10}](#) However, he did put limits on how far they can take that funding. Furthermore, what is often omitted is that private companies have always been allowed to invest in embryonic stem cell research.

The second myth often repeated by the media is that embryonic stem cells have the potential to cure all types of diseases including spinal cord injuries,[{11}](#) Parkinson's and Alzheimer's. So far, the only successful stem cell treatments of spinal cord injuries or of Parkinson's symptoms[{12}](#) have been with adult stem cells.

I want to emphasize that *Alzheimer's will never be cured by stem cell therapy of any kind*. Alzheimer's causes the death of many types of brain tissues. Stem cells might be able to replace some dead tissue, but tissue death is a symptom, not the cause. Alzheimer's affects the whole brain so deeply and quickly that it really isn't an issue of replacing cells. Therefore, scientists must look to other areas for cures for Alzheimer's.[{13}](#) The perpetuation of the myth that stem cells will cure Alzheimer's is either a cruel misrepresentation in order to sell a story, or else demonstrates a complete lack of understanding on the subject.

The third misrepresentation is the blatant lack of media

coverage for adult stem cells. There have been over 70 different diseases, disorders, or injuries that have been helped or cured with adult stem cells in human trials,[{14}](#) yet this has hardly been covered by the media. We have discussed the successes of bone marrow and umbilical cord blood, but where is the media coverage of the latest findings with skin stem cells?[{15}](#) Scientists have found ways to coax a patient's own skin stem cells into acting just like an embryonic stem cell. In other words, these cells have the potential to become almost any cell in the body and they are from the patient's skin. No use of embryos, no immuno-suppressant drugs, and the technique has been refined for patient safety.[{16}](#)

Why this bias? There is a worldview issue at the heart of the matter.

## **Stem Cells from a Christian Worldview**

We have looked at the differences between embryonic and adult stem cells. We have seen the double standard the media has in reporting these types. But the question remains, with all of the successes of adult stem cells, including the ability to create embryonic-like stem cells from the patient's own skin, why insist on continuing embryonic stem cell research? Why does the debate continue?

I believe a major part of the problem is the answer to the question, Who is in authority? There are two broad options: a God-centered authority or a man-centered authority. The man-centered authority in this case is called scientism. It is the idea that science will save us from our problems and tell what we need to know about life, including what is right and wrong.

Don't misunderstand me, I am trained as a scientist, and I think studying nature and pursuing scientific questions is important. But when we prioritize science as the only means of gaining knowledge and make it the guide for our lives and the

decisions we make, we aren't studying the world around us, we have essentially invented a religion.

The other perspective is a God-centered authority. In this case all of nature, technology and our decisions are under God's authority. In other words, we determine what is right and wrong from the Bible because it is God's revealed word.

Scientists want to continue studying embryonic stem cells, because they want to explore all possibilities, and they see no reason why they shouldn't. From their worldview, they are in authority. There is no reason to put moral limitations on research. Many people latch onto this idea because they believe science will save them. They have faith in science. Some even believe this to the point of claiming stem cells will cure diseases and ailments that no stem cell therapy could ever do.[{17}](#)

Some scientists argue that we need to study embryos to better understand how a disease can develop in the earliest cells. These studies have been done in animals, but scientists would prefer to use humans because there are several developmental differences between humans and other animals.[{18}](#)

As Christians, we believe scientific study and finding cures for diseases is a great endeavor. But just because we *can* do something, doesn't always mean we *should*. We know what we should do from God's word. He values the unborn, and values human beings as having inherent dignity because we are made in his image. We therefore cannot judge some humans less valuable than others, and we certainly cannot destroy them for research observations or for removal of their parts. From this perspective, adult stem cell research is ethical, but embryonic stem cell research is not.

## Notes

1. An excellent documentary on the basics of stem cells and the controversy around embryonic and adult stem cells: *The*



*Lines that Divide: The Great Stem Cell Debate*. Dir. Brian Godwana. The Center for Bioethics and Culture Network, 2009. See this link for a clip:

[www.thecbc.org/redesigned/research\\_display.php?id=373](http://www.thecbc.org/redesigned/research_display.php?id=373).

2. "Purification and characterization of mouse hematopoietic stem cells." GJ Spangrude, S Heimfeld, IL Weissman, *Science* Vol. 241, Issue 4861, 58-62.

3. [www.nationalcordbloodprogram.com](http://www.nationalcordbloodprogram.com)

4. [www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,392061,00.html](http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,392061,00.html)

5. [www.stemcellresearch.org](http://www.stemcellresearch.org)

6. [www.geron.com/grnopclclearance/](http://www.geron.com/grnopclclearance/)

7. "Survival and proliferation of non neural tissues, with obstruction of cerebral ventricles in a Parkinsonian patient treated with fetal allografts." *Neurology*, Vol 46, Issue 5, May 1, 1996.

8. [www.plosmedicine.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000029](http://www.plosmedicine.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pmed.1000029)

9. "Functional skeletal muscle regeneration from differentiating embryonic stem cells." *Nature Medicine* 14, 134-143, 2008.

10. See Executive Order 13435; for an excellent article on the politics of stem cell research from a Christian worldview, see "Responsible Science & ESCR" by Greg Koukl in *Solid Ground* May/June 2009 (a publication of Stand to Reason).

11. [www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1864811](http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1864811) (*Journal of Spinal Cord Medicine* 29, 191-203, July 2006).

12. [www.lifenews.com/bio2751.html](http://www.lifenews.com/bio2751.html);

[www.bio-medicine.org/medicine-technology-1/Groundbreaking-Paper-Publishes-Long-Term-Results-of-a-Successful-Phase-I-Clinical-Trial-Using-Autologous-Neural-Stem-Cells-to-Treat-Parkinsons-Disease-3848-1/](http://www.bio-medicine.org/medicine-technology-1/Groundbreaking-Paper-Publishes-Long-Term-Results-of-a-Successful-Phase-I-Clinical-Trial-Using-Autologous-Neural-Stem-Cells-to-Treat-Parkinsons-Disease-3848-1/);

[www.bentham-open.org/pages/content.php?TOSCJ/2009/00000001/00000001/20TOSCJ.PDF](http://www.bentham-open.org/pages/content.php?TOSCJ/2009/00000001/00000001/20TOSCJ.PDF)

13. For an excellent overview of Alzheimer's, see the Alzheimer's association website at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org); for their statement on stem cell research see:

[www.alz.org/national/documents/statements\\_stemcell.pdf](http://www.alz.org/national/documents/statements_stemcell.pdf).

14. "A 37-year-old-spinal-cord-injured female patient, transplanted of multipotent stem cells from hum UC blood, with improved sensory perception and mobility, both functionally and morphologically: a case study." *Cythotherapy* 7, Issue 4, 368-373, 2005.

15. One person in the popular media who did mention skin stem cells was Dr. Mehmet Oz on the Oprah Winfrey Show:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDFJ0zu9SyM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDFJ0zu9SyM).

16. K. Takahashi, et al., *Cell* doi: 10.1016/j.cell.

2007.11.019; 2007; J. Yu, et al., *Science* doi:

10.1126/Science. 1151526; 2007.

17. See Joseph Bottum and Ryan T. Anderson's article in *First Things* for an excellent reference on the history of stem cell research:

[www.firstthings.com/article.php?year=2008&month=10&title\\_link=001-stem-cells-a-political-history-27](http://www.firstthings.com/article.php?year=2008&month=10&title_link=001-stem-cells-a-political-history-27).

Also see Anderson's article in the *Weekly Standard* for reasons scientists still want to study embryonic stem cell research:

[www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/016/258hdaij.asp?pg=1](http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/016/258hdaij.asp?pg=1).

18. The scientists who conducted the research on skin stem cells that were coaxed into acting like embryonic stem cells did use knowledge from embryonic stem cell research to help identify the general markers for pluripotency. However, it is unclear that it is necessary to use human embryonic stem cells for this, because the markers for pluripotency were first identified in mouse embryonic stem cells.

# Consumerism – A Biblical Perspective

*Kerby Anderson examines ways in which a consumerist mindset is a concern for both society and the church. He concludes by providing a biblical perspective.*

Consumerism is a concern within society and within the church. So I would like to analyze both of these areas of concern by citing books that address this issue. The classic secular book on this subject is *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*.[\[1\]](#) An excellent Christian book that deals with the topic of consumerism (in one of its chapters) is Michael Craven's book *Uncompromised Faith: Overcoming Our Culturalized Christianity*.[\[2\]](#)

What is consumerism? Many people use the terms *materialism* and *consumerism* interchangeably. But there is a difference. Consumerism is much more than mere materialism. It is a way of perceiving the world that has affected all of us (especially Americans)—young and old, rich and poor, believer and non-believer—in significant ways. Essentially it is a never-ending desire to possess material goods and to achieve personal success.

Others have defined consumerism as *having* rather than *being*.[\[3\]](#) Your worth and value are measured by what you have rather than by who you are. It is buying into a particular lifestyle in order to find your value, worth, and dignity. As Christians we should be defined by the fact that we are created in God's image and have intrinsic worth and dignity.

Even secular writers see the problems with consumerism. The writers of *Affluenza* say that it is a virus that "is not confined to the upper classes but has found its way throughout our society. Its symptoms affect the poor as well as the rich

. . . Affluenza infects all of us, though in different ways.”[{4}](#)

The authors go on to say that “the *Affluenza* epidemic is rooted in the obsessive, almost religious quest for economic expansion that has become the core principle of what is called the American dream.”[{5}](#)

*Affluenza* is rooted in a number of key concepts. First, it is rooted in the belief that the measure of national progress can be measured by the gross domestic product. Second, it is rooted in the idea that each generation must do better economically than the previous generation.

The consequences of this are devastating to both the nation and individuals. We are living in a time when the economic realities should be restraining spending (both as a nation and as individuals). Instead, we have corporately and individually pursued a lifestyle of “buy now and pay later” in order to expand economically. As we have discussed in previous articles, this philosophy has not served us well.

In an attempt to find happiness and contentment by pursuing “the good life,” Americans have instead found it empty. Consumerism seems to promise fulfillment, but alas, it is merely an illusion. Consumerism does not satisfy.

## **Inverted Values and Changing Attitudes**

Anyone looking at some of the social statistics for the U.S. might conclude that our priorities are out of whack. For example, we spend more on shoes, jewelry, and watches than on higher education. We spend much more on auto maintenance than on religious and welfare activities. And three times as many Americans buy Christmas presents for their pets than buy a present for their neighbors.[{6}](#)

Debt and waste also show skewed priorities. More Americans

have declared personal bankruptcy than graduated from college. Our annual production of solid waste would fill a convoy of garbage trucks stretching halfway to the moon. We have twice as many shopping centers as high schools.{7}

Americans seem to be working themselves to death in order to pay for everything they own or want to buy. We now work more hours each year than do the citizens of any other industrial country, including Japan. And according to Department of Labor statistics, full-time American workers are putting in one hundred sixty hours more (essentially one month more) than they did in 1969.{8} And ninety-five percent of our workers say they wish they could spend more time with their families.{9}

Americans do recognize the problem and are trying to simplify their lives. A poll by the Center for a New American Dream showed a change in attitudes and action. The poll revealed that eighty-five percent of Americans think our priorities are out of whack. For example, nearly nine in ten (eighty-eight percent) said American society is too materialistic. They also found that most Americans (ninety-three percent) feel we are too focused on working and making money. They also believed (ninety-one percent) that we buy and consume more than we need. More than half of Americans (fifty-two percent) said they have too much debt.{10}

The poll found that many Americans were taking steps to work less, even if that meant reducing their consuming. Nearly half of Americans (forty-eight percent) say they voluntarily made changes in their life in order to get more time and have a less stressful life. This increase in the number of self-proclaimed "down-shifters" suggests the beginning of a national change in priorities.

Perhaps Americans are coming to the realization that more consumer goods don't make them happy. Think back to the year 1957. That was the year that the program *Leave it to Beaver*

premiered on television. It was also the year that the Russians shot Sputnik into space. That was a long time ago.

But 1957 is significant for another reason. It was that year that Americans described themselves as “very happy” reached a plateau.<sup>{11}</sup> Since then there has been an ever declining percentage of Americans who describe themselves that way even though the size of the average home today is twice what it was in the 1950s and these homes are filled with consumer electronics someone back then could only dream about.

## **Undermining the Family and Church**

What has been the impact of consumerism? Michael Craven talks about how consumerism has undermined the family and the church.

The family has been adversely affected by the time pressures created by a consumer mentality. Family time used to be insulated to a degree from employment demands. That is no longer true. “We no longer hesitate to work weekends and evenings or to travel Sundays, for example, in order to make the Monday-morning meeting.”<sup>{12}</sup> As we have already mentioned, Americans are working more hours than ever before. The signal that is being sent throughout the corporate world is that you must be willing to sacrifice time with your family in order to get ahead. And that is exactly what is taking place.

Sociologists have concluded that “since 1969 the time American parents spend with their children has declined by 22 hours per week.”<sup>{13}</sup> Some have questioned this study because its estimate of the decline came from subtracting increased employment hours of parents from total waking hours. But I believe it makes the point that families are suffering from consumerism and this study parallels other studies that have looked at the decline in quality parent-child interaction at home.

The bottom line is this: Americans may talk about family values and quality time with their kids but their behavior demonstrates that they don't live those values. Frequently children and their needs are sacrificed on the altar of career success. The marketplace trumps family time more than we would like to think that it does.

The church has also been undermined by consumerism. Busy lifestyles and time pressures crowd out church attendance. Weekly church attendance has reached an all-time low in America. And even for those who try to regularly attend church, attendance is sometimes hit-or-miss. Years ago I realized how difficult it was to teach a series in a Sunday School class because there was so little continuity in attendance from one week to the next.

Craven points out that those who are dissatisfied with a consumerist-created lifestyle turn to church for meaning and purpose. Unfortunately, they think that "by integrating a 'little religion' into their lives they will balance and perfect the lifestyle. Tragically, they do not realize it is not their lifestyle that is in need of salvation, it is their very souls."[\[14\]](#)

Consumerism also affects the way we go about the Christian life. Religious consumerists add spiritual disciplines to their life in the same way they approach work (as a task to be fulfilled with measurable goals). In the end, spiritual activity becomes one more item on a to-do list.

Craven reminds us that Jesus Christ is not to be treated as one good among many. Jesus Christ should be the supreme Good and the source of all life.

## **Undermining the Community and Character**

What has been the impact of consumerism? Craven talks about how consumerism has undermined community and how it has also

undermined virtue and character. "With the increased priority given to the marketplace, there follows a decreased commitment to neighbors, community, and connections to extended family; children are displaced in pursuit of opportunities, and familial priorities become subverted to company demands." [\[15\]](#)

This has an adverse impact on citizenship. People are no longer citizens but consumers. Citizens have duties and responsibilities to their fellow citizens. Consumers do not. They are merely partaking of what the consumer economy provides for them. Citizens care about others and their community. Consumers only care about what the society can provide to them.

Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer predicted that as society moved from the "death of God" to what today we can call the "death of truth" there would only be two things left: "personal peace and personal prosperity." Schaeffer argued that once Americans accepted these values, they would sacrifice everything to protect their personal peace and affluence. [\[16\]](#)

Consumerism also undermines virtue and character. It "shifts the objective of human life away from cultivating virtue and character, knowing truth, and being content to an artificially constructed, idealized lifestyle that is continually reinforced through media, entertainment, and advertising." [\[17\]](#)

With this view of life, things become more important than people. Having is more important than being. And it is a lifestyle that pursues distraction (sports, entertainment, hobbies, etc.) almost in an effort to keep from thinking about the real world and its circumstances.

As we have already noted, consumerism does not satisfy. In fact, it can be argued that a consumerist mentality puts us in an emotional place where we are perpetually discontent. We are unable to rest in that which is good because we always want



more. This is made even more difficult in our world where advertising images provide a seemingly endless series of choices that are promoted to us as necessary in order to achieve the perfect life.

Michael Craven points out that when Christians talk about being content, this is often ridiculed as being willing to “settle for less” and even condemned as “lazy, defeatist, and even irresponsible.”[\[18\]](#) Instead we are spurred on by talk of “doing all things to the glory of God” which can be used to justify a consumerist mentality.

## **A Biblical Perspective on Materialism and Consumerism**

We live in a culture that encourages us to buy more and more. No longer are we encouraged to live within our means. We are tempted to buy more than just the necessities and tempted to spend more on luxuries. The Bible warns us about this. Proverbs 21:17 says, “He who loves pleasure will become a poor man; He who loves wine and oil will not become rich.”

In our lifetimes we have lots of money that flows through our hands, and we need to make wiser choices. Consider that a person who makes just \$25,000 a year will in his lifetime have a million dollars pass through his hands. The median family income in America is twice that. That means that two million dollars will pass through the average American family’s hands.

A tragic aspect of consumerism is that there is never enough. There is always the desire for more because each purchase only satisfies for short while. Then there is the need for more and more. Essentially, it is the law of diminishing returns. Economists use a more technical term—the law of diminishing marginal return. Simply put, the more we get, the less it satisfies and the more we want.

Once again the Bible warns us about this. Haggai 1:5-6 says, "Now therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, 'Consider your ways! You have sown much, but harvest little; you eat, but there is not enough to be satisfied; you drink, but there is not enough to become drunk; you put on clothing, but no one is warm enough; and he who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes.'"

We should also be responsible citizens. A tragic consequence of consumerism is what it does to the average citizen. James Kunstler, author of *The Geography of Nowhere*, believes we have "mutated from citizens to consumers." He says that "consumers have no duties or responsibilities or obligations to their fellow consumers. Citizens do. They have the obligation to care about their fellow citizens and about the integrity of the town's environment and history."[\[19\]](#)

America was once a nation of joiners. Alexis de Tocqueville noted this in his book *Democracy in America*. Americans would join in all sorts of voluntary associations. But we seem to no longer be joiners but loners. Sure, there are still many people volunteering and giving their time. But much of this is "on the run" as we shuffle from place to place in our busy lives.

Christians are called to be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) and the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16). We are also called to be ambassadors for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). We must resist the temptations of consumerism that encourage us to focus on ourselves and withdraw from active involvement in society.

## Notes

1. John DeGraaf, David Wann, and Thomas Naylor, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2005).
2. Michael Craven, *Uncompromised Faith: Overcoming Our*

*Culturalized Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009).

3. Richard John Neuhaus, *Doing Well and Doing Good: The Challenge to the Christian Capitalist* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 52-53.

4. *Affluenza*, xviii.

5. *Ibid.*, 3.

6. U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2004-2005).

7. *Affluenza*, 4.

8. *Ibid.*, 42.

9. *Ibid.*, 4.

10. Center for a New American Dream, 2004 survey, [www.newdream.org/about/pdfs/PollRelease.pdf](http://www.newdream.org/about/pdfs/PollRelease.pdf).

11. David Myers, *The American Paradox* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 136. 12. Craven, *Uncompromised Faith*, 79.

13. L.C. Sayer, et. All, "Are Parents Investing Less in Children?", paper presented at the American Sociological Association annual meeting, August 2000.

14. *Affluenza*, 80.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?* (Old Tappan: NJ: Fleming Revell, 1976), 205.

17. *Affluenza*, 81.

18. *Ibid.*, 83.

19. James Kunstler in discussion with David Wann, March 1997, quoted in *Affluenza*, 65.

# Confucius – A Christian Perspective

*Dr. Patrick Zukeran considers the teachings of the greatest Eastern philosopher from a Christian perspective, analyzing their commonalities and differences.*



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

## The Life of Confucius

Born in 550 B.C., Confucius is considered the greatest of all Eastern philosophers. His teachings are foundational to Asian cultures. His writings, *The Five Classics*, a collection of ancient Chinese literature, and *The Four Books*, a collection of his and his disciples' teachings, were for centuries the standard curriculum for Chinese education.

Confucius' teachings and biography were written many years after his death and were edited by his disciples. Although historians present various accounts of his life, there are some basic facts about which we are reasonably sure. From these basic facts, it is possible to outline the major events of his life.

Confucius lived during the Chou Dynasty (1100 B.C. to 256 B.C.) He was born in northern China in the Lu province into a family of humble circumstances. His father died at a young age. Confucius began studying under the village tutor and, at the age of fifteen, devoted his life to study. He married at twenty but soon divorced his wife and had an aloof relationship with his son and daughter. In his twenties, he became a teacher and gathered a group of loyal disciples.

At this time, the land was divided among feudal lords. The moral and social order was in a state of decay. Confucius

sought a way to restore both cultural and political order. He believed that reform would be accomplished by educating the leaders in the classics and his philosophy. He therefore sought a political position of influence, from which he could implement his principles.

When Confucius was fifty years old, tradition teaches that the Duke of Lu appointed him to a cabinet position. Several historians believe he eventually ascended to higher positions of public office. Due to political disagreements and internal conflicts, he resigned his post at fifty-five and left the province of Lu. He then traveled from state to state for thirteen years, seeking to persuade political leaders to adopt his teachings. Although many lords respected him, no one gave him a position. Discouraged by the lack of response, he devoted his final years to teaching and writing. Before his death in 479 B.C., he expressed his discouragement and disillusionment regarding his career.

However, his disciples were able to gain significant positions in government after his death. They modified his teachings and added their own insights and centuries such that Confucianism later shaped Chinese culture by becoming the official religion of China. The values he espoused of education, family loyalty, work ethic, value of traditions, conformity to traditional standards, honoring of ancestors, and unquestioning obedience to superiors remain entrenched in Asian culture.

There is much to appreciate regarding the life and teachings of Confucius. Christians would agree with his philosophy of ethics, government responsibility, and social conduct on several points. These similarities provide bridges upon which we can build meaningful dialogue with those in East Asian Cultures. These values make East Asian people open to the message of Christ. Despite the similarities in ethics, there are some major differences between Christianity and Confucianism that are important to identify. This work will highlight these differences and provide ways we can

effectively share Christ with those in East Asian cultures.

## The Metaphysics of Confucius

Confucianism, as its founder taught, is not a religion in the traditional sense; rather, it is an ethical code. Chinese culture was steeped in the religion of animism, a belief that gods and spirits dwelt in natural formations. Along with an animistic worldview, there was a belief in ancestor worship. The spirits of the dead needed to be honored and cared for by the living family members.

However, Confucius avoided spiritual issues in his teachings. Although he believed in spirits and the supernatural, he did not feel the need to devote extensive efforts in teaching about them. Rather, he was humanistic and rationalistic in his outlook. According to David Noss, author of *A History of the World's Religions*, Confucius' "position on matters of faith was this: whatever seemed contrary to common sense in popular tradition and whatever did not serve any discoverable social purpose, he regarded coldly."[\[1\]](#) The answer to the cultural and social problems was found in humanity itself, not in anything supernatural. This is further exhibited in the following three references:

1) A disciple of Confucius wrote, "The master never talked of prodigies, feats of strength, disorders or spirits"[\[2\]](#)

2) Confucius himself stated, "To devote oneself earnestly to one's duty to humanity, and while respecting the spirits, to keep aloof from them, may be called wisdom."[\[3\]](#)

3) In the Waley translation of the *Analects*, Confucius stated, "Our master's views concerning culture and the outward insignia of goodness, we are permitted to hear; but about man's nature and the ways of heaven, he will not tell us anything at all."[\[4\]](#)

In the Confucian system a divine being does not have a

significant role; his philosophy is man-centered and relies on self-effort. Man is sufficient to attain the ideal character through education, self-effort, and self-reflection. His system articulated the proper conduct in relationships, ceremony, and government. The core problem of mankind according to Confucius is that people are not educated and do not know how to conduct themselves properly in their societal roles. The chief goal of life is to become educated and live a moral life.

However, Confucius acknowledges a supreme power which established the moral order of the universe. This he refers to as the "Mandate of Heaven." The "Mandate of Heaven" may also refer to fate and events occurring in life which are beyond the control of the individual. The just rule and the virtuous man live in accord with this moral order. This is the moral order that lies behind the Confucian ethical system. One must be careful not to violate the will of heaven. Confucius wrote, "He who put himself in the wrong with Heaven has no means of expiation left."[\[5\]](#) Some scholars believe the uses of the term reveals that Confucius was referring at times to a supreme being.[\[6\]](#) After his death, Confucianism evolved, combining with Chinese traditional religions and Buddhism to add a spiritual component.

In contrast, Christianity is God-centered. It is built on a relationship with a personal God who is involved in the world. Confucius focused on life here on this earth. Jesus focused on life in eternity. For Jesus, what happens in eternity has ramifications for life here on earth. In Matthew 6:19 Jesus stated, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasure in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal." Here we see a contrast in the perspectives of Jesus and Confucius.

# The Ethics of Confucius

Three key principles are emphasized in the teachings of Confucius: the principle of Li, the principle of Jen, and the principle of Chun-Tzu. The term Li has several meanings which are often translated as propriety, reverence, courtesy, ritual, or the ideal standard of conduct. It is what Confucius believed to be the ideal standard of religious, moral, and social conduct.

The second key concept is the principle of Jen. It is the fundamental virtue of Confucian teaching. Jen is the virtue of goodness and benevolence. It is expressed through recognition of value and concern in others regardless of their rank or class. In the *Analects*, Confucius summarizes the principle of Jen in this statement often called the silver rule: "Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you."[\[7\]](#) Li provides the structure for social interaction; Jen makes it a moral system.

The third important concept is that of Chun-Tzu, the idea of the true gentleman. It is the man who lives by the highest ethical standards. The gentleman displays five virtues: self-respect, generosity, sincerity, persistence, and benevolence.[\[8\]](#) His relationships are described as follows: as a son he is always loyal, as a father he is just and kind, as an official he is loyal and faithful, as a husband he is righteous and just, and as a friend, he is faithful and tactful.[\[9\]](#) If all men lived by the principles of Li and Jen and strove to the character of the true gentlemen, justice, and harmony would rule the empire.

The Christian would find himself in agreement with many of Confucius' ethical principles and virtues. A Christian would also agree with many of the character qualities of the true gentleman and seek to develop those qualities.

What accounts for the similarity in ethics in Confucianism and



other religious systems is that which Paul states in Romans 2: within every man there exists a God-given conscience or natural law that guides our moral conduct. This is because we are created in the image of God, and thus we reflect His character. However, similarity in ethical codes does not mean the religions are the same.

The key difference can be identified by examining the silver rule of Confucius in contrast with the greatest commandment of Christ. Confucian law is summarized by the silver rule; however, Jesus summarizes his teachings this way: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:38.) Confucius believed that in order to truly achieve the principles of Li, Jen, and the character of the true gentleman, one must look within oneself. Jesus takes His teaching a step further. All His principles revolve first around a relationship with God. We only truly love our fellow man and live the righteous life God calls us to after our nature is transformed by the work of God's Holy Spirit which comes to indwell all who trust in Christ.

## Nature of Man

The Confucian philosophy is built on the foundational belief in the goodness of human nature.<sup>{10}</sup> The *Analects* state, "The Master said, 'Is goodness indeed so far away? If we really wanted goodness, we should find that it was at our side.'" <sup>{11}</sup> He further taught that all individuals are capable of attaining the highest virtue. He stated, "Has anyone ever managed to do Good with his whole might even as long as the space of a single day? I think not. Yet I for my part have never seen anyone give up such an attempt because he had not the strength to go on." <sup>{12}</sup> In other words, all individuals are capable through self-effort to attain the ideal goodness.

Confucian disciple Mencius further develops this stating,

“Man’s nature is naturally good just as water naturally flows downward.”[{13}](#) This innate goodness can be developed and actualized through education, self-reflection, and discipline. Study in the six arts, which include ceremony, music, archery, charioteering, writing, and mathematics, develop one’s character.

However, despite man being naturally good, Confucius faced reality honestly. He questioned whether it was possible to ever truly attain to the level of the true gentleman. Confucius stated, “I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness.”[{14}](#) He said of himself, “As to being a divine sage or even a good man, far be it from me to make any such claim.”[{15}](#) He further stated, “The master said, the ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them.”[{16}](#) However, if man by nature is good, why can we not attain that which should be natural to us?

The Bible is built on a contrasting view of man. It teaches that man is created in the image of God and was thus originally good. However, because of the fall in Genesis 3, man is now sinful and in rebellion toward God. Therefore, his natural tendency is to disobey the commandments of God, and he is driven to please himself. Paul states in Romans 7:18, “I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out.” As Confucius observed, no man is able to live up to the standards of the “True Gentleman” or God’s commands because man’s nature is sinful and in need of transformation.

According to the Bible, good education is a positive step toward helping man change, but it falls short. Man is in need of a heart transformation. Life transformation occurs when a person enters into a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. One’s nature is transformed because God’s Spirit indwells an individual. Although the Christian is not capable of living out the principles of God’s law flawlessly, he is not left to live a holy life on his own

strength. God provides man the indwelling of His Holy Spirit to enable man to live in obedience to God's law.

## Relationships

Central to Confucius' teaching are relationships and social roles. There are five great relationships.[\[17\]](#) If these attitudes are practiced, there will be harmony among all:

1. Kindness in the father and obedient devotion in the son
2. Gentility in the eldest brother and humility and respect in the younger
3. Righteous behavior in the husband and obedience in the wife
4. Humane consideration in elders and deference in juniors
5. Benevolence in rulers and loyalty of ministers and subjects

The most important relationship is the family as it is the basic unit of all humanity. Consistent with the pantheistic world view, he did not believe in an individual self or soul. Rather, roles and relationships define a person. The goal of living is to achieve harmony by acting appropriately within those roles and relationships because the harmony of relationships within the family can extend into the life of the community and the world. The way individuals relate to their family members influences how they treat members of the community. This, in turn, affects relationships beyond the community. Thus, harmonious family relationships lead to harmonious relationships in the community. If there is discord in the family, this will likewise carry over into the community.

In the family unit, the father is the key figure. He must be a good example to his sons. It is the son's duty to obey without questioning and honor his father even after his father's death. When the father dies, obedience is then given to the

oldest brother. Confucius stated, "Meng I Tzu asked about the treatment of parents. The Master said, 'Never disobey! . . . While they are alive, serve them according to ritual. When they die, bury them according to ritual and sacrifice to them according to ritual.'" [\[18\]](#)

Confucius taught that government should be for the people. Feudal lords are to be responsive to the needs of the people they govern. If the rulers lived by the highest principles, the people would then follow, and there would be reform from the greatest to the least. The duty of those in subordinate positions is to be unquestioningly loyal to their superior. Confucius stated, "It is said that if good people work for a country for a hundred years, it is possible to overcome violence and eliminate killing. This saying is indeed true." [\[19\]](#) Confucius believed that a good society would be achieved through education.

There are points of agreement between Confucius and the Bible. Confucius believed the virtues he espoused are lived out in relationships. The same is true for Christianity; our relationship with God is reflected in our relationships with one another. The truth of the Christian life is lived out in a community, not in isolation. The family is the key social unit, and the father is the leader of the family. However, Christianity takes relationships one step further than Confucius. Not only can we have the five relationships espoused by Confucius, we can also have a personal relationship with God. It is from this connection that our earthly relationships find their greatest meaning.

## **A Final Critique**

There is much in the teachings of Confucius that I have found commendable. His moral values often parallel those taught in the Bible. As previously mentioned, the Bible teaches that we are created in the image of God, and, therefore, we reflect His moral character. His moral law code is embedded on our

hearts (Rom. 2). Most people of Asian descent may not be strict adherents to Confucianism, but they are all influenced by his philosophy. Anyone seeking to serve in Asian cultures would find it worthwhile to read his works. Confucianism is very adaptable and fluid in its structure. That has been a weakness, but it has also a strength of the system since it allows Confucianism to join other inclusive religious systems. There are several significant differences, and, I believe, deficiencies within Confucian philosophy.

First, Confucianism falls short as a comprehensive life view because it fails to address several key issues. The Confucian system does not answer the key questions such as, Why does the universe exist? How do we explain its origin? What is the meaning of mankind's existence in the universe? What happens after death? These are universal questions that must be addressed. Man is a spiritual being, and this philosophy leaves one spiritually void. The Bible teaches that God has set eternity in the heart of men (Eccl. 3:11.) The longing for spiritual answers is a universal need. For this reason, Confucian philosophy eventually combined with Chinese Folk religion and Buddhism. Nonetheless, it still fails to provide complete answers.

Second, Confucius taught there was an overarching morality and will called the "Mandate of Heaven" which guided the universe. The Mandate of Heaven is the moral order established by heaven. Some believe Confucius was referring to an impersonal force; others believe he was referring to a personal being. In either case, Confucius felt the heavens (or the one in heaven) do not communicate with people. Confucius stated, "Heaven does not speak; yet the four seasons run their course thereby, the hundred creatures, each after its kind, are born thereby. Heaven does no speaking!"[\[20\]](#) in contrast, the Bible teaches that we can have a relationship with the one who established the moral order. God is involved with creation and has made the way for a relationship with Him possible through His son

(Jn. 3:16). The creator of all things has communicated with us through His Word and His Son. He also invites us to commune with Him in prayer and intimate fellowship. The imagery of the Shepherd and His sheep found in Psalm 23 and John 10 reflect His desire for a close relationship with us.

Third, Confucius built his philosophy on the belief that man is basically good. However, despite this, Confucius honestly admitted that no one had attained the level of the true gentleman. Confucius stated, "I for my part have never yet seen one who really cared for goodness, nor one who really abhorred wickedness."[\[21\]](#) He said of himself, "...the Ways of the true gentleman are three. I myself have met with success in none of them."[\[22\]](#) If man is good by nature, we must ask why we cannot attain what should be natural to us.

The Bible is built on a contrasting view of man. It teaches that man is created in the image of God but fallen in sin and rebellious toward God. Therefore, his natural tendency is to disobey the commandments of God and please himself. Paul states in Romans 7:18, "I have the desire to do good, but I cannot carry it out." Good education is a positive step toward helping man change, but it falls short. Man is in need of a heart transformation. Life transformation occurs when a person enters into a personal relationship with God and God's Spirit transforms one's nature through the indwelling and enabling power of His Holy Spirit.

## Conclusion

Confucius teaches many valuable ethical principles that are consistent with Biblical teaching. This offers Christians a good way to build bridges with many in East Asian cultures. However, the spiritual void in Confucianism is a great weakness; however, it provides a wonderful opportunity to present the case for Christianity.

Christianity offers a comprehensive life view, for it explains

the nature of God, our relationship to Him, the origin of creation, and what happens after death. In Confucian teaching, one cannot communicate with the creator, but in Christianity, the Creator invites us and makes the way possible for a relationship with Him through His Son Jesus. Finally, true transformation of one's nature will not occur through education, but rather through the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer in Christ.

## Notes

1. David Noss, *A History of the World's Religions* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 298.
2. *Analects of Confucius*, trans. Arthur Waley, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 7:20.
3. *Analects* 6:20
4. *Analects* 5:12
5. *Analects* 3:13.
6. Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Volume 1 (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 57-8.
7. *Analects* 15:23.
8. *Analects* 17:6.
9. Noss, 297.
10. Stephen Schuhmacher & Gert Woerner, *The Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994), 80.
11. *Analects* 7:9.
12. *Analects* 4:6.
13. Mencius XI:2, trans. David Hinton, (Washington D.C.:

Counterpoint, 1998), 197.

14. *Analects* 4:6

15. *Analects* 7:33.

16. *Analects* 14:30.

17. Noss, 293.

18. *Analects* 2:5.

19. *Analects* 13:11.

20. *Analects* 17:19.

22. *Analects* 4:6.

22. *Analects* 14:30.

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## **Rome and America – Comparing to the Ancient Roman Empire**

*Kerby Anderson looks at the comparisons between modern America and ancient Rome, i.e. the Roman Empire. Do Americans have a worldview more like ancient Romans than the biblical worldview spelled out in the Bible? In some ways, yes, and in other ways, not so much.*

### **Similarities**

The philosopher George Santayana once said: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” To which I might add that those who remember Santayana’s maxim also seem

condemned to repeat the phrase.

✖ Ask anyone if they see similarities between Rome and America, and they are likely to respond with a resounding, “Yes!” But I have also found that people who see similarities between Rome and America see different similarities. Some see similarities in our moral decay. Others see similarities in pride, arrogance, and hubris. But all seem to agree that we are repeating the mistakes of the past and need to change our ways.

In his book *Are We Rome?*, Cullen Murphy argues that there are many similarities between the Roman Empire and America.<sup>{1}</sup> But he also believes that the American national character couldn't be more different from Rome. He believes those differences can help us avoid Rome's fate.

Let's begin by looking at some of the political, geographical, and demographic similarities.<sup>{2}</sup>

1. Dominant powers: “Rome and America are the most powerful actors in their world, by many orders of magnitude. Their power includes both military might and the ‘soft power’ of language, culture, commerce, technology, and ideas.”

2. Approximately equal in size: “Rome and America are comparable in physical size—the Roman Empire and its Mediterranean lake would fit inside the three million square miles of the Lower Forty-eight states, though without a lot to spare.”

3. Global influence: “Both Rome and America created global structures—administrative, economic, military, cultural—that the rest of the world and their own citizens came to take for granted, as gravity and photosynthesis are taken for granted.”

4. Open society: “Both are societies made up of many peoples—open to newcomers, willing to absorb the genes and lifestyles and gods of everyone else, and to grant citizenship

to incoming tribes from all corners of the earth.”

5. Culturally similar: “Romans and Americans can’t get enough of laws and lawyers and lawsuits. . . . They relish the ritual humiliation of public figures: Americans through comedy and satire, talk radio and Court TV; the Romans through vicious satire, to be sure, but also, during the republic, by means of the *censorial nota*, the public airing, name by name, of everything great men of the time should be ashamed of.”

6. Chosen people: “Both see themselves as chosen people, and both see their national character as exceptional.”

While there are many similarities, there are also profound differences between Rome and America. Before we look at the six major parallels that Murphy talks about, we need to remind ourselves that there are many distinct differences between Rome and America.

## Differences

It is no real surprise that people from different political and religious perspectives see similarities between Rome and America. While some see similarities in moral decay, others see it in military might or political corruption. Although there are many similarities between Rome and America, there are some notable differences.

Cullen Murphy points out these significant differences.[\[3\]](#)

1. Technological advancement: “Rome in all its long history never left the Iron Age, whereas America in its short history has already leapt through the Industrial Age to the Information Age and the Biotech Age.”

2. Abundance: “Wealthy as it was, Rome lived close to the edge; many regions were one dry spell away from famine. America enjoys an economy of abundance, ever surfeit; it must

beware the diseases of overindulgence.”

3. Slavery: “Rome was always a slaveholding polity with the profound moral and social retardation that this implies; America started out as a slaveholding polity and decisively cast slavery aside.”

4. Government: “Rome emerged out of a city-state and took centuries to let go of a city-state’s method of governance; America from early on began to administer itself as a continental power.”

5. Social classes: “Rome had no middle class as we understand the term, whereas for America the middle class is the core social fact.”

6. Democracy: “Rome had a powerful but tiny aristocracy and entrenched ideas about the social pecking order; even at its most democratic, Rome was not remotely as democratic as America at its least democratic, under a British monarch.”

7. Entrepreneurship: “Romans looked down upon entrepreneurship, which Americans hold in the highest esteem.”

8. Economic dynamism: “Rome was economically static; America is economically transformative.”

9. Technological development: “For all its engineering skills, Rome generated few original ideas in science and technology; America is a hothouse of innovation and creativity.”

10. Social equality: “On basic matters such as gender roles and the equality of all people, Romans and Americans would behold one another with disbelief and distaste.”

While it is true that Rome and America have a vast number of similarities, we can also see there are significant differences between the two. We therefore need a nuanced view of the parallels between the two civilizations and recognize that these differences may be an important key in

understanding the future of the United States.

## Six Parallels

Murphy sees many parallels between the Roman Empire and America in addition to the above.[{4}](#) The following are larger, more extensive, parallels.

The first parallel is perspective. It actually involves “the way Americans see America; and more to the point, the way the tiny, elite subset of Americans who live in the nation’s capital see America—and see Washington itself.”

Like the Romans, Americans tend to see themselves as more important than they are. They tend to have an exaggerated sense of their own presence in the world and its ability to act alone.

A second parallel involves military power. Although there are differences, some similarities stand out. Both Rome and America start to run short of people to sustain their militaries and began to find recruits through outside sources. This is not a good long-run solution.

A third parallel can be lumped under the term privatization. “Rome had trouble maintaining a distinction between public and private responsibilities.” America is currently in the midst of privatizing functions that used to be public tasks.

A fourth parallel concerns the way Rome and America view the outside world. In a sense, this is merely the flip side of the first parallel. If you believe your country is exceptional, you tend to devalue others. And more importantly, you tend to underestimate another nation’s capabilities. Rome learned this in A.D. 9 when three legions were ambushed by a smaller German force and annihilated.[{5}](#) The repercussions were significant.

The question of borders is a fifth parallel. The boundary of

Rome “was less a fence and more a threshold—not so much a firm line fortified with ‘Keep Out’ signs as a permeable zone of continual interaction.” Compare that description to our border with Mexico, and so can see many similarities.

A final parallel has to do with size and complexity. The Roman Empire got too big physically and too complex to manage effectively. The larger a country or civilization, the more “it touches, and the more susceptible it is to forces beyond its control.” To use a phrase by Murphy: “Bureaucracy is the new geography.”[\[6\]](#)

Cullen Murphy concludes his book by calling for greater citizen engagement and for us to promote a sense of community and mutual obligation. The Roman historian Livy wrote, “An empire remains powerful so long as its subjects rejoice in it.” America is not beyond repair, but it needs to learn the lessons from the Roman Empire.

## Decline of the Family

What about the moral decline of Rome? Do we see parallels in America? I have addressed this in previous articles such as “[The Decline of a Nation](#)” and “[When Nations Die](#).”[\[7\]](#) Let’s focus on the area of sexuality, marriage, and family.

In his 1934 book, *Sex and Culture*, British anthropologist Joseph Daniel Unwin chronicled the historical decline of numerous cultures, including the Roman Empire. He found that cultures that held to a strong sexual ethic thrived and were more productive than cultures that were “sexually free.”[\[8\]](#)

In his book *Our Dance Has Turned to Death*, Carl Wilson identifies the common pattern of family decline in civilizations like the Roman Empire.[\[9\]](#) It is significant how these seven stages parallel what is happening in America.

In the first stage, men ceased to lead their families in

worship. Spiritual and moral development became secondary. Their view of God became naturalistic, mathematical, and mechanical.

In the second stage, men selfishly neglected care of their wives and children to pursue material wealth, political and military power, and cultural development. Material values began to dominate thought.

The third stage involved a change in men's sexual values. Men who were preoccupied with business or war either neglected their wives sexually or became involved with lower-class women or with homosexuality. Ultimately, a double standard of morality developed.

The fourth stage affected women. The role of women at home and with children lost value and status. Women were neglected and their roles devalued. Soon they revolted to gain access to material wealth and also freedom for sex outside marriage. Women also began to minimize having sex relations to conceive children, and the emphasis became sex for pleasure.

In the fifth stage, husbands and wives competed against each other for money, home leadership, and the affection of their children. This resulted in hostility and frustration and possible homosexuality in the children. Many marriages ended in separation and divorce.

In the sixth stage, selfish individualism grew and carried over into society, fragmenting it into smaller and smaller group loyalties. The nation was thus weakened by internal conflict. The decrease in the birthrate produced an older population that had less ability to defend itself and less will to do so, making the nation more vulnerable to its enemies.

Finally, unbelief in God became more complete, parental authority diminished, and ethical and moral principles disappeared, affecting the economy and government. Because of

internal weakness and fragmentation, the society came apart.

We can see these stages play out in the decline of the Roman Empire. But we can also see them happening before our eyes in America.

## **Spiritual Decline**

What about the spiritual decline in Rome and America? We can actually read about the spiritual decline in Rome in Paul's letter to the church in Rome. In the opening chapter he traces a progression of spiritual decline that was evident in the Hellenistic world of his time.

The first stage is when people turn from God to idolatry. Although God has revealed Himself in nature to all men so that they are without excuse, they nevertheless worship the creation instead of the Creator. This is idolatry. In the past, this took the form of actual idol worship. In our day, it takes the form of the worship of money or the worship of self. In either case, it is idolatry. A further example of this is a general lack of thankfulness. Although they were prospered by God, they were ungrateful. And when they are no longer looking to God for wisdom and guidance, they become vain and futile and empty in their imaginations. They no longer honor God, so their foolish hearts become darkened. In professing to be wise, they have become fools.

The second stage is when men and women exchange their natural use of sex for unnatural uses. Here Paul says those four sobering words, "God gave them over." In a society where lust-driven sensuality and sexual perversion dominate, God gives them over to their degrading passions and unnatural desires.

The third stage is anarchy. Once a society has rejected God's revelation, it is on its own. Moral and social anarchy is the natural result. At this point God has given the sinners over to a depraved mind and so they do things which are not proper.



This results in a society which is without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, and unmerciful.

The final stage is judgment. God's judgment rightly falls upon those who practice idolatry and immorality. Certainly an eternal judgment awaits those who are guilty, but a social judgment occurs when God gives a nation over to its sinful practices.

Notice that this progression is not unique to the Hellenistic world the apostle Paul was living in. The progression from idolatry to sexual perversion to anarchy to judgment is found throughout history.

In the times of Noah and Lot, there was the idolatry of greed, there was sexual perversion and promiscuity, there was anarchy and violence, and finally there was judgment. Throughout the history of the nation of Israel there was idolatry, sexual perversion, anarchy (in which each person did what was right in his own eyes), and finally judgment.

Are there parallels between Rome and America? I have quoted from secular authors, Christian authors, and a writer of much of the New Testament. All seem to point to parallels between Rome and America.

## Notes

1. Cullen Murphy, *Are We Rome? The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).
2. Ibid., 14-15.
3. Ibid., 16-17.
4. Ibid., 18-20.
5. Ibid., 122.
6. Ibid., 135.
7. Kerby Anderson, ["The Decline of a Nation,"](#) Probe Ministries, 1991, and ["When Nations Die,"](#) 2002; both available on Probe's Web site, [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org).
8. J.D. Unwin, *Sex and Culture* (London: Oxford University,

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9. Carl Wilson, *Our Dance Has Turned to Death* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1981), 84-85.

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# Procrastination: Conquering the Time Killer – A Christian Cure

*Steve Cable considers the causes of procrastination from a biblical perspective. Understanding why we procrastinate is an important step in developing a Christ-centered cure for our ailment. Don't wait until it's too late. Stop procrastinating today!*

How many of us would drop twenty dollar bills out of our car window as we drive down the highway or smash Rolex watches with a hammer as a means of relaxation? Yet, many of us consistently waste the most valuable resource available to us—our time. Benjamin Franklin put it this way: “Dost thou love life? Then do not squander time; for that’s the stuff life is made of.”[\[1\]](#) From a biblical perspective, Paul admonishes us: “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16).[\[2\]](#) Looking at this statement in the original language, Paul commands us to *redeem* our time; that is, take time which is part of a fallen, sinful world system and convert it into something good and eternal through using it wisely for God’s purposes.

If we are honest with ourselves, most of us will admit to

feeling uncomfortable with our time stewardship. We want to use our time wisely, but when we look back on the last week, month, or year, we feel some remorse over the amount of time we wasted. A big reason that many of us are uncomfortable with how we use our time is the affliction of procrastination. One researcher in this field summarized her conclusions this way: "Procrastination is, hands down, our favorite form of self-sabotage."[\[3\]](#) In other words, procrastination undermines our attempts to accomplish our plans and goals.

I want to look at the epidemic of procrastination from a biblical perspective. With God's help we will gain a better understanding of why we struggle with procrastination and learn some practical perspectives to help us conquer this time killer.

## **A Biblical Perspective on Time**

You might be asking, Is this really a Christian worldview issue or simply a self-help question? Well, the Bible is very clear on how much God is concerned about how we use our time. Let me summarize a few of the principles the Bible teaches us about time:

1. God created time as a part of His "good creation" (Gen. 1:1).
2. God transcends time, existing in the past, present, and future simultaneously (Is. 43:12, Heb. 13:5, 1 Pet. 1:20, 2 Pet. 3:8).
3. God works in this world within the context of time (Gal. 4:4-5).
4. Our time on earth is precious and fleeting (Jas. 4:14, 1 Pet. 1:24).
5. Time has no meaning or value in eternity (Rev. 4:8-10).

6. God is very concerned with how we use our time on this earth (Eph. 5:16-17).

One way to see how much the Bible has to say about time is to replace references to *life* on this earth with the idea of *time* on this earth. After all, Ben Franklin was right in saying that time is the stuff that earthly life is made of. For example, let's apply this idea to a familiar verse, 2 Corinthians 5:14:

For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who "*have time on this earth*" might no longer "*use their time*" for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.[{4}](#)

So, Christ's sacrificial love for us demands that we use our time for Him.

Another example would be 1 Corinthians 10:31:

So whether you eat or you drink or "*however you spend your time, use all of your time for*" the glory of God. (NIV)

Peter highlighted the importance of how we use our time when he wrote:

If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:17-20).

Knowing the heavy price our Father paid to redeem us, we should be very concerned about whether we are making the most of the time God has entrusted to us. It is very clear that misuse of our time is a great concern to God. As Christians,

we have the ability to convert passing time into something good and eternal.

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, 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 on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Cor. 3:12-15).[{5}](#)

Naturally, Satan and the world system want us to waste that time and pass into eternity having accomplished nothing of eternal value. Thus, anything that causes us to waste our time is a spiritual issue. Thoreau captured this truth when he wrote: "As if you could kill time without injuring eternity."[{6}](#)

In other words, procrastination is not a casual laughing matter. It is of great concern to our Lord.

## **Procrastination: The Consequences**

As we continue to consider how to conquer procrastination, it would be helpful to have a working definition. An anonymous pundit quipped, "They said procrastination was the source of all my sorrow. I don't know what that big word means—I'll look it up tomorrow!" Procrastination literally means "to put off until tomorrow." One study defined it as "postponing the completion of a task to the point of feeling uncomfortable about one's delay."[{7}](#)

Well, feeling uncomfortable is not fun, but it doesn't sound that bad. Is that the only consequence of procrastination? Whether it is putting off balancing the checkbook, yard work, term papers, filling out expense reports, or reading the Bible, many of us have learned to live with our favorite areas

of procrastination. However, studies have shown that procrastination has many undesirable consequences.

A direct consequence is decreased performance and productivity. Some procrastinators say they put off starting projects because they perform better under pressure. Don't kid yourself! A study of university students showed that students who procrastinated had significantly lower grades than those who did not. Christians are called to "keep our behavior excellent among the Gentiles" and to "work heartily as unto the Lord." When procrastination impacts our performance, we are presenting a negative witness to the world.

The direct consequences of procrastination can be magnified well beyond our expectations. Consider these examples:

- In 1815, Napoleon was prepared to attack Wellington's British army at dawn, but delayed his attack until 11 AM. This delay allowed the Prussians to arrive in time to attack the French flank turning a certain French victory into a bitter defeat. Literally, procrastination caused Napoleon to meet his Waterloo.
- On October 31, 1846, after a tortuous shortcut gone bad cost them several weeks, the Donner Party decided to rest for a few days rather than press on over the Sierra Nevada mountains. Their delay caused them to be trapped by a monster blizzard resulting in thirty-six people dying of starvation and the rest living out their lives with the stain of cannibalism.
- The nation of Israel chose to delay entering the Promised Land, and the result was forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

These are extreme examples, but most of us have experienced times when we put off getting car repairs, working on the house, or starting a project, and found out that the consequences were much worse than we anticipated.

In addition to the direct consequences, frequent procrastination increases stress, anxiety, and guilt with all their related side effects. A recent study found that “college students who procrastinate have higher levels of drinking, smoking, insomnia, stomach problems, colds and flu.”[\[8\]](#) Many times we delay a task because we feel we need to relax instead, but the ultimate result is greater levels of stress.

## Procrastination: Some Causes

Most of us struggle with procrastination in one or more areas of our lives. However, what we share are common symptoms, not necessarily a common root cause. Studies of procrastination have identified some distinctly different causes. If you have a pain in your foot, you need to know whether it is a splinter or bone cancer before selecting a course of treatment. If you are going to conquer procrastination, you need to be aware of your primary root cause.

Two of the most common causes are laziness and avoiding negative feelings. These cause us to delay starting tasks that may be difficult or unpleasant in favor of more pleasurable activities. Research has found that considering a task as boring or adverse is more likely to result in procrastination than a lack of capability to do the task well.[\[9\]](#) The Bible often addresses this issue including Proverbs 24 which says:

*I passed by the field of the sluggard  
And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense,  
And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles;  
Its surface was covered with nettles,  
And its stone wall was broken down.  
When I saw, I reflected upon it;  
I looked, and received instruction.  
“A little sleep, a little slumber,  
A little folding of the hands to rest,”  
Then your poverty will come as a robber*

*And your want like an armed man (vv. 30-34).*

This cause is modeled by the college student who spends weeks playing video games and hanging out until the night before the term paper is due.

Two other common causes are lack of perspective and poor time management skills. This person is willing to take on an unpleasant task, but has a hard time knowing which tasks need to be tackled right away and which can or should be delayed. This cause is epitomized by the college student who begins working on their term paper at the beginning of the semester by spending hours selecting just the right binder and creating cover graphics rather than researching their topic.

Perfectionism and fear of failure drive some people to procrastinate. Some perfectionists recognize that they don't have enough time to do a perfect job so they are discouraged about undertaking the job at all. Others believe they need uninterrupted time to be able to do a perfect job and they never can seem to clear off enough of their schedule to get started. And some wait until the last moment so they can blame any shortcoming of the finished product on insufficient time. They want to be able to say, "I am really much more talented than this shows, but I had to throw it together at the last moment. So, what can you expect?"

A very different cause is resentment. This person says, "I know I should be starting this task, but my spouse has been bugging me about it and I am going to show them that I am in control of my own time."

## **Procrastination: the Cure**

Many of us feel frustrated by a pattern of procrastination. Like one author, we take the position "I am definitely going to take a course on time management . . . just as soon as I can work it into my schedule."[{10}](#)



However, God does not command us to make the most of our time without giving us the ability to do so. We need to tackle procrastination head on if we want to find a cure in our lives. From the rebuilding of Jerusalem under Nehemiah to the race to the moon in the 1960s,[{11}](#) some timeless principles stand out. From my studies of literature and the Bible and my experience in simultaneously raising a family, working as a corporate executive, and pastoring young adults, I suggest five steps to reduce the impact of procrastination in your life. They are:

1. Probing your problem,
2. Praying for perspective,
3. Proper priorities,
4. Perspective-based planning, and
5. Proactive partnering.

## **Probing Your Problem**

When we find ourselves consistently suffering the consequences of procrastination or we find ourselves tempted to procrastinate again, we need to do more than just say, “I am putting off tasks that I shouldn’t.” We need examine why we are tempted to delay. The director of student counseling at Cal Tech University counsels us, “Each time you feel ‘stuck’ or find yourself procrastinating, ask yourself, ‘What is going on here?’ What am I feeling and how might that contribute to my procrastinating?”[{12}](#) Knowing that we are being motivated by resentment or fear or simply a desire to avoid unpleasant activities or feelings should determine how we apply the next four steps.

## **Prayer**

Acknowledge that God has given us all of the time we need to accomplish everything He wants us to accomplish. Since that is probably far more than we normally accomplish, we need to invite God to lead our time management initiative. We need to

pray for a clear understanding of God's priorities and perspective. If we are dealing with laziness, we should ask for self control. If we are dealing with emotions such as resentment or fear, we need to ask God to take our thoughts captive in obedience to Christ. If we are struggling with anxiety, we need His peace that passes understanding. If we are struggling with perfectionism, we need to acknowledge that our total significance is found in Christ, not in our performance. Do not try to bypass this step. Time is a key battleground in the spiritual war. If we run onto the battlefield in our own power and wisdom, we will soon find ourselves hopelessly behind.

## **Proper Priorities**

A simplistic view of our priorities can often get us into time management trouble. God does not want us to have a hierarchy where we do everything possible for the top tier no matter how trivial before we move onto the next level of the hierarchy. Most of us usually have important time commitments for our spouse, our employer, our children, our church, our neighbors, and our personal spiritual and physical health, all on our task list at the same time. The Bible teaches us that Christ is our *life*, not just a priority (Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:1-3). We need to seek His direction each day for what is important for that day. If we are dealing with laziness, we need to acknowledge the importance God places on the tasks we are given.

In the flesh, we have a tendency to forget the unpleasant hard tasks on our list in order to partake of more pleasant interruptions to our plan. One practical tool to help deal with this is keeping an up-to-date task list. Over the last thirty years I have done this in a number of ways. What I have found most practical for me is as follows:

- Keep an ongoing list of all known tasks no matter how far away they are due. I do this on my computer since this is my

long-term master list.

- Each week, list all tasks for that week on a sheet of paper. I put my work related tasks on one side of the paper and my personal/family tasks on the other.
- Add a column for each day of the week. Select the first day you may be able to work on each task and place an A or B for that task in the column for that day. An A means the task is critical and really needs to be worked on that day. A B indicates that it would be good to work on that task, but it is not mandatory.
- As tasks are started, mark a dot by the letter. As tasks are completed, put a check mark by the task. If tasks are delegated, put the other person's initial by the task. If tasks are rescheduled, put an arrow by the task.
- Update the sheet of paper every morning to reflect that day's priorities. For example, a task that was a B on Monday and Tuesday may need to be changed to an A on Wednesday.

Note: If I am working on B tasks before addressing all of the A tasks, it is a warning that I may have moved into procrastination mode.

## **Perspective-based Planning**

Committing to keep an updated list of priorities is a big step, but that list may not be very meaningful if we do not set aside time for planning. Many of us have been surprised by unintentional procrastination. We thought we had plenty of time until we started working on the task and discovered that it was harder than expected or we forgot that we needed to order some parts with a long lead time. If your task is to pick up a loaf of bread, then no planning is required. If your task is a major term project, a major product development, or putting a man on the moon, you need to take some time to think

through the subtasks required by this project. Proverbs 1:25 teaches us:

The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage,  
But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty.

Perspective based planning means to look at the priority of the overall project and ask these questions about each subtask:

- What other tasks must I accomplish before I can do this task?
- How long should this task take?
- What are the consequences of delaying this task?
- Are the tasks broken down into small enough increments to take advantage of openings in my schedule to work on them?
- Should this task be delegated to someone else?
- How likely is this task to take longer than expected?

Once I have done this planning, I can do a good job of filling out my weekly priority sheet.

## **Proactive Partnering**

If you are struggling with procrastination issues, don't try to tackle it on your own. Galatians 6:1-5 tells us that we are to help restore those who are struggling and help bear one another's burdens. Yet we are to accept this help without passing our responsibilities onto someone else: "For each one will bear his own load."

Look around for someone who seems to be effective in managing their time. Share your dilemma with them and ask them to help provide guidance and accountability. Ask them to take a look at your weekly priority lists and project plans to see if they are reasonable. Pick out some intermediate deadlines that they will check on and hold you to. It is much easier to recover from missing one intermediate deadline than to be almost to the final deadline and realize that you are way behind.

An accountability partner can also help us avoid swinging from procrastinator to workaholic. Sometimes the partner needs to reassure us that it is ok to take some time for relaxation. After all, Jesus told his disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). Sometimes the partner needs to challenge our priorities.

You may have noticed that each of these steps will take some time. Productive people have learned that sufficient time spent in planning will save much more time in the long run.

## **Conclusion**

We have been given the high calling of using our time for God's glory. We are called to be wise and make the most of our time. However, many of us know that we let procrastination rob value from the time God has entrusted to us. God understands our temptation in this area and wants to help us conquer procrastination. We can participate in this by acknowledging our underlying motivation, adopting God's perspective and priorities through prayer, practicing a discipline of planning, and allowing others to hold us accountable. When we commit to practicing these things, we will be able to rejoice in the privilege we have of converting fleeting time into eternal value.

## **Notes**

1. Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanack, June 1746.
2. All Scriptures are from the NASB except where noted.
3. Alyce P. Cornyn-Selby, manager and author, Procrastinator's Success Kit (Beynch Press Publishing, 1987).
4. Italics indicate the author's substituted words.
- 5 . See also Col 4:5-6.
6. Henry David Thoreau, Walden, chapter 1, "Eternity," accessible online at [www.kenkiifer.com/Thoreau/economy.htm](http://www.kenkiifer.com/Thoreau/economy.htm).
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9. Irene Tham, *Journal of Young Investigators*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (June 1999), [www.jyi.org/volumes/volume2/issue1/features/tham.html](http://www.jyi.org/volumes/volume2/issue1/features/tham.html).
10. Louis Boone, author of *Contemporary Marketing and Contemporary Business*, [www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/l/louis\\_e\\_boone.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/l/louis_e_boone.html).
11. For an interesting treatment of how the race to the moon was accomplished ahead of schedule, check out Mike Gray, *Angle of Attack: Harrison Storms and the Race to the Moon* (W. W. Norton and Co., 1992).
12. Dr. Kevin P. Austin, Director of the Student Counseling Services, CalTech University; [www.counseling.caltech.edu/articles/procrastination.html](http://www.counseling.caltech.edu/articles/procrastination.html)

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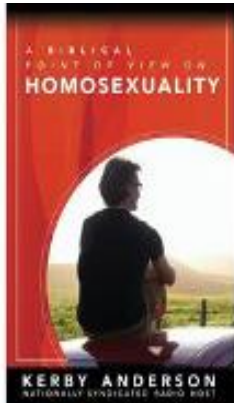
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## **Answering Arguments for Same-Sex Marriage – A Christian Worldview Perspective**

*Kerby Anderson considers the arguments in favor of same-sex marriage from a biblical worldview perspective. He shows that arguments such as tolerance, equal rights, and no impact on others do not hold up under critical examination. As Christians, we can love those who live a different lifestyle*

*without allowing them to claim their lifestyle is identical and harmless to society.*

## Shouldn't We Be Tolerant?



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

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

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

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

“a gentle answer turns away wrath.”

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

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

The context of this verse is important. It seems that what Jesus was condemning was a critical or judgmental spirit. It is a judging spirit when someone believes they are superior to you. Jesus was obviously not saying that people should not make judgments. A few verses later Jesus calls certain people “pigs” and “dogs” (Matthew 7:6). He even calls some “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15). There are many passages in the Bible that admonish us to use sound judgment and discernment (1 Kings 3:9; Proverbs 15:14; 1 Corinthians 12:10; Philippians 1:9-10).

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

## **Don’t Homosexuals Deserve Equal Rights?**

Each person in our society deserves equal rights. But redefining marriage is not about equal rights but about adding



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

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

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

As we have already noted, the push for same-sex marriage has been more about respect and acceptance than it has been about rights. If government recognizes the legal validity of gay marriage, then that places government's "seal of approval" on homosexuality.

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

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

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

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

## **Isn't Homosexual Marriage Like Interracial Marriage?**

When objections are raised about legalizing same-sex marriage, proponents argued that the same concerns were said about interracial marriage. For years gay activists have tried to hitch their caboose to the civil rights train. While many in the African-American community have found this comparison offensive, the tactic is still used on a fairly regular basis.

There are significant differences between interracial marriage and same-sex marriage. First, removing certain state laws banning interracial marriage did not call for a *redefinition* of marriage but merely an *affirmation* of marriage. Traditional marriage is not about equal rights but about establishing norms for sexual relationships within society. We ban discrimination based on race because it is an immutable

characteristic that each person has from the moment of conception. And the word “race” appears in the Constitution.

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

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

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

The Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia* struck down state laws prohibiting interracial marriage, arguing that marriage is one of the “basic civil rights of man.”[\[3\]](#) The Supreme Court of Minnesota later ruled in *Baker v. Nelson* that race and homosexual behavior are not the same.

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

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

## **Does Same-Sex Marriage Hurt Traditional Marriage?**

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

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

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

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

A second consequence of same-sex marriage legalization would be the complete redefinition of marriage and the introduction of a variety of marital relationships. Already we are seeing

court cases attempting to legalize polygamy. The most prominent case involved Utah polygamist Tom Green. He and his lawyer used the Supreme Court case of *Lawrence v. Texas* as a legal foundation for his marriage to multiple wives.[\[6\]](#) It is interesting to note that when the Supreme Court rendered its decision in the *Lawrence* case, Justice Antonin Scalia warned that the decision could lead to the legalization of same-sex marriage and the redefinition of marriage.[\[7\]](#)

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

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

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

## **Does Legalization of Same-Sex Marriage Really Affect Families?**

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

While it is true that some marriages do not result in children due to choice or infertility, that does not invalidate the

public purpose of marriage. Marriage, after all, is a public institution that brings together a father and mother to bring children into the world. Individuals may have all sorts of private reasons for marrying, but there is an established public purpose for marriage.

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

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

At the center of every civilization is the family. There may be other social and political structures, but civilizations survive when the family survives. And they fall apart when the family falls apart. Michael Novak, former professor and winner of the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion, put it this way: "One unforgettable law has been learned through all the oppressions, disasters, and injustices of the last thousand years: if things go well with the family, life is worth living; when the family falters, life falls apart."[\[9\]](#)

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

## Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008).

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3. *Loving v. Virginia*, Supreme Court of U.S., 388 U.S. 1, 1967.
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9. Michael Novak, "The family out of favor," *Harper's Magazine*, April 1976, 37-46.