

What a Biblical Worldview Looks Like

Sue Bohlin explores elements of a way of looking at life that provides a biblical world and life view.

What Is a Worldview?

A young Christian couple I know married with high hopes for the future. Within three years they were divorced; the husband handled his hatred for his job by snapping at his wife and retreating to online gaming, and the wife shut down her heart to him and opened it to someone else.

In her book [Total Truth](#), Nancy Pearcey tells of a Christian lawyer whose job was to find loopholes in the contracts with clients his law firm wanted to get rid of—that is, which enabled his company to break promises.[{1}](#) She tells another story of a Christian who worked at an abortion facility and never saw any conflict between the Bible she studied and its command not to murder.[{2}](#)



This disconnect between biblical teaching and the way it's lived out is not just an American problem. Many African Christians go to church on Sundays and pray to Jesus for healing or prosperity, but when He doesn't answer the way they wanted, they go to the village witch doctor.

All these people profess to be Christ-followers and agree that the Bible is the Word of God, yet they don't view reality or live out their lives as if Jesus were Lord and the Bible is true. They don't have a biblical worldview. They don't "think Christianly."

Nancy Pearcey writes, "'Thinking Christianly' means understanding that Christianity gives the truth about the

whole of reality, a perspective for interpreting every subject matter.”^{3} It means we learn to interpret everything in light of its relationship to God. The title of Nancy’s book, *Total Truth*, reflects her premise: that Christianity is not just a collection of religious truths, it is *total* truth. Thinking Christianly—which equips us to then live out a biblical worldview—means we understand that natural and supernatural are seamlessly woven into one reality.

Our worldview is like an invisible pair of glasses through which we see reality and life. If we have the wrong prescription, the wrong beliefs and assumptions, what we see will be fuzzy and undependable. If we have the right prescription, we will see things as they are. The prescription of these glasses consists of our beliefs and the things we assume to be true. These beliefs and assumptions comprise the filter through which we experience and interpret life. And we *all* have a filter.

For example, let’s say you walk into a Walmart and discover you are their zillionth customer. Balloons drop, strobe lights go off, and you are handed a \$1000 gift card, a trip to Disneyworld, and the keys to a new car. Your worldview will determine how you interpret that event. If you believe in fate, you will think, “It’s my lucky day! The stars are shining on me!” If you believe in only this physical, material universe, you will think, “Nice, but it’s a totally random and meaningless occurrence.” If you believe that Jesus is Lord over everything, you will think, “I so do not deserve this gift of grace, but I thank You for it, Lord. How do You want me to be a good steward of this amazing blessing?”

Everyone has a worldview, even though most people aren’t aware of it. We believe a biblical worldview is the right prescription for both living and understanding life.

Creation, Fall, and Redemption

My friend Dr. Jeff Myers of Summit Ministries says, “[A] person’s worldview is his default answers to life’s most pressing questions: Where did I come from? How should I live? What happens when I die?, and How do I know my answers to these questions are true?”[\[4\]](#)

We all buy into an overarching story that explains much of why things are the way they are. For example, people who believe in traditional folk religion (animism) believe there are spirits connected to every physical item and event and place, and this way of looking at life shapes their response to the things that happen in life. People who embrace pantheism—a view of life that sees everything connected as part of a divine but impersonal force with no personal God and no distinctions between good and evil—will respond differently.

If we draw our worldview from the story of God’s dealing with mankind from the Bible, a helpful way to structure it is terms of creation, fall, and redemption. They answer the big three universal questions: Where did we come from? Why are things so messed up? How can it be fixed? Everything that exists and everything that happens falls into one of these categories.

Creation answers the question, where did we come from? as well as a basic philosophical question, why is there something rather than nothing at all? God created us in His image for the purpose of having a relationship with us, and He created the universe and our world as well. This explains the exquisite design we see in the human body, right down to the molecular machines inside cells. Creation explains why the earth is so finely tuned for life—just the right distance from just the right kind of star and the right kind of moon, just the right temperature for liquid water, just the right kind of atmosphere for us to breathe.

The relational God, whose very being consists of Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit, created us in His image to draw us into the circle of divine mutual love and fellowship and delight. The reason we are here is so God could lavish love on us by sharing Himself with us and inviting us to participate in the divine life. That explains why we are so relational, and why we need and enjoy other people. It explains why we are hard-wired to be spiritual—because He made us for Himself, and He is spirit. He created the universe and our planet as an expression of His love and glory, and because physical people need a physical place to live. A beautiful God creating us in His image explains why we love beauty in the world, in art, in music, and in every other expression of human culture.

The *Fall* answers the question, what went wrong? Adam and Eve's rebellion against God brought sin into His marvelous creation, resulting in brokenness, blindness, and nothing working the way it did in the perfect, pre-fall world. The fall explains why death feels so unnatural, why there is suffering and sickness. It explains why there is moral evil like murder, rape and theft, and why there is natural evil like earthquakes and tsunamis and tornadoes. Many people are angry at God at these things. But they are all effects of the fall. He didn't create the world this way; we're the ones who messed it up. This fallen world breaks His heart far more than it breaks ours.

The good news is *Redemption*. God is working to set things right and restore His damaged, distorted creation. This explains why our souls long for justice, for the wicked to face the consequences of their evil choices, and for things to be fair and right. A just God will fulfill our longing for justice. He will make the wrongs right and the shattered whole. Good will triumph over evil once and for all. God's promise of restoration explains why we still long for the perfection of Eden, even while we live immersed in a world and relationships that are far from perfect: He's going to bring it back. The Lord Jesus Christ, who came to earth as fully God

and fully man, living as one of us and then dying in our place, rising again, and ascending back to the Father's right hand, promises He is making all things new (Rev. 21:5). God's got a plan and He's working it!

Living in Two Worlds

One of my favorite things to do is go snorkeling in the crystal clear waters of the Caribbean. When I'm wearing a mask and a snorkel tube, I can float on the water's surface and enjoy the beautiful fish and corals that live in the underwater world. But I can also breathe air from the above-water world. When I'm snorkeling, I get to enjoy two worlds, two spheres of life, at the same time.

This is a picture of what it looks like to live out a biblical worldview. Paul exhorts us to focus "not [on] the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). We live in a physical world, but looking at life biblically also means living in awareness of the unseen, eternal spiritual reality that also surrounds us. Many believers make the mistake of living as if they were functional naturalists—as if the material, physical world were all there is.

Thinking biblically means staying aware and focused on the spiritual and eternal part of life, letting that guide our interpretation of physical and temporal events. That doesn't mean dismissing or denying the physical, living like some sort of ascetic who refuses to engage with the world; we just keep it in perspective.

I believe this is what the Lord Jesus intended when He said to "seek first the Kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33). The physical world is so in-your-face about its reality—especially when we get tired, hungry, thirsty every day—that we don't have any

trouble being aware of *this* sphere of life. But focusing on (or even just staying aware of) the unseen, eternal part of life, like donning snorkel gear and going face-down in the water, allows us to function in both worlds at the same time. Next time you're in a group where people share prayer requests, pay attention to how many of them are in the physical realm: health, finances, jobs, etc. These things are important, but according to Jesus' priorities, the Kingdom—the unseen realm where He is Lord—is *more* important. I wonder what would happen if our prayer requests started reflecting this priority?

The seventeenth century monk Brother Lawrence lived out an important spiritual discipline he called “practicing the presence of God.” When we do this, we are able to process the heartbreak of living in a fallen world and the apparent unfairness of what looks like evil winning. When we read what the prophet Habbakuk wrote, and what Asaph recorded in Psalm 73, we see what it looks like to remember that God is sovereign, and He is able to make all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28). It helps us see all people as beloved image bearers for whom Christ died, even the jerks who cut us off in traffic. It helps us remember that what may feel like a bizarre random event may actually be the attack of spiritual warfare. It helps us balance our now-fallen feelings, which were impacted by the Fall like everything else, with the truth of God's word. For example, one Christian woman filed for divorce from her husband with no biblical grounds, claiming that it must be okay since she didn't *feel* “convicted by God.”

Thinking biblically means cultivating an awareness of the spiritual realm: the eternally important things, and the activity of God, angels, and demons. It's like going through life wearing snorkel gear!

Refusing the Sacred/Secular Split

Have you ever heard someone saying something like, “Well, I personally oppose abortion, but I would never say that it’s wrong for anyone else because that’s a private issue.” Or, do you give ten percent of what you think of as *your* money to the Lord because that’s His portion? Do you think of your spiritual life as time spent reading the Bible and going to church, but the rest of the week is yours? One of the ways Christians fail to live out a biblical worldview is when we buy into the false division of the sacred and the secular.

Thinking biblically means not only believing that Jesus is Lord at the moment of our deaths, but He is also Lord over every aspect of our lives and every aspect of His creation. He created this world, He owns it, He entered it, and He redeemed it. He created us in His image, and then commanded us to take the salt and light of our image-bearing influence into every aspect of life: business, science, law, education, politics, and art, to name a few. The “Creation Mandate” is found in Genesis 1:2:

God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and *subdue it*; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (emphasis mine).

Let’s look at some examples:

- I’ve had a freelance [calligraphy business](#) for thirty years. Beyond showing honesty and integrity in my business dealings, there is also value in the beauty I bring into people’s lives through my hand lettering as a reflection of God’s beauty.
- All of my husband [Ray’s](#) education is in biology. He lives out his biblical worldview by seeking to explore and understand God’s creation through science, then explaining

it to others in a way that gives glory to God.

- Christian educators who express a biblical worldview are teaching about God's world and God's truths whether they mention Him or not. Whether it's the glorious patterns of mathematics or the themes of great literature, the Lordship of Christ ties it all together.
- My son's undergraduate education was in art, and we loved seeing how he wove his biblical worldview into his art pieces. He suggests that a Christian artist has the opportunity to express both the brokenness of life in a fallen world as well as the hope and redemption found in Christ.
- Christians in law can live out their biblical worldview by using their knowledge of the law to create protection for the weak and defenseless, to criminalize criminal behavior, and to codify making restitution, all of which are biblical values.

One element of living out a biblical worldview is refusing to compartmentalize life into our religious activities and then everything else, as if spiritual truth and concepts were unrelated to how we live our lives. One of my dear friends has lived in moral and emotional purity for three years after repenting of her lesbian relationship. The temptation can be strong some days, but she consistently chooses Jesus over her feelings. One day her supervisor, who goes to a large church, asked if she were gay. My friend replied that she used to claim a gay identity, but she's been emotionally and sexually sober for three years. Her supervisor asked why, and my friend said, "Because it's sin! It's not God's design or intention."

"Oh, it's not sin!" her supervisor cheerfully assured her. "God wants you to be happy! You just need to find the right girl and settle down." My friend is living out a biblical worldview; her Christian supervisor, who most definitely does

not, relegates the Bible to religious topics that don't intersect with where the rest of life is lived. (Not only that: the Enemy used the supervisor's lies and wrong beliefs to harass my friend as part of an all-out spiritual warfare attack.)

Jesus is Lord, and He loves and provides for His creation through people, whether we are delivering milk or delivering babies, serving in the military or the government, growing corn or managing hedge funds, raising our family or even serving in ministry. It's *all* God's work and we get to share in it (1 Cor. 3:9). Just as we can't divide colors into sacred and secular, we shouldn't do it with the rest of life either.

Processing Life Through a Biblical Worldview

I said earlier that a worldview is like a pair of glasses that is comprised of our beliefs and assumptions through which we see and interpret life. My husband, Ray, and I got a chance to put our biblical worldview into practice a few years ago when someone ran a red light and slammed into his car. He sustained a concussion but, miraculously, no cuts or scratches or broken anything. It took almost a year for him to recover from both the impact on his body and the mental fuzziness of his concussion.

As we processed this accident and the difficulties that unfolded from it, we experienced the wisdom that comes from interpreting life according to the truth of God's word. Other [worldviews](#) would have interpreted this experience differently:

- *Naturalism*, the belief that the physical world is all there is, and there is no spiritual or supernatural component to life, would say, "Ray was in a car wreck, but there's no meaning to it. It was just another accident;

everything is an accident without purpose. Whether he survived or had been killed, ultimately that wouldn't make any difference anyway since all of life is a random, meaningless existence."

- *Pantheism*, the belief that all of life is a spiritual reality and the physical world is an illusion, would say, "Ray, his car, the other driver, and her car, are all part of 'the one,' the unifying essence of the universe. All of these particulars are an illusion, since there is only one reality where everything and everyone is divine." And since many pantheists also share many of Eastern mysticism's beliefs, we would hear, "Ray must have done something terrible in a previous life to have experienced this trauma in this life. He was working off his bad karma from an earlier existence."

- [Traditional folk religion \(Animism\)](#), the belief that the spirit world is constantly manipulating life in the physical world, because there is a spirit or spiritual force behind every event, might say, "Ray must have made some spirit angry with him. He needs to say some magic words or burn some incense or build an altar or do something to get the angry spirit to not be angry with him anymore."

Since we seek to make the truth of God's word the pair of glasses through which we view life, our filter includes the question, what does God say about this? Together, we practiced responding to this trauma according to our Christian worldview.

The most important truth was that God exists, and He has revealed Himself to be all-powerful and all-knowing. That means that getting "t-boned" was not a random accident that just happened. We reminded ourselves that He was still sovereign; a loving God was in control, even though He allowed Ray to get hit and his car totaled by a driver without insurance. God is all-powerful and could have prevented the

accident, but for some reason He didn't. We determined to trust Him even though He wasn't explaining Himself.

This was a very bad car wreck, and the witnesses couldn't believe he wasn't killed instantly. Instead, he was protected from serious injury. We have thanked God many times for His amazing protection that resulted in 100% recovery.

Ray experienced very real pain and suffering, but we know from the Bible where that comes from: the fall of man is responsible for most pain and all suffering. He was not troubled by the possibility that his suffering might be meaningless because there was no one "up there" or "out there" giving meaning to it, like the view of life that atheists and agnostics have to face.

Ray's car wreck had a special impact on me. At the time, I was dealing with my fear for my son's safety since he was about to enter the Air Force during a war. Because Ray's car wreck happened just three blocks from home, God impressed on me that His protection has nothing to do with geography. The best place to be, the safest place to be, is in God's hand, and He has promised that no one can snatch us from His hand (John 8:28-29). I sensed Him impressing me that I could trust Him with my son the same way He protected my husband from lasting damage.

I hope this article helps you grow in your ability to think biblically so you can see life as it really is—one reality comprised of both the physical and spiritual, God's world, God's life—that He invites you into.

Notes

1. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004), 31.
2. Ibid., 97-98.
3. Ibid., 34.

4. Email from Dr. Jeff Myers, April 19, 2011.

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Heterosexual and Homosexual Marriages – Are Straight and Gay Marriages Identical?

Although Kerby wrote this article before same-sex marriage was legalized, his assessment of homosexual relationships has not changed because the intrinsically disordered nature of same-sex relationships has not changed. He identifies the measurable benefits of heterosexual marriage over other types of family set ups. Then he considers the difficulties introduced by homosexual marriage in obtaining the same benefits. With the fundamental differences between them, considering them to be equivalent will not make it so.

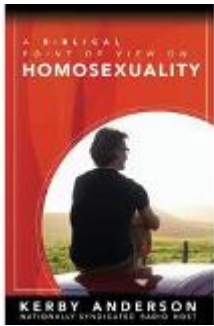
Is there any difference between heterosexual marriage and homosexual marriage? We are told that there is essentially no difference between the two and thus marriage status should be granted to anyone of any sexual orientation. This is not true (as I discuss in more detail in my book *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality*[\[1\]](#)).



Traditional, Heterosexual Marriage

Let's begin by talking about the benefits of traditional marriage. Traditional marriage is the foundation of civilization. So before we even consider the impact of homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and other alternative

lifestyles, we should consider the benefits of traditional marriage to society.



An excellent summary of the studies done on married people can be found in the book, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People are Happier, Healthier, and Better off Financially* by Linda Waite and Maggie Gallagher.[\[2\]](#) Here are just a few of the many findings from the research:

- Married people are much happier and likely to be less unhappy than any other group of people.
- Married people live up to eight years longer than divorced or never-married people.
- Married people suffer less from long-term illnesses than those who are unmarried.
- Married people are less likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse.
- Married people have twice the amount of sex as single people and report greater levels of satisfaction in the area of sexual intimacy.

A look at individual studies by social scientists also confirms these conclusions. For example, married men and women report greater satisfaction with family life.[\[3\]](#) Married couples report greater sexual satisfaction.[\[4\]](#) Married women report higher levels of physical and psychological health.[\[5\]](#) Married people experience less depression.[\[6\]](#)

Researchers at the Heritage Foundation have also compiled

numerous statistics that also demonstrate the positive impact of marriage. Traditional marriages have higher incomes when compared to step families, cohabiting couples, or those who never married.[{7}](#) Traditional marriages also result in lower welfare costs to society when compared to divorced couples or out-of-wedlock births.[{8}](#) Married women are less likely to be victims of domestic violence, and married couples are more likely to be happy and less likely to attempt suicide.[{9}](#)

The studies compiled by the Heritage Foundation also found many positive effects on children.[{10}](#) For example, they found that:

- Children in married families are less likely to suffer serious child abuse.
- Children in married families are less likely to end up in jail as adults.
- Children in married families are less likely to be depressed as adolescents.
- Children in married families are less likely to be expelled from school.
- Children in married families are less likely to repeat a grade in school.
- Children in married families are less likely to have developmental problems.
- Children in married families are less likely to have behavioral problems.
- Children in married families are less likely to use drugs (marijuana, cocaine).
- Children in married families are less likely to be sexually active.

Children benefit from traditional marriage in the same way just as was previously mentioned adults. For example, they are better off financially. The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth found that child poverty dramatically increased outside of intact marriages.[{11}](#) Children in married homes are generally healthier physically and emotionally when they reach adulthood than children from other home situations.[{12}](#)

Although these are relatively recent studies, the conclusions have been known for much longer. In the 1930s, British anthropologist J.D. Unwin studied 86 cultures that stretched across 5,000 years. He found that when a society restricted sex to marriage, it thrived. However, he also found that when a society weakened the sexual ethic of marriage, it deteriorated and eventually disintegrated.[{13}](#)

Differences Between Heterosexual Marriages and Homosexual Marriages

Are heterosexual couples and homosexual couples different? The popular media treats heterosexual couples and homosexual couples as if they are no different. One headline proclaimed, "Married and Gay Couples Not All that Different," and essentially said they were just like the couple next door.[{14}](#)

There is good reason to question that assumption. Dr. Timothy Dailey has compiled numerous statistics that demonstrate significant differences.[{15}](#) He shows that "committed" homosexual relationships are radically different from married couples in at least six ways: relationship duration, monogamy vs. promiscuity, relationship commitment, number of children being raised, health risks, and rates of intimate partner violence.

Consider the duration of a relationship. Gay activists often point to high divorce rates among married couples, suggesting that heterosexuals fare no better than homosexuals. Research

shows, however, that male homosexual relationships last only a fraction of the length of most marriages. By contrast, the National Center for Health Statistics reported that 66% of first marriages last ten years or longer, with 50% lasting twenty years or longer.[\[16\]](#)

Various studies of homosexual relationships show a much different picture. For example, the Gay/Lesbian Consumer Online Census of nearly 8,000 homosexuals found that only 15% described their "current relationship" lasting twelve years or longer.[\[17\]](#) A study of homosexual men in the Netherlands published in the journal *AIDS* found that the "duration of steady partnerships" was one and a half years.[\[18\]](#) In a study of male homosexuality in reported in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, Pollak found that "few homosexual relationships last longer than two years, with many men reporting hundreds of lifetime partners."[\[19\]](#)

Another key difference is "monogamy versus promiscuity." Married heterosexual couples are more monogamous than the popular culture and media would have you believe. A national survey published in the *Journal of Sex Research* found that 77% of married men and 88% of married women had remained faithful to their marriage vows.[\[20\]](#) A national survey in *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* came to essentially the same conclusions (75% of husbands and 85% of wives).[\[21\]](#)

By contrast, homosexuals were much less monogamous and much more promiscuous. In the classic study by Bell and Weinberg, they found that 43% of white male homosexuals had sex with 500 or more partners, with 28% having 1,000 or more sex partners.[\[22\]](#) And a Dutch study of partnered homosexuals, published in the journal *AIDS*, found that men with a steady partner nevertheless had an average of eight sexual partners per year.[\[23\]](#)

The authors of *The Male Couple* reported that in their study of 156 males in homosexual relationships lasting from 1 to 37 years, "Only seven couples have a totally exclusive sexual relationship, and these men all have been together for less than five years. Stated another way, all couples with a relationship lasting more than five years have incorporated some provision for outside sexual activity in their relationships." [\[24\]](#) They also found that most homosexual men understood sexual relations outside the relationship to be the norm, and usually viewed standards of monogamy as an act of oppression.

A third difference between heterosexual and homosexual couples is "level of commitment." Timothy Dailey argues: "If homosexuals and lesbians truly desired the same kind of commitment signified by marriage, then one would expect them to take advantage of the opportunity to enter into civil unions or registered partnerships." [\[25\]](#) This would provide them with legal recognition as well as legal rights. However, it is clear that few homosexuals and lesbians have chosen to take advantage of these various unions (same-sex marriage, civil unions, domestic partnerships), suggesting a difference in commitment compared with married couples.

These three differences (along with others detailed by Timothy Dailey) demonstrate a significant difference between heterosexual and homosexual relationships. Gay and lesbian couples appear less likely to commit themselves to the type of monogamous relationship found in traditional marriage.

Is It Natural?

Many in the homosexual movement say that their feelings are natural. Often they even say that their feelings are God-given. So how could they be wrong? Years ago Debbie Boone sang a song with the lyrics, "How can it be so wrong when it feels so right?" That is the argument from many in the homosexual

movement. It feels natural, so it must be natural.

But God's character as revealed in the Bible should be our standard. There are many sinful acts that feel natural, but that does not mean they are moral. Romans 1:26-27 makes it very clear that these passions are unnatural:

For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

Homosexual desires and temptations may feel natural to some people, but they are not what God intends for human beings. Any sexual encounter outside of marriage is immoral. The Bible refers to the sin of sexual immorality nearly four dozen times. Homosexuality, along with fornication and adultery, are all examples of sexual immorality.

Although God created a perfect world (Genesis 1-2), it was spoiled by sin. The effects of sin impact us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Homosexual temptation, like other sexual temptations, is a result of the fall (Genesis 3). When Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees, He reminded them that God "created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'" (Matthew 19:4-5).

Although there is a concerted effort to push for homosexual marriage within our society, we have seen in this article that there are fundamental differences between heterosexual marriage and homosexual marriage. For more information on this topic, visit the Probe website and read many of our other [articles on homosexuality](#). And you might pick up a copy of my

book, *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality*.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, *A Biblical Point of View on Homosexuality* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008).
2. New York: Doubleday, 2000.
3. Linda J. Waite, *The Ties that Bind: Perspectives on Marriage and Cohabitation*, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter 2000), 368-391.
4. Scott Christopher, "Sexuality in Marriage, Dating, and Other Relationships: A Decade Review," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62, no. 4, November 2000: 999-1017.
5. Peggy McDonough, "Chronic Stress and the Social Patterning of Women's Health in Canada," *Social Science and Medicine*, 2002: 767-782.
6. Allan Horwitz, "Becoming Married and Mental Health: A Longitudinal Study of a Cohort of Young Adults," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, November 1996: 895-907.
7. Patrick Fagan, et. al., "The Positive Effects of Marriage: Economic Effects of Marriage," The Heritage Foundation, www.heritage.org/Research/Features/Marriage/economic.cfm.
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9. Patrick Fagan, et. al., "The Positive Effects of Marriage: The Effects of Marriage on Adults," The Heritage Foundation, www.heritage.org/research/features/marriage/adults.cfm.
10. Patrick Fagan, et. al., "The Positive Effects of Marriage: The Effects of Marriage on Children," The Heritage Foundation, www.heritage.org/research/features/marriage/children.cfm.
11. See the U.S. Department of Labor for the various longitudinal studies, www.bls.gov/nls/home.htm.
12. James Dobson, *Marriage Under Fire* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 54.
13. See J. D. Unwin, *Sexual Regulations and Human Behavior* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1933).

14. Robert Gebeloff and Mary Jo Patterson, "Married and gay couples are not all that different," *Times-Picayune*, 22 November 2003.
15. Timothy J. Dailey, "Comparing the lifestyles of homosexual couples to married couples," *Family Research Council Insight*, www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=IS04C02.
16. Matthew Bramlett and William Mosher, "First marriage dissolution, divorce and remarriage: United States," *National Center for Health Statistics*, 31 May 2001: 1.
17. "Largest gay study examines 2004 relationships," GayWire Latest Breaking Releases, www.glcensus.org.
18. Maria Xiridou, et. al., "The contribution of steady and casual partnership to the incidence of HIV infection among homosexual men in Amsterdam," *AIDS*, 17 (2003): 1031.
19. M. Pollack, "Male Homosexuality," in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Precept in Past and Present Times*, ed. Philippe Aries and Andre Bejin, trans. A. Forster (New York: Blackwell, 1985), 40-61.
20. Michael Wiederman, "Extramarital sex: prevalence and correlates in a national survey," *Journal of Sex Research*, 34 (1997): 170.
21. E. O. Laumann, et. al. *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 216.
22. A. P. Bell and M.S. Weinberg, *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 308-309.
23. Xiridou, "The contribution of steady and casual partnership," 1031.
24. David McWhirter and Andrew Mattison, *The Male Couple: How Relationships Develop* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 252-253.
25. Dailey, "Comparing."

Divorce – A Biblical Christian Perspective

Kerby Anderson examines the epidemic of divorce from a Christian, biblical worldview perspective. He presents data on its impact on families and society and compares the trend with biblical teaching on the subject.

Families are experiencing many problems today, but the role of divorce in this picture has been frequently overlooked because its destructive effects have been subtle, yet insidious. When the divorce rate increased in the 1960s, few would have predicted its dire consequences three decades later. Yet divorce has changed both the structure and the impact of the family.

This is not just the conclusion of Christians, but also the conclusion of non-Christian researchers working in the field. Clinical psychologist Diane Medved set out to write a book to help couples facing transitions due to divorce. She begins her book with this startling statement:

I have to start with a confession: This isn't the book I set out to write. I planned to write something consistent with my previous professional experience helping people with decision making. . . . For example, I started this project believing that people who suffer over an extended period in unhappy marriages ought to get out....I thought that striking down taboos about divorce was another part of the ongoing enlightenment of the women's, civil- rights, and human potential movements of the last twenty-five years....To my utter befuddlement, the extensive research I conducted for this book brought me to one inescapable and irrefutable conclusion: I had been wrong."(1)

She titled her book *The Case Against Divorce*.

Until the 1960s, divorce has been a relatively rare phenomenon. Certainly there have always been some couples who have considered divorce an option. But fundamental changes in our society in the last few decades have changed divorce from being rare to routine.

During the 1970s, the divorce rate doubled (and the number of divorces tripled from 400,000 in 1962 to 1.2 million in 1981).(2) The increase in the divorce rate came not from older couples but from the baby boom generation. One sociologist at Stanford University calculated that while men and women in their twenties comprised only about 20 percent of the population, they contributed 60 percent of the growth in the divorce rate in the 1960s and early 1970s.(3)

This increase was due to at least two major factors: attitude and opportunity. The baby boom generation's attitude toward such issues as fidelity, chastity, and commitment were strikingly different from their parents'. Their parents would stay in a marriage in order to make it work. Baby boomers, however, were less committed to the ideal of marriage and quite willing to end what they felt was a bad marriage and move on with their lives. While their parents might keep a marriage going "for the sake of the kids," the baby boom generation as a whole was much less concerned about such issues.

Economic opportunities also seem to be a significant factor in divorce. The rise in divorce closely parallels the increase in the number of women working. Women with a paycheck were less likely to stay in a marriage that wasn't fulfilling to them. Armed with a measure of economic power, many women had less incentive to stay in a marriage and work out their differences with their husbands. A study of mature women done at Ohio State University found that the higher a woman's income in relation to the total income of her family, the more likely

she was to seek a divorce.(4)

Divorce and Children

Divorce is having a devastating impact on both adults and children. Every year, parents of over 1 million children divorce. These divorces effectively cut one generation off from another. Children are reared without the presence of their father or mother. Children are often forced to take sides in the conflict. And, children often carry the scars of the conflict and frequently blame themselves for the divorce.

So what is the impact? Well, one demographer looking at this ominous trend of divorce and reflecting on its impact, acknowledged:

No one knows what effect divorce and remarriage will have on the children of the baby boom. A few decades ago, children of divorced parents were an oddity. Today they are the majority. The fact that divorce is the norm may make it easier for children to accept their parents' divorce. But what will it do to their marriages in the decades ahead? No one will know until it's too late to do anything about it.(5)

What little we do know about the long-term impact of divorce is disturbing. In 1971, Judith Wallerstein began a study of sixty middle-class families in the midst of divorce. Her ongoing research has provided a longitudinal study of the long-term effects of divorce on parents and children.

Like Diane Medved, Judith Wallerstein had to revise her previous assumptions. According to the prevailing view at the time, divorce was seen as a brief crisis that would resolve itself. Her book, *Second Chances: Men, Women and Children a Decade After Divorce*, vividly illustrates the long-term psychological devastation wrought not only on the children but the adults.(6) Here are just a few of her findings in her

study of the aftershocks of divorce:

- *Three out of five children felt rejected by at least one parent.*
- *Five years after their parent's divorce, more than one-third of the children were doing markedly worse than they had been before the divorce.*
- *Half grew up in settings in which the parents were warring with each other even after the divorce.*
- *One-third of the women and one-quarter of the men felt that life had been unfair, disappointing and lonely.*

In essence, Wallerstein found that the emotional tremors register on the psychological Richter scale many years after the divorce.

In addition to the emotional impact is the educational impact. Children growing up in broken homes do not do as well in school as children from stable families. One national study found an overall average of one lost year of education for children in single-parent families.(7)

Divorce and remarriage adds another additional twist to modern families. Nearly half of all marriages in 1990 involved at least one person who had been down the aisle before, up from 31 percent in 1970.(8)

These changing family structures complicate relationships. Divorce and remarriage shuffle family members together in foreign and awkward ways. Clear lines of authority and communication get blurred and confused in these newly revised families. One commentator trying to get a linguistic handle on these arrangements called them "neo-nuclear" families.(9) The rules for these neo- nukes are complex and ever-changing. Children looking for stability are often insecure and frustrated. One futuristic commentator imagined this possible scenario:

On a spring afternoon, half a century from today, the Joneses are gathered to sing "Happy Birthday" to Junior. There's Dad and his third wife, Mom and her second husband, Junior's two half brothers from his father's first marriage, his six stepsisters from his mother's spouse's previous unions, 100-year-old Great Grandpa, all eight of Junior's current "grandparents," assorted aunts, uncles-in-law and step-cousins. While one robot scoops up the gift wrappings and another blows out the candles, Junior makes a wish ...that he didn't have so many relatives.(10)

The stress on remarried couples is difficult enough, but it intensifies when step-children are involved. Conflict between a stepparent and stepchild is inevitable and can be enough to threaten the stability of a remarriage. According to one study, remarriages that involve stepchildren are more likely to end in divorce than those that don't.(11) Fully 17 percent of marriages that are remarriages for both husband and wife and that involve stepchildren break up within three years.(12)

No Fault Divorce

Historically the laws governing marriage were based upon the traditional, Judeo-Christian belief that marriage was for life. Marriage was intended to be a permanent institution. Thus, the desire for divorce was not held to be self-justifying. Legally the grounds for divorce had to be circumstances that justified making an exemption to the assumption of marital permanence. The spouse seeking a divorce had to prove that the other spouse had committed one of the "faults" recognized as justifying the dissolution of the marriage. In most states, the classic grounds for divorce were cruelty, desertion, and adultery.

This legal foundation changed when California enacted a statute in 1969 which allowed for no-fault divorce. This experiment has effectively led to what could now be called "divorce-on-demand." One by one, various state legislatures

enacted no-fault divorce laws so that today, this concept has become the de facto legal principle in every state.

The fault-based system of divorce law had its roots in the view that marriage was a sacrament and indissoluble. The current no-fault provisions changed this perception. Marriage is no longer viewed as a covenant; it's a contract. But it's an even less reliable contract than a standard business contract.

Classic contract law holds that a specific promise is binding and cannot be broken merely because the promisor changes his/her mind. In fact, the concept of "fault" in divorce proceedings is more like tort law than contract law in that it implies an binding obligation between two parties which has been breached, thus leading to a divorce. When state legislatures implemented no-fault divorce provisions, they could have replaced the fault-based protections with contract-like protections. Unfortunately, they did not. In just a few decades we have moved from a position where divorce was permitted for a few reasons to a position in which divorce is permitted for any reason, or no reason at all.

The impact on the institution of marriage has been devastating. Marginal marriages are much easier to dissolve, and couples who may have tried to stick it out and work out their problems instead opt for a no-fault divorce.

But all marriages (not just marginal marriages) are at risk. After all, marriages do not start out marginal. Most marriages start out on a solid footing. But after the honeymoon, comes the more difficult process of learning to live together harmoniously. The success of the process is affected by both internal factors (willingness to meet each other's needs, etc.) and external factors (such as the availability of divorce). But even these factors are interrelated. If the law gives more protection to the marriage contract, a partner may be more likely to love sacrificially and invest effort in the

marriage. If the law gives less protection, a partner may be more likely to adopt a “looking out for number one” attitude.

Biblical Perspective

The Bible speaks to the issue of divorce in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The most important Old Testament passage on divorce is Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

These verses were not intended to endorse divorce; just the contrary. The intention was to regulate the existing custom of divorce, not to put forth God’s ideal for marriage. Divorce was allowed in certain instances because of human sinfulness (Matt. 19:8).

Divorce was widespread in the ancient Near East. The certificate of divorce apparently was intended to protect the reputation of the woman and provided her with the right to remarry. This public declaration protected her from charges of adultery. The Mishnah, for example, stated that a divorce certificate was not valid unless the husband explicitly said, “Thou art free to marry any man.”(13)

Key to understanding this passage is the definition of “something indecent.” It probably did not mean adultery since that was subject to the penalty of death (22:22), nor did it

probably mean premarital intercourse with another man (22:20-21) since that carried the same penalty. The precise meaning of the phrase is unknown.

In fact, the meaning of this phrase was subject to some debate even during the time of Christ. The conservative school of Shammai understood it to mean a major sexual offense. The liberal school of Hillel taught that it referred to anything displeasing to the husband (including something as trivial as spoiling his food). The apparent purpose of this law was to prevent frivolous divorce and to protect a woman who was divorced by her husband. The passage in no way encourages divorce but regulates the consequences of divorce.

Another significant Old Testament passage is Malachi 2:10-16.

Have we not all one Father ? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?...Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel.

This passage deals with breaking a prior agreement or covenant. It specifically addresses the issue of illegal intermarriage and the issue of divorce. Malachi specifically teaches that husbands and wives are to be faithful to one another because they have God as their Father. The marriage relationship is built upon a solemn covenant. While God may tolerate divorce under some of the circumstances described in Deuteronomy 24, the instructions were given to protect the woman if a divorce should occur. This passage in Malachi reminds us that God hates divorce.

In the New Testament book of Matthew, we have the clearest teachings by Jesus on the subject of divorce.

It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give

her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to commit adultery, and anyone who marries a woman so divorced commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32) I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9)

In these two passages, Jesus challenges the views of the two schools of Jewish thought (Shammai, Hillel). He teaches that marriage is for life and should not be dissolved by divorce.

Defining the word *porneia* (which is translated marital unfaithfulness) is a key element in trying to understand these passages. While some commentators teach that this word refers to incestuous relationships or sexual promiscuity during the betrothal period, most scholars believe the word applies to relentless, persistent, and unrepentant adultery. Among those holding to this exception clause for adultery, some believe remarriage is possible while others do not.

The other significant section of teaching on divorce in the New Testament can be found in Paul's teaching on divorce in 1 Corinthians 7:10-15.

To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife. To the rest I say this (I, not the Lord): If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man

or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace.

In the first section, Paul addresses Christians married to one another. Paul was obviously aware of the prevalence of divorce in the Greek world and of the legal right that a wife has to initiate a divorce. He gives the command for believers to stay married.

In the next section, Paul addresses the issue of mixed marriages. He says that even in spite of religious incompatibility in such a marriage, Paul teaches that the believing spouse is not to seek divorce. Some divorces may have been initiated because of the command of Ezra to the Israelites in Jerusalem after the exile (Ezra 10:11) to divorce themselves from pagan spouses. Paul affirms the same biblical principle: do not seek divorce. However, if the unbelieving spouse insists on divorce, the believer may have to concede to those proceedings and is not bound in such circumstances.

Based on the preceding verses, we can therefore conclude that a Christian can acquiesce to divorce in cases of marital infidelity by the other spouse or in cases of desertion by an unbelieving spouse. Yet even in these cases, the church should not encourage divorce. Certainly in very troubling cases which involve mental, sexual, and/or physical abuse, legal separation is available as a remedy to protect the abused spouse. God hates divorce; therefore Christians should never be in the position of encouraging or promoting divorce. Instead they should be encouraging reconciliation.

One final question is whether a divorced person is eligible for a leadership position within the church. The key passage is 1 Timothy 3:2 which calls for a church leader to be above reproach and "the husband of one wife." Rather than prohibiting a divorced person from serving in leadership, the language of this verse actually focuses on practicing

polygamists. Polygamy was practiced in the first century and found among Jewish and Christian groups. The passage could be translated "a one-woman man." If Paul intended to prohibit a divorced person from leadership, he could have used a much less ambiguous term.

As Christians in a society where divorce is rampant, I believe we must come back to these important biblical principles concerning marriage. Christians should work to build strong marriages. Pastors must frequently preach and teach about the importance of marriage. We should encourage fellow Christians to attend various marriage enrichment seminars and ministries in our community.

As Christians I also believe we should reach out to those who have been through divorce. We must communicate Christ's forgiveness to them in the midst of their shattered lives. They need counseling and support groups. Many times they also need financial help and direction as they begin to put together the shattered pieces of their lives.

But as we reach out to those whose lives are shattered by divorce, we must be careful that our ministry does not compromise our theology. We must reach out with both biblical convictions and biblical compassion. Marriage for life is God's ideal (Genesis 2), nevertheless, millions of people have been devastated by divorce and need to feel care and compassion from Christians. Churches have unfortunately erred on one side or another. Most churches have maintained a strong stand on marriage and divorce. While this strong biblical stand is admirable, it should also be balanced with compassion towards those caught in the throes of divorce. Strong convictions without compassionate outreach often seems to communicate that divorce is the unforgivable sin.

On the other hand, some churches in their desire to minister to divorced people have compromised their theological convictions. By starting without biblically-based convictions

about marriage and divorce, they have let their congregation's circumstances influence their theology.

Christians must simultaneously reach out with conviction and compassion. Marriage for life is God's ideal, but divorce is a reality in our society. Christians should reach out with Christ's forgiveness to those whose lives have been shattered by divorce.

Notes

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Capital Punishment: A Christian View and Biblical Perspective

Kerby Anderson provides a biblical worldview perspective on capital punishment. He explores the biblical teaching to help us understand how to consider this controversial topic apply Christian love and biblical principles.

Should Christians support the death penalty? The answer to that question is controversial. Many Christians feel that the Bible has spoken to the issue, but others believe that the New Testament ethic of love replaces the Old Testament law.

Old Testament Examples

Throughout the Old Testament we find many cases in which God commands the use of capital punishment. We see this first with the acts of God Himself. God was involved, either directly or

indirectly, in the taking of life as a punishment for the nation of Israel or for those who threatened or harmed Israel.

One example is the flood of Noah in Genesis 6-8. God destroyed all human and animal life except that which was on the ark. Another example is Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18-19), where God destroyed the two cities because of the heinous sin of the inhabitants. In the time of Moses, God took the lives of the Egyptians' first-born sons (Exod. 11) and destroyed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea (Exod. 14). There were also punishments such as the punishment at Kadesh-Barnea (Num. 13-14) or the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16) against the Jews wandering in the wilderness.

The Old Testament is replete with references and examples of God taking life. In a sense, God used capital punishment to deal with Israel's sins and the sins of the nations surrounding Israel.

The Old Testament also teaches that God instituted capital punishment in the Jewish law code. In fact, the principle of capital punishment even precedes the Old Testament law code. According to Genesis 9:6, capital punishment is based upon a belief in the sanctity of life. It says, "Whoever sheds man's blood by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God, He made man."

The Mosaic Law set forth numerous offenses that were punishable by death. The first was murder. In Exodus 21, God commanded capital punishment for murderers. Premeditated murder (or what the Old Testament described as "lying in wait") was punishable by death. A second offense punishable by death was involvement in the occult (Exod. 22; Lev. 20; Deut 18-19). This included sorcery, divination, acting as a medium, and sacrificing to false gods. Third, capital punishment was to be used against perpetrators of sexual sins such as rape, incest, or homosexual practice.

Within this Old Testament theocracy, capital punishment was extended beyond murder to cover various offenses. While the death penalty for these offenses was limited to this particular dispensation of revelation, notice that the principle in Genesis 9:6 is not tied to the theocracy. Instead, the principle of *Lex Talionis* (a life for a life) is tied to the creation order. Capital punishment is warranted due to the sanctity of life. Even before we turn to the New Testament, we find this universally binding principle that precedes the Old Testament law code.

New Testament Principles

Some Christians believe that capital punishment does not apply to the New Testament and church age.

First we must acknowledge that God gave the principle of capital punishment even before the institution of the Old Testament law code. In Genesis 9:6 we read that “Whoever sheds man’s blood by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God, He made man.” Capital punishment was instituted by God because humans are created in the image of God. The principle is not rooted in the Old Testament theocracy, but rather in the creation order. It is a much broader biblical principle that carries into the New Testament.

Even so, some Christians argue that in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus seems to be arguing against capital punishment. But is He?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is not arguing against the principle of a life for a life. Rather He is speaking to the issue of our personal desire for vengeance. He is not denying the power and responsibility of the government. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking to individual Christians. He is telling Christians that they should not try to replace the power of the government. Jesus does not deny the power and authority of government, but rather He calls individual

Christians to love their enemies and turn the other cheek.

Some have said that Jesus set aside capital punishment in John 8 when He did not call for the woman caught in adultery to be stoned. But remember the context. The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus between the Roman law and the Mosaic law. If He said that they should stone her, He would break the Roman law. If He refused to allow them to stone her, He would break the Mosaic law (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Jesus' answer avoided the conflict: He said that he who was without sin should cast the first stone. Since He did teach that a stone be thrown (John 8:7), this is not an abolition of the death penalty.

In other places in the New Testament we see the principle of capital punishment being reinforced. Romans 13:1-7, for example, teaches that human government is ordained by God and that the civil magistrate is a minister of God. We are to obey government for we are taught that government does not bear the sword in vain. The fact that the Apostle Paul used the image of the sword further supports the idea that capital punishment was to be used by government in the New Testament age as well. Rather than abolish the idea of the death penalty, Paul uses the emblem of the Roman sword to reinforce the idea of capital punishment. The New Testament did not abolish the death penalty; it reinforced the principle of capital punishment.

Capital Punishment and Deterrence

Is capital punishment a deterrent to crime? At the outset, we should acknowledge that the answer to this question should not change our perspective on this issue. Although it is an important question, it should not be the basis for our belief. A Christian's belief in capital punishment should be based upon what the Bible teaches not on a pragmatic assessment of whether or not capital punishment deters crime.

That being said, however, we should try to assess the effectiveness of capital punishment. Opponents of capital

punishment argue that it is not a deterrent, because in some states where capital punishment is allowed the crime rate goes up. Should we therefore conclude that capital punishment is not a deterrent?

First, we should recognize that crime rates have been increasing for some time. The United States is becoming a violent society as its social and moral fabric breaks down. So the increase in the crime rate is most likely due to many other factors and cannot be correlated with a death penalty that has been implemented sparingly and sporadically.

Second, there is some evidence that capital punishment is a deterrent. And even if we are not absolutely sure of its deterrent effect, the death penalty should be implemented. If it is a deterrent, then implementing capital punishment certainly will save lives. If it is not, then we still will have followed biblical injunctions and put convicted murderers to death.

In a sense, opponents of capital punishment who argue that it is not a deterrent are willing to give the benefit of the doubt to the criminal rather than to the victim. The poet Hyman Barshay put it this way:

The death penalty is a warning, just like a lighthouse throwing its beams out to sea. We hear about shipwrecks, but we do not hear about the ships the lighthouse guides safely on their way. We do not have proof of the number of ships it saves, but we do not tear the lighthouse down.”(1)

If capital punishment is even a potential deterrent, that is a significant enough social reason to implement it.

Statistical analysis by Dr. Isaac Ehrlich at the University of Chicago suggests that capital punishment is a deterrent.(2) Although his conclusions were vigorously challenged, further cross-sectional analysis has confirmed his conclusions.(3)

His research has shown that if the death penalty is used in a consistent way, it may deter as many as eight murders for every execution carried out. If these numbers are indeed accurate, it demonstrates that capital punishment could be a significant deterrent to crime in our society.

Certainly capital punishment will not deter all crime. Psychotic and deranged killers, members of organized crime, and street gangs will no doubt kill whether capital punishment is implemented or not. A person who is irrational or wants to commit a murder will do so whether capital punishment exists or not. But social statistics as well as logic suggest that rational people will be deterred from murder because capital punishment is part of the criminal code.

Capital Punishment and Discrimination

Many people oppose capital punishment because they feel it is discriminatory. The charge is somewhat curious since most of the criminals that have been executed in the last decade are white rather than black. Nevertheless, a higher percentage of ethnic minorities (African-American, Hispanic-American) are on death row. So is this a significant argument against capital punishment?

First, we should note that much of the evidence for discrimination is circumstantial. Just because there is a higher percentage of a particular ethnic group does not, in and of itself, constitute discrimination. A high percentage of whites playing professional ice hockey or a high percentage of blacks playing professional basketball does not necessarily mean that discrimination has taken place. We need to look beneath the allegation and see if true discrimination is taking place.

Second, we can and should acknowledge that some discrimination does take place in the criminal justice system. Discrimination takes place not only on the basis of race, but on the basis of

wealth. Wealthy defendants can hire a battery of legal experts to defend themselves, while poor defendants must rely on a court-appointed public attorney.

Even if we acknowledge that there is some evidence of discrimination in the criminal justice system, does it likewise hold that there is discrimination with regard to capital punishment? The U.S. Solicitor General, in his amicus brief for the case *Gregg vs. Georgia*, argued that sophisticated sociological studies demonstrated that capital punishment showed no evidence of racial discrimination.(4) These studies compared the number of crimes committed with the number that went to trial and the number of guilty verdicts rendered and found that guilty verdicts were consistent across racial boundaries.

But even if we find evidence for discrimination in the criminal justice system, notice that this is not really an argument against capital punishment. It is a compelling argument for reform of the criminal justice system. It is an argument for implementing capital punishment carefully.

We may conclude that we will only use the death penalty in cases where certainty exists (e.g., eyewitness accounts, videotape evidence). But discrimination in the criminal justice system is not truly an argument against capital punishment. At its best, it is an argument for its careful implementation.

In fact, most of the social and philosophical arguments against capital punishment are really not arguments against it at all. These arguments are really arguments for improving the criminal justice system. If discrimination is taking place and guilty people are escaping penalty, then that is an argument for extending the penalty, not doing away with it. Furthermore, opponents of capital punishment candidly admit that they would oppose the death penalty even if it were an effective deterrent.(5) So while these are important social

and political issues to consider, they are not sufficient justification for the abolition of the death penalty.

Objections to Capital Punishment

One objection to capital punishment is that the government is itself committing murder. Put in theological terms, doesn't the death penalty violate the sixth commandment, which teaches "Thou shalt not kill?"

First, we must understand the context of this verse. The verb used in Exodus 20:13 is best translated "to murder." It is used 49 times in the Old Testament, and it is always used to describe premeditated murder. It is never used of animals, God, angels, or enemies in battle. So the commandment is not teaching that all killing is wrong; it is teaching that murder is wrong.

Second, the penalty for breaking the commandment was death (Ex.21:12; Num. 35:16-21). We can conclude therefore that when the government took the life of a murderer, the government was not itself guilty of murder. Opponents of capital punishment who accuse the government of committing murder by implementing the death penalty fail to see the irony of using Exodus 20 to define murder but ignoring Exodus 21, which specifically teaches that government is to punish the murderer.

A second objection to capital punishment questions the validity of applying the Old Testament law code to today's society. After all, wasn't the Mosaic Law only for the Old Testament theocracy? There are a number of ways to answer this objection.

First, we must question the premise. There is and should be a relationship between Old Testament laws and modern laws. We may no longer be subject to Old Testament ceremonial law, but that does not invalidate God's moral principles set down in the Old Testament. Murder is still wrong. Thus, since murder

is wrong, the penalty for murder must still be implemented.

Second, even if we accept the premise that the Old Testament law code was specifically and uniquely for the Old Testament theocracy, this still does not abolish the death penalty. Genesis 9:6 precedes the Old Testament theocracy, and its principle is tied to the creation order. Capital punishment is to be implemented because of the sanctity of human life. We are created in God's image. When a murder occurs, the murderer must be put to death. This is a universally binding principle not confined merely to the Old Testament theocracy.

Third, it is not just the Old Testament that teaches capital punishment. Romans 13:1-7 specifically teaches that human government is ordained by God and that we are to obey government because government does not bear the sword in vain. Human governments are given the responsibility to punish wrongdoers, and this includes murderers who are to be given the death penalty.

Finally, capital punishment is never specifically removed or replaced in the Bible. While some would argue that the New Testament ethic replaces the Old Testament ethic, there is no instance in which a replacement ethic is introduced. As we have already seen, Jesus and the disciples never disturb the Old Testament standard of capital punishment. The Apostle Paul teaches that we are to live by grace with one another, but also teaches that we are to obey human government that bears the sword. Capital punishment is taught in both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

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5. Further discussion of these points can be found in an essay by Ernest van den Haag, "The Collapse of the Case Against Capital Punishment," *National Review*, 31 March 1978, 395-407.

A more complete discussion of capital punishment can be found in chapter 10 of *Living Ethically in the 90s* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1990), available from Probe Ministries.

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The Dark Underside of Abortion: A Christian Worldview Perspective

Sue Bohlin looks at the common effects of an abortion on the women who choose it. From a biblical worldview perspective, it is not surprising that many women experience guilt, shame and denial. Christ can bring forgiveness and healing for those who have taken this brutally wrong path in their past.

Laura's Story

No matter how many times Laura^[1] took the home pregnancy test, it kept showing up positive. She was pregnant, and seventeen years old. She'd gotten an A on her paper against abortion in school. Her parents would never understand, especially since her mother volunteered at the crisis pregnancy center! Her boyfriend was hot, but hardly husband material. He was more committed to skateboarding than to her.

Laura had never felt more confused in her life.

When she called her boyfriend to tell him she was pregnant, he just said, "That stinks. Well, I gotta go," and he was gone. She carried her horrible secret for three weeks before finally telling her parents. Her father exploded: "What did I ever do to deserve this? Well, we'll just have to get rid of it. It's the best thing for everybody. You're too young to be a mother." When Laura's eyes flooded with tears, he said, "You may hate me for a while, but I'm willing to take that risk. You'll get over it. You're young. You can have a real life with a real future this way."

Her mother, visibly shaken, said, "How could you do this to us? What would people think of us, to have a pregnant daughter? You've really gone and done it now, Laura." Two days later, her mother took her to a Planned Parenthood clinic. Laura cried the whole way there: "Please, no! Don't make me do this, don't make me do this!" Nobody listened, nobody cared that she didn't want the abortion. When a counselor asked if she was sure, she just shrugged her shoulders, beaten and defeated.

As soon as it was over, everyone seemed to forget about it. Her parents never brought it up again. All her relationships fell apart. Laura was deeply depressed, not knowing how to handle her feelings. She was too ashamed to talk about the abortion with her friends, and her parents made her promise not to tell anyone.

She didn't get over it. She was stuck in a place filled with anger and hurt. She couldn't overcome the loss of her baby, and she didn't even have words for that. Anything related to babies made her cry: new baby announcements at church, diaper commercials, even driving by Babies-R-Us. Everything triggered relentless heartache. There was a wound in her soul that would not stop bleeding.

Abortion is not the cure to a problem pregnancy. It is what counselor Theresa Burke calls an “emotionally draining and physically ugly experience.”[{2}](#) The majority of those who have an abortion experience a variety of problems afterwards. One post-abortion woman described it as “emotional torture.”

In what follows, we’re going to explore the ugly underside of abortion.

Why Women Choose Abortion

The banner of the pro-choice movement is, “Every woman has the right to choose.” But why do women choose to have an abortion? Many women report that they didn’t want one. Various studies have found that sixty-five to seventy percent of women who get abortions also believe it’s morally wrong.[{3}](#) When women violate their conscience or betray their maternal instincts, that’s going to cause a lot of stress.

Years after their abortion, women will often say that they didn’t want to have one but they felt forced to. They thought it was wrong, but they did it anyway because they felt pressure—from circumstances, or from one or more key people in their lives. Often it’s boyfriends, sometimes husbands. When a boyfriend threatens to leave unless a girl has an abortion, most of the time they break up anyway. Then she has lost both her baby and her boyfriend. Crisis pregnancy counselor Dr. Julie Parton says that almost as often, the pressure comes from parents, especially Christian parents.[{4}](#) She says that there are three main factors influencing Christian mothers to push their daughters toward abortion: selfishness, shame, and fear.[{5}](#)

But the bottom line reason for abortion is spiritual. Even though they’re usually not aware of it, people are listening to the voice of the enemy, who Jesus said came to steal, kill, and destroy.[{6}](#) Satan hates women, and he hates the image of

God in the unborn baby. Abortion hurts women and destroys babies.

And for every woman who has had an abortion, there is a man whose baby has died. Whether he pushed for the abortion or fought it,[{7}](#) God's design of his masculine heart to protect and provide has been violated as well. Dr. Parton points out that over forty-five million men have bottled-up feelings about their abortions, and wonders if there is a connection with the heightened amount of violence in our culture of death. Could road rage be the boiling over of deep-seated anger in some of these men?

We need to talk more about the ways that abortion steals, kills and destroys. But it is crucial that you know that *abortion is not the unpardonable sin*. Jesus Christ died to pay for all sins, including abortion. He extends cleansing and forgiveness to every man and woman who has been wounded by abortion. He offers reconciliation with God and the grace to forgive ourselves. No sin is greater than His love or His sacrifice to pay for that sin. There is peace and joy waiting for those who have received Christ's gift of forgiveness and cleansing from guilt.[{8}](#)

Post-Abortion Syndrome: Self-destruction, Guilt and Anger

Abortion is deeply troubling because it touches on three central issues of a woman's self-concept: her sexuality, her morality, and her maternal identity. She also has to deal with the loss of a child. This loss must be confronted, processed, and grieved in order for a woman to resolve her experience.[{9}](#)

Many women find themselves troubled after their abortion because they don't think through these issues before their abortion. The fact that they experience relief immediately after the abortion is no guarantee that problems won't surface

later. Unresolved emotions will demand our attention sooner or later.

For millions of women, Post-Abortion Syndrome is an ugly after-effect of abortion, consisting of a number of powerful emotions that can erupt in dangerous and destructive behaviors. Far from being “no big deal,” which is how abortion is often minimized in our culture, abortion is a traumatic event in the life of most women who have one. Life becomes divided into “before the abortion” and “after the abortion.” So it is no surprise that so many experience some degree of post-traumatic stress disorder. They used to call this “shell shock” after World War II. PTSD is a collection of negative, destructive behaviors and ways of thinking.

In many women with a history of abortion there is an alarming increase of self-destructive behavior. Many women are consumed with self-hatred, expressing it in drug and/or alcohol abuse. Millions of women battle depression and suicidal thoughts.[{10}](#) One woman said, “I became a tramp and slept with anyone and everyone. I engaged in unprotected sex and each month when I wasn’t pregnant I would go into a deep depression. I was rebellious. I wanted my parents to see what I had become. I dropped out of college. I tried suicide, but I didn’t have the guts to slit my wrists or blow my brains out. I couldn’t get my hands on sleeping pills, so I resorted to over the counter sleep aids and booze.”[{11}](#)

The majority of post-abortive women are plagued by guilt.[{12}](#) As one woman put it, “I hated myself. I felt abandoned and lost. There was no one’s shoulder to cry on, and I wanted to cry like hell. And I felt guilty about killing something. I couldn’t get it out of my head that I’d just killed a baby.”[{13}](#) This high guilt rate is unique to abortion compared to any other medical procedure. There are no support groups for those who had their appendix or gall bladder removed, and people don’t seek counseling after orthopedic surgery. Guilt is a painful aftereffect of abortion.

Some women react with anger and rage. They feel deeply isolated and angry at anyone who hurt them and their baby. They are irritated by everyone and everything, and no one can do anything right. They can fly into rages with the slightest provocation. Often, they are not aware of the connection between their abortion and a constantly simmering heart full of anger, especially since most women feel pressured to have the abortion in the first place.

Post Abortion Syndrome: Shame and Denial

A huge aspect of Post-Abortion Syndrome is shame. Post-abortal women often feel like second-class citizens. They live in fear of others finding out their terrible dark secret. One woman told me that whenever she would walk into a room, she was constantly scanning the faces: *Do they know? Can they tell by looking at me?* Some women are afraid to attend an abortion recovery group where anyone would know them, even though everyone is there for the same reason. When a Christian has an abortion, she often goes into one of two directions; she either cuts herself off from God because she's so ashamed of herself, or she tries to become the ultimate "Martha," wearing herself out in service to try and earn her way to back to God's approval and blessing. The shame of abortion drives many women to perfectionism because they feel so deeply flawed and sinful.

Denial – Many women spend huge amounts of mental energy trying not to think about their abortion. Romans 1 calls this "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness." The horror of participating in the death of one's child is too painful to face, and many women work hard at maintaining denial for five to ten years.[\[14\]](#) But eventually reality usually comes to the surface.

Some women find themselves falling apart when their youngest child leaves home, or at menopause. Others become

uncontrollably sad when they hold their first grandchild. One woman's denial system shattered when she saw a museum exhibit of pre-born babies and saw what her baby looked like when she aborted him. Another woman almost lost it in nursing school when she learned about prenatal development. The abortion counselor had told her it was just a blob of tissue. Even those who deny their unborn child was a human being and not a clump of cells admit they have to work at maintaining denial. One woman said, "I didn't think of it as a baby. I just didn't want to think of it that way."[{15}](#)

Child abuse – As the number of abortions continues to rise, so does the incidence of child abuse.[{16}](#) Unresolved post-abortion feelings are tied to patterns of emotional or physical abuse of living children. One mother erupted in intense rage whenever her newborn baby cried. She came to realize that she hated her daughter for being able to do all the things that her aborted baby could never do.[{17}](#) One woman beat her three year old son to death shortly after an abortion which triggered a "psychotic episode" of grief, guilt, and anger.[{18}](#)

Healing After Abortion

Post-Abortion Syndrome is a dark, ugly underside of abortion. Researchers have reported over a hundred psychological effects of abortion stress, including depression, flashbacks, sleep and eating disorders, anxiety attacks, a diminished capacity for bonding with later children, increased tendency toward violent outbursts, chronic problems in maintaining intimate relationships, and difficulty concentrating.[{20}](#)

Death – Women who abort are approximately four times more likely to die in the following year than women who carry their pregnancies to term.[{21}](#)

Breast Cancer – The risk of breast cancer almost doubles after

one abortion, and rises even further with two or more abortions.[{22}](#)

Cervical, Ovarian and Liver Cancer – Women with one abortion face a 2.3 relative risk of cervical cancer, compared to non-aborted women, and women with two or more abortions face a 4.92 relative risk. Similar elevated risks of ovarian and liver cancer have also been linked to single and multiple abortions. These increased cancer rates for post-aborted women are apparently linked to the unnatural disruption of the hormonal changes which accompany pregnancy and untreated cervical damage.[{23}](#)

Damage to Cervix and Uterus – This causes problems with subsequent deliveries, and can result in handicaps in subsequent newborns.[{24}](#)

Increased Risks for Teenagers – Teenagers, who account for about thirty percent of all abortions, are also at much higher risk of suffering many abortion related complications. This is true of both immediate complications and of long-term reproductive damage.[{25}](#)

What do you say to someone who's experienced the trauma of abortion? It's a terrible loss. How do you help someone grieve? What do you say? Perhaps something like, "I'm so sorry. It must be very difficult for you. Do you want to tell me about it?" We can offer a listening ear, full of compassion and grace: "What was the abortion like? What has it been like to live with it?" Seek to validate the woman or man's grief with honor and respect so they can get to a place of healing peace.

What if you're the one who's had an abortion? You need to grieve. Grief is a natural and necessary response to loss. It's more than a single emotion of sadness. It includes feelings of loss, confusion, loneliness, anger, despair, and more. It can't be turned on and off at will. Working through

your grief means confronting your loss, admitting it, grieving it with tears and other expressions of sadness.

The pain and grief of abortion is complicated by the fact that it is also sin. But it is not the unpardonable sin. Confess it, and receive the cleansing and forgiveness that Jesus offers. He paid for your abortion on the Cross. He offers you the healing that allows you to be at peace with God and with yourself. He offers you the courage to tell your story with someone safe, which transforms your pain into something redemptive. He offers you the stability that means you don't fall apart if someone else is talking about abortion, or pregnancy, or babies in general.

Dr. Parton suggests three steps toward healing. First, acknowledge the wound that needs to be healed. It may take ten to fifteen years before a woman may be willing to take this step. Second, reach out for help. The Bible tells us, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed."[\[26\]](#) Find others who have walked the same path, either in person or online.[\[27\]](#) Dr. Parton says there is an unusual strength of emotional bonding in post-abortive groups. Receive God's forgiveness and cleansing in community; that's His plan. Third, get into God's Word. It's a supernatural source of comfort and encouragement.

There is a dark and ugly underside to abortion, but it's not too dark for God to redeem. Praise the Lord!

Notes

1. This account is based on a true story, with the name changed, found in Theresa Burke and David C. Reardon, *Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion* (Springfield, IL: Acorn Books, 2002), 23-25.
2. Ibid., 41.
3. Ibid., xx.
4. Personal conversation with the author, Sept. 21, 2007.

5. **Selfishness** – because she had all these dreams, plans, hopes, and ambitions for her daughter. When the daughter turns up pregnant, mom has to grieve the loss of all her dreams for her precious daughter. She'll say things like, "I just can't stand by and watch you throw your life away" or "If you have a baby right now you're just going to be stuck for the next eighteen years."

Shame – Mom feels that if her daughter's pregnancy becomes public knowledge, everyone will know she was not a good mother. She failed at teaching her daughter morality and purity and the things a good Christian mother should have taught her.

Fear – of rejection. She fears that her Christian friends will judge and reject her. So she thinks, or says, "How could you do this to me?" The mom can be so focused on her own stuff, her selfishness and shame and fear, that she can't or doesn't step up to the plate and help her daughter do what they both know is right, because these other factors are overwhelming her.

6. John 10:10.

7. I am aware that many men never know about the abortion of their child. Some find out later and they often experience deep grief and anger, not only at the loss of their child's life, but the unilateral decision to keep them in the dark about their own child's life or death.

8. Come to our website at Probe.org for help with that. ["The Most Important Decision of Your Life"](#) and ["How to Handle the Things You Hate But Can't Change"](#).

9. Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 33.

10. Sixty-three percent of women who have had an abortion seek mental health care. There is a one hundred and fifty-four percent increase in suicide. The suicide rate within one year after an abortion was three times higher than for all women, seven times higher than for women carrying to term, and nearly twice as high as for women who suffered a miscarriage. Suicide attempts appear to be especially prevalent among post-abortion teenagers.

Afterabortion.org,

www.afterabortion.info/psychol.html (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).

11. "Before I Had Time to Think," Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.org (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).

12. A poll by the *LA Times* revealed that fifty-six percent of those who admitted to an abortion felt guilty. But since another poll showed that seventy-four percent of those who admitted to having an abortion believe it's morally wrong, I believe that number is way too low. See Burke and Reardon, *Forbidden Grief*, 47.

13. Linda Bird Francke, *The Ambivalence of Abortion* (New York: Random House, 1978), 61. Cited in www.abortionfacts.com/reardon/women_who_abortion_and_their_views.asp (accessed February 23, 2008).

14. David Reardon, *Aborted Women-Silent No More* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1987).

15. Francke, *Ambivalence*, 63.

16. Psychologist Philip Ney has studied the connection. He sees several effects of abortion:

1) Failure to bond with subsequent children. One mother admitted, "We had our first daughter and I never felt the deep love for her I should have. For several reasons, I guess. The first is that I had never grieved over the loss of the child I had aborted. I was also afraid to love her too much. I felt that God was just going to take her away from me to punish me for killing my first child."

2) The weakening of maternal instincts. Killing one's own child violates the God-given instinct to nurture and protect. It can result in a hardened heart as a way of protecting herself from the truth of her action.

3) Reduced inhibitions against violence, particularly toward children. (Theresa Karminiski Burke and David C. Reardon, "Abortion Trauma and Child Abuse," Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.org.)

17. Reardon, *Aborted Women*, 129-30.

18. Ibid.

19. R.F. Badgley, et al., *Report of the Committee on the Operation of the Abortion Law*, Minister of Supply and

Services, Ottawa, Canada, 1977, 313-319.

20. The following citations are found in "A List of Major Physical Sequelae Related to Abortion" at Afterabortion.org, www.afterabortion.org (accessed Feb. 23, 2008).

21. Gissler, M., et al., "Pregnancy-associated deaths in Finland 1987-1994 – definition problems and benefits of record linkage," *Acta Obstetricia et Gynecologica Scandinavica* 76 (1997): 651-657 .

22. H.L. Howe, et al., "Early Abortion and Breast Cancer Risk Among Women Under Age 40," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 18, no. 2 (1989): 300-304; L.I. Remennick, "Induced Abortion as A Cancer Risk Factor: A Review of Epidemiological Evidence," *Journal of Epidemiological Community Health* (1990); M.C. Pike, "Oral Contraceptive Use and Early Abortion as Risk Factors for Breast Cancer in Young Women," *British Journal of Cancer* 43 (1981): 72.

23. M-G, Le, et al., "Oral Contraceptive Use and Breast or Cervical Cancer: Preliminary Results of a French Case- Control Study, Hormones and Sexual Factors in Human Cancer Etiology," ed. JP Wolff, et al., *Excerpta Medica: New York* (1984), 139-147; F. Parazzini, et al., "Reproductive Factors and the Risk of Invasive and Intraepithelial Cervical Neoplasia," *British Journal of Cancer*, 59 (1989): 805-809; H.L. Stewart, et al., "Epidemiology of Cancers of the Uterine Cervix and Corpus, Breast and Ovary in Israel and New York City," *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 37, no. 1, 1-96; I. Fujimoto, et al., "Epidemiologic Study of Carcinoma in Situ of the Cervix," *Journal of Reproductive Medicine* 30, no. 7 (July 1985):535; N. Weiss, "Events of Reproductive Life and the Incidence of Epithelial Ovarian Cancer," *Am. J. of Epidemiology* 117, no. 2 (1983): 128-139; V. Beral, et al., "Does Pregnancy Protect Against Ovarian Cancer," *The Lancet* (May 20, 1978), 1083-1087; C. LaVecchia, et al., "Reproductive Factors and the Risk of Hepatocellular Carcinoma in Women," *International Journal of Cancer* 52 (1992): 351.

24. K. Schulz, et al., "Measures to Prevent Cervical Injuries During Suction Curettage Abortion," *The Lancet* (May 28, 1983):

1182-1184; W. Cates, "The Risks Associated with Teenage Abortion," *New England Journal of Medicine* 309 no. 11: 612-624; R. Castadot, "Pregnancy Termination: Techniques, Risks, and Complications and Their Management," *Fertility and Sterility* 45, no. 1 (1986): 5-16. Barrett, et al., "Induced Abortion: A Risk Factor for Placenta Previa," *American Journal of Ob&Gyn* 141 (1981): 7. Hogue, Cates and Tietze, "Impact of Vacuum Aspiration Abortion on Future Childbearing: A Review," *Family Planning Perspectives* 15, no. 3 (May-June 1983).

25. Wadhera, "Legal Abortion Among Teens, 1974-1978," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 122 (June 1980):1386-1389.

26. James 5:16

27. [Her Choice to Heal;](http://www.abortionrecovery.org/messageboards/tabid/210/Default.aspx)
www.abortionrecovery.org/messageboards/tabid/210/Default.aspx

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Does God Exist? A Christian Argument from Non-biblical Sources

Probe founder, Jimmy Williams, looks at evidence for the existence of God from multiple, non-biblical sources. He demonstrates that God's creation speaks to his creator. The important apologetic discussion forms the foundation for a complete biblical understanding of God and His purposes.



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

Metaphysical Options

Most will agree that the most basic, fundamental question

concerning existence is not that *nothing* is here, but rather that *something* is here. I am a part of some kind of *reality*. I possess a consciousness, an awareness that something is transpiring, unfolding, happening. And you and I are part of it. The reality borne out of our personal observation and experience is that we are participants in a space-time universe which is characterized by a *series of events*. The mind naturally asks the question, "What is it?" Where did it come from?" Did the *cosmos*, what we see, simply come into being from nothing, or has this material universe of which we are a part always been here? Or is something or someone which transcends this material universe responsible for bringing it into existence and us with it?

All of these questions relate to the philosophical concept of *metaphysics*. Webster defines it thusly: "*That division of philosophy which includes ontology, or the science of being and cosmology, or the science of fundamental causes and processes in things.*"[\[1\]](#) When we seek to answer these basic questions, then, we are thinking "*metaphysically*" about the origin and the causes of the present reality. And at this basic, fundamental level of consideration we really are left with few options, or possible answers, to account for or explain the universe. The three potential candidates are:

(1) Something came from nothing. Most reject this view, since the very idea defies rationality. This explanation to account for the universe is not widely held. Kenny remarks: "*According to the big bang theory, the whole matter of the universe began to exist at a particular time in the remote past. A proponent of such a theory, . . . if he is an atheist, must believe that the matter of the universe came from nothing and by nothing.*"[\[2\]](#) Since nothing cannot produce something by rules of logic (observation, causality), something is *eternal* and *necessary*. Since any series of events is not eternal (thus a contradiction), there is, therefore, an eternal, necessary *something not identical* to the space-time universe.

(2) Matter is eternal and capable of producing the present reality through blind chance. Carl Sagan stated this view clearly when he said, "All that ever was, all that is, and all that ever shall be is the Cosmos."^{3} This second view has spawned two basic worldviews-*Materialism* (or Naturalism) and *Pantheism*. Both hold the premise that nothing exists beyond matter. Materialism therefore is atheistic by definition. Pantheism is similar but insists that since God does not exist, nature is imbued with "god" in all its parts.

(3) God created the universe. This view, *Theism*, holds forth the assertion that *Someone* both transcends, and did create the material universe of which we are a part. There are *no* other logical alternatives to explain the *cosmos*. Christians, of course, embrace this third view, along with all other theists, as the most reasonable explanation for what we find to be true of ourselves and of the world. Holding this view is not simply a statement of blind faith. There are sound and rational reasons for preferring this view over the other two. Theism is therefore a reasonable idea. In fact it is more reasonable to believe that God exists than not to believe He exists. Theologians have posed several lines of "proof" to argue for God's existence. These arguments, while not *proving* the existence of God, do nevertheless provide insights that may be used to show *evidence* of His existence.

The Cosmological Argument

This argument centers around the concept of *causality*. Every event has a *cause*, and that includes the universe. It had a beginning. There was a time when it was not, and a time when it was:

An **infinite** number of real parts of time, passing in succession and exhausted one after another, appears so evident a contradiction that no man, one should think, whose judgment is not corrupted, instead of being improved, by the sciences, would ever be able to admit it." (emphasis

mine){4}

Hume is here arguing that time and space are *not* infinite, not eternal. If this is true, the universe, which is an “effect,” had a *cause*. Robert Jastrow comments,

“The most complete study made thus far has been carried out . . . by Allan Sandage. He compiled information on 42 galaxies, ranging out in space as far as six billion light years from us. His measurements indicate that the universe was expanding more rapidly in the past than it is today. This result lends further support to the belief that the universe exploded into being.”{5}

He goes on to say:

“No explanation other than the big bang has been found for the fireball radiation. The clincher, which has convinced almost the last doubting Thomas, is that the radiation discovered by Penzias and Wilson has exactly the pattern of wavelengths expected for the light and heat produces in a great explosion.”{6}

Jastrow also concludes the universe is dying:

“Once hydrogen has been burned within that star and converted to heavier elements, it can never be restored to its original state. Minute by minute and year by year, as hydrogen is used up in stars, the supply of this element in the universe grows smaller.”{7} “Astronomers now find they have painted themselves into a corner because they have proven, by their own methods, that the world began abruptly in an act of creation to which you can trace the seeds of every star, every planet, every thing in this cosmos and on the earth. And they have found that all this happened as a product of forces they cannot hope to discover.”{8}

Some have argued that an *infinite regress* of causes may not be logically possible. They say the universe is not a “whole”

that *needs* a single cause, but rather that it is “mutually dependent” upon itself! Mutual dependence misses the point. The real issue is why there is an *existing* universe rather than a *non-existing* one. Reality and rationality suggest that every event has a cause. Whole series of events must have a cause as well (since the whole is the sum of the parts). If all the parts were taken away, would there be anything left? If we say *yes*, then God exists (i.e. an eternal necessary being that is *more* than the world. If we say *no*, then the whole is *contingent* too, and needs a cause *beyond* it (God).

We will conclude this section with an examination of perhaps the most often-asked question concerning the cosmological argument, “*Where did God come from?*” While it is both reasonable and legitimate to ask this question of the universe which we have just examined, it is irrational and nonsensical to ask that same question of God, since it implies to Him characteristics found only in the finite universe: *space* and *time*. By definition, something eternal must exist *outside* this space/time continuum. The very question posed reveals the inquirer’s fallacy of reasoning from within his *own* space/time context! By definition, something *eternal* must exist *outside* both time and space. God has no beginning; He **IS!** (Exodus 3:14).

The Teleological Argument

This second argument for the existence of God addresses the order, complexity, and diversity of the cosmos. “Teleological” comes from the Greek word “*telos*,” which means “end” or “goal.” The idea behind the argument is that the observable *order* in the universe demonstrates that it functions according to an *intelligent design*, something undeniable to an open-minded, intelligent being. The classic expression of this argument is William Paley’s analogy of the watchmaker in his book *Evidences*. If we were walking on the beach and found a watch in the sand, we would not assume that it washed up on

the shore having been formed through the natural processes and motions of the sea. We would rather naturally assume that it had been lost by its owner and that somewhere there was a watchmaker who originally designed and built it with a specific purpose in mind. Intelligence cannot be produced by non-intelligence any more than nothing can produce something. There is, therefore, an eternal, necessary intelligence present and reflected in the space-time universe.

Until about five hundred years ago, humanity had no difficulty in acknowledging God as the Creator of the natural order. The best explanation saw Him as the divine Designer who created it with a purpose and maintained all things by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17). But the rise of modern science initiated a process we could call the "demythologizing of nature," the material world. Superstition and ignorance had ascribed spirit life even to forest, brook, and mountain. Things not understood scientifically were routinely accepted to be unexplained, supernatural forces at work. Slowly, the mysterious, spiritual factor was drained away as scholars and scientists replaced it with natural explanations and theories of how and why things actually worked. After Copernicus, human significance diminished in the vastness of the cosmos, and it was felt only time and research, not God, would be needed to finally explain with accuracy the totality of the natural order. The idea of a transcendent One came to be deemed unnecessary, having been invalidated by the new theory of natural selection.

Ironically, the same science which took God away then, is bringing back the possibility of His existence today. Physics and quantum mechanics have now brought us to the edge of physicality, to a place where sub-atomic particle structures are described by some as spirit, ghost-like in quality. Neuro-physiologists grapple with enigmatic observations suggesting that the mind *transcends* the brain! Psychology has developed an entirely new branch of study (parapsychology) which asserts

that psycho-spiritual forces (ESP, biofeedback, etc.) actually function *beyond* the physical realm. Molecular biologists and geneticists, faced with the highly-ordered and complex structures of DNA, ascribe a word implying “intelligence” to the chaining sequences: the genetic “*code*.” And we have already concluded that astrophysicists have settled on the “big bang” which seems to contradict the idea that matter is eternal, and, huge as it is, the universe appears to be finite. Whether we look through the microscope or the telescope it becomes more difficult in the light of experimental science to hold to the old premise that such order and complexity are the products of blind chance. The old naturalistic assumptions are being critically reexamined, challenged, and found to be unconvincing by many of today’s scientists. Dr. Walter Bradley, Professor Emeritus of Mechanical Engineering at Texas A & M University states the case:

“Discoveries of the last half of the 20th century have brought the scientific community to the realization that our universe and our planet in the universe are so remarkably unique that it is almost impossible to imagine how this could have happened accidentally, causing many agnostic scientists to concede that indeed some intelligent creative force may be required to account for it.”[\[9\]](#)

Areas of reconsideration include cosmology and the origin of life, essential elements of design and their recognition, the minimal requirements for a universe to support both life of any type and specifically complex human life, why these requirements are met in our universe, and requirements for a place in that universe uniquely met by planet earth. All of these remarkable features of our world are being reevaluated and point toward intelligent design.

The Moral Argument

This argument for God's existence is based on the recognition of humankind's universal and inherent sense of *right* and *wrong*. (cf. Romans 2:14,15). No culture is without standards of behavior. All groups recognize honesty as a virtue along with wisdom, courage, and justice. And even in the most remote jungle tribes, murder, rape, lying, and theft are recognized as being wrong, in all places and at all times. The question arises, "Where does this sense of morality come from?" C. S. Lewis speaks of this early on in his classic work *Mere Christianity*. He calls this moral law "The Rule of Right and Wrong"—"a thing that is *really there*, not made up by ourselves."[\[10\]](#) For years Lewis struggled against God because the universe to him seemed unjust and cruel. But he began to analyze his outrage. Where did *he* get the very ideas of *just* and *unjust*? He said, "A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line."[\[11\]](#)

He goes on to suggest that there are three parts to morality. Using the analogy of a fleet of ships on a voyage, he points out that three things can go wrong. The *first* is that ships may either drift apart or collide with and do damage to one another (alienation, isolation: people abusing, cheating, bullying one another). The *second* is that individual ships must be seaworthy and avoid internal, mechanical breakdown (moral deterioration within an individual). Lewis goes on to point out that if the ships keep having collisions they will not remain seaworthy very long, and of course, if their steering parts are out of order, they will not be able to avoid collisions! But there is a *third* factor not yet taken into account, and that is, "Where is the fleet of ships headed?" The voyage would be a failure if it were meant to reach New York but actually arrived in Buenos Aires (the general purpose of human life as a whole, what man was made for)![\[12\]](#)

The human conscience to which Paul refers in Romans 2 is not found in any other animal-only man. The utter uniqueness of this moral compass within humans, along with other exclusively human qualities (rationality, language, worship and aesthetic inclinations) strongly suggest that man not only has a relationship *downward* to animals, plants and earth, but also a relationship *upward* to the God in Whose image he is. As we saw God's great power and intelligence expressed in the first two arguments, we also see here that this sense of morality, not known in the world of nature, comes from the Great Law Giver Who is Himself in *character* the "straight line" (righteous, just, holy) against which all human actions are measured.

A Word about Atheism and Agnosticism

An *atheist* is a person who makes a bold assertion, "There is no God." It is bold because it claims in an *absolute* manner what we have stated above what is not possible: i.e., the existence or non-existence of God cannot be *proven* absolutely. It is also bold because, in order to make such an assertion, an atheist would literally have to be God himself! He would need to possess the qualities and capabilities to travel the entire universe and examine every nook and cranny of it before he would ever qualify to hold such a dogmatic conclusion!

The most brilliant, highly-educated, widely-traveled human on earth today, having maximized his/her brain cells to optimum learning levels for a lifetime could not possibly "*know*" 1/1000th of all that *could* be known. And knowledge is now doubling by the years rather than by the decades or centuries of the past! Is it *possible* that God could *still* exist outside the very limited, personal knowledge/experience of one highly intelligent human being? Furthermore, before an atheist can identify himself as one, he must first acknowledge the very idea, or concept, or possibility of God so he can then deny His existence!

The Bible says that "he who comes to God must believe that He

is. . .” (Hebrews 11:6). In other words, there is a “faith” factor relative to a belief in God’s existence. But the dogmatic and bold assertion above is itself an expression of faith. It takes faith to believe God *is*, and it takes faith to say God *is not*. In my judgment, it takes even *more* faith for the atheist to believe in his position because he holds to his faith against overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Christians also affirm God’s existence on the basis of faith, but it is a *reasonable* faith based on the true nature of the *cosmos*, not a *blind* faith.

Turning to agnosticism, Webster defines it as a position which states that “neither the existence nor the nature of God, nor the ultimate origin of the universe is known or knowable.”[\[13\]](#) Here again is a bold statement: When the agnostic says, “*I don’t know*,” what is really implied is “I can’t know, you can’t know, and *nobody* can know.” Leith Samuel in his little book *Impossibility of Agnosticism*, mentions three kinds of agnostics: [\[14\]](#)

Dogmatic: “I don’t know, you don’t know, and no one can know.” Here is a person who already has his mind made up. He has the same problems as the atheist above—he must know *everything* in order to hold this position honestly.

Indifferent: “I don’t know and I don’t care.” It is not likely that God would reveal Himself to someone who does not care to know: “He who has ears, let him hear.” (Luke 14:35).

Dissatisfied: “I don’t know, but I would like to know.” Here is a person who demonstrates an *openness* to truth and a willingness to change his position should he have sufficient reasons. If such were the case, he would also be demonstrating what is true of agnosticism, namely, that it is meant to be a *temporary* path in search of truth which gives way to a more reasonable and less skeptical view of life and all reality.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes,

His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so they are without excuse.” (Saint Paul, Romans 1:20).

“Only the fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ ” (King David, Psalm 14:1).

Notes

1. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam Co., Publishers, 1953), s.v. “metaphysics”, 528.
2. Anthony Kenny, *Five Ways* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1969), 66.
3. Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* (New York: Random House, 1980), 4.
4. David Hume, *An Enquiry: Concerning Human Understanding*, Great Books of the Western World, vol. 35 (Chicago: William Benton, 1952), 506.
5. Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W.W. Norton,, 1978), 94-95.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
7. *Ibid.*, 15-16.
8. Robert Jastrow, “A Scientist Caught Between Two Faiths,” interviewed by Bill Durbin, *Christianity Today*, 26 (6 August 1982):14-18.
9. Walter L. Bradley, “*Is There Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Creator of the Universe?*” (lecture given at High Ground Men's Conference, Beaver Creek, Colo., Lecture given at High Ground Men's Conference, 2 March, 2001).
10. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1943), 18.
11. *Ibid.*, 45.
12. *Ibid.*, 70-71.
13. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, s.v. “agnosticism.”
14. Leith Samuel, *Impossibility of Agnosticism* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity, n.d.).

Rise of the Planet of the Apes and Social Consciousness

Rise of the Planet of the Apes (2011, Rupert Wyatt) continues a long movie franchise history of social commentary begun with the original science fiction classic *The Planet of the Apes* (1968, Franklin J. Schaffner). The first movie teemed with theological and political themes from race relations, to church and state struggles, to religion versus science debates, to the evolution and creation controversy, to issues of law and nature and finally nuclear fear. The apocalyptic masterpiece contains one of the greatest surprise endings in movie history with astronaut George Taylor (Charlton Heston) cursing humanity for its murderous tendencies in front of the ruined Statue of Liberty.

The original movie was followed by a sequel and three prequels that never regained the intrigue and depth of the first movie and were criticized for their plunge into movie mediocrity. *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* is based loosely on the 1972 prequel *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes* (J. Lee Thompson). Not an official remake, *Rise* moves away from the idea of a slave revolt that seizes power as the only recourse for the oppressed, to focus on the inherent danger of scientific transgression against natural limits.

A trailer for the recent ape flick repeats a recurring theme in the social criticism of new technology when it states: "Our greatest discovery will become our greatest threat." The invention of a cure for neural disease leads to intelligence enhancement in other primates as an unintended consequence and creates a species of ape capable of competing mentally with human beings. The lead character Will Rodman (James Franco)

believes he has discovered a cure for Alzheimer's through a gene therapy method involving the injection of the virus ALZ 112 into chimpanzees, which allows the brain to heal itself at the cellular level. The therapy has the side-effect of increasing memory, cognitive capacity and intelligence. When the experimental chimp attacks its handlers the Gen-sys Corporation scraps the project, but not before the chimp gives birth to a highly intelligent baby that Will adopts to save from extermination. The baby chimp is named Caesar (Andy Serkis) by Will's father Charles (John Lithgow), who also suffers from Alzheimer's and is temporarily cured by the virus-therapy. Will persuades Gen-sys to restart the program with a revised virus called ALZ 113 that drastically increases chimp intelligence, but proves lethal to humans.

After Caesar attacks a neighbor while trying to defend Charles, he is committed to an ape sanctuary where he devises a plan of escape and seizes the ALZ 113 for his fellow Simian inmates. The apes manage to escape from the prison, wreak havoc on San Francisco and overpower a police blockade on the Golden Gate Bridge in efforts to take refuge in the Redwood National Forest. Meanwhile, the ALZ 113 has been accidentally exposed to humans, causing a global epidemic. We are left to believe the apes will adapt and thrive in their new habitat as the human population is decimated by a new viral plague of its own making, thus giving rise to the "planet of the apes."

The movie is obviously not a prequel to the 2000 remake of the original, but a reboot, an attempt to restart the series with a different line of thought. It places the blame for the intelligent origins of apes on the technological tampering with genes in the search for a cure to neural disorders and the desire to enhance human intelligence. The film remains apocalyptic in its social criticism, but locates the new threat in biotechnology rather than nuclear weapons, as in the original series. The one voice of conscience, Caroline Aranha (Freida Pinto), who is Will's girlfriend and zoo veterinarian,

tells him that the gene therapy “is wrong. . . . You are trying to control things that are not meant to be controlled.” The film offers a warning regarding the overly optimistic expectations of scientific capability to reverse the natural process of aging and dying. The ultimate negative association is made by comparing the experimental procedure of gene manipulation to the mythological character of Icarus, the man who flew too close to the sun and drowned after his wax wings melted. The allusion appears on a TV set in the background during the ape rebellion that reports on the Icarus manned space mission that was poised to enter the Martian atmosphere. We discover later through a newspaper headline, after the apes have escaped, that the rocket may be “Lost in Space?”

The latest installment in the franchise falls short of the original glory of the 1968 film, but foreshadows the arrival of more movies in the series, hopefully soon. These new movies will unfold linearly from this new starting point that centers on a social consciousness concerning the potential dangers of biotechnology, which has largely replaced nuclear paranoia as the source for our fears of the future and belief that science has spun out of control. This science fiction series continues to present a challenge to our thinking about the belief in the limitless potential of technological progress in an accessible and entertaining format.

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Yahweh War and the Conquest of Canaan – A Biblical

Worldview Perspective

Rick Wade provides an expanded discussion of the issues around the Israelites battles against the Canaanites. He points out how Yahweh Wars, i.e. wars instituted by and fought with the direct help of Yahweh, have a specific, God-designed purpose and are not a call to genocide against non-Christians. He considers the events and differing views of those events before summarizing a biblical worldview perception of them.

The Charge of Genocide

A common attack today on Christianity has to do with the character of the God of the Old Testament.^{1} Especially singled out for censure by critics is the conquest of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham, by Joshua and the Israelites. Through Moses, God gave these instructions:

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).

In obedience to this command, when the Israelites took Jericho, their first conquest after crossing the Jordan River, "they devoted all in the city to destruction, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep, and donkeys, with the edge of the sword" (Josh. 6:21).

Because of such things, biologist and prominent atheist Richard Dawkins describes God as, among other things, "a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."^{2}

Dawkins also complains about God's jealous rage over the worship of other gods. "One cannot help," he says, "marveling at the extraordinarily draconian view taken of the sin of flirting with rival gods. To our modern sense of values and justice it seems a trifling sin compared to, say, offering your daughter for a gang rape" (referring to Lot offering his daughters in exchange for the angels). "It is yet another example," he continues, "of the disconnect between scriptural and modern (one is tempted to say civilized) morals. . . . The tragi-farce of God's maniacal jealousy against alternative gods recurs continually through the Old Testament." {3}

For an atheist, of course, there is no supernatural, so the gods of all the many religions were, of course, made up; they are merely mythologies devised to give meaning to life. The God invented by the Israelites (and still believed in by Christians) was given a very jealous and mean-spirited personality. What atheists truly dislike is not only that people actually *believe* in this God but that they think *other* people should, too!

Of course, it would be illogical to try to argue against the existence of God on the basis of the conquest of Canaan. In fact, the moral values that make what the Israelites did seem so objectionable to atheists are *grounded* in God. As William Lane Craig notes, "The Bible itself inculcates the values which these stories seem to violate." {4} But atheists come to the matter already confident that there is no God. They then condemn belief in such a made-up God.

But some Christians also have doubts about the matter. Some believe that a more accurate exegesis reveals that the command to destroy everyone doesn't mean what it appears to on the surface. Some believe the command wasn't given by God at all, but was the product of an Ancient Near Eastern mentality; that the people *thought* they were doing God's will and put those words in His mouth. Some take the command to be authentic but hyperbolic. I'll return to this later.

The actions of the Israelites are often called *genocide*. Is this a legitimate use of the term?

The word *genocide* was coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jew.^[5] According to Article II of the United Nations Genocide Convention of 1948, the term genocide means a major action "committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group."^[6] Some twentieth-century examples are the massacre of Armenian Christians by Turks in 1915 and 1916, the extermination of six million Jews by the Nazis in the 1940s, and the slaughter of 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda in 1994. Going by this definition alone, the destruction of the Canaanites was genocide.

But there is a major difference between these events and the Israelite conquest of Canaan. The 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.^[7] Because the Canaanites' destruction was believed to be directed by *God*, obviously atheists will not find anything acceptable in what happened. If the atheists are correct in their naturalistic understanding of the world—that there is no God, no supernatural; that religion is just a human institution; that all there is is nature; and that people are the products of random evolution—then the Israelites were no different than Hitler or other Ancient Near Eastern people who slaughtered people simply to take their lands.

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. The doctrines of God and of sin put this in a different light.

Because of this, I think the term *genocide* should be avoided. The completely negative connotations of the word make it hard to look at the biblical events without a jaundiced eye.

Dawkins accuses the biblical God of jealousy as well. If the God of the Bible really *does* exist, why might He be so jealous? For one thing, being the creator and Lord of all, He ought to be the only one worshiped and served. He has the right to claim that. Second, people worshiping other gods are indeed worshiping gods of their own (or their forebears') invention. Even Dr. Dawkins should understand why worshiping a god that isn't real is a problem! Third, since God made the world and the people in it, He knows best how they function. To go against the true God is to lose sight of one's own nature and of what makes for the good life.

Furthermore, being the creator of the world, God has the authority to move people as He wills. As Paul said much later to the Athenians, God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place" (Acts 17:26). If God wanted the Israelites in that land, He had every right to put them there.

One more note about the complaints of atheists. Not only do they leave out the key factors of the reality of God and sin, but they think that their own ideas about ethics should have ruled in Joshua's day and even for all time since clearly their own modern liberal ethical sensibilities are the height of moral evolution! Never mind that such critics, while castigating Israel for killing children, will support a woman's right to have her unborn child cut to pieces in her womb (an odd ethical system, to my mind). Never mind, too, that the best of modern liberal ethical beliefs were built upon Judeo-Christian ethics.

Yahweh War

To understand what God was doing in Canaan, in addition to having a correct understanding of God's existence and authority and of the consequences of sin, one must see it within the larger context of redemptive history.

One of the categories 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.^{8} Old Testament scholar Eugene Merrill describes Yahweh war this way: "God initiated the process by singling out those destined to destruction, empowering an agent (usually his chosen people Israel) to accomplish it, and guaranteeing its successful conclusion once the proper conditions were met."^{9} These wars were "a constituent part of the covenant relationship" between Yahweh and Israel. "Israel . . . would not just witness God's mighty deeds as heavenly warrior but would be engaged in bringing them to pass."^{10}

There are numerous examples of Yahweh war in Scripture. In some of them, God fights the battle alone. Think of the Israelites caught between the Egyptian army behind them and the sea in front. God told them, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. . . . The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Exodus 14:13-14). They walked through the parted waters and watched them close down around the Egyptians behind them.

Another example is found in 2 Kings 18 and 19. When the Assyrians were about to attack Judah, King Sennacherib's representative threw down a challenge to Judah's God:

Do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you by saying, The LORD will deliver us. Has any of the gods of the nations ever delivered his land out of the hand of the king of

Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their lands out of my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand (2 Kings 18:32-35)?

Unfortunately for the Assyrians, Yahweh decided to take them up on that challenge. Hezekiah prayed, and God answered through Isaiah:

“I will defend this city to save it,” He said, “for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.” And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies (2 Kings 19:34, 35).

Most of the time God had the Israelites help in the battle. So at Jericho, for example, God made the wall fall, and then the Israelites moved in and took the city. Numerous examples are given in Joshua and Numbers of the Israelites fighting the battle, with God making them victorious.

The involvement of God is a key point in the whole matter of the conquest of Canaan. It wasn't just the Israelites moving in to take over like any other tribal people. It was commanded by God and accomplished by God. Merrill says this:

It is clear that the land was considered Israel's by divine right and that the nations who occupied it were little better than squatters. Yahweh, as owner of the land, would therefore undertake measures to destroy and/or expel the illegitimate inhabitants, and he would do so largely through his people Israel and by means of Yahweh war.[\[11\]](#)

The Israelites were not at heart a warrior tribe. There was no way they could have conquered the land of Canaan if they didn't have divine help. They escaped the Egyptians and moved into their new land by the power of Yahweh (Judges 6:9; Joshua

24:13).

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. Deuteronomy 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. Daniel 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, not earthly ones.

This change might explain a rather odd question asked by John the Baptist. When he was in prison, John had his disciples go and ask Jesus if he was the expected one (Matthew 11:2). Why would John have asked that? Didn't he baptize Jesus and understand then who he was? He did, but it could be that John was still looking for a *conquering* Messiah. Matthew 3 records John's harsh words to the Pharisees: "Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10). Was he thinking this was imminent? Perhaps later when he was in prison John was still looking for an exercise of power against earthly rulers on Jesus' part. Notice how Jesus responded to John's disciples in Matthew 11. He told them about his miracles, his exercises of power in the spiritual realm. Then he made this curious comment: "And blessed is the one who is not offended by me" or does not "stumble over" me (v.6). He may simply have been thinking of people stumbling over him saying the he was the one who fulfilled Old Testament prophecies (see Isaiah 29:18; think also of Nicodemus' comment: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" [John 3:2].). It could be, however, that Jesus was urging John (and others) not to fall away on account of His *actual* program of fighting the battle at *that time* in the *spiritual*

realm rather than militarily. Jesus conducted Yahweh war on spiritual powers in His healings and exorcisms and preeminently in His victory in the heavenlies by His death and resurrection (see Colossians 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" (Ephesians 6:12). We do not (or ought not!) advance the kingdom by the sword.

Phase five of Yahweh war will be the final battle of history when Jesus returns and will once again be military in nature. In Mark 13:26 and Revelation 1:7 we're presented with the imagery of Christ coming on a cloud, an imagery seen in the prophecy of Daniel: "I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him" (Daniel 7:13). The cloud represents a war chariot.{12}

Summing up, Longman writes, "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." {13}

There are several aspects of Yahweh war, not all of which are seen in every battle narrative. Merrill names, among other aspects, the mustering of the people, the consecration of the soldiers, an oracle of God, and, at the end, the return to their homes or tents.{14}

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"). Exodus 22:20 reads, "Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to

destruction.” Deuteronomy 7:2, speaking of the conquest of the land, says, “and when the LORD your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them.” Tremper Longman writes that “*herem* refers to the climactic aspect of divine warfare: the offering of the conquered people and their possessions to the Lord.”[\[15\]](#)

Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitsch give a fuller understanding of the meaning of *herem* in their discussion of Lev. 27:29. They write,

Nothing put under the ban, nothing that a man had devoted (banned) to the Lord of his property, of man, beast, or the field of his possession, was to be sold or redeemed, because it was most holy. . . . [*Herem*], judging from the cognate words in Arabic . . . , has the primary signification ‘to cut off,’ and denotes that which is taken away from use and abuse on the part of men, and surrendered to God in an irrevocable and unredeemable manner, viz. human beings by being put to death, cattle and inanimate objects by being either given up to the sanctuary for ever or destroyed for the glory of the Lord. . . . [T]here 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.[\[16\]](#)

The word used to translate *herem* in the Greek translation of the Old Testament—the Septuagint—is *anathema*, a word we encounter in the New Testament as well. There it is translated “accursed”. The same underlying meaning is seen in Gal. 1:8 and 9 where Paul says that anyone who preaches a gospel contrary to what he preaches is to be accursed. About this the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* says:

He who preaches a false gospel is delivered to destruction by God. . . . The curse exposes the culprits to the judicial wrath of God.

In this act of being handed over to God lies the theological meaning of the . . . ban curse. . . . [T]he person sentenced by the *anathema* is immediately delivered up to the judgment of God.[{17}](#)

A major difference, of course, is that, in the New Testament, the “sentence” isn’t carried out by people but by God.

Canaan, because of its sin, was to be devoted to destruction. And Israel was to be the instrument of God for the carrying out of judgment.

The Conquest of Canaan

Let’s turn now to look at the goals of the conquest of Canaan by Israel.

In this conquest, three things were being accomplished: the fulfillment of the promise of land, the judgment of the Canaanites, and the protection of the Israelites.

Possession of the Land

First, the movement of the Israelites into Canaan was the fruition of God’s promises to Abram. We read in Genesis 12 where God promised Abram that He would produce a great nation through him (vv. 1, 2). When Abraham and his family reached Canaan, Yahweh appeared to him and said, “To your offspring I will give this land” (v.7). This promise was repeated to the people of Israel in the years following (cf. Exodus 33:1; Numbers 32:1). When Joshua led the people across the Jordan River into Canaan, he was fulfilling the promise. Since the land wasn’t empty, they could only take possession of it by driving the Canaanites out.

Judgment of the Canaanites

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 worshiped other gods. In our pluralistic age, it's easy to forget what an offense that is to the true God. This sounds almost trivial today. As noted previously, Richard Dawkins mocks this "jealous" God. But since Yahweh is the true God who created us, He is the one who ought to be worshiped.

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. Writes Bernhard Anderson:

The cooperation with the powers of fertility involved the dramatization in the temples of the story of Baal's loves and wars. Besides the rehearsal of this mythology, a prominent feature of the Canaanite cult was sacred prostitution (see Deut. 23:18). In the act of temple prostitution the man identified himself with Baal, the woman with Ashtart [or Ashtoreth, the mother goddess]. It was believed that human pairs, by imitating the action of Baal and his partner, could bring the divine pair together in fertilizing union.[\[18\]](#)

Although the worship of other gods and temple prostitution might not be sufficient grounds for the overthrow of the Canaanites in the eyes of contemporary atheists, another of their practices should be. In their worship of their gods, Canaanites engaged in the detestable practice of child sacrifice.

The people of Canaan were viciously cruel. Christopher

Hitchens speaks of the “Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites” who were “pitilessly driven out of their homes to make room for the ungrateful and mutinous children of Israel.”[\[19\]](#) (“Ungrateful” and “mutinous” are silly charges in themselves. Ungrateful to whom? I don’t recall the Canaanites issuing an open invitation for the Israelites to move in. And mutinous? Did the Canaanites have some kind of inherent rights to the land? They had taken it from other peoples earlier.) One might get the impression from Hitchens that these were good people (maybe in the mold of good modern Westerners of liberal persuasion) who were just minding their business when out of the blue came this ferocious band of peace-hating Israelites who murdered them and robbed them of their just possession! To speak of the Israelites being “pitiless” with respect to the Canaanites is worse than the pot calling the kettle black. Apparently Mr. Hitchens hasn’t bothered to read up on these people! If he had, he wouldn’t feel so sentimental about their demise. Writes Paul Copan,

The aftermath of Joshua’s victories are featherweight descriptions in comparison to those found in the annals of the major empires of the ANE [Ancient Near East]—whether Hittite and Egyptian (second millennium), Aramaean, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, or Greek (first millennium). Unlike Joshua’s brief, four-verse description of the treatment of the five kings (10:24–27), the Neo-Assyrian annals of Assurnasirpal (tenth century) take pleasure in describing the atrocities which gruesomely describe the flaying of live victims, the impaling of others on poles, and the heaping up of bodies for display.[\[20\]](#)

In addition to the Old Testament claims about child sacrifice by the Canaanites, there is extra-biblical evidence found by archaeologists as well.

Under the sanctuary in the ancient city of Gezer, urns containing the burnt bones of children have been found that are dated to somewhere between 2000 and 1500 BC, between the

time of Abraham and the Exodus.[{21}](#) The practice continued among the Canaanites (and sometimes even among the Israelites) even up to the time Israel was deported to Assyria in the late eighth century BC. Jon D. Levenson, professor of Jewish Studies at Harvard, reports that thousands of urns containing human and animal bones were found in Carthage. "These human bones are invariably of children, and almost all of them contain the remains of not one but two children, usually from the same family, one often a newborn and the other 2-4 years of age." It is highly doubtful the urns represent a funerary custom, he says. "The frequency with which the urns were deposited makes it unlikely that natural death could account for all such double deaths in families in a city of such size."[{22}](#)

The Canaanites were so evil that God wanted their very name to perish from the earth. Moses said, "But the LORD your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed. And he will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under heaven. No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them" (Deuteronomy 7:23-24; see also 9:3).

Now, a critic today might be happier with a God who simply showed Himself to the Canaanites and invited them to discuss the situation with Him, to negotiate. Wouldn't that be a more civilized way to deal with them? Of course, any criticism from an atheist will have behind it the belief that there is no God behind such events at all. But just to play along, we have to try to put ourselves in the mindset of people in the Ancient Near East to understand God's way of dealing with them. Philosophical reasoning wasn't the order of the day. God showed Himself to the Canaanites in a way they understood, just as He did earlier with the Egyptians. It might better suit the sensibilities of twentieth-century people for Yahweh to have convinced the Canaanites by rational argument of His existence and rightful place as Lord of the land, but it would

have accomplished nothing then (and it doesn't work very well with a lot of people today, either!).

It was typical in ancient times for nations to see the power of gods in military victories. Recall the Rabshakeh's taunt in 2 Kings 18 that the gods of the other peoples they'd conquered hadn't done them any good. There is evidence of this understanding outside Scripture as well. For example, an ancient document with the title "Hymn of Victory of Mer-ne-Ptah" is from a thirteenth-century BC Egyptian ruler who gives praise to Ba-en-Re Meri-Amon, son of the god Re, for victory over Ashkelon, Gezer, and other lands.[{23}](#) In the ninth century BC, Mesha, a king of Moab, built a high place for the god Chemosh, "because he saved me from all the kings and caused me to triumph over all my adversaries."[{24}](#)

When the Israelites were about to attack Jericho, the prostitute Rahab helped the Israelite spies and offered this explanation for her help:

I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you devoted to destruction. And as soon as we heard it, 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" (Joshua 2:9-11).

God showed Himself through acts of power, and some people recognized it.

The Protection of Israel

The third goal of removing the Canaanites was the protection of Israel. God said that the Canaanites had grown so evil that "the land vomited out its inhabitants" (Leviticus 18:25). And

He was concerned that, if they remained in the land, they would draw the Israelites into their evil practices and they, too, would be vomited out (v. 28).

How could the Canaanites have that much influence over the Israelites?

It might be thought that simply being the dominant power in the land would be sufficient to prevent a strong influence by inferior powers. However, the shift from the life of the nomad to the life of the farmer marked a major change in the life of the Israelites. The people of Israel hadn't been settled in one place for over forty years. The generation that entered the promised land knew only a nomadic life. They might easily have become enamored with the established cultural practices of the Canaanites. This happened with other nations in history. Anderson points out that the Akkadians who overcame the Sumerians were strongly influenced by Sumerian culture. Centuries later, Rome conquered the Greeks, but was greatly influenced by Greek culture.[\[25\]](#)

The most important danger for the Israelites was turning to the Canaanite gods. Today the way people have of dropping religion from their lives in favor of no religion isn't a model that would have been understood in the Ancient Near East. The option of atheism or secularism was unknown then. People would serve one god or another or even many gods. If the Israelites turned away from Yahweh, they wouldn't slip into the complacent secular attitude that is so common today; they would transfer their allegiance to another god or gods.

God knew that, unless they kept the boundaries drawn very clearly, the Israelites would intermarry with the Canaanites who would bring their gods into the marriage and set the stage for compromise.

In Exodus 34, we see this connection:

Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of

the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods (vv. 12-16).

In addition, the Israelites would be tempted to imitate Canaanite religious rituals because of their close connection to Canaanite agricultural rhythms. Whether or not each year's crop was successful was of major importance to the Israelites. It would have been very tempting to act out Canaanite religious rituals as a way of insuring a good harvest. To do this didn't necessarily mean abandoning Yahweh. They tried to merge the two religions by adopting Canaanite methods in their worship of Yahweh. God had warned them not to do that (Deuteronomy 12:4, 30, 31). They couldn't straddle the fence for long.

The Israelites had much earlier shown how quickly they would look for a substitute for the true God when Moses went up on the mountain to hear from God, recorded in Exodus 20-31. Moses took too long to come down for the people, so they demanded that Aaron make them some new gods to go before them. Aaron made a golden calf that the people could see and worship (Exodus 32:1-4). Worshiping gods that were visible in the form of statues was a central part of the religions of their day. It was what everyone did, so the Israelites fell into that way of thinking, too.

The book of Judges is witness to what happened by being in such close proximity to people who worshiped other gods. Repeatedly the Israelites turned away from Yahweh to other gods and were given over by God to their enemies.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he gave them over to plunderers, who plundered them. And he sold them into the hand of their surrounding enemies, so that they could no longer withstand their enemies. Whenever they marched out, the hand of the LORD was against them for harm, as the LORD had warned, and as the LORD had sworn to them. And they were in terrible distress (Jdg. 2:11-15).

Thus, God's judgment wasn't reserved just for the Canaanites. This was the second phase of Yahweh war. The Israelites had been warned (Deuteronomy 4:26; 7:4). By disobeying God, the Israelites experienced the same judgment meted out through them on the Canaanites.

“Save nothing alive that breathes” – Part 1

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 in the land. I'll address three views on this which deny that the commands and/or reports about the battles are to be taken literally. The first is that the presence of such commands and reports are evidence that the Bible isn't inerrant. The second is that the commands are clearly antithetical to the character of Jesus and so couldn't have come from God. The third is that the commands are authentic but not intended to be taken literally. These three views are ones that are held by people who believe in God and take the Bible seriously.

Untrustworthy Records

Wesley Morriston, a Christian philosopher, believes the conquest narratives which tell of the slaughter of children are strong evidence against the inerrancy of Scripture. I won't go into a defense of [inerrancy](#) here, nor will I present a detailed rebuttal, but it might be helpful to take a brief look at the basic framework of Morriston's argument.[{26}](#) He writes:

Here is a more careful formulation of the argument that I wish to discuss.

1. God exists and is morally perfect.
2. So God would not command one nation to exterminate the people of another *unless He had a morally sufficient reason for doing so*.
3. According to various OT texts, God sometimes commanded the Israelites to exterminate the people of other nations.
4. It is highly *unlikely* that God had a morally sufficient reason for issuing these alleged commands.
5. So it is highly *unlikely* that everything every book of the OT says about God is true.

I believe that this argument constitutes quite a strong *prima facie* case against inerrancy. Unless a better argument can be found for rejecting its conclusion, then anyone who thinks that God is perfectly good should acknowledge that there are mistakes in some of the books of the OT.[{27}](#)

In response, I wonder how the argument might look if we *presuppose* inerrancy on *other* bases. Let premises 1 to 3 stand. Then add these premises:

4. Everything the OT says about God is true.

5. God, being perfectly holy, always has morally sufficient reasons for everything He does (acting in keeping with His morally perfect nature).

6. Therefore, God must have had morally sufficient reasons for exterminating the people.

When it has been decided on *other* bases that the Bible is without error, that itself becomes a foundational part of our consideration of the conquest narratives. We might not understand *why* God does some things, but we don't always need to. There are secret things that belong only to God (Deuteronomy 29:29).

A second view which casts doubt on the reliability of the conquest narratives is based on the character of Jesus. Theologian C. S. Cowles, for example, believes that, since Jesus is the best and fullest revelation of God, any characterizations of God that run counter to the character of Christ are wrong. "Jesus made it crystal clear," he writes, "that the 'kind of spirit' that would exterminate"[\[28\]](#) To show Jesus' attitude toward children, Cowles points to Matt. 18:5,6: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." When the disciples tried to send people away who were bringing their children to Jesus to be blessed by him, he said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:14). Surely Jesus would have nothing to do with the wholesale slaughter of innocent children, and thus it couldn't have been commanded by God.

As Eugene Merrill points out, in his insistence on separating God from violence, Cowles doesn't take seriously descriptions of God as a warrior elsewhere in Scripture.[\[29\]](#) Tremper Longman notes the connection of Jesus as divine warrior in the

book of the Revelation with God as warrior in the book of Isaiah. In Revelation Jesus is described as wearing a robe dipped in blood (Revelation 19:13 / Isaiah 63:2, 3); he has a rod in his mouth (Revelation 19:15 / Isaiah 11:4b); he treads the winepress of his wrath (Revelation 19:15 / Isaiah 63:3).

To distance God from the stories of slaughter in the Old Testament, Cowles calls for a distinction between the parts of the Old Testament that Jesus endorsed and all the rest which must be rejected as an authentic witness of God.[\[30\]](#) As with Morrision, the recognition of both Testaments as equally inspired (and true) prior to an examination of particular parts will mean that such a distinction cannot be maintained.[\[31\]](#)

A Non-Literal Interpretation

Philosopher and apologist Paul Copan offers a detailed discussion of this issue in his article “Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites.” He sets forth two scenarios, one of which takes the commands as being typical of Ancient Near Eastern warfare hyperbole (Scenario 1), and the other of which takes the commands at face value (Scenario 2). He says “we have excellent reason for thinking that Scenario 1 is correct and that we do not need to resort to the default position [Scenario 2].”[\[32\]](#) He believes that God didn’t really intend the Israelites to literally kill *everyone* in the cities they attacked. In his article “Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?” Copan writes,

The “obliteration language” in Joshua (for example, “he left no survivor” and “utterly destroyed all who breathed” [10:40]) is clearly hyperbolic. Consider how, despite such language, the text of Joshua itself assumes Canaanites still inhabit the land: “For if you ever go back and cling to the rest of these nations, these which remain among you, and intermarry with them, so that you associate with them and they with you, know with certainty that the Lord your God

will not continue to drive these nations out from before you" (23:12-13). Joshua 9-12 utilizes the typical ANE [Ancient Near Eastern] literary conventions of warfare.{33}

How could there be anyone left to marry if everyone was put to death?

In addition to this, drawing on the work of Richard Hess, Copan thinks that the cities which were attacked were primarily military fortresses occupied by soldiers and military leaders, Rahab of Jericho being an exception. Thus, the targets of the Israelites' attacks were soldiers, not the citizens of the land.{34}

Hess makes the curious comment that "there is no indication in the text of any specific noncombatants who were put to death." {35} This is so with respect to the accounts of the battles following the crossing of the Jordan. But one wonders what he makes of the vengeance taken on the Midianites recorded in Numbers 31. When the soldiers returned from defeating the Midianites, Moses was angry because they had allowed the women to live. He commanded them, "Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him" (v. 17).

In addition, consider the instructions given in Deuteronomy 20 about warfare. Regarding cities far away, only the males were to be put to the sword; "the women and little ones" were to be taken as plunder (along with everything else; v.14). However, in the cities in the areas they would inhabit, the instruction was to "save alive nothing that breathes, but [to] devote them to complete devotion" (vv. 16, 17). If the distinction isn't between sparing women and children and killing them, what is it? Hess says that Rahab and her family were the exceptions, but, given the instructions in Deuteronomy 20, perhaps she should be seen as further evidence that there were indeed civilians in these cities.

The distinction just noted along with what Israel did with the Midianites and the clear statement in Leviticus 27:29 that every person devoted to destruction was to be killed lead me to conclude that women and children were indeed put to death as Israel cleared the land of the Canaanites. If God *didn't* mean to kill everyone when it was commanded to "save alive nothing that breathes" (Dt. 20:16), how would He have said it if He *did*?

One further note. Even if we should conclude that the treatment of the Midianites was a unique event and that the army of Israel didn't kill women and children in their battles, God still won't be off the hook with critics. Women and children were surely killed in the Flood and in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Save nothing alive that breathes" Pt. 2

Intermarriage

But this still leaves unanswered the matter of intermarriage. Who would be left to marry if everyone was put to death?

Glen Miller explains how some would have remained. As he observes, the Israelites didn't sneak up on the Canaanites.[\[36\]](#) People had heard about the Israelites and their God Yahweh, and they had plenty of time to get out of town. Before ever crossing the Jordan River, the Israelites took a whole swath of land from the middle of the Salt Sea on the east side up to the Sea of Chennerith, or the Sea of Galilee as it came to be known later (accounts can be read from Numbers 21 through 31). Recall Rahab's claim that the people of Jericho had heard about the victories given the Israelites by Yahweh. Likewise, Amorite kings heard about the Jordan River drying up for the Israelites to cross over and "their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel" (Joshua 5:1). The inhabitants of Gibeon heard about what happened at Jericho and

AI and were so afraid they devised a deceptive scheme to protect themselves (Joshua 9).

Because of that advance warning, it is quite possible that some people abandoned their cities. Copan agrees:

When a foreign army might pose a threat in the ANE, women and children would be the first to remove themselves from harm's way—not to mention the population at large: "When a city is in danger of falling," observes Goldingay, "people do not simply wait there to be killed; they get out. . . . Only people who do not get out, such as the city's defenders, get killed." [\[37\]](#)

There is no indication that the Israelites pursued people who escaped. Those who stayed, however, showed their obstinate determination to continue in their ways, and they were to be destroyed. (Joshua 2:9-11). Goldingay supposes that only the cities' defenders remained and were killed, but Moses clearly believed those who remained could include women and children.

Why wouldn't the Israelites have pursued those who escaped? To answer that we must determine what God's main purpose was in this series of events. Earlier I gave three reasons for the destruction of the Canaanites: possession of the land by the Israelites, judgment on the Canaanites, and the protection of Israel. All these worked together. Yahweh wanted to move the Israelites into a land of their own, but knew that for them to thrive and remain faithful to Him, they would have to be free of the influence of the Canaanites. The Canaanites were also ripe for judgment. Clearing the land, by whatever means, seems to have been the foremost goal.

Glen Miller points out that two kinds of words are used to describe what was to be done with the Canaanites: "dispossession" words and "destruction" words. He notes that the former are used by a three-to-one margin over the latter. [\[38\]](#) Here's an example of the former:

I will send my terror before you and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivites the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. . . . I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you" (Exodus 23:27, 28, 31).

Unlike the people in Ninevah who repented at the preaching of Jonah (Jonah 3:6-10), the people of Canaan resisted. Because of that, they had to be moved out by force. But their *presence* wasn't the only problem. Theirs was a debased culture, and it had to be destroyed. Thus, the Old Testament also speaks of the destruction of the Canaanites. Miller believes it was the *nations* that God intended to destroy more than the individual persons.[\[39\]](#) The cities represented the real power centers of the land, so to move the inhabitants out by terror or by destruction would have seriously weakened the nations.

If it's true that people escaped before the Israelites attacked, then it is possible that the Israelites would marry some of them.

Secondly (and more obviously), the Israelites could marry Canaanites who were not removed from the cities because of their (the Israelites') disobedience. As it turned out, Moses' warning in Deutonomy 4:25-28 became prophetic. Starting in Judges 1:27 we read that tribe after tribe of Israelites did not drive out all the inhabitants of the cities they inhabited. Verse 28, for example, tells us that "it came about when Israel became strong, that they put the Canaanites to forced labor, but they did not drive them out completely."

With all this as background, I think we can understand why Moses both commanded that literally everyone was to be destroyed in the cities taken *and* warned the Israelites against intermarriage. The cities, the power centers of

Canaanite wicked and idolatrous culture, were to be destroyed along with everyone who obstinately refused to leave. People who escaped could possibly have intermarried with the Israelites. And when the various tribes failed to deal appropriately with the Canaanites, they eventually mixed with them in marriage and in the broader society as well.

The Children

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” (Deuteronomy 2:34; 3:3, 6). Why would God have ordered that?

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 Ezekiel 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 (Isaiah 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. In the course of normal life, children weren't to be punished for the sins of their fathers. The situation in 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 those

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 when they die, 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.[{40}](#) How persuasive this thought is will depend on how seriously we take biblical teaching about our future after the grave.

These ideas may provide little consolation. But we must keep in mind that God is not subject to our contemporary sensibilities.[{41}](#) If we're going to find peace with much of the Bible, we will have to accept that. There is much to offend in Scripture: the burden of original sin; that the Israelites were permitted to keep slaves; the gospel itself (1 Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 5:11); the headship of the husband. How about commands about servanthood, suffering for the gospel, and dying to oneself? Such things may still not be as offensive to us as the killing of children, but our sensibilities—especially those of modern individualistic Westerners who haven't grasped the seriousness of sin and of worshiping other gods—do not raise us to the level of judging God. We cannot evaluate this on the basis of contemporary secular ethical thought.

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 more pleasure in the death of adults than in those of children.

This doesn't resolve the issue, but I'll just point out (again) that it's hard to swallow the revulsion people feel at this who themselves support abortion rights. It's well known that the unborn feel pain, and that late term abortion methods are abominable practices, ones pro-choicers wouldn't tolerate if performed on animals. A critic might hastily claim that I am employing a *tu quoque* argument here, but I'm not (that is the fallacy of defending something on the basis that the other person does it, too). I'm not offering it as a defense of the killing of children in the Old Testament. The purpose of the observation is intended simply to make critics stop and think about the charge they are making. It's rather like the adage, "One who lives in a glass house shouldn't throw stones."

Final Comments

Another term used in place of *Yahweh war* is *holy war*. We think of holy war primarily in the context of Islam. Critics may try to paint with a broad brush and claim that what the Israelites did to their neighbors was no different than modern day Islamic *jihad*. How might we respond?

I noted early in this article that the conquest of Canaan presupposed a particular theological background. The one true God was moving His people into their new home and meting out judgment to the Canaanites at the same time. Such warfare could only be conducted at the command of God. After the Israelites rebelled at the news of the spies that the inhabitants of the land were strong and their cities were large and fortified, God pronounced judgment on them. To try to make it up, the Israelites took it on themselves to go up into the land and fight. Moses pled with them not to, but they did anyway, and they were defeated (Numbers 14). Even having the ark of the covenant with them wasn't sufficient when they fought against the Philistines apart from the will of God in

the time of Samuel (1 Samuel 4:1-11). As Eugene Merrill says, *God* was the protagonist in Yahweh war. If He was not behind it, it would fail. Since today the battle has shifted to the spiritual level, there is no place for military warfare in the service of the advance of God's kingdom. Muslims who engage in *jihad* are not fighting on the side of the true God. Furthermore, for the atheist to criticize Christianity today for what God did a very long time ago is to show a lack of understanding of the progress of revelation and the development of God's plan. What has Jesus called us to do? That is what matters today.

Apologists have the task of answering challenges to biblical faith. We talk about Christianity being "reasonable," and we want to show it to be so. But reasonable by whose standards? The laws of logic are valid no matter one's religious beliefs. But we aren't here talking about the laws of logic. We're talking about moral issues. By whose moral standard will we judge God? We can clarify the conflict between the Canaanites and Israelites to non-believers. We can also appeal to the ethical principles we know Western secularists accept (e.g., prohibitions against child sacrifice). But, bottom line, the only way we can appease modern Westerners in this matter is to deny the inspiration of the text or to re-interpret the text and so to distance ourselves from what the Israelites did. We certainly shouldn't do the former, and we have to be careful with the latter.

One final note. Our own circumstances will weigh heavily in how we read such texts. Not being oppressed ourselves, we view apparent oppressors (in this case the Israelites) with a jaundiced view. What about people who *are* oppressed?

Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim quotes Walter Brueggemann, another OT scholar. "'It is likely that the violence assigned to Yahweh is to be understood as counterviolence, which functions primarily as a critical principle in order to undermine and destabilize other

violence.’ And so,” Fretheim continues, “God’s violence is ‘not blind or unbridled violence,’ but purposeful in the service of a nonviolent end. In other words, God’s violence, whether in judgment or salvation, is never an end in itself, but is always exercised in the service of God’s more comprehensive salvific purposes for creation: the deliverance of slaves from oppression (Exodus 15:7; Psalm 78:49–50), the righteous from their antagonists (Psalm 7:6–11), the poor and needy from their abusers (Exodus 22:21–24; Isaiah 1:23–24; Jeremiah 21:12), and Israel from its enemies (Isaiah 30:27–33; 34:2; Habakkuk 3:12–13).” Quoting Abraham Heschel, he continues, “‘This is one of the meanings of the anger of God: the end of indifference’ with respect to those who have suffered human cruelty. In so stating the matter, the divine exercise of wrath, which may include violence, is finally a word of good news (for those oppressed) and bad news (for oppressors).”[\[42\]](#)

Notes

1. This article is a more detailed version of my “[God and the Canaanites](#)” which aired on Probe. That version is available on our Web site as well.
2. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008), 51.
3. Ibid., 278-79.
3. William Lane Craig, “Slaughter of the Canaanites,” Reasonablefaith.org, www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5767.
5. Seymour Rossel, *The Holocaust: An End to Innocence*, chap. 15, “Genocide,” www.rossel.net/Holocaust15.htm.
From “Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide,” University of the West of England, at: <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/>.
6. Later I’ll mention the goal of fulfilling the promise of land to Abraham. To fulfill that promise, God needed only to move the Canaanites out.

7. Here I'm talking specifically about the command to destroy them.
8. The phrases "the Lord's battles" or "battles of the Lord" which make this clear are found in 1 Sam. 18:17 and 25:28. In Deut. 20 one can find the most succinct biblical description of Yahweh war.
9. Eugene H. Merrill, "The Case for Moderate Discontinuity," 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), 65.
10. Ibid., 66.
11. Ibid., 67.
12. Tremper Longman III, "The Case for Spiritual Continuity," in Cowles et al., *Show Them No Mercy*, 182.
13. Ibid., 185.
14. Merrill, "The Case for Moderate Discontinuity," 69.
15. Longman, "The Case for Spiritual Continuity," 172.
16. 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.
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23. "Hymn of Victory of Mer-ne-Ptah," in James B. Pritchard, ed. *The Ancient Near East*, vol. 1, *An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1958), 231.
24. "The Moabite Stone," in Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East*, 209.
25. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 93-94; 96-103.
26. Paul Copan offers an response to Morriston's argument in his "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."
27. Wesley Morriston, "Did God Command Genocide? A Challenge to the Biblical Inerrantist," *Philosophia Christi*, 11, no. 1 (2009): 7-26.
28. C. S. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," in Cowles et al., *Show Them No Mercy*, 26.
29. Merrill, "A Response to C. S. Cowles," in C. S. Cowles, et al, *Show Them No Mercy*, 49.
30. Cowles, "The Case for Radical Discontinuity," 33.
31. More detailed responses to this argument are found in the responses to C. S. Cowles in *Show Them No Mercy*, 47-60.
32. Paul Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites," *Philosophia Christi* 11, no. 1 (2009): 73-92; www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=63.
33. Paul Copan, "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?", *Philosophia Christi* 10, no. 1 (2008): 7-37; www.epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=45. Copan also refers to Deut. 7:2-3 as evidence of this. See also his discussion in "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."
34. See Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."
35. Richard S. Hess, "War in the Hebrew Bible: An Overview," in *War in the Bible and Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Richard S. Hess and Elmer A. Martens (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 25; quoted in Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites."
36. Glenn M. Miller, "How could a God of Love order the massacre/annihilation of the Canaanites?" on the web site A Christian Thinktank, christianthinktank.com/qamorite.html.

{37. Copan, "Yahweh Wars and the Canaanites," quoting John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), chap. 5.

38. Miller, "How could a God of Love order the massacre/annihilation of the Canaanites?"

39. Copan says similarly that "wiping out Canaanite religion was far more significant than wiping out the Canaanites themselves." See his "Is Yahweh a Moral Monster?"

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

41. And I say "contemporary" because children weren't regarded as highly in the Ancient Near East as they are today. People may not have found this as appalling as we do today (because it so out of keeping with our experience).

42. Terence Fretheim, "God and Violence in the Old Testament," *Word and World*, 24, no. 1 (Winter 2004); accessed online at www2.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/24-1_Violence/24-1_Fretheim.pdf; quoting Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 244, and Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper&Row, 1962), 284.

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Go to the Movies. . . But Don't Turn Off Your Brain!

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How many of you have seen one movie in the past month (on TV or at the theater)? Two movies? Three? Ten? How many of you, like me, see so many movies on a regular basis it's too hard

to count? Do you know how many movies are made on average per year in Hollywood? Over the last ten years or so, Hollywood puts out an average of six hundred movies each year. That's almost two a day—many many more if you include Bollywood. Movies are everywhere! They show up in abundance in our culture and in our lives. On that level alone movies are important to think about and discuss in our Christian communities as we try to help one another live more like Christ.

But movies aren't only important because they're prevalent. Movies are important because they communicate ideas about what is true. We've always used art as a way of expressing our beliefs about and experiences of reality: what is true about life and what it means to be a person, why is there evil and how can we be saved from it... "Man has always and will continue to express his hope and excitement, as well as his fears and reservations, about life and what it means to be human through the arts. He will seek to express his world through any and all available mediums, and presently that includes film."[\[1\]](#)

So movies are important not just because they're everywhere, but because they tell us about life and what it means to be human. Normally, in church, when we talk about where our ideas about life and what it means to be a person and how we should live, where do we say those ideas come from? Right, the Bible.

And that's true! But God has given us art too. And we need art and science and nature and each other and the Bible to interpret what is real, what is true. We need all of these things together to help us make sense of life; because life can sometimes be a mess. When your friend betrays you and you don't know why. When your parents divorce. When life isn't bad just uncertain, or confusing... or complicated because two boys like you at the same time or you're not exactly sure where you want to go to college... Now, the Scriptures come first among all informers of reality; but we'll come back to that.

I have to thank my friend and colleague [Todd Kappelman](#); he works with me at Probe and he is a professor of philosophy at [Dallas Baptist University](#). I'll be pulling a lot from his lecture "Perspectives on Film: What's in a movie?" Let me quote Todd:

"A film is able to convey an enormous range of human experience and emotions. A good film maker, script writer, director, producer, or actor can take us to places that we might never be able to see through our everyday experiences."

Can you think of some examples? *Avatar*. *Lord of the Rings*. Even movies like *Saving Private Ryan* or *Braveheart*. And because movies are able to involve us in situations that are outside of our everyday experiences, but that we can relate to, "[movies] may also show us things about our world that would otherwise remain hidden to the untrained eye." For example, *Wall-E*. How many of you have seen *Wall-E*? So basically humanity destroys all oxygen-producing plant life and has to ship civilization out into outer space. Everyone's on a giant cruise ship in space, lounging in these mobile recliners that take them wherever they want to go and they have these screens that pop up and they can order whatever food they want, and it comes right to them. And they've been living like this in space for years so everyone is super fat. There are a couple of underlying messages in this movie; they're pretty obvious, right? Take care of the Earth our home and discipline yourself in this world of modern convenience. But because these messages are communicated to us, not directly in the world in which we live, but indirectly through a world with robots and space cruise ships, it's a message that's easier to swallow.

The underlying messages of *Wall-E* are pretty obvious; however, many movies have messages which are much more subtle. And unless we know what to look for and how to look for it we will miss it. We will miss what the movie is really saying behind

the special effects and witty dialogue. Often movies communicate ideas about life and reality through symbols; it's like code. The movies don't often just come out and say, "This is the message about life from this movie." So we need to learn how to interpret the code.

Movies have ideas and those ideas come from the women and men who make them. Duh. Right, I know. But we don't always think about it. Every person has a [worldview](#) and that worldview is always in a person's art.

My colleague Todd gives us five basic questions to ask when watching movies:

1. How important is life to the director/writers, etc? Are tough issues dealt with or avoided? "Christian" movies come to mind when I think of this question. Sometimes these movies are really bad about candy-coating life—everything ends nice and neatly and all the bad stuff about life is kind of skipped over or neatly dealt with. This is a disservice because it isn't true to life.

2. Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your interpretation? How many of you saw Avatar? I saw it twice. It was awesome in 3D. I hear it's even cooler in XD. I'll let you in on a not-so-secret secret. Hollywood's favorite and most popular worldview right now is pantheism. Think about Avatar and look at your chart (under Cosmic Humanism). See anything that rings familiar from the movie?

3. Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to determine if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that is in agreement with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality. Let me think here... what comes to mind? Um... romantic comedies. Don't get me wrong, I like many romantic comedies, but I also go to those movies with my brain turned on, watching the screen through my

biblical worldview lenses. And it's important we do that because those movies aren't just fun-loving and warm-fuzzy, they also communicate ideas about romance and marriage and dating and sex. And if we go into these movies with our brains turned off, we will begin to subconsciously absorb these false ideas. If I'm not filtering the film with my biblical worldview, I can easily begin to expect my love life to be like the movies, which when I say it out loud like that sounds ridiculous. But it happens in subtle ways and more often than we think.

4. Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film seek to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone? I think a case can be made that *The DaVinci Code* fits into this category. But you know, hostility toward Christianity is all over, not just movies, but TV too. When Christians are portrayed on the show *Criminal Minds* for example, they're often extreme fundamentalists who hate gays and repress women. And you know, that's a legitimate complaint against some who call themselves Christians. But when those are the only types of Christians shown time and time again on TV and in the movies, the whole picture isn't being shown. It's being distorted.

5. Is the film technically well made, written, produced and acted? I confess, *Transformers II* was a major disappointment. It was technically well done; I mean, the special effects were awesome. But the writing... I felt like I was getting dumber sitting there listening to that dialogue. Even the plot had some holes in it, which was disappointing because I like action flicks.

Now as Christian interpreters, we have three more questions to ask ourselves:

1. Does the interpretation of reality in this work conform to or fail to conform to Christian doctrine or ethics? Sometimes

a movie will match up pretty solidly with the Creation-Fall-Redemption narrative of Scripture. Sometimes a movie will represent the complete opposite ideas about what life is like and what it means to be human. But most of the time, movies present to us ideas that partly conform to Christian doctrine or ethics. Because movies come out of the ideas in the heart and minds of the women and men who create them, and Romans 2 tells us that God has written his truth on the hearts of all people.

2. If some of the ideas and values are Christian, are they inclusively or exclusively Christian? That is, do these ideas encompass Christianity and other religions or philosophic viewpoints, or do they exclude Christianity from other viewpoints? The case could be made that *The Book of Eli* presents Christian values in an inclusive way. It's subtle, and if you blinked you might have missed it. The movie isn't about preserving the Word of God. It's about preserving the religious books of the world. And it is no mistake that the Bible was placed right next to the Koran in the library at the end.

3. If some of the ideas and values in a work are Christian, are they a relatively complete version of the Christian view, or are they a relatively rudimentary version of Christian belief on a given topic? (Like *Criminal Minds*.)

Finally, a few cautions:

1. Just because a movie depicts unChristian ethics or values doesn't mean it's bad art. Likewise, just because a movie depicts Christian values doesn't mean it's good art.

2. Be careful not to allow your personal perspective to dominate the description of a particular work. Try to understand as many other perspectives as you can.

3. Do not expect a non-Christian to agree with you, arrive at

the same conclusions, or completely understand your perspective. At best we can hope to offer a clear and coherent insight into a work and thereby gain an opportunity for a Christian voice to be heard.

Okay. So movies are important. And so is the need for Christian interpretation. So if you like movies as much as I do, I hope you will go to the movies and keep your brain turned on because movies communicate messages about life and what it means to be human. And if we don't turn *on* our brains, we will unknowingly begin to believe untruths about life and what it means to be human. Movies are also important because they provide a good, nonthreatening way to talk about truth and worldview—ideas about life and what it means to be human—with our friends.

1. Kappelman, Todd, Film and the Christian, bit.ly/LvfUe1

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reneamac.com/2010/02/12/go-to-the-movies-but-dont-turn-off-your-brain/

Hayek and 'The Road to Serfdom'

Kerby Anderson gives an overview of the bestseller The Road to Serfdom and explains how it is consistent with a Christian worldview.

Why the Interest in Hayek and *The Road to Serfdom*?

A few years ago, if you said the name Friedrich Hayek to the average person in society, they wouldn't know his name. They might wrongly guess that he was the father of actress Selma Hayek. His name was unknown to non-economists.



Today he has much more visibility. People are reading his classic book, *The Road to Serfdom*, perhaps in order to make sense of our troubled economic climate and the current administration's policies. When TV host Glenn Beck talked about Hayek and *The Road to Serfdom*, the book went to number one on Amazon and stayed in the top ten for some time. A [rap video](#) featuring cartoon versions of Hayek and John Maynard Keynes have been viewed over a million times on YouTube.

Why all the interest in a Vienna-born, Nobel Prize-winning economist who passed off the scene some time ago? People are taking a second look at Hayek because of our current economic troubles. Russ Roberts, in his op-ed, "Why Friedrich Hayek is Making a Comeback,"^{1} says people are reconsidering four ideas Hayek championed.

First, Hayek and his fellow Austrian School economists such as Ludwig Von Mises argued that the economy is much more complicated than the simple economic principles set forth by Keynes. Boosting aggregate demand by funding certain sectors with a stimulus package of the economy won't necessarily help any other sector of the economy.

Second, Hayek highlighted the role of the Federal Reserve in the business cycle. The artificially low interest rates set by

the Fed played a crucial role in inflating the housing bubble. Our current monetary policy seems to merely be postponing the economic adjustments that must take place to heal the housing market.

Third, Hayek argued in his book that political freedom and economic freedom are connected and intertwined. The government in a centrally controlled economy controls more than just wages and prices. It inevitably infringes on what we do and where we live.

Even when the government tries to steer the economy in the name of the “public good,” the increased power of the state corrupts those who wield that power. “Hayek pointed out that powerful bureaucracies don’t attract angels—they attract people who enjoy running the lives of others. They tend to take care of their friends before taking care of others.”[\[2\]](#)

A final point by Hayek is that order can emerge not just from the top down but also from the bottom up. At the moment, citizens in many of the modern democracies are suffering from a top-down fatigue. A free market not only generates order but the freedom to work and trade with others. The opposite of top-down collectivism is not selfishness but cooperation.

Although *The Road to Serfdom* was written at the end of World War II to warn England that it could fall into the same fate as Germany, its warning to every generation is timeless.

Misconceptions About *The Road to Serfdom* (part one)

Hayek wrote his classic book *The Road to Serfdom*[\[3\]](#) more than sixty years ago, yet people are still reading it today. As they read it and apply its principles, many others misunderstand. Let’s look at some of the prevalent misconceptions.

Because Hayek was a Nobel-winning economist, people wrongly believe that *The Road to Serfdom* is merely a book about economics. It is much more. It is about the impact a centrally planned socialist society can have on individuals. Hayek says one of the main points in his book is “that the most important change which extensive government control produces is a psychological change, an alteration in the character of the people. This is necessarily a slow affair, a process which extends not over a few years but perhaps over one or two generations.”[\[4\]](#)

The character of citizens is changed because they have yielded their will and decision-making to a totalitarian government. They may have done so willingly in order to have a welfare state. Or they may have done so unwillingly because a dictator has taken control of the reins of power. Either way, Hayek argues, their character has been altered because the control over every detail of economic life is ultimately control of life itself.

In the forward to his book, Hayek makes his case about the insidious nature of a soft despotism. He quotes from Alexis de Tocqueville’s prediction in *Democracy in America* of the “new kind of servitude” when

after having thus successively taken each member of the community in it powerful grasp, and fashioned him at will, the supreme power then extends its arm over the whole community. It covers the surface of society with a network of small, complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered but softened, bent and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to be nothing more than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the

shepherd. {5}

Tocqueville warned that the search for greater equality typically is accompanied by greater centralization of government with a corresponding loss of liberty. The chapter was insightfully titled, "What Sort of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear."

Tocqueville also described the contrast between democracy and socialism:

Democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom; socialism restricts it. Democracy attaches all possible value to each man; socialism makes each man a mere agent, a mere number. Democracy and socialism have nothing in common but one word: equality. But notice the difference: while democracy seeks equality in liberty, socialism seeks equality in restraint and servitude. {6}

Hayek believed that individual citizens should develop their own abilities and pursue their own dreams. He argued that government should be a *means*, a mere *instrument*, "to help individuals in their fullest development of their individual personality." {7}

Misconceptions About *The Road to Serfdom* (part two)

Another misconception about Hayek is that he was making a case for radical libertarianism. Some of the previous quotes illustrate that he understood that the government could and should intervene in circumstances. He explains that his book was not about whether the government should or should not act in every circumstance.

What he was calling for was a government limited in scope and power. On the one hand, he rejected libertarian anarchy. On

the other hand, he devoted the book to the reasons why we should reject a pervasive, centrally controlled society advocated by the socialists of his day. He recognized the place for government's role.

The government, however, should focus its attention on setting the ground rules for competition rather than devote time and energy to picking winners and losers in the marketplace. And Hayek reasoned that government cannot possibly know the individual and collective needs of society. Therefore, Hayek argues that the "state should confine itself to establishing rules applying to general types of situations and should allow the individuals freedom in everything which depends on the circumstances of time and place, because only the individuals concerned in each instance can fully know these circumstances and adapt their actions to them."[\[10\]](#)

Wise and prudent government must recognize that there are fundamental limitations in human knowledge. A government that recognizes its limitations is less likely to intervene at every level and implement a top-down control of the economy.

One last misconception has to do with helping those who suffer misfortune. It is true that he rejected the idea of a top-down, centrally controlled economy and socialist welfare state. But that did not exclude the concept of some sort of social safety net.

In his chapter on "Security and Freedom" he says, "there can be no doubt that some minimum of food, shelter, and clothing, sufficient to preserve health and the capacity to work can be assured to everybody."[\[11\]](#) He notes that this has been achieved in England (and we might add in most other modern democracies).

He went on to argue that the government should provide assistance to victims of such "acts of God" (such as earthquakes and floods). Although he might disagree with the

extent governments today provide ongoing assistance for years, Hayek certainly did believe there was a place for providing aid to those struck by misfortune.

Paved With Good Intentions

Friedrich Hayek wrote *The Road to Serfdom* to warn us that sometimes the road can be paved with good intentions. Most government officials and bureaucrats write laws, rules, and regulations with every good intention. They desire to make the world a better place by preventing catastrophe and by encouraging positive actions from their citizens. But in their desire to control and direct every aspect of life, they take us down the road to serfdom.

Hayek says the problem comes from a “passion for conscious control of everything.”[\[12\]](#) People who enter into government and run powerful bureaucracies are often people who enjoy running not only the bureaucracy but also the lives of its citizens. In making uniform rules from a distance, they deprive the local communities of the freedom to apply their own knowledge and wisdom to their unique situations.

Socialist government seeks to be a benevolent god, but usually morphs into a malevolent tyrant. Micromanaging the details of life leads to what Hayek calls “imprudence.” Most of us would call such rules intrusive, inefficient, and often downright idiotic. But the governmental bureaucrat may believe he is right in making such rules, believing that the local people are too stupid to know what is best for them. Hayek argues that citizens are best served when they are given the freedom to make choices that are best for them and their communities.

Hayek actually makes his case for economic freedom using a moral argument. If government assumes our moral responsibility, then we are no longer free moral agents. The intrusion of the state limits my ability to make moral choices. “What our generation is in danger of forgetting is

not only that morals are of necessity a phenomenon of individual conduct but also that they can exist only in the sphere in which the individual is free to decide for himself and is called upon voluntarily to sacrifice personal advantage to the observance of a moral rule.”{13} This is true whether it is an individual or a government that takes responsibility. In either case, we are no longer making free moral decisions. Someone or something else is making moral decisions for us. “Responsibility, not to a superior, but to one’s conscience, the awareness of duty is not exacted by compulsion, the necessity to decide which of the things one values are to be sacrificed to others, and to bear the consequences of one’s own decision, are the very essence of any morals which deserve the name.”{14}

A socialist government may promise freedom to its citizens but it adversely affects them when it frees them from making moral choices. “A movement whose main promise is the relief from responsibility cannot but be antimoral in its effect, however lofty the ideals to which it owes its birth.”{15}

Hayek also warned about the danger of centralizing power in the hands of a few bureaucrats. He argued that, “by uniting in the hands of a single body power formerly exercised independently by many, an amount of power is created infinitely greater than any that existed before, so much more far reaching as almost to be different in kind.”{16}

He even argues that once we centralize power in a bureaucracy, we are headed down the road to serfdom. “What is called economic power, while it can be an instrument of coercion, is, in the hands of private individuals, never exclusive or complete power, never power over the whole of life of a person. But centralized as an instrument of political power it creates a degree of dependence scarcely distinguishable from slavery.”{17}

Biblical Perspective

How does *The Road to Serfdom* compare to biblical principles? We must begin by stating that Friedrich Hayek was not a Christian. He did not confess Christian faith nor did he attend religious services. Hayek could best be described as an agnostic.

He was born in 1899 into an affluent, aristocratic family in Austria. He grew up in a nominally Roman Catholic home. Apparently there was a time when he seriously considered Christianity. Shortly before Hayek became a teenager, he began to ask some of the big questions of life. In his teen years, he was influenced by a godly teacher and even came under the conviction of sin. However, his quest ended when he felt that no one could satisfactorily answer his questions. From that point on he seems to have set aside any interest in Christianity and even expressed hostility toward religion.

Perhaps the most significant connection between Hayek and Christianity can be found in their common understanding of human nature. Hayek started with a simple premise: human beings are limited in their understanding. The Bible would say that we are fallen creatures living in a fallen world.

Starting with this assumption that human beings are not God, he constructed a case for liberty and limited government. This was in contrast to the prevailing socialist view that human beings possessed superior knowledge and could wisely order the affairs of its citizens through central planning. Hayek rejected the idea that central planners would have enough knowledge to organize the economy and instead showed that the spontaneous ordering of economic systems would be the mechanism that would push forward progress in society.

Hayek essentially held to a high view and a low view of human nature. Or we could call it a balanced view of human nature. He recognized that human beings did have a noble side

influenced by rationality, compassion, and even altruism. But he also understood that human beings also are limited in their perception of the world and subject to character flaws.

Such a view comports with a biblical perspective of human nature. First, there is a noble aspect to human beings. We are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27-28) and are made a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5). Second, there is a flaw in human beings. The Bible teaches that all are sinful (Rom. 3:23) and that the heart of man is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9).

Hayek believed that “man learns by the disappointment of expectations.” In other words, we learn that we are limited in our capacities. We do not have God’s understanding of the world and thus cannot effectively control the world like socialists confidently believe that we can. We are not the center of the universe. We are not gods. As Christians we can agree with the concept of the “disappointment of expectations” because we are fallen and live in a world that groans in travail (Romans 8:22).

Although Hayek was not a Christian, many of the ideas in *The Road to Serfdom* connect with biblical principles. Christians would be wise to read it and learn from him the lessons of history.

Notes

1. Russ Roberts, “Why Friedrich Hayek is Making a Comeback,” *Wall Street Journal*, 28 June 2010.
2. Ibid.
3. F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents, the Definitive Edition*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
4. Ibid., 48.
5. Ibid., 49.
6. Ibid., 77.

7. Ibid., 115.
8. Ibid., 57.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. Ibid., 114.
11. Ibid., 148.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 216.
14. Ibid., 217.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 165.
17. Ibid., 166.

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