Private Sin Impacts Society

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The June issue of the *AFA Journal* focuses due attention on how five areas of private sin impacts all of society. This is such an important issue since a very large portion of our society has bought into the idea that "what I do in private has no impact on the public." This current issue reminds us that it is not true!

The first area the article addresses is pornography. Dr. Jill Manning documents that about 170 million Americans use the Internet and that nearly one-third go online "for sexual purposes." Her research has also revealed that online sexual activity is "a hidden public health hazard" that is exploding.

Substance abuse is another example of how private sin impacts society. The U.S. Department of Justice has found that more than one-third of convicted felons had been drinking alcohol when they committed their offense. Another study found that more than one-quarter of state and federal drug offenders committed crimes in order to get money to support their drug habits.

A third area is crime in general. The statistics are staggering. The National Center for Victims of Crime estimates that just three areas (robberies, arson, and Internet fraud) cost us more than $1.6 trillion.

Abortion is a fourth area. Pro-choice advocates say that it shouldn't matter to society what a women does with her body. Apart from the obvious moral objections to abortion are the social and economic costs. As one expert from the National Right to Life observed, "You can't lose fifty-three million lives and not expect it to have a serious economic impact."

A final area documented in the article is fatherlessness. U.

S. Ambassador Gregory Slayton has been on my radio program a number of times and documents the social and economic impact of fatherless homes. The estimated price tag for fatherhood failure is more than a trillion dollars over the last decade alone.

These few examples show the error in believing that private sin has no impact on society. We are paying a huge cost for people's sin. I'm Kerby Anderson, and that's my point of view.

The Effect of Origins on Society

Why Is the Subject of Origins Important?

Every worldview addresses the question, "Where did we come from?" The Christian worldview says that we are a special part of creation made in the image of God. A materialistic worldview says that we are the product of natural selection and random mutations acting on organisms. The Christian view of origins is called Creation; the materialistic view of origins is called Darwinism. The Christian worldview is based on faith in the creative work of God of the Bible. The materialistic worldview is based on faith in the creative power of natural selection acting on mutations.

There are evidences for and against these worldviews from scientific research being conducted in the areas of intelligent design, evolutionary biology, genetics, mathematics, astronomy, and many other fields. However, people will often confuse the worldview with the scientific evidence. Worldviews are a way of explaining the evidence. For example,

we see that during a drought birds with longer beaks are selected over birds with shorter beaks. This is an observation. Saying that this is evidence for natural selection's creative ability to make totally new types of creatures is an extrapolation based on a worldview. Just as there is a right and a wrong interpretation for observations, there are right and wrong worldviews. And one way to test for a worldview is whether or not it is livable.

So does your view of origins affect other areas of life than just science? Yes, these two views of origins have a profound effect on how we value people and how we view personhood and personal responsibility. Using John West's book *Darwin Day in America* as a resource, we will look at how the materialistic worldview has trickled down into areas of society that affect us every day.

West argues in his book that the logical end materialistic worldview leaves nothing for an ethical standard other than to survive. The materialistic worldview says that non-living chemicals came together to make genetic material which then made an organism and that organism evolved until we got human beings. This view claims that man is made from chemicals and is no more valuable than any other animal. The logical end to this perspective is that everything a man does is a result of his genes and his environment. He therefore has no choices or free will of his own. His actions are the result of natural selection acting on him. This has important consequences for how we deal with crime, personhood, the embryo, the infirmed, and education.

West says, "Darwin helped spark an intellectual revolution that sought to apply materialism to nearly every area of human endeavor. This new, thoroughly 'scientific' materialism affected the entire span of culture, from economics and politics to education and the arts".{1} Darwin published *Origin of Species* one hundred fifty years ago, but it is in the mid-twentieth century that we begin to see how his theory

has trickled down into society.

Crime and Responsibility

How does a materialistic worldview affect society? For one thing, a Darwinian view of man has changed our criminal justice system.

How are the courts and science related? In our culture, the scientists are the holders of truth and the courts are the arbiters of law. And while the idea that law coincides with truth is good and even biblical, the idea that scientists, and only scientists, are the ones who dictate truth is a dangerous position. If the pervading worldview in science is materialism, then a materialistic view of man is reflected in the courts.

According to a materialistic worldview, man is the product of his genes and his environment with no real ability to act differently than what his genes and environment would have him do. If this is the case, then how can he be held responsible for his crimes? Why not just blame bad genes or a bad home life? Often this is what is argued in the courts.

West describes the crux of the problem. In order to provide protection and have an orderly society, the criminal justice system needs to punish wrong behavior. But from a materialistic worldview, there is no moral foundation for individual responsibility. A materialist perspective does not blame the individual but their genes or the way that they were raised (their environment). West outlines a history of criminals getting off in the name of very loose definitions of insanity, and other criminals undergoing treatment instead of punishment.{2} And the treatment, at times, amounts to something closer to coercion or torture.{3} Whether we are talking about being overly lenient by giving criminals excuses or coercing them to treatment, both diminish the value and

dignity of the individual as a person.

The Christian view of man is that, although differences in our genetics or our environment may mean that we have different struggles or temptations than others, we are made in God's image. Therefore, just as God treats us with dignity by exacting punishment for our actions, so, too, do we treat people with inherent dignity by exacting punishment and allowing for atonement. The Darwinian view says that we are not responsible because we are a product of our genes, but it also says that we are not redeemable because we will remain flawed.

Our entire criminal justice system is based on the idea that man can be held accountable for his crimes, that he has a choice in what he does. Furthermore, it is based on the inherent dignity that every individual has, so that a wrong done to one individual must result in the wrong-doer being punished. This maintains equal dignity and value in both individuals.{4} However, this system crumbles under a materialistic worldview.

So man is a product of his genes and his environment, a view which, taken to its logical end, has conflicting and dangerous results for exacting justice in society. Now we turn to how this view of man affects how we treat others that are different from us and how we define "normal."

Personhood

At the beginning of the twentieth century, during the rise of the scientific revolution, the idea of atonement for a guilty crime changed to an idea of fixing a broken machine. Criminals were treated as if they were machines with broken parts, instead of individuals with value and free will, because scientists had supposedly found a materialistic cause for crime. Something in their genetic code went wrong, so many

were subjected to some kind of institutionalization or treatment. As John West points out in *Darwin Day in America,* the idea is if science can explain the problem, then science can fix it.{5} One way that scientists attempted to fix this problem was to try to breed out the bad traits. Scientists in the '30s, '40s and '50s reasoned that bad behavior, stupidity, and emotional instability were passed down from parent to child just like physical traits, and the only way to cleanse our society of these ailments was to sterilize those who carry these traits.

It began with criminals being sterilized; then it turned to those who were mentally handicapped; then those who were deemed less intelligent, poor, or unproductive in society were sterilized. In hindsight it is easy to see how this slippery slope happened. One group changes the standards by which we value other groups. No longer is the foundation in the Judeo-Christian concept that all individuals have inherent value, but in the Darwinian concept that some are less valuable than others and deemed less worthy of life than the more "fit" in society. This was the breeding ground for what would become the eugenics movement. [Editor's note: Eugenics is the idea that the human race can be improved by careful selection of those who mate and produce offspring. The word comes from the Greek word *eugenes*, "well-born, of good stock," from *eu*– "good" + *genos* "birth."]

We saw the logical end of the eugenics movement in Nazi Germany. Darwinism was not necessarily the cause for Nazi Germany, but eugenics was justified with a Darwinian view of man. This is an important picture of how one can promote one's worldview (and one's prejudices) in the name of science. Darwinism allows for race discrimination and even genocide. As West points out, "Historically speaking, the eugenics movement is important because it was one of the first—and most powerful—efforts to use science to expand the power of the state over social matters. Eugenists claimed that their

superior scientific knowledge trumped the beliefs of nonscientists, and so they should be allowed to design a truly scientific welfare policy."{6}

Today this attitude is still seen when doctors, lawyers, and family members evaluate individuals based on their physical abilities and their cost to society. Oftentimes individuals are assessed based on their perceived "quality of life." Unfortunately, this usually reflects what the doctor, lawyer, or family member would hate to have happen to themselves than the actual desires of the individual in question. Judging others unworthy of life based on physical features or capabilities ignores the inherent value and dignity God has given man as being made in His image.

The Beginning and End of Life

We have looked at how a society that promotes a materialistic worldview results in a degraded view of personhood. This degraded view includes basing a person's value on how well they physically function and how much they cost society. However, from a Christian view, humans were created with a purpose and in the image of God. They have inherent value beyond their physical bodies.

How does a Darwinian view of man's origin affect the way we look at the most vulnerable in society—the embryo and the aged or infirmed?

West traces a historical record of the legalization of abortion and demonstrates why we have the debate about embryonic stem cell research today.{7} Darwinism is not the cause of the legalization of abortion and destruction of embryos, but it provided an ideology that allowed people to justify it. It began with a scientist named Haeckel who influenced Darwin. Haeckel discussed how all embryos go through stages of development and how the earliest stages look

very similar to each other. In his famous drawings, he shows how a human embryo goes from a small fish-like creature that looks similar to other animal embryos, to a human-looking embryo. He said that the fetus goes through a mini version of evolutionary development.{8}

What conclusions were drawn from this? If the fetus is no more than a fish, then it is as ethical to discard it as it would be to discard a fish. The only problem with this idea is that it is now well-documented that Haeckel's drawings were faked, and the similarities were more contrived than real. Despite this finding, people still latched on to the concept and refused to accept that the fetus does not go through evolutionary stages. It is from this concept that many justify early stage abortion and embryonic stem cell research; the clump of cells or the mass does not look human.{9} This is an example of basing a person's value on their physical appearance and function.

Today we not only see this idea played out in the unborn, but also in the elderly and the infirmed. Many family members and doctors elect to end someone's life because they have deemed them less valuable. Again, the basis of this is on how well they physically function. One group is putting value on another group.

Both of these examples demonstrate how our culture has bought into a materialistic worldview which devalues the person that does not have certain physical characteristics. As Christians we value human life and believe that the embryo, the aged, and the infirmed have inherent dignity despite how they might function or appear.

Education

We have been looking at how a Darwinian view of man led to a slow and steady dehumanization of man. Our view of origins

affects other areas of life as well. In this section, we will address how a Darwinian view of man has influenced how we educate our children. A Darwinian view says that there is no absolute authority; there is merely survival of the fittest. In academics that means teaching based on what works, not on what is right.

One of the biggest influences on our educational system, both in public and private schools, has been John Dewey. As Nancy Pearcey points out in her book *Total Truth*, Dewey thought education should be like biological evolution where students construct their own answers based on what works best. Pearcey calls this "a kind of mental adaptation to the environment."{10} It is easy to see how this leads to moral relativism. Students are not taught character or values. Instead, they learn that an idea or a concept is deemed valuable if it works, not if it is right. Teachers are taught in certification classes to guide students along and help them to come up with their own moral code. Teachers are not allowed to punish students for wrongdoing, because they have no moral basis to do so, but are still expected to have an orderly classroom. In some cases teachers are not permitted to give a failing grade to a student who is genuinely failing. Also they are not permitted to give A's to good students for fear that they may not continue putting forth effort. Students are stripped of the concept of an objective standard or absolute morals, and by the time they are high school seniors, they are more educated in how to play the system than in reading, writing, or arithmetic. This is the very fruit of Dewey's pragmatism, and it continues through the university level. When students are stripped of any set of beliefs and a moral foundation, they are left empty and ready to be filled with the pervading worldview of academia. What we end up with is a fully indoctrinated student with a materialistic worldview.{11}

Contemporary materialism's view of origins, known as

Darwinism, has profound effects on our society. As Christians we need to be a light unto the world by showing that human beings are more than their genes and environment, that they have inherent value, and that there are moral foundations beyond survival of the fittest.

Notes

1. John West, *Darwin Day in America* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007), 41-42.
2. Ibid., 73.
3. Ibid., 79-101
4. For a good article on capital punishment and human dignity see Kerby Anderson, "Capital Punishment," Probe, 1992, www.probe.org/capital-punishment/.
5. West, *Darwin Day*, 80.
6. Ibid., 162.
7 . Ibid., 325-335.
8. See Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution* (Washington, DC: Regency Publishing, 2000), chap. 5.
9. Ibid., 330.
10. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005), 239.
11. See Don Closson, "Humanist Psychology and Education" Probe, 1991, www.probe.org/humanistic-psychology-and-education/; Closson, "Grading America's Schools," Probe, 2002, www.probe.org/grading-americas-schools/; and Kerby Anderson, "Cultural Relativism," Probe, 2004, www.probe.org/cultural-relativism/.

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Can You Forgive Michael Vick?

Public reaction to football star Michael Vick's confession and apology for dog fighting has been passionate and polarized. Was he sincere? Or was it just a last resort when cornered by the law, a PR move to help rehabilitate his image and financial future?

The crimes were abhorrent. Underperforming canines were executed by hanging and drowning. This sickening stuff hits many folks in their guts, hard and deep.

He faces legal consequences. But should you and I forgive him?

Genuine Contrition?

Vick says, "Dog fighting is a terrible thing, and I did reject it. I'm upset with myself through this situation I found Jesus and asked him for forgiveness and turned my life over to God."{1}

Smooth but not convincing, cry some. It's just a show. He's a disgusting person and a terrible role model. Off with his head! Others quote English poet Alexander Pope, "To err is human, to forgive divine."

Perhaps time will tell how sincere he was. Some wonder, Michael Vick didn't do anything to me, so *for what* could I forgive him? True, he may not have harmed you personally. But he did violate society's laws and many people's sense of decency. Public figures' actions can have wide social impact. The fact that lots of kids looked up to him compounds the anger many feel when they indicate they could never accept his apology or forgive him for the harm he's done.

Indeed, negative feelings expressed toward Vick sometimes sound visceral, as if the speakers themselves had been injured. Frederic Luskin, former director of the Stanford

Forgiveness Project, says, “Our bodies react as if we’re in real danger right now to a story of how someone hurt us seven years ago. You’re feeling anger, your heart rhythm changes breathing, gets shallow.”{2}

Can you and I forgive Michael Vick?

Consider a wise woman who wrestled with similar feelings. Corrie ten Boom and her Dutch family hid Jews from the Nazis during World War II. For this she endured Ravensbruck, a concentration camp. Her inspiring story became a famous book and film, *The Hiding Place*.

Chilling Memories

In 1947 in a Munich church, she told a German audience that God forgives.{3} When we confess our sins, she explained, God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. After her presentation, she recognized a man approaching her, a guard from Ravensbruck, before whom she had had to walk naked. Chilling memories flooded back.

A fine message, *Fraulein*! said the man. How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea! He extended his hand in greeting.

Corrie recalled, “I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me. . . But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face to face with one of my captors, and my blood seemed to freeze.”

The man continued: “You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk…. I was a guard there. But since that time I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well, *Fraulein*.” He extended his hand again. “Will you forgive me?”

Forgive Him?

Corrie stood there, unable to forgive. As anger and vengeful thoughts raged inside her, she remembered Jesus' death for this man. Of His executioners He said, "Father, forgive these people, because they don't know what they are doing." {4}

How could she refuse? But she lacked the strength. She silently asked God to forgive her and help her forgive him. As she took his hand, she felt a healing warmth flooding her body. "I forgive you, brother!" she cried, "With all my heart."

And so, Corrie later recalled, "I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on [God's]. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."

If Corrie could forgive one who did her such harm, should we be willing to consider forgiving a public figure whose actions harm society? Could what Corrie found in faith help manage overwhelming anger and rage?

Will you and I forgive Michael Vick?

Notes

1. Text of Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick's statement, USA Today, August 27, 2007, www.usatoday.com/sports/football/2007-08-27-2672656486_x.htm
2. "Peace Work," Stanford Magazine, Joan O'C. Hamilton, 2001, http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2001/mayjun/features/forgiveness.html.
3. Corrie ten Boom, "Death Camp Revisited," Worldwide Challenge, July/August 1994, 35-36.
4. Luke 23:34 NLT.

Duke Lacrosse: Ethical Reflections

Written by Rusty Wright

The Duke lacrosse story has multiple ingredients for explosive media coverage: sex, race, politics, criminal charges, sports, class, a prestigious institution the list goes on.

Like many Duke alumni, I have personal convictions about the scandal. My Duke experience was and remains positive. So I'm biased. But I'm also realistic. Houston, we have a problem.

As much of the civilized world knows, a hired African-American stripper alleged some white players raped her at a lacrosse party. The accuser attended nearby North Carolina Central University. The accused maintain their innocence. The lacrosse coach resigned. Duke cancelled the season.

During basketball season, it was often "All Duke, all the time" on America's sports pages. Through much of the Spring, it became "All Duke, all the time" on the front pages.

Nowadays at Duke, quips one professor, historical calendars are not reckoned "BC" and "AD" but "BLC" and "ALC." "Before the Lacrosse Crisis" and "After the Lacrosse Crisis."

I'm glad Duke President Richard Broadhead emphasizes the presumption of innocence in criminal law. Travels in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have exposed me to chilling stories about presuming guilt.

At an April reunion, I found the campus buzzing with controversy. Some students conveyed deep personal pain about race and gender issues. At their national tournament in May,

Duke women lacrosse players wore wristbands and headbands supporting the men's team.

Broadhead commissioned an ongoing Campus Culture Initiative emphasizing responsibility and respect. In my view, he's handled a difficult situation with exceptional grace, dignity, and transparency.

What ethical lessons might come from this episode? Of course, if rape occurred, punishment should ensue.

But setting aside the rape allegations, what about the ethics of hiring a stripper? What principles should determine how we act in life?

When I was an undergraduate, a friend from the fraternity next door excitedly told me the dean had just given his fraternity permission to host a topless dancer at their Saturday night party in university housing.

Fast forward to 2006. On one television program, a woman argued that her own stripping had paid her college bills, and besides, it allowed her to exercise power over men.

Suppose you were a Duke student. Should you host or attend such a party? Hiring a stripper broke no laws. Both the players and the young woman could claim benefit. What's the harm?

A pragmatist might maintain, "In retrospect, it was more trouble than it was worth." A libertarian might assert, "Stripping's OK, if no one gets hurt." Some absolutists might say, "No. Never." Feminists could argue either side. Stripping exploits women as sex objects, a negative cultural influence. Yet a woman needs to earn a living.

Duke ethicist Elizabeth Kiss, soon to become Agnes Scott College president, recommends a starting point for answering the classic question, "How should I act?" She notes that the

"Golden Rule" appears in various forms in different faith traditions.

Good point. Jesus said, "In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you."

The Jewish Talmud says, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor."

Muhammad said, "Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself."

On Duke's main quadrangle sits a plaque containing the first article of the university's bylaws. The statement promotes truth, scholarship, freedom, tolerance, and service. It begins as follows:

"The aims of Duke University are to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion set forth in the teachings and character of Jesus Christ, the Son of God…."

Hmmm. An ethical guideline worth considering?

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Crime and Punishment – A Christian View of Dostoevsky's Classic Novel

Michael Gleghorn looks at the famous novel through a Christian worldview lens to see what truths Dostoevsky may have for us. We learn that this great novel records the fall of man into a degraded state but ends with the beginning of his restoration through the ministry of a selfless, Christian woman.

Introduction and Overview

In 1866 the Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky published *Crime and Punishment*, one of his greatest novels. It's a penetrating study of the psychology of sin, guilt, and redemption, and it haunts the reader long after the final page has been read. It tells the story of an intelligent, but impoverished, young Russian intellectual named Raskolnikov. Under the unfortunate influence of a particularly pernicious theory of society and human nature, he exalts himself above the moral law, grievously transgresses it by committing two murders, "and plunges into a hell of persecution, madness and terror."{1}

Raskolnikov had conceived of himself as a great and extraordinary man, on the order of a Napoleon. He tried to convince himself that he wasn't bound by the same tired old moral code that the vast mass of humanity lives in recognition of, if not obedience to—the merely *ordinary* men and women who accomplish little and amount to less. Nevertheless, after committing his horrible crime, he finds that he cannot escape his punishment: he cannot silence his sensitive and overburdened conscience. In the end, when he can stand it no longer, he decides to confess his crime and accept suffering as a means of atonement.

Joseph Frank observes that Dostoevsky, the author of this story, had "long been preoccupied with the question of crime and conscience."{2} In one of his letters, Dostoevsky describes his story as the "psychological report of a crime."{3} The crime is committed, he says, by "a young man, expelled from the university . . . and living in the midst of the direst poverty." Coming under the influence of "the strange, 'unfinished' ideas that float in the atmosphere," he decides to murder an old pawnbroker and steal her money. Dostoevsky describes the old woman as "stupid and ailing," "greedy" and "evil." Why, it would hardly be a crime at all to murder such a wretched person! What's more, with the money from his crime, the young man can "finish his studies, go abroad," and devote the rest of his life to the benefit of humanity!

Inspired by these thoughts, the young man goes through with the crime and murders the old woman. But, notes Dostoevsky, "here is where the entire psychological process of the crime is unfolded. Insoluble problems confront the murderer, unsuspected and unexpected feelings torment his heart . . . and he finishes by *being forced* to denounce himself."

This, in brief, is the story of *Crime and Punishment*. In what follows, we'll take a closer look at the theory which led Raskolnikov to commit his crime. Then we'll consider why the theory proved false when Raskolnikov actually attempted to put it into practice.

The Ordinary and Extraordinary

Raskolnikov committed two murders, in part simply to see if he really has the bravado to put his theories into practice. But what are these ideas? Where do they come from? And why do they lead Raskolnikov to such heinous actions?

Essentially, Raskolnikov's theory, which was partially

developed in an article on crime that he had written, holds that all men, by a kind of law of nature, are divided into two distinct classes: the *ordinary* and the *extraordinary*. This theory, which finds some of its philosophical roots in the writings of men like Hegel and Nietzsche, claims that ordinary men exist merely for the purpose of reproduction by which, at length, the occasional, extraordinary man might arise. Raskolnikov declares, "The vast mass of mankind is mere material, and only exists in order by some great effort, by some mysterious process, by means of some crossing of races and stocks, to bring into the world at last perhaps one man out of a thousand with a spark of independence." The man of genius is rarer still, "and the great geniuses, the crown of humanity, appear on earth perhaps one in many thousand millions."{4}

The distinctive features of the ordinary man are a conservative temperament and a law-abiding disposition. But extraordinary men "all transgress the law." Indeed, says Raskolnikov, "if such a one is forced for the sake of his idea to step over a corpse or wade through blood, he can . . . find . . . in his own conscience, a sanction for wading through blood."{5} So the extraordinary man has the right—indeed, depending on the value of his ideas, he may even have the duty—to destroy those who stand in his way. After all, Raskolnikov observes, such ideas may benefit "the whole of humanity."{6} But how can we know if we are merely ordinary men, or whether, perhaps, we are extraordinary? How can we know if we have the *right* to transgress the law to achieve our own ends?

Raskolnikov admits that confusion regarding one's class is indeed possible. But he thinks "the mistake can only arise . . . among the ordinary people" who sometimes like to imagine themselves more advanced than they really are. And we needn't worry much about that, for such people are "very conscientious" and will impose "public acts of penitence upon

themselves with a beautiful and edifying effect."{7}

But as we'll see, it's one of the ironies of this novel that Raskolnikov, who committed murder because he thought himself extraordinary, made precisely this tragic mistake.

A Walking Contradiction

James Roberts observes that Raskolnikov "is best seen as two characters. He sometimes acts in one manner and then suddenly in a manner completely contradictory."{8} Evidence for this can be seen throughout the novel. In this way, Dostoevsky makes clear, right from the beginning of his story, that Raskolnikov is *not* an extraordinary man, at least not in the sense in which Raskolnikov himself uses that term in his theory of human nature.

In the opening pages of the novel, we see Raskolnikov at war with himself as he debates his intention to murder an old pawnbroker. "I want to attempt a thing *like that*," he says to himself.{9} Then, after visiting the old woman's flat, ostensibly to pawn a watch, but in reality as a sort of "dress rehearsal" for the murder, he again questions himself: "How could such an atrocious thing come into my head? What filthy things my heart is capable of. Yes, filthy above all . . . loathsome!"{10}

This inner battle suggests that Raskolnikov has mistaken himself for an *extraordinary* man, a man bound neither by the rules of society, nor the higher moral law. But in fact, he's actually just a conscientious *ordinary* man. The portrait Dostoevsky paints of him is really quite complex. He often appears to be a sensitive, though confused, young intellectual, who's been led to entertain his wild ideas more as a result of dire poverty and self-imposed isolation from his fellow man, rather than from sheer malice or selfish ambition.

In fear and trembling he commits two murders, partly out of a confused desire to thereby benefit the rest of humanity, and partly out of a seemingly genuine concern to really live in accordance with his theories. Ironically, while the murders are partly committed with the idea of taking the old pawnbroker's money to advance Raskolnikov's plans, he never attempts to use the money, but merely buries it under a stone. What's more, Raskolnikov is portrayed as one of the more generous characters in the novel. On more than one occasion, he literally gives away all the money he has to help meet the needs of others. Finally, while Raskolnikov is helped toward confessing his crime through the varied efforts of Porfiry Petrovich, the brilliant, yet compassionate, criminal investigator, and Sonia, the humble, selfless prostitute, nevertheless, it's primarily Raskolnikov's own tormented conscience that, at length, virtually forces him to confess to the murders.

So while Raskolnikov is guilty, he's not completely lost. He still retains a conscience, as well as some degree of genuine compassion toward others. Dostoevsky wants us to see that there's still hope for Raskolnikov!

The Hope of Restoration

After Raskolnikov commits the two murders, he finds himself confronted with the desperate need to be reconciled with God and his fellow man. From the beginning of the story, Raskolnikov is portrayed as somewhat alienated from his fellows. But once he commits the murders, he experiences a decisive break, both spiritually and psychologically, from the rest of humanity. Indeed, when he murders the old pawnbroker and her sister, something within Raskolnikov also dies. The bond that unites him with all other men in a common humanity is destroyed—or "dies"—as a sort of poetic justice for murdering the two women.

This death, which separates Raskolnikov both from God and his fellow man, can only be reversed through a miracle of divine grace and power. In the novel, the biblical paradigm for this great miracle is the story of the raising of Lazarus. Just as Lazarus died, and was then restored to life through the miraculous power of God in Christ, so also, in Dostoevsky's story, Raskolnikov's "death" is neither permanent nor irreversible. He too can be "restored to life." He too can be reconciled with God and man.

While this theme of death and restoration to life is somewhat subtle, nevertheless, Dostoevsky probably intended it as one of the primary themes of the novel. In the first place, it is emphasized by Sonia, Porfiry Petrovich, and Raskolnikov's own sister, that only by confessing his crime and accepting his punishment can Raskolnikov again be *restored* to the rest of humanity. In this way, Dostoevsky repeatedly emphasizes the "death" of Raskolnikov.

In addition, the raising of Lazarus is mentioned at least three times in the novel. One time is when, in the midst of a heated discussion, Porfiry specifically asks Raskolnikov if he believes in the raising of Lazarus, to which Raskolnikov responds that he does.{11} This affirmation foreshadows some hope for Raskolnikov, for the fact that he believes in this miracle at least makes possible the belief that God can also work a miracle in his own life. Secondly, the only extended portion of Scripture cited in the novel relates the story of Lazarus. In fact, it's Raskolnikov himself, tormented by what he's done, who asks Sonia to read him the story.{12} Finally, at the end of the novel, the raising of Lazarus is mentioned yet again, this time as Raskolnikov recollects Sonia's previous reading of the story to him.{13} Interestingly, this final reference to the raising of Lazarus occurs in the context of Raskolnikov's own "restoration to life."

Restored to Life

Near the end of the novel, Raskolnikov at last goes to the police station and confesses to the murders: *"It was I killed the old pawnbroker woman and her sister Lizaveta with an axe and robbed them."*{14} He is sentenced to eight years in a Siberian labor prison. Sonia, true to her promise, selflessly follows him there. Early one morning she comes to visit Raskolnikov. Overcome with emotion, he begins weeping and throws himself at her feet. Sonia is terrified. "But at the same moment she understood . . . . She knew . . . that he loved her . . . and that at last the moment had come."{15} God's love, mediated through Sonia, had finally broken through to Raskolnikov: "He had risen again and he . . . felt in it all his being."{16}

Although Raskolnikov had previously been something of an outcast with his fellow inmates, nevertheless, on the day of his "restoration," his relations with them begin to improve. Dostoevsky writes:

> *He . . . fancied that day that all the convicts who had been his enemies looked at him differently; he had even entered into talk with them and they answered him in a friendly way. He remembered that now, and thought it was bound to be so. Wasn't everything now bound to be changed?{17}*

What's more, Dostoevsky also implies that Raskolnikov is being restored to relationship with God. Picking up the New Testament that Sonia had given him, "one thought passed through his mind: 'Can her convictions not be mine now? Her feelings, her aspirations at least . . .'"{18} And Dostoevsky then concludes his great novel by stating: "But that is the beginning of a new story—the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life."{19}

So by the end of the novel, Raskolnikov, as a type of Lazarus, has experienced his own "restoration to life." He is ready to begin "his initiation into a new unknown life." And interestingly, the grace which brings about Raskolnikov's restoration is primarily mediated to him through the quiet, humble love of Sonia, a prostitute. Just as God was not ashamed to have his own Son, humanly speaking, descended from some who were murderers and some who were prostitutes—for it was just such people He came to save—so also, in Dostoevsky's story, God is not ashamed to extend His forgiveness and grace to a prostitute, and through her to a murderer as well. *Crime and Punishment* thus ends on a note of hope, for the guilty can be forgiven and the dead restored to life!

Notes

1. Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Bantam Books, 1987). Citation from cover blurb on back of book.
2. Joseph Frank, "Introduction" to Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, ix.
3. The citations from Dostoevsky's letter come from Joseph Frank's "Introduction" to Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment,* viii-ix.
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7. Ibid., 228.
8. James Roberts, *Cliffs Notes on Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment*, ed. Gary Carey (Lincoln, Nebraska: Cliffs Notes, Inc.), 70.
9. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, 2.
10. Ibid., 7.
11. Ibid., 227.
12. Ibid., 283.
13. Ibid., 472.
14. Ibid., 458.

15. Ibid., 471.
16. Ibid.
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18. Ibid., 472.
19. Ibid.

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Violence in Society

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

It's a scary world today!

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

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

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

likely to be killed by guns in 1993 than they were in 1986. Violent crime has increased by more than 560 percent since 1960.

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

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

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

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

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

It’s a scary world, and children are exposed to more violence than any generation in recent memory. An article in *Newsweek*

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

“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”

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

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

Defenders of television programs say that isn’t true. They contend that televised imagery doesn’t make people violent nor does it make people callous to suffering. But if televised imagery doesn’t affect human behavior, then the TV networks should refund billions of advertising dollars to TV sponsors.

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

So, how violent is the media? And what impact does media have on members of our family? First, we will look at violence in

the movies, and then we'll take up the issue of violence on television.

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

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

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

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

Children especially confront an increasingly violent world with few limits. As concerned parents and citizens we must do what we can to reduce the level of violence in our society

through the wise use of discernment and public policy. We need to set limits both in our homes and in the community.

Does Media Violence Really Influence Human Behavior?

Children's greatest exposure to violence comes from television. TV shows, movies edited for television, and video games expose young children to a level of violence unimaginable just a few years ago. The average child watches 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school. That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age 18.

The violent content of TV includes more than just the 22 minute programs sent down by the networks. At a very young age, children are seeing a level of violence and mayhem that in the past may have only been witnessed by a few police officers and military personnel. TV brings hitting, kicking, stabbings, shootings, and dismemberment right into homes on a daily basis.

The impact on behavior is predictable. Two prominent Surgeon General reports in the last two decades link violence on television and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a 94-page report entitled, "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties." They found "overwhelming" scientific evidence that "excessive" violence on television spills over into the playground and the streets. In one five-year study of 732 children, "several kinds of aggression– conflicts with parents, fighting and delinquency–were all positively correlated with the total amount of television viewing."

Long-term studies are even more disturbing. University of Illinois psychologist Leonard Eron studied children at age eight and then again at eighteen. He found that television

habits established at the age of eight influenced aggressive behavior through childhood and adolescent years. The more violent the programs preferred by boys in the third grade, the more aggressive their behavior, both at that time and ten years later. He therefore concluded that “the effect of television violence on aggression is cumulative.”

Twenty years later Eron and Rowell Huesmann found the pattern continued. He and his researchers found that children who watched significant amounts of TV violence at the age of 8 were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child or spouse abuse at 30.

They concluded “that heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the causes of aggressive behavior, crime and violence in society. Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence.”

Since their report in the 1980s, MTV has come on the scene with even more troubling images. Adolescents already listen to an estimated 10,500 hours of rock music between the 7th and 12th grades. Now they also spend countless hours in front of MTV seeing the visual images of rock songs that depict violence, rebellion, sadomasochism, the occult, drug abuse, and promiscuity. MTV reaches 57 million cable households, and its video images are even more lurid than the ones shown on regular TV. Music videos filled with sex, rape, murder, and other images of mayhem assault the senses. And MTV cartoons like Beavis and “the other guy” assault the sensibilities while enticing young people to start fires and commit other acts of violence. Critics count 18 acts of violence in each hour of MTV videos.

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

Television Promotes Not Only Violence But Fear As Well.

Children see thousands of TV murders every year. And the impact on behavior is predictable. Various reports by the Surgeon General in the last two decades link violence on television and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a 94-page report entitled, “Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties.” They found “overwhelming” scientific evidence that “excessive” violence on television spills over into the playground and the streets. In one five-year study of 732 children, “several kinds of aggression (such as conflicts with parents, fighting and delinquency) were all positively correlated with the total amount of television viewing.”

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

George Gerbner and Larry Gross working at the Annenberg School of Communications in the 1970s found that heavy TV viewers live in a scary world. “We have found that people who watch a lot of TV see the real world as more dangerous and frightening than those who watch very little. Heavy viewers are less trustful of their fellow citizens, and more fearful of the real world.”

So heavy viewers were less trustful and more fearful than the average citizen. But what constitutes a heavy viewer. Gerber and Gross defined heavy viewers as those adults who watch an average of four or more hours of television a day.

Approximately one-third of all American adults fit that category.

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

And if this is true of adults, imagine how much TV violence affects children's perception of the world. Gerbner and Gross say, "Imagine spending six hours a day at the local movie house when you were 12 years old. No parent would have permitted it. Yet, in our sample of children, nearly half the 12-year-olds watch an average of six or more hours of television per day." This would mean that a large portion of young people fit into the category of heavy viewers. Their view of the world must be profoundly shaped by TV. Gerbner and Gross therefore conclude: "If adults can be so accepting of the reality of television, imagine its effect on children. By the time the average American child reaches public school, he has already spent several years in an electronic nursery school."

Television violence affects both adults and children in subtle ways. While we may not personally feel or observe the effects of TV violence, we should not ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perception and behavior.

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

Some Suggestions for Dealing with Violence in the Media

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

1. Learn about the impact of violence in our society. Share this material with your pastor, elders, deacons, and church members. Help them understand how important this issue is to them and their community.

2. Create a safe environment. Families live in the midst of violence. We must make our homes safe for our families. A child should feel that his or her world is safe. Providing care and protection are obvious first steps. But parents must also establish limits, provide emotional security, and teach values and virtue in the home.

3. Parents should limit the amount of media exposure in their homes. The average young person sees entirely too much violence on TV and at the movies. Set limits to what a child watches, and evaluate both the quantity and quality of their media input (Rom. 12:2). Focus on what is pure, beautiful, true, right, honorable, excellent, and praiseworthy (Phil. 4:8).

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

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

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

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

8. Work to establish broadcaster guidelines. No TV or movie producer wants to unilaterally disarm all the actors on their screens out of fear that viewers will watch other programs and movies. Yet many of these same TV and movie producers would like to tone down the violence, but they don’t want to be the first to do so. National standards would be able to achieve what individuals would not do by themselves in a competitive market.

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

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Crime in America

Case #1: Polly Klaas of Petaluma, California, was abducted from her suburban home during a sleepover with two friends on October 1, 1993, and subsequently murdered. Her alleged assailant, Richard Allen Davis, had been sentenced to sixteen years in prison for kidnapping, but was released in June after serving only eight years of that sentence.

Case #2: Michael Jordan's father, James Jordan, was fatally shot in the chest on Interstate 95 in North Carolina on July 23, 1993. Charged with the murder were Larry Martin Demery and Daniel Andre Green. Demery had been charged in three previous cases involving theft, robbery, and forgery. He was awaiting trial for bashing a convenience-store clerk in the head with a cinder block during a robbery. Green had been paroled after serving two years of a six- year sentence for attempting to kill a man by smashing him in the head with an axe, leaving his victim in a coma for three months.

Americans are scared, and they are angry. The scary orgy of violent crime has made average citizens afraid to walk the streets in front of their homes. And this fear has fueled a public cry to end the killing fields in America. Americans have had enough, and they want to know why known criminals were let back out on the streets so they could kill Polly Klaas and James Jordan.

In America, the crime clock continues to click: one murder every 22 minutes, one rape every 5 minutes, one robbery every 49 seconds, and one burglary every 10 seconds. And the cost of crime continues to mount: $78 billion for the criminal justice system, $64 billion for private protection, $202 billion in loss of life and work, $120 billion in crimes against

business, $60 billion in stolen goods and fraud, $40 billion from drug abuse, and $110 billion from drunk driving. When you add up all the costs, crime costs Americans a stunning $675 billion each year.

In addition to the financial cost is the psychological cost of devastated lives and a loss of security. In recent months, even apathetic Americans have been shaken from their false sense of security as they have seen criminals invade nearly every sanctuary where they felt they were safe: their cars (James Jordan); their public transit (the Long Island Rail Road murders by Colin Ferguson); and even their bedrooms (the abduction of Polly Klaas).

Past solutions seem ineffective. Massive spending on social programs, massive spending on prisons, and sweeping changes in sentences seem to have little effect. No wonder there is such anger and a clamor for change.

Current Trends in Crime

1.The Crime Rate Is Increasing.

The recent string of heinous crimes does not represent a sudden wave of crime in America. Violent crime actually has been steadily increasing since the 1960s (though violent crime rates did dip for a time during the early 1980s). But in addition to the steady increase of crime has been the changing nature of these crimes. For example, there has been a pronounced increase in the prevalence of stranger-on-stranger robberies and drive-by shootings.

2. Teenagers Are Responsible for a Disproportionate Share of Violent Crime.

The violent-crime rate seems to rise and fall in tandem with the number of teens in the population. But recently, teen violence has exploded (murder arrests of teens jumped 92 percent since 1985) during a period in which the teen

population remained steady or declined.

3.The Median Age of Criminals Is Dropping.

The perception that criminals are getting younger is backed up by statistics. In 1982, 390 teens ages 13-15 were arrested for murder. A decade later, this total jumped to 740.

4. A Majority of the Crimes Are Committed by Habitual Criminals.

Criminologist Marvin Wolfgang compiled arrest records for males born and raised in Philadelphia (in 1945 and in 1958). He found that just 7 percent in each age group committed two-thirds of all violent crime. This included three-fourths of the rapes and robberies, and nearly all of the murders. They also found that this 7 percent had five or more arrests before the age of 18.

5. Crime Does Pay: Most Criminals Are Not Caught or Convicted.

Consider these statistics compiled by professor Morgan Reynolds (Texas A&M University) concerning burglary:

- *500,000 burglaries take place each month*
- *250,000 of these are reported to the police*
- *35,000 arrests are made*
- *30,450 prosecutions take place*
- *24,060 are convicted*

- *6,010 are sent to prison; the rest paroled*

Of the 500,0000 burglaries, only 6,000 burglars went to jail! And if this 1 percent effectiveness ratio isn't disturbing enough, professor Reynolds found that the average time served was only 13 months.

How to Fight Crime

1. Put More Police on the Street.

The statistics from professor Reynolds illustrate the problem for burglary. Similar statistics exist for other major crimes including murder. Today 3.3 violent crimes are committed for every police officer. Twenty-five years ago, the ratio was exactly opposite. It is not surprising that we have an epidemic of crime in this country when the chances of being caught, prosecuted and convicted are so low. The average criminal has no reason to fear law enforcement. The obvious solution is to increase the deterrent through more police and swift and sure punishments.

2. Put More Criminals in Prison.

The premise is simple: a criminal in prison cannot shoot your family. While the idea of incarceration is not new, some of the recent findings are. A 1992 publication by the Justice Department entitled, "The Case for More Incarceration" showed the following:

- *That incarceration is cheaper than letting a criminal out on the streets.*

- *That although the crime rate is high, the rate of increase has been going down since we started putting more people in prison.*

- *That blacks and whites are treated equally and that the vast majority of law-abiding African-Americans would gain most from more incarceration of criminals because African-Americans are more likely to be victims of violent crime.*

Putting criminals behind bars keeps them off the streets and is less expensive to society than letting them back out on the street.

3. Focus on Habitual Criminals.

The same publication by the Justice Department also found that much violent crime is committed by people who have already been in the criminal justice system. This included those who have been arrested, convicted, or imprisoned, or who are on probation or parole. The chronic offender has had 5 or more arrests by the age of 18 and has gotten away with dozens of other crimes.

Police departments that target "serious habitual offenders" and put them behind bars have found the number of violent crimes as well as property crimes drops significantly. Arresting, prosecuting, convicting, and incarcerating this small percentage of criminals will make communities safer.

4. Keep Violent Criminals in Prison Longer.

Most citizens are shocked to find out that violent criminals serve only 5.5 years for murder or 3 years for rape. But those are the sobering statistics wrought from lenient early-release practices.

Government statistics (for 36 states and the District of Columbia) show that although violent offenders received an average sentence of seven years and eleven months imprisonment, they actually served an average of only two years and eleven months in prison—or only 37 percent of their imposed sentences. The statistics also show that, typically,

51 percent of violent criminals were discharged from prison in two years or less, and 76 percent were back on the streets in four years or less.

We need to revise our current parole and probation procedures. Criminals who knowhow to work the system can be set free on bond, on their own recognizance, for re-habilitation, or for supervision. Three out of four people serving a criminal sentence are currently on probation or parole. In other words, they are out on the streets ready to commit another crime!

Many states are enacting “truth in sentencing” laws that require violent criminals to serve at least 85 percent of their prison sentence before becoming eligible for parole or other early release possibilities. Other states and the federal government are considering “three strikes and you’re out.” These laws mandate that those convicted of three violent crimes be put in jail for life.

Incarceration incapacitates violent criminals and keeps them off the streets, but it also deters would-be criminals. Criminologists have shown that an increase in arrest rates reduces the crime rate, and they have also demonstrated that an increase in sentence length also decreases crime rates. Catching more criminals, convicting more criminals, and keeping more criminals behind bars will reduce the crime rate.

5. Focus National and State Resources on Criminals, Not Weapons.

Many politicians seem to think that crime can be fought through gun control rather than criminal control.

No matter where you come down on the issue of gun control, consider the following statistics. Only 1 percent of all guns purchased in America are ever used in the commmission of a crime. And of those 1 percent, 5 out of 6 were obtained illegally. At its best, any gun control bill is only going to affect a very small portion of the criminal element.

6. Provide Alternative Sentencing for Non-Violent Offenders.

Criminals who are not a physical threat to society should not be locked up with violent criminals but should be sentenced to projects that will pay back the community. Criminals should pay restitution to their victims and the community. Locking up violent criminals makes sense; locking up non-violent criminals does not. Currently it costs more to warehouse a criminal for one year than it does to send the brightest student to Harvard University. Alternative sentencing for non-violent offenders will reduce taxpayer cost and generate funds which can provide restitution for the crime committed.

7. Develop Community Programs Which Deter Crime.

Many cities have introduced curfews prohibiting minors from being on the streets from 10 P.M. to 6 A.M. Exceptions are made for those passing through town or on their way to or from a political or religious event.

Some neighborhoods have found erecting roadblocks effective in reducing crime. Drug dealing drops dramatically when police check for driver's licenses and when local citizens write down license plate numbers and film activities with hand-held videos. Setting up a neighborhood crime watch program has also been a major deterrent to crime in many neighborhoods.

Citizens and legislators need to take back the streets. If we implement these common sense measures in the legislature and in our communities, we can make our streets safe again.

Notes

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The Sinfulness of Humanity

Over the last couple of years we have witnessed some incredible events in our world. In Europe, communism has become a thing of the past. In South Africa, apartheid finally appears to be on the way out. The former Soviet Union is in the throes of reorganization as it moves toward democracy and free enterprise.

Such events, coupled with recent successes on the battlefield,

have caused many Americans to feel tremendously optimistic about the future. It has become fashionable to appeal to a new world order in which nations will cooperate with one another in a spirit of peace, and some have even suggested that we are on the edge of the millennial kingdom.

Don’t get your hopes up.

It’s easy to be optimistic when looking at the trend of world events, but it’s a little more difficult when one takes human nature into consideration. The sinfulness of humanity may be an uncomfortable subject, but it is absolutely necessary to understand sin in order to understand both ourselves and the world in which we live.

Many people like to focus on our tremendous potential as a society, maintaining that the only thing preventing us from fulfilling that potential is inadequate education. For example, consider the following statement from the second Humanist Manifesto:

> *Using technology wisely, we can control our environment, conquer poverty, markedly reduce disease, extend our life-span, significantly modify our behavior, alter the course of human evolution and cultural development, unlock vast new powers, and provide humankind with unparalleled opportunity for achieving an abundant and meaningful life.*

Humanists recognize the fact that such utopian dreams are not guaranteed, but they believe our potential for progress is essentially unlimited. If we as a society decide that we really want to achieve something, we are capable of achieving it.

The Bible presents a very different view of humankind and our future. From a biblical perspective, we have all violated God’s laws, and our continuing tendency is not to seek the well-being of others but to seek our own satisfaction.

Consider the following words from Romans chapter 3:

> *There is none righteous, not even one; There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; All have turned aside, together they have become useless; There is none who does good, there is not even one.*

These words may sound pretty pessimistic, especially when compared with modern humanism, but they are true. We all know our own failings. God says that we are to be holy just as He is holy (1 Peter 1:15, 16), and we cannot honestly say that we meet that standard. You and I recognize that we have selfish desires, that we rebel against God, that we often find it easier to cheat people than to love them. The Bible tells us that everyone else has the same problem. As Paul put it, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

Forgiveness for Sin

Thinking about the sinfulness of humanity is unpleasant at best, but we must first understand that all humankind has sinned if we are to realize that, even so, all is not lost. The most important thing to realize about human sinfulness is that forgiveness is available!

The Bible says that we have all broken God's laws, and we all deserve punishment as a result. Jesus Christ, however, came to take that punishment on our behalf. Let me explain it this way. We have been sentenced to death because of our sin. God's justice demands that the sentence be carried out. If He were to simply lay the sentence aside, then He wouldn't be a very fair judge, and He is always fair.

At the same time, God's love demanded that He provide a way of forgiveness. He provided that forgiveness through Jesus Christ. By dying on the cross for our sins, Jesus paid the penalty that we should have had to pay. He took the punishment for our sins.

Since God's justice has been satisfied in the person of Jesus Christ, we are able to have peace with God through Jesus (Rom. 5:1). All we have to do to experience that peace is to place our trust in Jesus, believing that He died to take the punishment that we deserved (John 3:16). When we trust in Christ, our sins are forgiven. We no longer need to be afraid of death or of God's future judgment. We have been declared righteous in Christ, and we are at peace with God.

The idea that someone would or could take our punishment seems very strange to many in today's culture. The film *Flatliners* provides an excellent illustration of the way our world thinks about sin and life after death. In the film, several medical students take turns killing and then reviving one another, hoping to learn something about life after death. In their near-death experiences, they are confronted with past sins, in which they have offended not God but other human beings. They themselves must atone for their sins by making peace with the people they have wronged. There is no mediator to take their place. In addition, the sins for which they suffer are much less grievous than one might expect. What could a person do to obtain forgiveness for actions much worse than teasing another child or even causing another person's accidental death? Apparently nothing. Reflecting the perspective of many in our culture, *Flatliners* seems to say that there is no God to offend, no Christ to bear our punishment, and no hope for those who have committed grievous sin. What a sad perspective!

The Continuing Presence of Sin

When we accept God's forgiveness by placing our trust in Christ, we are completely freed from the penalty of sin. At the same time, however, we continue to experience the presence of sin. We still have the capacity, even the tendency, to rebel against God and to act independently of Him (Gal. 5:16-17). God's goal for us as Christians is that we would consistently obey Him, and the indwelling Holy Spirit works to

change us from the inside out, but the process won't be completed until we are in the presence of God in heaven (Rom. 8:12-25; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:7-18). In the meantime, we continue to struggle with the fact that we are sinful people.

As fallen creatures, we will always want to say no when God says yes and yes when He says no. All too often, we seek to please ourselves rather than to please God.

This thought doesn't sound very encouraging, and some have maintained that talking about the sinfulness (or depravity) of humanity causes Christians to have a pessimistic attitude about life. I disagree. Understanding that everyone is sinful gives us a realistic appraisal of life, one that explains the headlines we see in each morning's paper. If our natural tendency as sinful people is to seek power and control for ourselves or to lie, cheat, and steal, then we should expect people to act that way. Expecting these actions doesn't make them right, but it makes them understandable. Recognizing the sinfulness of humanity doesn't excuse crime, but it does protect us from the disillusionment that so many experience when their optimistic ideals eventually fall apart.

The belief that all persons are sinful can actually be a very liberating concept. We no longer place expectations on ourselves or others that no one could fulfill. We no longer demand perfection, for we expect a degree of failure. With regard to current events, we do not join those who continually hope for some kind of global transformation apart from divine intervention. We recognize that sinful people will continue to govern every nation, even our own, and that they will always seek their own interests.

The founders of this country believed in the sinfulness of humanity; indeed, this view of human sinfulness is central to the United States Constitution. We do not believe in giving any single individual limitless power, because we do not trust anyone enough to put him or her in that position. We regard a

system of checks and balances, through which each person's decisions must ultimately be approved by others, as safer than a government in which unlimited power is entrusted to one individual.

I am not saying that humanity should simply accept its lot; we must certainly work to improve our society. A proper understanding of human nature, however, prevents us from seeking to fulfill impossible goals through unrealistic means and keeps us from placing too much faith in humanity. We need to be involved in the political and social arenas, but we should not place too much hope in our involvement. Human sinfulness will keep us from doing all that we would like, but we must continue to do all that we can.

The Politics of Sin

Many people believe that humanity is basically good and that all we need to do to improve our society is provide a healthy psychological and physical environment. This belief is appealing because it makes us feel like we are in control of our own destiny, but unfortunately it isn't true. Humans are not good creatures in a bad environment. If anything, we are sinful creatures in a relatively good environment.

In this country we elect representatives who promise to uphold our interests in the public realm. Yet year after year we are disappointed when they break their promises. They may institute some helpful programs and make a few choices that we agree with, but often the entire exercise seems futile. One reason behind this sense of futility is that politics is built upon compromise, but another reason is that political programs are unable to deal with humanity's real problem—sin. Barry Goldwater, who served many years in the United States Senate, said it this way:

> *We have conjured up all manner of devils responsible for our present discontent. It is the unchecked bureaucracy in*

> *government, it is the selfishness of multinational corporate giants, it is the failure of the schools to teach and the students to learn, it is overpopulation, it is wasteful extravagance, it is squandering our national resources, it is racism, it is capitalism, it is our material affluence, or if we want a convenient foreign devil, we can say it is communism. But when we scrape away the varnish of wealth, education, class, ethnic origin, parochial loyalties, we discover that however much we've changed the shape of man's physical environment, man himself is still sinful, vain, greedy, ambitious, lustful, self-centered, unrepentant, and requiring of restraint.*

That is a pretty profound statement, and it is one with which the Bible would agree. Political programs have no effect on society's real problem, the fact that we are all sinful and self-centered.

When we look at the seeming hopelessness of the situation, it is easy to see why some Christians have grown apathetic. They say, We try as hard as we can and it doesn't do any good. Why bother to keep trying? Theirs is a good question. Many Christian activists felt the same way at the end of the 1980s. Christians had been more involved in this country's politics than ever before, and there were several events in which they seemed to pull out all the stops. Many Christians lobbied intensively for the confirmation of Robert Bork to the U.S. Supreme Court, seeing him as a vital tool in their aim to bring an end to the abortion industry in this country. Their efforts failed. The troops were marshalled several more times during legislative battles on Capitol Hill, but they fell short more times than they succeeded. Many grew weary in the fight. I know I did.

Looking back on that decade, we have to ask, What did we expect? Did we expect our politicians to abandon the appeal of special- interest groups in favor of altruistic ideals and

biblical ethics? We should not have been so naive. The sinfulness of humanity means that people will always tend to enhance their own power and seek their own interests. When they do otherwise, we take their actions as grace, but we do not expect them to act in accordance with anything but their own interests.

That’s why we as believers must continue to be active in political and social causes. True, we do struggle with our own sinfulness, but we are being transformed by the person of Jesus Christ, transformed to the extent that we should no longer fit comfortably into our culture (Rom. 12:1-2). Jesus said that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and what He meant by that is that we are to be distinctive representatives of God in a world that is trying to forget Him (Matt. 5:13-16; cf. Phil. 2:15). If we abandon our culture, we abandon that duty. We realize that we won’t necessarily win the day, but we might. In any case, we’ll have done the right thing.

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