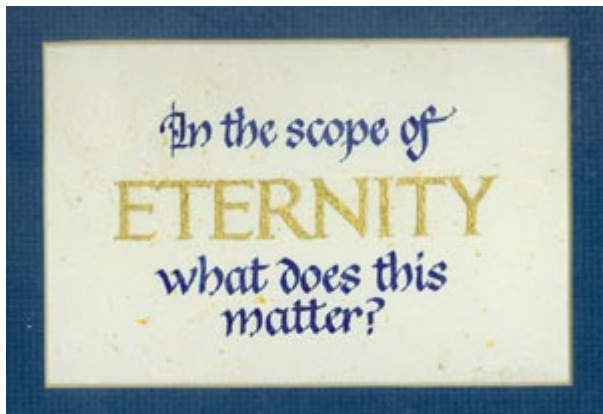


In the Scope of Eternity. . .

There's a piece of my calligraphy in our bathroom, where it's been for many years in a place where my sons would see it (over the commode!), of one of life's most important questions: "In the scope of eternity, what does this matter?"



This simple question can create a lens or filter through which we can assign value and importance to our experiences. It helps us know if something is worth getting upset about or not. If it's not going to matter two weeks from now, much less in eternity, *let it go*. Many of our stressors would be less stressful if we would just put them in perspective.

Both of my sons were athletes when they were growing up. They had a full supply of testosterone and were quite competitive. When you play sports, there are going to be wins and losses; when you're a boy or a young man, you can think those wins and losses are a lot more important than they actually are. But when filtered through the question, "In the scope of eternity, what does this matter," you can see both wins and losses as valuable for teaching and revealing character. (I put another calligraphy plaque in the bathroom as well: "Win without boasting, lose without excuses.")

I find myself invoking this question when trying to encourage people caught in the throes of temptation. One of my friends is in the excruciating process of withdrawing from an addictive and sinful relationship. I ask her, "One hundred

years from today, where will you be? When you are facing Jesus, what do you want to be glad you did now, and what do you want to avoid regretting? Think back on this difficult time from the position of one hundred years from today, when you are in eternity.”

One of my dear ones has been doing hard work in counseling for over a year. When the challenge of facing one’s internal pain is filtered through this question about eternity, it is encouraging to realize that cooperating with the Holy Spirit to uncover and relinquish his unhealed and broken parts is changing him forever, making him more fit for future Kingdom responsibilities and glory. The answer to the question, “In the scope of eternity, what does this matter,” is “The hard work and pain will be totally worth it.”

It’s helpful to ask myself this question when I’m experiencing nighttime sleeplessness, or physical pain, or financial stress. And it’s also helpful to ask myself this question when I’m concerned about my loved ones; when the answer is, “In the scope of eternity, this is REALLY important,” it motivates me to pray. Hard. And long.

What are you wrestling with? In the scope of eternity, what does it matter, really? Does this question help?

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/in_the_scope_of_eternity
on Aug. 30, 2011

The Mitchell Report: Christian Response to Steroids in Sports

Heather Zeiger considers the question of how Christians should respond to the revelations regarding steroid use in sports. The Mitchell report is one example accompanied by many others such as the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency report on cyclist, Lance Armstrong. Heather takes a biblical worldview perspective on this issue taking into consideration their impact on our bodies, our perception of the world, and the perception of young people on what is acceptable in our society. As a Christian, there are numerous reasons not to take steroids and not to glorify the accomplishments of those who do.

Former Senator George Mitchell was charged to investigate and document the prevalence of steroid and human growth hormone use in Major League Baseball. The objective of the report was not only to bring to light the steroid problem, but to offer solutions to help eradicate its use and abuse. Senator Mitchell specifically wanted “the media to focus less on names and more on central conclusions and recommendations of the report.”[\[1\]](#)

Later this month and in February, hearings before the House Committee on Oversight and Reform will be held to determine if stronger penalties for steroid use and more rigorous testing are appropriate. The committee will also investigate whether certain athletes are guilty of using performance enhancing drugs. This has brought the topic of steroid abuse in sports to the forefront of the media, providing an excellent opportunity for discussion.

Sport is an important part of life. The Apostle Paul wrote about running and boxing, and used it as an analogy for the

Christian walk.^{2} And unlike the Gnostics who despise the body, we honor it as part of our *imago dei* or being created in God's image (for more information see [Bodybuilding: Edifying Thoughts About Our Bodies](#) by Michael Gleghorn). So as Christians, we embrace playing sports and exercise. But like so many things, there is a way to play sports that is consistent with a Christian worldview and a way that is not. There are both physical and biblical reasons why steroid use is dangerous and unethical.

What are Steroids?

The first reported use of performance enhancers was in 776 B.C.^{3} when athletes would eat sheep testicles to increase their testosterone levels. Today athletes don't use sheep, but the intention is still to increase their testosterone beyond natural levels. Steroids are chemicals that are either a form of testosterone or a testosterone precursor. *Anabolic androgenic steroids* (AAS)^{4} increase muscle mass and muscle recovery by producing five to thirty times the testosterone that the typical male body produces.^{5} Athletes who abuse steroids do see an increase in muscle mass and/or speed, and at first, will see improvements in their performance. ESPN's *The Dope on Steroids* reports that steroids can make the body as much as 50 percent more muscular than is possible without them.^{6}

Using steroids to increase muscle strength is illegal, but there are many forms of steroids that remain undetectable in drug tests making it difficult to regulate their use. Furthermore, players have also abused another illegal, undetectable drug called *human growth hormone*, which is not a steroid, but is often used in conjunction with steroids to make a player bigger and to speed injury recovery.^{7} Random drug testing creates controversy over privacy violations, and announced tests are easy to beat. By using water-based steroids, it only takes a couple of weeks for players' bodies

to dilute the chemicals to undetectable levels.

While steroids do produce short-term results, the side effects and long-term effects can be devastating.

The Problem

Side-Effects

Physical side-effects from steroid use include increases in cholesterol, acne on arms and back, increase in blood pressure, stiffening of heart tissue, increased production of body hair yet decreased production of scalp hair, stunted growth, hypogonadism (diminished hormonal or reproductive functioning in the testes or the ovaries), sexual dysfunction, and increased risks for both strokes and heart attacks. Psychological side effects include aggressiveness, depression, and addiction/dependence. See [Dangers of Steroid Abuse](#) for a more detailed look at these and other possible side-effects to steroid abuse.

Influence on Teens

Athletes are role models for kids, and some studies indicate that athletes are second only to parents in their influence on teen choices. I remember watching track and field as a child and later as a teenager and being captivated by the runners. They had this combination of grace and strength that I admired, so I eventually took up running.

Kids turn to athletes for inspiration all the time, but the problem is they also believe that the athletes are successful because they use steroids. Take this testimonial from www.steroidabuse.com as an example:

For me, taking steroids was a natural move. I was an athlete in high school and got a college scholarship to play football at a major university. Between my senior year of high school and my freshman year of college I started my first cycle

because I thought I needed to be faster. I took injectable testosterone and winstrol. I figured that winstrol must be good because it's what Ben Johnson got busted using. I wanted to be fast like him.

I was getting stronger at every workout and feeling great. I had heard that steroids can make your joints weaker but I figured Ben Johnson didn't have that problem, so it was probably just a rumor.[{8}](#)

Another testimonial discusses how a parent's obsession with his son, Corey, and his athletic success eventually lead him to administering steroids to Corey when he was only 13. He thought this was how the pros compete. In the end, Corey, now 18, comments about his steroid experience:

As Corey tries to scrounge together enough money to get his own place, one point still gnaws at him: He firmly believes he could have been a champion without pharmacological enhancement.

Soft-spoken and reserved, Corey wavers among embarrassment, regret and awe when he reflects on his fractured teenage years and his experiment with steroids. "People make it sound like these medications are only performance-enhancing, but they have a huge mental impact as well," he says. "By the time I was done, I was a wreck...."[{9}](#)

And as the Mitchell Report stated, "After the Associated Press reported Mark McGwire was using androstenedione (a testosterone precursor)...sales of that substance increased by over 1000%."[{10}](#) Athletes have a strong influence on people, especially teens.

The Christian Worldview

When the news of Barry Bonds' alleged steroid use broke last summer, *Newsweek* commentator George Will observed that "Athletes who are chemically propelled to victory do not merely overvalue winning, they misunderstand why winning is properly valued.... In fact, it becomes a display of some chemists' virtuosity and some athlete's bad character." He later adds that "the athlete's proper goal is to perform unusually well, not unnaturally well."[\[11\]](#) We have a moral foundation for these points in God's word.

First of all, steroids cause the body to be enhanced beyond what it was designed to do. We believe that God has designed us with his purposes in mind, and he has gifted people with different talents and abilities. From an engineering perspective, he put the parts together with a particular design in mind, so when a steroid user becomes stronger than that for which he was designed, the rest of the parts, his joints, tendons, and ligaments, become damaged.[\[12\]](#)

Secondly, steroids are often taken for cosmetic reasons—usually by men obsessed with acquiring a certain physique. As we see from Scripture, this is a disproportionate view of the human body. The Bible tells us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.[\[13\]](#) And as we see in Luke 12:22-34, Jesus tells us not to worry over what we will eat or drink and what to wear, that He will provide what is necessary. This puts the body in its proper perspective as something to care for, but not something to obsess over.

Lastly, there is a character issue here. Consider the Apostle Paul's view of weakness, which we could apply to physical weakness as well:

So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from

being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, and that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10, ESV).

As Christians, we believe in being good stewards of our health, but there is a difference between "therapeutic" and "enhancement." Therapeutic medical advancements alleviate the effects of the fall of man, such as death and suffering. Enhancements involve man trying to become what he deems as "better" than how God made him, which essentially was the very cause of the fall. Obviously, there is gray area here, but this helps us make some distinctions. As we see from Paul's statements, the human idea of weakness is not necessarily God's idea of weakness. God's view is that in our weakness Christ is glorified.

Notes

1. Mitchell, George L. "Report to the Commissioner of baseball of an independent investigation into the illegal use of steroids and other performance enhancing substances by players in major league baseball," Dec. 13, 2007, Office of the Commissioner of Baseball, pg. SR 35-37.
2. [1 Corinthians 9:24-27](#) (ESV)
3. www.steroidabuse.com
4. *Anabolic* = metabolic process of building larger muscles from smaller ones, *Androgenic* = production of male traits
5. Mitchell, pg. 7. The complete Mitchell report can be viewed at Major League Baseball's official site: mlb.mlb.com/mlb/news/mitchell/index.jsp
6. sports.espn.go.com/specialdesign/steroids/window.html
7. Both Anabolic steroids and human growth hormone (HGH) are

legal when used for prescribed medical reasons. Muscle growth or cosmetics is not an FDA approved medical use for either of these drugs.

8. www.steroidabuse.com/true-stories-of-steroid-abuse.html

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10. Mitchell, pg. 16.

11. George Will, *Newsweek*, May 21, 2007, www.newsweek.com/id/34762

12. [Genesis 1:27, Psalm 139:13-16, Proverbs 16:4](#) (ESV)

13. [Romans 12:1,2](#) (ESV)

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Our Cheatin' Hearts (Radio Version)

From classroom to boardroom, from sports to shoplifting, people try to get something that's not rightfully theirs. What are the roots of dishonesty? Why do people cheat? How does cheating impact society? Is there a solution? Rusty Wright considers cheating.



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

Cheating Ways

Cheating is rampant these days. Just ask the nation's

retailers, educators, and investors. From classroom to boardroom, from filling stations to airplanes, folks everywhere are trying to get something that's not rightfully theirs.

The *Wall Street Journal* has reported a rash of petty personal cheating ranging from zipping through turnpike tollbooths without paying to pocketing restaurant silverware.{1}

One Los Angeles network television employee described the rush he felt from sneaking into an airline First Class seat from his coach section. "It was exhilarating," he explained of his stealth upgrade. "I felt like I robbed a bank."

A Las Vegas restaurant lost \$10,000 in pilfered ashtrays during its first two weeks of operation. A New Jersey engineer refuses to pay automated tolls on the Garden State Parkway because he feels the toll plazas are poorly designed and irritating. The state established a bad system, he reasons, so "you have to abuse it." Convenience stores report massive losses from "pump-and-flee" customers who fill their gas tanks and take off without paying.

A Knoxville-based theater chain watches for discount cheaters who purchase pay-by-phone automated tickets at undeserved senior discounts and hope ticket takers won't notice. Shoppers buy party dresses and power tools, use them, and return them for refunds. A California bookseller laments the customers who try for full-price refunds on books they've purchased from discount outlets. "You want to send them to Miss Manners," she says.{2}

Prominent sports figures have been flagged for un-citizen-like conduct. George O'Leary lost the head football coaching job at Notre Dame within a week of his hiring for padding his résumé. U.S. Olympic Committee president Sandra Baldwin resigned after confessing lies about her academic background.{3}

Golfers not only adjust the lay of the ball. Some duck pricey

greens fees by sneaking onto the course.

I know something about golf ethics. My childhood Miami home bordered a golf course. Occasionally, stray balls landed in our back yard. Neighborhood kids decided a ball was fair game only after the golfer had walked by without retrieving it. But it was entirely ethical, we determined, to cover the ball with a large almond leaf until the golfer passed.

What are the roots of dishonesty? Why do people cheat? How does cheating impact society? Is there a solution, and what is it? This article explores these themes.

Campus Cheating

What part does education play in cheating? Duke University president Nannerl Keohane says that 45 percent of Duke students have cheated at least once during college. *US News and World Report* quoted one Duke student who plagiarized an assignment: "It's not a big deal because it's just a mindless assignment. It's not a final or a midterm."[{4}](#)

The Center for Academic Integrity reports that:[{5}](#)

- On most university campuses more than 75 percent of students admit to some cheating.
- About one-third of students in one nationwide survey admitted to "serious test cheating."
- Half of the students in that survey admitted to "one or more instances of serious cheating on written assignments."

The Internet expands choices and convenience. Web access and a credit card can buy ready-made term papers or customized writing. Cybercheating can backfire though. Special computer searches sometimes allow suspicious professors to discover the original sources in only minutes.[{6}](#)

Cheating is bad enough when students do it to boost their

academic standing. It's a mess when teachers and administrators orchestrate it. So-called "high-stakes testing" has tempted some educators to cheat to retain their jobs, earn merit pay or even preserve their schools. Some states base financial allocations on school test scores. Administrators anxious over funding cuts prompt teachers to provide, shall we say, inappropriate assistance.

New York City teacher Stacey Moscovitz gave her students answers to tests, raising their scores and the school's academic ranking. She says the school principal encouraged the practice. Later, Moscovitz felt she had betrayed her kids. Students needing remedial help did not qualify for it due to their artificially high test scores.

Moscovitz blew the whistle, prompting an investigation by Edward Stancik, the New York City School District independent investigator. Stancik found fifty-two educators implicated in thirty-two schools. Among the methods he uncovered was the "scrap paper" method: Students took the exam on scrap paper, a teacher corrected the answers, then the answers went onto the standardized answer sheets, so as not to reflect erasures. In the "group testing" method, students called out the answers, the group agreed on the correct answer, and everyone filled it in. [\[7\]](#)

Cheating in school might seem fairly harmless to some. Lots of people do it. But what happens when corporate leaders cheat?

Corporate Cheaters

Corporate cheating has had devastating effects. U.S. corporate scandals have seen thousands of employees lose their jobs while stocks plummet and corporate executives are led off in handcuffs. Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Anderson, AOL Time Warner, Adelphia, Xerox . . . sometimes the patterns of financial scandals can be confusing.

Consider a simple illustration. Suppose you want your local bank to lend you money so you can purchase your dream house. The bank views you as a means for them to make money. They want to assess their risk of investing in you to be sure you can pay them back faithfully and with interest. So they check your credit, income, assets and liabilities, and get you to fill out lots of forms.

Suppose you deceive the bank into believing that your financial status is better than it really is. You lie about your income and indebtedness. They believe you and lend you the funds. You buy your castle, then can't make the payments. You default on the loan, declare bankruptcy, and the bank loses its money.

That's a snapshot of just one type of scandal plaguing corporate America. Corporations that cook the books look like better investments than they really are. Investors buy their stock, driving the price up and enriching leaders who profit personally from stock gains. When irregularities are exposed, companies restate their actual earnings and indebtedness and lay off employees. Investors, realizing they've been hoodwinked, sell their stock. Stock prices plummet. Investors question the sincerity of other corporations and are reluctant to buy. The market system falters.

Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan summarized for Congress corruption's impact on the nation: "Fraud is theft. . . . It is indistinguishable from going into a bank and stealing something. . . . Our free market capitalist system cannot function in an environment in which fraud and misrepresentation are critical elements, because trust is so essential to making that system work."[\[8\]](#)

Corrupt CEOs wielded power similar to economic "weapons of mass destruction," said University of Minnesota accounting professor Brian Shapiro.[\[9\]](#) Consumer advocate Ralph Nader called it "greed on steroids."[\[10\]](#)

Moses, the great liberator of ancient Israel, once received some counsel on leadership from his father-in-law, who advised him to pick able leaders who “fear God” and “hate dishonest gain.”[{11}](#) Not bad advice. As national scandals have shown, to do otherwise can be disastrous.

Cheating's Costs

Epidemic cheating has serious costs. Whom can you trust?

TIME magazine compared what executives of seven troubled companies received (in stock sales and severance) with what their shareholders got.[{12}](#) Adelphia's John Rigas gained \$4.2 million in severance. When Adelphia filed for bankruptcy, its stock was worth 14 cents, a decline of over 99 percent in about a year. Enron's Jeffrey Skilling made \$78 million in stock sales over a two-year period. Shareholders got a bankrupt company.

Have your medical insurance premiums been rising? Some of the increase may be offsetting corruption losses. Big names in healthcare like Columbia/HCA, National Health Laboratories, and GlaxoSmithKline have paid millions in fines to settle billing or fraud charges or investigations. While corporate accounting scandals may seem complex, much of the healthcare crisis involves outright theft such as overcharging for hospital care. This profitable game has even drawn drug criminals and the Russian mafia. Some have called the healthcare industry terminally ill.[{13}](#)

The African Union claims “corruption costs Africa almost \$150 billion a year.” That's about one quarter of the continent's gross domestic product.[{14}](#) One Nigerian doctor told me bribery had become so commonplace in his country that corporations were including bribery allowances in staff budgets. They called it “public relations.” Problems arose when employees began pocketing the “public relations” money instead of using it for bribes.

Identity thieves use computers to snoop. The biggest identity theft in U.S. history garnered information on 30,000 people. Thieves used pilfered data to siphon bank accounts and tap credit card accounts. The prosecutor described the situation as “every American’s worst financial nightmare multiplied tens of thousands of times.”[\[15\]](#)

Cheating that may begin in school can have disastrous results in society. Duke’s president Keohane aptly summarizes: ” (A)n education that involves cheating instead of learning . . . is no education at all. . . . (I)n the real world, when you set out to build a bridge or craft a legal document or begin brain surgery, just knowing what the result is supposed to be is of mighty little use in making it happen; pity the poor patients and clients!”[\[16\]](#)

Why do people cheat, and what is the solution?

The Psychology of Cheating

Why do people cheat? Some seek the thrill of beating the system. Others want to make ends meet, protest high prices or achieve difficult—perhaps unattainable—standards.

Actress Winona Ryder’s shoplifting conviction prompted questions about why a wealthy person would steal items they could easily afford. Often anxiety or depression accompanies kleptomania. The rush of theft may assuage deep emotional pain. Young shoplifters have stolen on dares from their peers.[\[17\]](#)

Desires for approval, advancement, avoiding embarrassment—all influence self-esteem. People sometimes take foolish risks to feel good about themselves.

Self-centeredness and lax standards seem obvious roots of dishonesty. The Securities and Exchange Commission began requiring CEO’s of major companies to personally affirm “in writing, under oath and for publication ” that their corporate

reports are “complete and accurate.”[{18}](#)

Restructuring business relationships to avoid conflicts of interest could reduce temptation. Stiff penalties—suspension, expulsion, prosecution—may help slow moral hemorrhaging. Strong role models, peer support, and ethical codes are significant.

Ultimately, honesty is an individual matter. Alan Greenspan told Congress of “an infectious greed” that influenced corporate scandals. “Greed is not an issue of business,” he emphasized, “it’s an issue of human beings.”[{19}](#)

My sophomore year in college, I swiped a plastic bucket from behind the lectern in the psychology lecture hall. It had been there every day during the semester. “No one wants it,” I convinced myself. “It deserves to be taken.” I used it to wash my car.

Two years later, I encountered a statement by an early follower of Jesus: “If we confess our sins to him, he (God) is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”[{20}](#) I not only needed to admit my theft to God. I needed to make restitution.

My booty long since lost, I purchased a new bucket and carried it sheepishly across campus one afternoon. Finding no one in the psychology building to confess to, I left the bucket in a broom closet with a note of explanation. Maybe a janitor read it. My conscience was clear.

Solid spiritual commitment can help develop inner strength to resist temptation and act honorably. It can provide reasonable standards for civil society. And it can bring forgiveness and power to rebound from personal failure.

This article is adapted with permission from Rusty Wright, “Our Cheatin’ Hearts,” *The Plain Truth*, September/October 2003, pp. 6-10.

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